Challenging stigma to improve mental health in young people

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Structure of the presentation

- Why young people?
- Are we sure that stigma exists?
- How would tackling it help mental health?
- How can it be tackled?
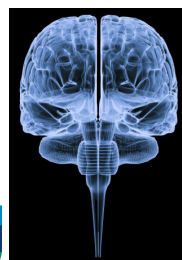- What do young people currently know about mental health?

Why young people?

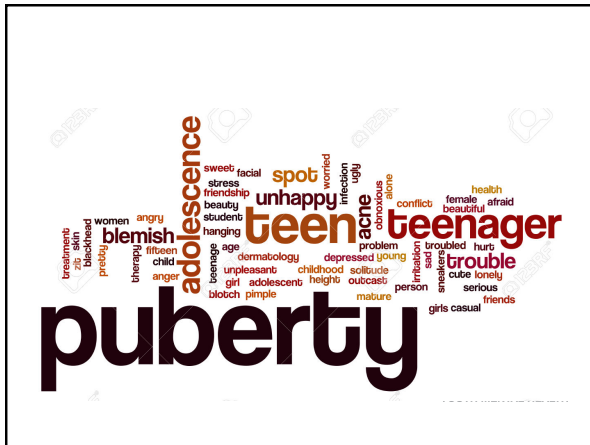- Adolescence and early adulthood are times of vulnerability for mental health problems.

Brain development

- A fundamental reorganization of the brain takes place in adolescence.
- Subcortical areas are more mature than prefrontal areas.
- Areas important for decision making, moderating social behaviour not yet fully developed.

Higher order thinking
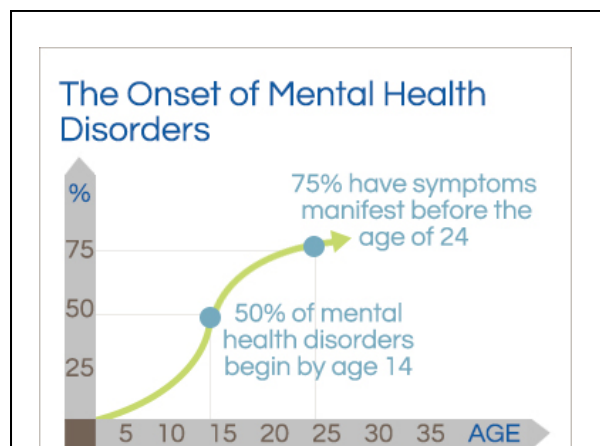

Social changes

The Onset of Mental Health Disorders

Mental health problems in adolescence

Figure 4.9: DASS depression categories by gender

Severity of Depression

Male

Female

(bar chart values: Normal 76, 64; Mild 9, 13; Moderate 9, 14; Severe 3, 4; Very Severe 3, 5)
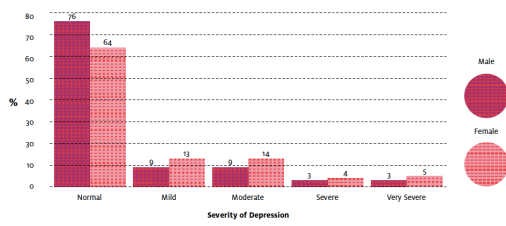
Are we sure stigma exists?

My friend told me that she thinks people who go to get help [for a mental health problem] are kind of weird.

Leah (age 15)

McKeague (2013)

Are we sure stigma exists?

There was one person that found out [about my mental health problem] and they kept mocking me because of it
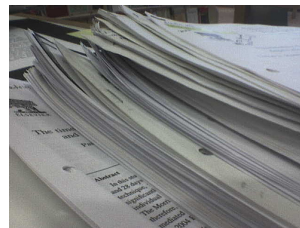
Gavin (age 14)

McKeague (2013)

A higher level of symptoms such as anxiety, depression, or affective disorders is significantly associated with a higher level of peer victimization

Ask adolescents about fictional characters

- Story characters with symptoms of depression have low social status and are more likely to be rejected by peers
- Among adolescents, characters with depression are viewed more negatively than characters with ADHD
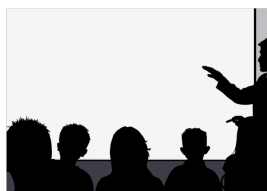
How would tackling stigma help mental health?

- Stigma is linked to help seeking attitudes:
  - Men with higher levels of stigma of mental health problems were less likely to seek help.
  - College students with a high level of mental health stigma are less likely to seek help.

