Western Balkan Network for Youth Support and Counselling Service in Digital Era

Bojana TOSIC[1,a], Emmanouil ZOULIAS[b] and Katja CIC[c]

a*Institute of Modern Technologies Montenegro, Podgorica, Montenegro*
b*Greek Biomedical Informatics and Health Informatics Association, Greece*
c*International Youth Health Organization, Ljubljana, Slovenia*

Abstract. This poster presents a Western Balkan network for youth support and counselling services in the digital era, resulted from Erasmus project BeWell@Digital. The network consists of an online counselling platform, peer-to-peer support, and mobile app. A collaborative effort between mental health professionals, ICT experts, and young people was used to develop the network. First results indicate positive mental health outcomes, stress, axiety, and depression reduction, increased sense of social support, and enhanced coping skills.

Keywords. Digital counselling services, mental health, youth

1. Introduction

There has been a growing concern about mental health of young people, especially with the increased use of digital devices and social media during COVID-19 [1]. Many young people are facing challenges such as stress, anxiety, depression, and loneliness, and they often struggle to find support. To address this issue, a network for youth support and counselling service in the digital era has emerged as a potential solution. This network aims to provide support to young people through digital platforms and technologies, such as online counselling services, peer-to-peer support groups and mobile apps. This poster presents the benefits and challenges of this network, as well as its potential to improve the mental health outcomes of youth in digital era.

2. Methods

The network for youth support and counselling services in the digital era [2] was developed through a collaborative effort between mental health professionals, ICT experts and young people themselves. The network includes several components, such as online counselling platform, a peer-to-peer support group, and a mobile app for monitoring wellbeing index. The development process involved several stages, including needs assessment, user testing, and feedback incorporation. The assessment involved a review of existing approach on youth mental health and consultation with mental health professionals, educators, and young people themselves. User testing was

---

[1] Corresponding Author: Bojana Tošić, Institute of Modern Technologies Montenegro, Podgorica, Montenegro; E-mail: bojana.tosic@imtm.me.

conducted with a diverse group of young people, including those from different socioeconomic backgrounds and cultural contexts, to ensure the accessibility and relevance of the network. Feedback incorporation involved regular communication with users and stakeholders to address issues and improve network effectiveness. Quantitative and qualitative data derived from surveys, interviews were utilized.

3. Results

The network for youth support and counselling services has shown promising results in improving the mental health outcomes of young people. The online counselling platform has been accessed by hundreds of young people, with a high satisfaction rate reported by users. The peer-to-peer support group has also been successful in providing a safe and supportive environment for young people to connect and share their experiences and problems. Users provided positive feedback on its effectiveness and usability. The evaluation of the network's impact has shown significant improvements in the mental health outcomes of young people, including reduced levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, increased sense of social support, and improved coping skills.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The established network has the potential to address the growing mental health needs of young people in the digital age. The collaborative development process and user-centred design approach have ensured the relevance and accessibility of the network ensuring diversity. This digital network reached many young people and provided cost-effective and flexible support. However, there are some challenges to be addressed related to maintenance and updates, data privacy and security. Further research is needed to explore long term impact of the network and enhance effectiveness. Overall, this is a promising model for addressing the mental health needs of young people. Network should remain up-to-date, secure, and accessible to all. The network presents a valuable contribution to relieving mental pressing issues and highlights the potential of ICT in delivering mental health services.

Acknowledgments

References

[1] Hollis C. Youth mental health: risks and opportunities in the digital world. World Psychiatry. 2022;21(1):81, doi:10.1002/wps.20929.

[2] WB Youth Support portal – Digital tool with live chat support aimed on WB youth and peer counselors [Internet]. WB Youth Support portal – Digital tool with live chat support aimed on WB youth and peer counselors; [cited 2023 May 2]. Available from: https://wbyouthsupport.net.