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## INFO 200: Blog post #3

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### Information-seeking among young people with anxiety or depression

In researching the community of teens who struggle with anxiety and depression, I've encountered quite a bit of literature that also includes young adults up to 26 years of age. As Rickwood, Deane, Wilson, and Ciarrochi reported, youth between the ages of 12-26 have an increased incidence of mental health issues (2005). They added that many mental health disorders have their highest incidence in adolescence and young adulthood. As a result, I have decided to include young adults in my research as well.

In the literature, the information-seeking process is often referred to as help-seeking. Help-seeking is defined as "obtain[ing] help in terms of understanding, advice, information, treatment and general support in response to a problem or distressing experience" (Rickwood et al., 2005, p. 4). This definition fits Dervin's (1983) sense-making model of information-seeking (as cited in Savolainen, 2010). She employs the terms situations, gaps, and uses to describe the behavior of information seekers. When a situation arises, it leads to a realization of a gap in understanding or a lack of adequate information. One example she gives is a need to know how to get out of a bad situation. For teens, this situation might be feelings of anxiety or depression or recognizing the desire to inflict deliberate self-harm (DSH). The gap then is the teen needing to understand or get control of the feelings. Uses are then the ways teens go about seeking information from various sources to bridge the information gap.

Teens overwhelmingly seek information via informal pathways (Rickwood et al., 2005). These informal information sources include family, friends, and the Internet. Not surprisingly, since adolescence is marked by a desire to demonstrate independence from parents as well as a desire to create stronger bonds outside of the familial unit, teens turn to their friends most often when depressed (Rickwood et al.). Goodwin, MocarSKI, Marusic, and Beautrais studied adolescents with depression and found that both those with and without thoughts of DSH sought help from friends at very high rates. For those with thoughts of DSH, teens sought help from friends nearly 70% of the time, and those without thoughts of DSH, about 58% of the time (2013). Parental help was also sought by many teens who were surveyed.

Because of its nearly ubiquitous reach in the lives of Western adolescents, much research has been done in recent years surrounding the role of the Internet and social media in the mental health information-seeking behaviors of adolescents and young adults. In the U.S., 92% of teens report going online daily, and nearly one-fourth (24%) characterize themselves as being online "almost constantly" (Lenhart, 2015).

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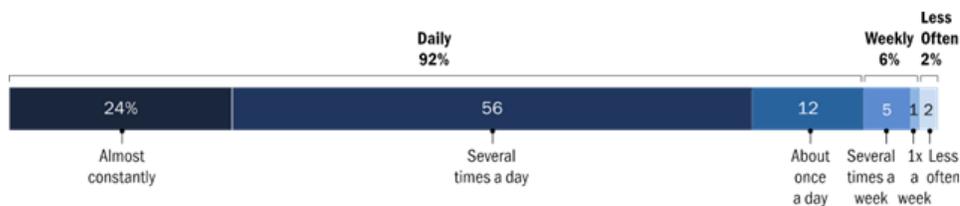
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## Frequency of Internet Use by Teens

% of teens ages 13 to 17 who use the internet with the following frequencies



Source: Pew Research Center's Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014 and Feb. 10-Mar. 16, 2015. (n=1,016 teens ages 13 to 17).

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In their survey of 521 Canadian youth, ages 17-24, Wetterlin, Mar, Neilson, Werker, and Krausz (2014) found that nearly 62% of respondents had used the Internet to seek information or help for distressing feelings they had experienced. Furthermore, over 80% reported that they were either "somewhat likely" or "very likely" to seek help or information from a website in the future. According to Rideout (2001), many youth who have sought health information online said they discussed the information they found with someone else. Nearly 70% reported having a conversation with a friend about what they had found.

In 2001, Rideout found that the most common method teens used to find health information on the Internet was via a text-based query in a search engine. In 2016, Best, Gil-Rodriguez, Manketlow, and Taylor also found that search engines (namely Google) were the most utilized method of mental health information-seeking among adolescent males living in Northern Ireland. Theirs was a qualitative study of 14-15 year old males intended to develop a conceptual understanding of the help-seeking process among these adolescents. Researchers met in a series of focus groups, each with eight boys, to discuss the boys' information-seeking behavior. Through analysis of the conversations, researchers were able to identify several factors that made search engines appealing to the group: they were familiar, easy to use, offered immediate access, and provided anonymity. Anonymity was important to these youth. They reported feelings of inhibition related to help-seeking because they perceived it to be in direct conflict with the gender roles they had internalized which they said forced them to maintain a "tough" or "cool" image.

Best et al. (2016) cite a sobering statistic: males in Northern Ireland were three times more likely than females to commit suicide. Yet according to Rickwood et al. (2005), females are consistently more likely to seek help for mental health concerns. Both genders in the Rickwood study reported that it was important to be able to solve one's problems on one's own, so why are females seeking help more frequently? One possibility for this discrepancy is that along with being taught the importance of self-reliance, many males are also taught that masculinity equates to toughness. They may interpret feelings of depression or anxiety as a sign of weakness, and as a result, choose not to acknowledge them. Alternatively, some males may feel that their innate toughness will be enough to see them through a challenging time. Both possibilities gel with Wilson's (1999) theory of information-seeking in which he explains that some information needs, though understood by a person, go unmet as a result of role-related or psychological barriers.

To the chagrin of many mental health professionals, teens rarely use formal pathways for help and information seeking. These include teachers, school officials and counselors, medical and mental health professionals, and helplines. Goodwin et al. reported that teens with feelings of depression sought help from a helpline 8% of the time, from a teacher 6% of the time, and from a mental health professional only 5% of the time (2013). Rickwood, Mazzer, and Telford (2015) also reported that the percentage of teens and young adults who sought help from mental health professionals

was quite small. This should be a big concern to all those who work with teens, especially since teens have been shown to possess poor health information literacy skills (Gray, Klein, Noyce, Sesselberg, & Cantrill, 2005). Current research points to the fact that even though today's teens may be digital natives (Prensky, 2001), they are also what danah boyd refers to as digital naïves (2014), or lacking in the critical thinking skills needed to evaluate health information online. boyd points out that, "Teens view Google as the center of the information universe even though they have little understanding of how the search results are produced..." (p. 186) and that "many of the media literacy skills needed to be digitally savvy require a level of engagement that goes far beyond what the average teen picks up..." (p. 197). Because teens are regularly using informal resources on the internet (Best et al., 2016; Rickwood et al., 2015), and infrequently using research-based websites (fewer than 17% of teens and young adults reported accessing them) (Wetterlin et al., 2014), the big push now in the fields of psychology and information science is to develop youth-friendly, accurate, online mental health resources. Conclusions in much of the current literature point to this pressing need.

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## 1 comment on “INFO 200: Blog post #3”



**Michael Stephens** says:  
October 7, 2017 at 11:46 am [Edit](#)

You make strong connections from the research you found to LIS theory. Wilson, for example. I wonder if the lit in LIS related to more general health info behaviors would be helpful. Perhaps take a look.

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