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### Seeking Help From Everyone and No-One

A summary of the peer-reviewed article



In "Seeking Help From Everyone and No-One: Conceptualizing the Online Help-Seeking Process Among Adolescent Males," Paul Best, Elena Gil-Rodriguez, Roger Manktelow, and Brian J. Taylor describe their focus-group research with 56 Northern Irish, male adolescents between 14 and 15 years of age. The purpose of their study was to shed light on how young people locate, access, and receive support online.

The lead author, Best, is a lecturer at Queen's University Belfast. Among his research interests are online help-seeking and mental health. He has published in a variety of journals including the *Journal of Information Science* and the *Journal of Public Mental Health*. Gil-Rodriguez holds a Doctorate in Psychology and lectures at Goldsmith's, University of London. Both Manktelow and Taylor hold PhDs and are, respectively, a lecturer and professor at Ulster University's Magee campus in the United Kingdom.

Before conducting the interviews, a topic guide was created to elicit information about how the boys sought help. Specifically, the researchers were seeking information about help-seeking behaviors and the role of friends, both online and offline, how the participants used social networking sites, and the perceived positive and negative attributes of online help-seeking.

The lead author was present for each focus group interview along with a team member. The 56 boys were divided into groups of eight and met with the interviewers for 45-60 minutes. Research has shown that males worry about the stigma attached to needing help, which Best and his colleagues took into account. In order to stimulate conversation around the subject of help-seeking, the team prepared a vignette to be used if necessary. They also utilized "photo-elicitation," a technique which involves inserting a picture stimulus into an interview. During the interviews, the images containing screenshots of four national health organizations were left on the table for participants to use as they discussed help-seeking pathways. The interviews were recorded, and the team coded the data and developed their findings from patterns that emerged.

The research team found that adolescent males relied more heavily on informal pathways. The most utilized methods included text-based queries in a search engine or on social networking sites. The participants rarely used the formal pathway of known professional health websites such as

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those depicted in the photo-elicitation images. The researchers found that the participants had several methods for evaluating the validity of information on a site. They often sought more than one site for comparative purposes, they used a site's appearance to judge its validity, and they took its position on the results page into consideration.

Though the participants articulated that both informal and formal online pathways facilitated help-seeking because of ease of access, immediacy, and the increased likelihood of self-disclosure, the formal online pathway had the added perceived benefit of confidentiality and anonymity. Many of the males reported concerns about confidentiality when seeking information through their personal online networks.

The research gathered by Best et al. supports previous research which has shown that adolescents prefer informal pathways for their information and help-seeking. However, it also highlights an important new finding: these adolescents found some comfort in the formal online pathways because of the increased sense of anonymity and confidentiality they provided. These sites also provide adolescents with the valid and trustworthy information that mental health professionals wish for them to have. Given that adolescents have been shown to have poor information literacy skills, they are "at risk of absorbing inaccurate or poor quality information" (Best et al., 2016, p. 1076), making it imperative that their needs be met through more formal pathways.

In terms of gathering and organizing material on how teens seek and use information, it will be important to develop an understanding of what the catalysts to utilizing formal pathways are for teens. This paper was unable to provide any insight into this question. However, the research does point to how health and information literacy impact help-seeking behaviors, and it presents several barriers (social stigma and confidentiality) that adolescent males discussed in their interviews that will be important to highlight and important for me to explore further.

## References

Best, P. (2017). Research Portal. Retrieved from [http://pure.qub.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/paul-best\(88d1f907-48b9-42bd-b871-58cba74ebd42\).html](http://pure.qub.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/paul-best(88d1f907-48b9-42bd-b871-58cba74ebd42).html)

Best, P., Gil-Rodriguez, E., Manktelow, R., & Taylor, B. J. (2016). Seeking Help From Everyone and No-One: Conceptualizing the Online Help-Seeking Process Among Adolescent Males. *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(8), 1067-1077. doi: 10.1177/1049732316648128

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## 1 comment on "INFO 200: Blog post #4"



**Michael Stephens** says:  
October 19, 2017 at 10:55 am [Edit](#)

The methodology is so interesting in this study. Nice to read a deep dive on an article I remembered from your Post #3.

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