



Understanding the associations between young people's mental health, sexual health and substance use experiences and their access to relevant (in)formal sources of help, support and information/a co-produced mixed-methods approach



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Public Summary:

The primary aim of this project was to study the relationships between young people's mental health, sexual health and substance-use experiences. While these topics may appear to be distinct elements of health and wellbeing, the literature shows that they are often interconnected, working together to produce disproportionate impact on individuals.

To this end, a systematic review has identified the associations between mental health and sexual health/substance-use in UK-based literature. Later qualitative work captured rich data on mental and sexual health associations, alongside an exploration of barriers and facilitators to accessing mental and sexual health services in Kent, Surrey and Sussex. Current quantitative work is investigating the associations between young people's mental health, social connectedness and access to sexual health services.

A greater understanding of how these experiences are related in this age group could have implications for how services are structured and delivered to provide holistic and appropriate care. This is particularly important as young people under-engage with healthcare services relative to their theoretical and documented need.



Public and Community Involvement:

Throughout this doctoral work, decisions around eligibility, recruitment and public-facing materials (e.g., recruitment posters, participant information sheets), interview schedules and survey questions have been made with input from young people between the ages of 16 and 24 years old.

This input has allowed for the studies to be as accessible as possible for our population of interest. Co-production partners have paid extra attention to ensuring the use of clear and non-stigmatising language around mental health, sexual health, gender, sexuality and more.

Dissemination:

A systematic review has been published in the International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health, identifying a gap in qualitative data on young people's mental and sexual health associations in the UK.

Social media has been used to disseminate participation and co-production opportunities. ARC KSS, NIHR resources and multiple partner local organisations.

Impact and Implementation:

All findings will be published in relevant academic journals and opportunities for presenting at conferences will be sought. Social media and similar channels will be used to disseminate lay summaries of findings. Co-production partners will co-design the style and content of this material. Recruitment partners (e.g., schools, colleges, non-governmental organisations) will similarly be given a summary of findings.

Publications

<https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/ijamh-2022-0090/html>

What next?

I aim to pursue a career in research and academia, with a focus on sociological approaches to healthcare research and teaching/module design.