

| Project Details | |
|-----------------|---|
| Project Code | MRCNMH24Ba Loades |
| Title | Improving access to early help for adolescent depression symptoms in adolescents from minority backgrounds |
| Research Theme | Neuroscience & Mental Health |
| Summary | Many adolescents feel unable to ask for help when they first experience depression symptoms. Linked to an NIHR-funded programme to improve access to help for adolescent depression, the PhD focuses on adolescents from minority backgrounds and comprises (1) interviewing them to discover where they look for help (2) conducting co-design workshops to build messages to use to let them know about early help options, and (3) Test these messages in a funded trial. |
| Description | <p>One in three adolescents has elevated depression symptoms and even sub-diagnostic depression has substantial consequences and costs. Prompt treatment can reduce this burden, yet it is difficult to access. The needs-access gap is even wider for minority adolescents including ethnic minorities, who are disproportionately vulnerable to depression, and less likely to access traditional mental health services. Barriers to accessing help are not knowing what help is available and stigma. Therefore, we need (1) engaging, relevant and credible ways to let all adolescents, including minorities, know about early help options and (2) scalable, effective interventions that are available immediately and anonymously when an adolescent seeks them. As today's adolescents are digital natives, we need to better understand how and where adolescents from ethnic minority backgrounds seek their digital experiences (e.g., Tik-Tok) including early help for depression symptoms, to capitalise on morphing their digital presence with early help messaging. Furthermore, digital technology offers an effective way to deliver evidence-based treatment at scale. But currently available digital treatments suffer from significant drop out and most frequently, are only used once or twice. Single session interventions (SSIs) are one-off therapeutic interventions by design. In three American randomised controlled trials (RCTs), online, self-help SSIs have been shown to reduce adolescent depression symptoms at 3 to 9-month follow-up compared to a supportive (placebo) control SSI, with much higher uptake and comparable outcomes for minority groups than traditional mental health services. Aim: to improve the provision and reach of scalable early help for minority adolescents with depression symptoms who are currently underserved by traditional mental health provision (PhD student to identify specific minority group to focus on e.g. ethnic minority, LGBTQ+). Objectives: (1) to establish guidelines on early help messaging, specifically for reaching minority adolescents (2) to evaluate the reach, acceptability, and utility of two 'one-shot', digital self-help interventions as a post-messaging provision for this underserved population. Work package 1– Discover, Design, Build: Messaging Stage 1: Individual semi-structured qualitative interviews to discover how minority adolescents seek help for depression symptoms online. Participants: Minority adolescents aged 13-18 (N~30) – PhD student to design recruitment strategy. Procedure: Participants will be interviewed using open-ended questions to explore where adolescents seek help online when they first begin to struggle, and what influences their</p> |

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| | <p>perceptions of the information they find. Data will likely be analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. (PhD student to identify focus, refine method & design questions) Stage 2: Co-design workshops to build messaging materials The PhD student will run a series of co-design workshops with adolescents from minority backgrounds (6-10 adolescents/workshop). Working together, they will use creative techniques (e.g., word association hexagons, mapping, arts-based approaches, PhD student to refine) to design messaging materials, based on stage 1 findings. Work package 2- To test messaging materials and online SSIs: WP1 outputs will be used as part of the promotional materials for an NIHR funded 3 arm randomised control trial (PI: Loades, commences 2025), comparing two SSIs to each other and to a placebo SSI. The PhD student will specifically analyse data from this trial to examine: (1) which adverts are most effective at recruiting minority participants, (2) what the experience is of minority participants who complete the SSIs, and (3) whether outcomes differ for minority participants compared to majority participants. Data will capture recruitment and uptake, acceptability and clinical utility: PhD student to refine focus, plan data analysis.</p> |
| Supervisory Team | |
| Lead Supervisor | |
| Name | Dr Maria Loades |
| Affiliation | Bath |
| College/Faculty | HSS |
| Department/School | Psychology |
| Email Address | m.e.loades@bath.ac.uk |
| Co-Supervisor 1 | |
| Name | Professor Paul Stallard |
| Affiliation | Bath |
| College/Faculty | HSS |
| Department/School | Health |
| Co-Supervisor 2 | |
| Name | Dr Lucy Biddle |
| Affiliation | Bristol |
| College/Faculty | |
| Department/School | Bristol Medical School |
| Co-Supervisor 3 | |
| Name | |
| Affiliation | |
| College/Faculty | |
| Department/School | |