

Institution: University of Bolton		
Unit of Assessment: Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience (A4)		
Title of case study: Changes and Developments of an Online Counseling Service Provision for Young People		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2017 to date		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Julie Prescott	Reader in Psychology	September 2013 to date
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2017 to date		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>This research on online counseling provision has benefited young people through a representation of their views and preferences resulting in the development of two outcome measures; currently being tested and validated, aiming to achieve acceptability within the NHS. This research provides Xenzone with an evidence-base to further commission their service UK wide. Decision making was influenced through a select committee, an Education Policy Report and cited by the Association of Child and Adolescent Mental Health (ACAMH). The impact is evidenced in service changes benefitting young people who engage in online counseling. UK research prompted a US organization to request collaboration.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<u>Systematic Review</u>		
<p>An initial systematic review contributed to the underpinning research of this impact case study [1]. The review explored the use of mobile apps and SMS messaging as physical and mental health interventions and found that technology is efficacious when used as a mental health intervention.</p>		
<u>Online Counseling</u>		
<p>Following the initial systematic reviews, the area of research focused upon online counseling. Dr Prescott partnered with Dr Terry Hanley (University of Manchester) and KOOOTH, an online counseling service for young people, to undertake this case study, consisting of several phases. In the initial phase, an understanding of how young people use an online forum for emotional and mental health was gained using qualitative data. Results showed that both informational and emotional support was sought and received in a directive and non-directive way [2] and online forums provide a valuable place for young people to gain additional, lower level support [3]. The methodological approach of the research has also been considered, including working with external organizations, challenges of online qualitative research, and ethical considerations of thematically analyzing forum data [4]. A further systematic review highlighted the promises and challenges of online forums and how they can be used for mental health support [5].</p>		
<u>Further Research Commission</u>		
<p>Due to this research, the authors have been further commissioned by Xenzone for a study entitled; Digital Outcomes in Therapeutic Support (DOTS), resulting in a report published in November 2019, A positive virtual ecosystem: the theory of change for Kooth [6].</p>		

International Collaboration

Due to the success of this research, the team was approached to engage in research collaboration with a US online mental health community, 18percent. Results from the first US study evidenced that the platform provides users with increased self-efficacy and encourages further support seeking in a professional capacity, either via an online or offline platform. The community is moderated by non-professional volunteers, providing users a safe online space and often the confidence and self-efficacy to seek professional support, providing transitional provision.

Further research will continue with the US based provision to further explore online to offline support for mental health.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Rathbone, A. L., & Prescott, J. (2018). The Use of Mobile Apps and SMS Messaging as Physical and Mental Health Interventions: Systematic Review. *Focus*, 16(4), 456-465. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.focus.16406>
2. Prescott, J., Hanley, T & Ujhelyi, K. (2017). Peer Communication in Online Mental Health Forums for Young People: Directional and Nondirectional Support. *JMIR Mental Health*. 4(3):e29. DOI: 10.2196/mental.6921
3. Prescott, J., Hanley, T & Ujhelyi Gomez, K. (2019). Why young people use online forums for mental health and emotional support? benefits and challenges. *British Journal Of Guidance And Counselling*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2019.1619169>
4. Prescott, J., Hanley, T & Ujhelyi, K. (2018). A Qualitative Analysis of an Online Forum to Understand How Young People Use this Platform for Mental Health Support. *SAGE Research Methods Cases*, SAGE, London <http://dx.doi.org/10.2196/mental.6921>
5. Hanley, T., Ujhelyi, K. & Prescott, J. (2019). A systematic review exploring how young people use online forums for support around mental health issues. *Journal of Mental Health* <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2019.1630725>
6. Hanley, T., Sefi., A., Grauberg, J., Green, L., & Prescott, J. (2019). A positive virtual ecosystem: the theory of change for Kooth. Comprehensive Report, November 2019, Xenzone and The University of Manchester. (PDF)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The initial systematic review was republished as an influential article by *FOCUS: The Journal of Lifelong Learning in Psychiatry*. The review was referenced by 41 US news outlets; e.g. National Public Radio and CBS News [A]. It was cited in a policy report from the Rathenau Institute, a member of the European Parliamentary Technology Assessment. The report explored digital health data services, controlling personal data and subsequent impact on Dutch healthcare [B]. The publication is open access providing ease of access to the general public.

