

Socialising helps to alleviate symptoms of depression

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(Medical Xpress) -- Simply going out for a coffee or chatting to a friend can reduce the symptoms of depression experienced by people with mental health problems, according to a new study by UCD researchers funded by the Health Research Board.

“This study shows that conventional treatments can be supplemented by social support from family, friends and the community in the battle against [mental health problems](#) in Ireland,” said the Minister for Disability, Equality, Mental Health and Older People, Ms Kathleen Lynch TD who officially launched the report findings at UCD.

“Increased social interaction helps sufferers to rebuild their self-esteem which in turn enables them to maintain and develop positive relationships and friendships.”

For the study, over 100 adults, who were already receiving conventional treatment for mental [health problems](#), were given additional supports to increase their [social activities](#) over a nine month period.

At the beginning of the study, 20% of participants had no contact with friends, 33% reported that they never had contact with neighbours, and 50% never attended social groups. 35% were living alone.

All participants were given a monthly stipend of €20, and encouraged to take part in a social activity for at least two hours every week. Some of the participants were also matched up with a volunteer to create a ‘social

friendship' outside of the constraints of existing relationships. They were also asked to keep a diary of their social activities during the study.

The social activities reported by the participants during the course of the study included: going to a movie, going to a concert or play, going to a gallery or museum, going for a coffee, going out to eat, and enjoying a conversation.

“By the end of the study, all of the participants reported feeling better about themselves, having more confidence to socialise in their community, and experiencing fewer [symptoms of depression](#),” said Dr Ann Sheridan, University College Dublin, the lead author of the study.

The study findings show that taking part in normal social activities outside of the constraints of the mental health system and the home environment, like meeting for a coffee or engaging in conversation, helps people with mental health difficulties to feel less isolated, less stigmatised, and less anxious.

“The evidence from this study is unequivocal,” added Dr Sheridan, a lecturer at the UCD School of Nursing, Midwifery, and Health Systems, University College Dublin.

“Supporting the development of positive relationships and increasing social activity helps with the treatment of mental health difficulties.”

Health Research Board, Chief Executive, Enda Connolly, said: “The outcome of this research is positive and it’s simple; socialising with others helps the recovery process for people with [mental health](#) problems. This provides a clear message of hope.”

More information: The study: “Enabling Recovery: The Benefits of Supporting Socialisation Report of a Randomised Control Trial”:

Provided by University College Dublin

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