

Blame culture preventing parents accessing mental health support for children

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Credit: University of Reading

Feelings that others are dismissive or blame parents commonly cited as reasons for not accessing help for children and young people with mental health concerns.

"Cumbersome" mental health services with long waiting times and difficulties getting a referral also cited.

Parents feeling blamed for their child's mental health difficulties has been cited as a common reason for them not seeking support, according to new research from the University of Reading.

In a study of barriers to accessing mental health services for [children](#) and

young people, one of the most commonly raised issues was concern about negative attitudes towards parents of children and young people with mental health problems in nearly half (46%) of the qualitative papers reviewed, and a quarter of quantitative papers. The feeling of being dismissed or blamed by professionals was similarly highly cited, in 42% of qualitative papers.

Tessa Reardon, lead author of the research from the Anxiety and Depression in Young people (AnDY) research clinic at the University of Reading said:

"Growing numbers of children and young people experience mental health problems, but only a small number of these young people receive professional help. This research highlights the many difficulties parents face accessing professional help for mental health problems in children and teenagers - and by doing so also highlights the key improvements and interventions that are needed to help ensure more young people who experience mental health problems receive the help they need.

"A concerning finding highlights how frequently parents feel blamed for their children's difficulties and how important it is to remove this stigma to enable parents to access support for their children with [mental health problems](#)."

Beckie, a mum who has taken part in other research at the University of Reading shared her experiences of caring for her son:

"Even from then, these small minor things affected me, that parent guilt of him looking so sad when I wasn't around. I blamed myself thinking that I wasn't parenting correctly as I would see other parents coping so well with their kids! Why was mine like this? I would turn up at work in tears most mornings, feeling worried and guilty."

Not knowing where to seek help

Other commonly cited barriers included not knowing where or how to seek help. Among 42% of quantitative samples, at least 14% (and up to 75%) of participants reported a lack of knowledge about where or how to get help as a barrier. Further systematic barriers include long waiting times to access services.

Tessa Reardon continued:

"Our findings show that, as well as ensuring there are sufficient [child mental health services](#) available, awareness needs to be raised about the services that are available to families. It can be very hard for parents to know when it is ok to ask for help, and how they can get help for their child."

Professor of Developmental Clinical Psychology Cathy Creswell said:

"Half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by the age of 14 years of age, yet few children and young people in need access professional support for mental [health](#) difficulties.

"A number of influential reports have highlighted that 'quick access to good quality care is vital' (Five Year Forward View for Mental Health, NHS England 2016) and that dramatic improvements need to be made in identification and provision of effective early intervention (Future In Mind, Dept of Health 2015).

"This research highlights a number of critical factors that need to be addressed in order to improve recognition of [mental health](#) difficulties and access to interventions for children and [young people](#), including supporting (not blaming) [parents](#) who ask for help."

More information: Tessa Reardon et al. What do parents perceive are the barriers and facilitators to accessing psychological treatment for mental health problems in children and adolescents? A systematic review of qualitative and quantitative studies, *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* (2017). [DOI: 10.1007/s00787-016-0930-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-016-0930-6)

Provided by University of Reading

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