Xenzone (owners of Kooth) carries out collaborative research with academic partners to develop an evidence base for digital therapeutic support. Xenzone provides online mental health services to over 5 million people in the UK, with Kooth being the UK's largest digital mental health and wellbeing support service. The research into online counselling for young people via Kooth has had national and international impact.

Research was pivotal in the commissioning of Kooth in over 70 CCG's in the UK [2-5]. It was cited in the Education Institute Policy (EPI) report: Online Mental Health Support for Young People [C]. The EPI uses research and data analysis to communicate information to the general public and helps advance education. The policy highlights the peer support online counselling can provide and cites the research [2]. The report also highlights the value of the online service for mental health support through research findings. This is beneficial to users of online mental health provisions, since the EPI aims to raise standards in education using empirical evidence and make this information accessible to decision makers at a governmental level.

One phase of research [2] has been cited by the ACAMH [D]. ACAMH membership comprises of a diverse group of clinicians, practitioners and world-leading child mental health researchers, working across an array of child and adolescent mental health domains. Conclusions from these publications, which indicate that online mental health support is beneficial to young people, were presented at the House of Commons science and technology committee; impact of social media and screen-use on young people's health (29 January 2019; [E]). This demonstrates the efficacy of the research in supporting decision making and impacting young people's mental health support at a national level.

The report (6) delves into the different and powerful mechanisms of change within the service and its role as a safe virtual environment for support. This is a unique and collaborative research project involving researchers, Kooth practitioners and young people, utilising more than 15 years of data amassed through Kooth's therapeutic work. Kooth utilises the report as evidence to base the launch of a new set of outcomes. Highlighting how Kooth utilise research to change and enhance their practice/service [F], a webinar [G; 386 views] based on this work engaged approximately 50 people, including NHS commissioners, therapists, researchers and policy makers. This showcased an evidence base for the service, while the new outcome measures demonstrate efficacy and sustainability of research. This part of the research was beneficial for Kooth, and in turn, young people who use the service. Presentations made to those within the NHS and decision makers is the initial step to further the amount of commissioning from CCGs.

Xenzones Chief Research Officer states [H], "*The organisation engaged in the research in the hopes to understand better the fundamental tenets of online therapeutic support, through a theory of change (ToC) approach. This research has helped the organisation to be able to define the key ingredients of its work, and thus build an outcomes framework to be able to demonstrate its unique evidence base. As an organisation, this research has been important to us because we are building this evidence base as well as developing a research-based and data informed practice across the company.*"

Promotion has led Kooth to be recognised in a Horizons Spring report (2019), released by JISC [I] highlighting the impact of online support. Following the dissemination of the research, Dr Prescott was contacted by an American mental health service, 18percent, for research collaboration. 18percent is a free American based online mental health community which has a global reach. The co-founders stated [J] "*We used these results to inform our practise and provisions and since then we have better understood why people join 18percent and how we can better support our members*". The letter also mentions current research being undertaken and how this will be utilised for development and potentially moderator training, furthering societal impact.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- A. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/should-you-trust-an-app-for-mental-health-help/>
- B. <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2019-06/apo-nid242666.pdf> (see page 59; PDF)
- C. Firth, E. (2017). Online mental health support for people. Education Policy Institute. <https://epi.xenzone.com/>
- D. The Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health <https://www.acamh.org/topic/digital-interventions/>
- E. Select committee SMH0078 <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocumen>

- F. [t/science-and-technology-committee/social-media-and-mental-health/written/80952.html](https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/all-committees/science-and-technology-committee/social-media-and-mental-health/written/80952.html)
- G. <https://xenzone.com/publications/>
- H. <https://vimeo.com/375694669>
- I. Corroboration letter from Aaron Sefi: Chief Research Officer at XenZone
<https://www.jisc.ac.uk/reports/horizons-report-emerging-technologies-and-the-mental-health-challenge> (see page 43; PDF)
- J. Corroboration letter from Zach Schleien: Co-founder of 18percent