

Education is central to the development and improvement of the lives of our young people, it is an integral part of a better society.

Schools and colleges play an essential role in promoting and supporting the positive mental health and wellbeing of pupils, staff and the wider community.



MENTAL HEALTH & EDUCATION

Here at the University of York our researchers are collaborating with young people and educators to better understand the vital relationship between mental health and education and provide practical solutions.

Event Summary

On the 27th of June 2023 researchers came together at the **National STEM Learning Centre** to share research outputs with the wider education community and generate new collaborations. The showcasing event was expertly hosted by **Beth Bell** (Department of Education - Lecturer in Mental Health and Wellbeing) and **Lina Gega** (Director of the Institute for Mental Health Research at York - IMRY), and was co-funded by the Nurture Network (Research Council Grant Ref: ES/S004467/1) and IMRY.



Youth Mental Health in the Digital Age

Not a day goes by without a media reference to the impact of navigating the digital world on the mental health of future generations.

Young people, parents and educators are confronted with an ever changing digital environment, conflicting opinion and a sea of digital tools addressing mental health problems.

It was refreshing to start the showcase with an excellent intro from **Louisa Salhi** from **Kooth Digital Health**. Kooth is a digital mental health and wellbeing company working to provide a welcoming space for digital mental health care, available to all. As well as outlining the state of the nation and the COVID-19 pandemic related upsurge in demand for online mental health support from children and young people, Louisa eloquently explained the need to connect quality online mental health services to schools.



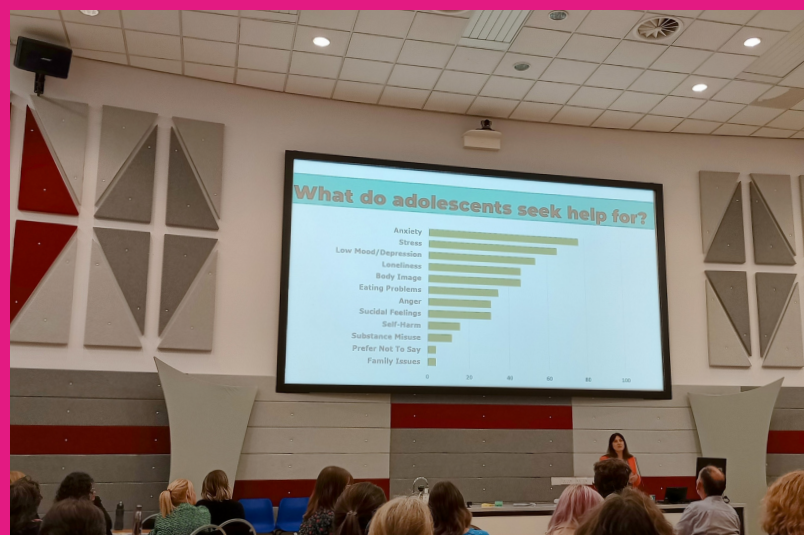
As **Beth T. Bell** and **Laura Fox** (Department of Education, University of York) went on to explain the reality is that young people are more likely to seek out health advice online than offline. Whether it is via TikTok or dedicated web-based resources, online information and support is highly diverse - varying in form, function & features as well as quality.

The duo presented findings from the **Connecting Online Mental Health Services to Schools (COMS)** project, which aimed to understand how and why adolescents selectively use online and school-based mental health advice, and the risks and opportunities associated with this. The project was funded by **eNurture**, run in collaboration with Kooth and University of Central Lancashire, and steered by a brilliant Youth Advisory Panel, all of whom were young people with experience of mental health difficulties.

Ask young people

By talking to young people, as well as adult stakeholders, the team identified six things that need to be considered in order to improve the information and support that is available to young people in relation their mental health:

- Accessibility**
- Relatability**
- Credibility**
- Anonymity**
- Autonomy**
- Peers**



Youth-Led Recommendations

From these findings Beth's team have been able to develop important practical recommendations for educators. Reminding people that when seeking help for mental health difficulties at school, teenagers might:

- Already have prior knowledge.
- Be receiving support online.
- Have worries about safeguarding.
- Want to be discreet.
- Question school-staff credibility.



