

Irish teenagers unable to identify depression

July 20 2015, by Fiona Tyrrell

Many Irish teenagers are unable to identify signs of depression or suicidal thoughts, according to new research on mental health literacy among adolescents conducted by psychologists at Trinity College Dublin.

The research, which has been published in the July edition of the Journal of Adolescent Research, has found that only half of participants in the study correctly identified depression in hypothetical case studies and only 10% correctly identified suicide ideation.

Additionally, the study found that participants were unable to identify appropriate treatment for peers experiencing depression and a sizable minority of young people did not recognise the importance of adult help for a friend experiencing emotional distress. One third of all participants said they would only involve their peer-group in the provision of help for a depressed friend.

Overall, the findings of this study, which involved 187 [adolescents](#) aged between 15 and 19, indicates that while Irish adolescents with depression may prefer support from friends instead of seeking support from a professional, it is unlikely that their friends will be able to recognise their symptoms. It is also unlikely that their friends will identify the importance of engaging an adult's support. Girls were more likely than boys to name multiple ways in which they would help a depressed friend.

The study paints a worrying picture of Irish teenagers' knowledge of [mental health issues](#), according to post graduate student Sadhbh Byrne who conducted the research with Dr Lorraine Swords and Dr Elizabeth

Nixon of the School of Psychology and Children's Research Centre in Trinity.

"While the majority of adolescents in our study showed great concern for a friend experiencing distress, their specific knowledge of the characteristics of mental disorders and potential suicidality was lacking. The identification of depression is considered an important component of [mental health](#) literacy, and is critical in helping an individual to access appropriate help," she added.

"We know from previous research that approximately 20% of young Irish people show symptoms of [mental health problems](#), of which [depression](#) is the most concerning, given the strong link with suicide. Ireland has the fourth highest rate of suicide in Europe among 15 to 24 year olds. Our research points to the need to educate young people about the need to seek adult help for a friend experiencing [emotional distress](#)."

More information: "Mental Health Literacy and Help-Giving Responses in Irish Adolescents." *Journal of Adolescent Research* July 2015 30: 477-500, first published on February 4, 2015 [DOI: 10.1177/0743558415569731](#)

Provided by Trinity College Dublin

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