

For teens battling depression, interactive online tools big help

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Interactive online mental health resources combined with traditional counselling help improve the mental wellbeing of teenagers, according to new research by the University of Sydney published in the [*Journal of Technology in Human Services*](#).

The landmark study, conducted by Dr. Andrew Campbell and Dr Suvena Sethi from the Faculty of Health Sciences and Dr Louise Ellis from the [Brain and Mind Research Institute](#), assessed the effectiveness of online mental health resources (static and interactive), including tools used to assist rural and remote young people suffering from mild-to-moderate depression.

Dr. Campbell's research team are the first to conduct an online mental health resource cross-evaluation in Australia.

The study, titled Internet Self-Help for Depression, focused on evaluating current online mental health resources to demonstrate their effectiveness as both stand-alone tools and tools used in conjunction with traditional face-to-face therapy.

Study author and senior lecturer in psychology, Dr. Andrew Campbell said around one in five Australian teenagers experience depressive mood changes.

"While not all have [clinical depression](#), among those who do it often goes unrecognised and untreated, increasing the risk and burden of the

disorder," he said.

"Each of these innovative online approaches to the prevention and management of mild to moderate depression are in use globally, especially to bridge gaps in the lack of mental health services in rural and remote Australia.

"However, the independent and combined effectiveness of online mental health help-tools being accessed by adolescents such as [MoodGym](#), with education websites such as [BeyondBlue](#), or online support groups such as [Mood Garden](#) had not been investigated in combination with face-to-face cognitive behavioural therapy."

Online self-help therapy tools such as MoodGym were recommended as best practice in assisting teenagers suffering from mild to moderate depression in comparison to traditional text-based websites. The more interactive, the more adolescents were likely to engage with the resource.

However, while online tools were particularly useful in bridging gaps in the lack of mental health services in rural and remote Australia, the research found that their performance was enhanced when used in conjunction with more traditional offline treatments.

"The combination of MoodGym with traditional face-to-face [cognitive behavioural therapy](#) was even more effective than just using MoodGym by itself. As such, our research concluded that for adolescents, the best form of [depression](#) treatment is a combination of online self-help tools used in conjunction with offline counselling."

Dr. Campbell believes that the study can be used to further develop outreach programs for youth at risk.

"Results have led to research collaboration with [KidsHelpLine](#) who plan

to use the knowledge to reach at-risk adolescents in rural and remote Australia, as well as those living in Indigenous communities," he said.

"We hope our current findings will continue to help inform Australian Mental Health services on best-practice strategies and future youth engagement policies."

Provided by University of Sydney

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