The role of education

- Adolescents who are taught about mental health problems and who meet someone with a mental health problem generally have more positive attitudes as a result.
- Education on its own is more effective than personal contact on its own.
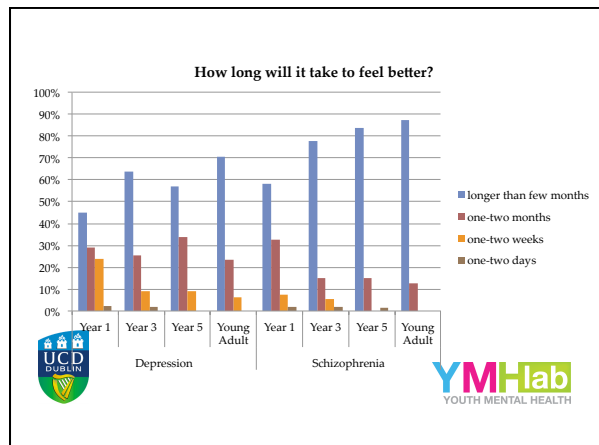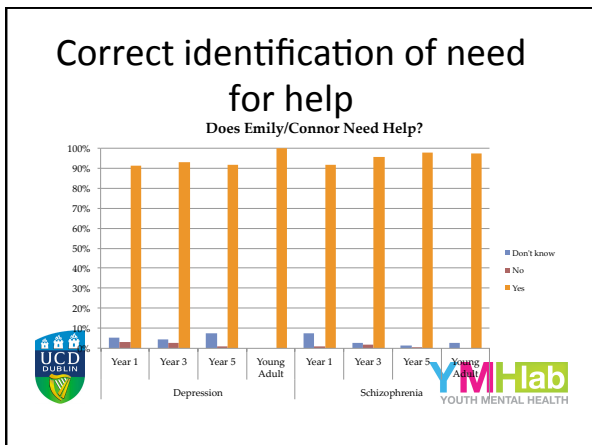
Why should education work?

- Attribution theory:
  - If I hold someone personally responsible for his behaviour I are more likely to have a negative emotional response if I don't like what he does.
  - If I have a negative emotional response my behaviour towards him is also more likely to be negative.

Attribution theory
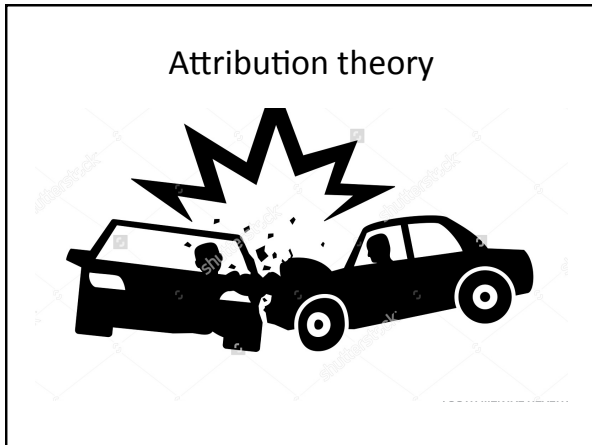
What do young people know?

	Age	Gender	N
1st year	12 - 13	48% Male, 52% Female	256
3rd year	14 - 15	44% Male, 54% Female	239
5th year	16 - 17	46% Male, 53% Female	279
Young adult	18 - 25	23% Male, 76% Female	187
Total		48% Male, 52% Female	961

Correct identification of need for help

Does Emily/Connor Need Help?

Legend: Don't know, No, Yes

Depression | Schizophrenia

Year 1, Year 3, Year 5, Young Adult

How long will it take to feel better?

Legend: longer than few months, one-two months, one-two weeks, one-two days

Depression | Schizophrenia

Year 1, Year 3, Year 5, Young Adult
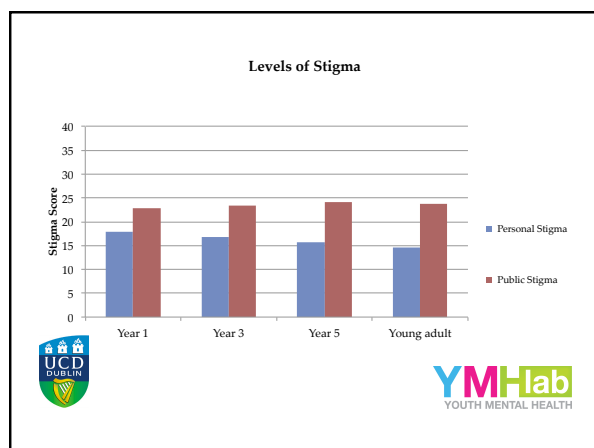
Levels of Stigma

What we now know

- Young people are vulnerable to mental health problems.
- Young people with mental health problems are stigmatized.
- Lower levels of stigma are related to higher levels of help seeking.
- Education can reduce stigma and increase intentions to seek help

What can you do?

- Be willing to listen without judgement.
- Signal your interest through your body language.
- Ask for clarification where necessary.
- Avoid offering 'quick' solution.
- Offer reassurance.

Where could you get more information?

- Depression: www.aware.ie
- Self harm/suicidal ideas: www.pieta.ie
- Eating disorders: www.bodywhys.ie
- Sexuality: www.belongto.org
- General info: www.jigsaw.ie
- General info: ie.reachout.com

More complete list of resources:

- http://www.ucd.ie/psychology/ourresearch/researchcentres/youthmentalhealthlaboratory/youth-mental-heath-resources-ireland/
- Remember that GPs are an excellent source of information and support.

Mind your own mental health

- Eat well
- Exercise
- Help others
- Believe in yourself
- Stay connected
- Take time out regularly
- Look for help

Thank you

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