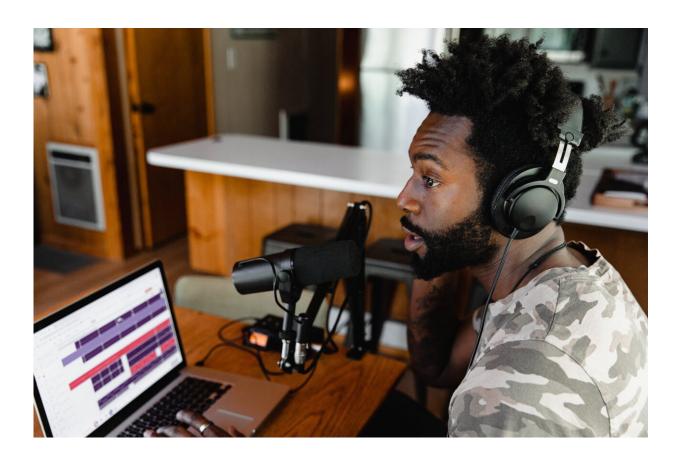# Study shows listening to mental health podcasts reduces stigma

May 16 2024

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Listening to mental health podcasts reduces stigma, supports the development of mental health literacy and increases help-seeking, a new study finds.

The study shows that [mental health](#) podcasts helped listeners to learn coping strategies, deepen their sense of self-compassion and effectively directed them to other services and resources. Researchers found that podcasts are a driving force in shifting perspectives from stigma to shared experiences.

The research is [published](#) in the journal *Rural and Remote Health*.

Led by researchers at University College Cork (UCC), the research highlights the importance of ethical practices in the [podcast](#) industry highlighting the need for professionals to endorse particular podcasters who are not engaging in erroneous or misleading advice.

Podcasting is projected to become a $4 billion industry in 2024. There are reportedly over 400m monthly podcast listeners worldwide, while in Ireland, [46% of the public](#) listened to a podcast on a monthly basis. Mental health podcasts have emerged as powerful tools, offering insight, support and guidance to listeners.

Reducing mental health stigma

Participants said they gained new perspectives by listening to mental health podcasts which in turn enhanced their increased understanding of mental health topics and reduced mental health stigma.

Naoise Ó Caoilte, MA Applied Psychology (Mental Health) graduate in UCC School of Applied Psychology, said, "Our research found that listeners furthered their own knowledge of and language around mental health topics. Participants noted the importance of gaining access to trusted experts was key to this psychoeducation."

"Our study also reveals that a range of professionals, including therapists, teachers and [health care professionals](#), are using podcasts as a

channel for continuing [professional development](#) and gaining new perspectives," Caoilte said.

Increased compassion for self and others

Researchers found that participants became equipped with language to help understand their own mental health in a more self-reflective manner. Mental health podcasts provided the language to describe thoughts or emotions that may have been difficult to articulate previously.

The study found that podcasts helped listeners to develop self-compassion and increased compassion for other people through developing different and new perspectives.

Participants indicated that mental health-related podcasts have helped them to develop a sense of connection to others, through learning that experiencing mental health issues is "normal". Many individuals noted the value of connection, mental health-related podcasts helped them to feel "less alone" in their struggles.

The research finds that social disconnection is a major contributing factor and outcome for poor mental health, particularly in the context of experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings offer evidence for the success of mental health podcasts as an accessible and informative tool.

Dr. Sharon Lambert said, "Our results indicate that a strong sense of 'connection to others,' 'validation,' and 'normalization' of mental health issues has been central to participants' experiences. The effect of this increase in connection and normalization has on a person's mental health cannot be understated. The study shows that podcasts are valued by the public as an effective medium to decrease stigma, increase hope and

connection."

Highly accessible platform for education

With podcasts' unique ability to offer on-demand and low-cost access, the study found that podcasts are changing attitudes to help-seeking behavior and can effectively signpost to more formal mental health services.

Caoilte said, "Commentators have previously expressed concern about the use of mental health podcasts, saying that listeners could utilize podcasts and forgo professional supports. In fact, our study finds that listening to mental health podcasts encouraged participants to develop a deeper sense of self compassion and increased positive attitudes towards help seeking behavior."

The study found that podcasts can offer a highly accessible platform for education and practical guidance. Participants contrast this accessibility with barriers they perceive in formal mental health services, particularly for those who live in rural and remote locations where there might be an absence of any service provision, long waiting lists and high costs.

"The study shows that mental health podcasts are informative with significant potential to reach people in underserved communities. Given that our data indicates that podcasts are being utilized by mental health professionals, it may be advisable that mental health-related podcasts be endorsed by professional bodies. This will allow the public to feel assured that the content is evidence-based, safe and appropriate," Dr. Lambert said.

More information: Caoilte et al, 'There's no waiting list, just press

play': listeners' experiences of mental-health-related podcasts, *Rural and Remote Health* (2024).

Provided by University College Cork