What about the teachers?

Everyone has heard about teachers thinking about leaving the profession, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. The wellbeing of school leaders, teachers, and teaching assistants is paramount. **Lisa E. Kim** (Department of Education, University of York) explained some of her ongoing research exploring teacher mental health and wellbeing including job satisfaction and burnout.

As well as learning about the harsh reality of what it was really like to be a teacher in England during the COVID-19 pandemic, **Lisa, Sarah Crellin** and **Charlie Ding** (Department of Education, University of York) provided new insights gained from a recent survey on the occupational wellbeing and professional development needs of school leaders, teachers and teaching assistants in England. From the findings, practical ways to support staff at different levels (e.g., individual-, school-, national-level) are emerging.

Equipping the next generations

As the showcase progressed we learnt more about what steps can be taken to practically equip young people with the skills needed to help promote positive mental health and wellbeing as they mature into adulthood.

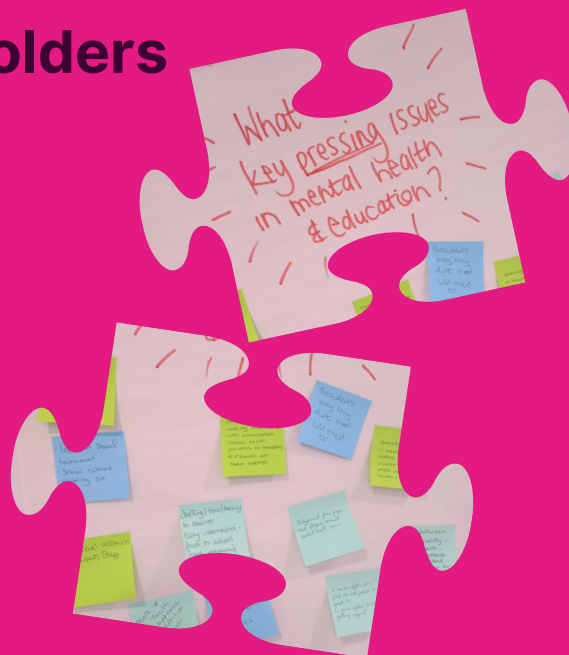
Joshua Stubbs (Department of Education, University of York) presented his exciting Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) project with the **PSHE Association**. Joshua is co-creating an evidence-based mental health and wellbeing **Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE)** education curriculum aimed at promoting mental health and wellbeing among 4-11-year old pupils. Pupils in England must learn about mental wellbeing and are expected to understand that it is just as important as physical health.

The curriculum that Joshua co-designs will be informed by Dusana Dorjee's (Department of Education, University of York) Development Theory of Wellbeing Capacities and focus on enhancing pupils' self-regulation. Childhood self-regulation is associated with a wide range of benefits during childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Teaching these skills as part of PSHE will give primary pupils important practical skills as well as knowledge about mental wellbeing. The impact of the project will be far reaching - as a membership association and charity, the PSHE Association supports over 50,000 teachers and schools with resources, training, guidance and advice.

Engagement with stakeholders

Ongoing discussion and engagement with key stakeholders in the education sector is essential, including young people. We hope this showcase is the first of many similar events where research knowledge is shared and new research questions are co-created.

There is much work to be done in this area but through mutual trust and a shared understanding of the needs on the ground we hope to keep generating practical and research-informed solutions to better enable the education system to support mental health.



Thank you to all the researchers who took part in the event and shared their ongoing research with us all. We hope discussing your work with practitioners leads to future collaborative work in this area.

MENTAL HEALTH & EDUCATION

Contact us

To find out more about mental health research at the University of York please get in touch with the team at the Institute of Mental Health Research at York.
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