

# UCD Impact Case Study

## My World Survey: improving youth mental health in Ireland

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### SUMMARY

*My World Survey* (MWS), led by UCD, is the largest national survey on youth mental health. This research has made significant contributions to policies and practice in youth mental health. It has informed national policy debate, and is referenced in various policy documents, such as the Healthy Ireland Framework and Connecting for Life, Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide.

MWS also provided a body of evidence to community-based services like Jigsaw, the National Centre for Youth Mental Health, helping them plan for Ireland's future mental health needs. The findings from MWS are therefore contributing to the psychological wellbeing of tens of thousands of young people across the country.

The MWS report, downloaded over 8,700 times, was launched in 2012 by the Minister for Mental Health, Disability and Older People. It was extensively covered in 6 television broadcasts, 25 newspaper prints and 24 radio programmes.

"A great topic that needs much more awareness and research in Ireland. Good mental health comes from the support systems around us, and we all need to be able to say when we need help and not be ashamed that we may have a problem."

Female participant, age 22

### RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

*My World Survey* (MWS) is a cross-sectional study of youth mental health in Ireland. Before 2012, there were no national data in Ireland on youth mental health in the age range of 12-25. To address this gap, Professor Barbara Dooley and Associate Professor Amanda Fitzgerald devised MWS, and data were collected from over 14,000 young people on a range of risk and protective factors, such as social support, quality of relationships, experience of bullying etc. These data were analysed to identify key factors that support or hinder psychological wellbeing.

The MWS research was a collaboration between Jigsaw (the National Centre for Youth Mental Health) and the UCD School of Psychology. The first wave of research was published in 2012 and the second wave of data collection was published in November 2019, with data from over 19,000 young people.



Professor Barbara Dooley and Associate Professor Amanda Fitzgerald at the launch of MWS in 2012.

### Key findings from My World Survey:

- ‘One Good Adult®’ was important to the mental health of young people. Young people who perceived very low support from a special adult when in need had significantly higher levels of depression and anxiety. The presence of ‘One Good Adult’ was a key indicator of how well a young person can cope with problems.
- Excessive drinking was reported by 58% of over young people over 16, which has negative consequences for mental health and adjustment. Depression and anxiety were significantly higher when a young person engaged in harmful drinking.
- Not talking about problems was linked to suicidal behaviour, and those who share their problems enjoyed better mental health.
- Friends, talking, music and family were the top reported ways of coping among young people.
- Many young people in distress were not seeking help, and they reported low levels of personal well-being.
- The internet was the most popular source of mental health information among young people.

## National Youth Mental Health Task Force Report 2017



## RESEARCH IMPACT

### Outcomes of My World Survey in figures

- 1 national published report, cited by over 100 peer-reviewed papers
- 30,586 young people have engaged with Jigsaw services across Ireland (which has seen the launch of 7 more sites nationally since the launch of MWS, with two more to be developed over the coming year)
- 20,331 views on journal.ie [announcing the launch](#) of the follow-up study to *My World Survey*
- 13,486 Twitter interactions, using the #mws12 hashtag, when the report was launched in 2012
- 8,719 downloads from the UCD Research Repository (within the top 35 downloads)
- 7,074 unique page views on the Headstrong (now Jigsaw) website in the first week of launch
- 5,441 page views on the UCD Research Repository (top four document page views)
- 30+ invited talks (including to the HSE Leadership Team, National Association for Principals and Deputy Principals, and Psychology Counsellors of Higher Education in Ireland)
- 25+ newspaper articles
- 20+ radio programmes (including Radio One and Today FM)
- >20 international conference presentations
- >20 national conference presentations
- 12 published peer-reviewed papers
- 6 television broadcasts (including RTÉ news and Ireland AM)
- 4 invited plenary talks
- 3 Éadbhard O’Callaghan Youth Mental Health Memorial Award recipients (among researchers working on MWS) for outstanding research in youth mental health
- 1 spin-off study investigating the efficacy of an app for improving mental health – this study, funded by the Irish Research Council, was completed by a PhD candidate in 2016.
- 1 follow-up study currently underway (*My World Survey 2*) which employs four full-time and one part-time staff for 12-15 months

### Impact of My World Survey beyond the figures

In 2013, the [Youth Mental Health \(YMH\) Lab](#) was founded by MWS authors and faculty with the aim of disseminating information from the research to the wider population. The YMH Lab disseminates biannual newsletters and runs annual outreach events for teachers and guidance counsellors. The lab has organised 8 outreach events on numerous MWS topics for over 300 attendees.

The findings from MWS have been shared online by many organisations working with young people, and those who support young people, such as [Bodywhys](#), [Gaelic Players Association](#) and [Psychological Counsellors in Higher Education in Ireland](#).

For instance, the finding that ‘One Good Adult’ is a key protective factor for young people has informed training programmes and social media messaging by Jigsaw, the National Centre for Youth Mental Health. These initiatives, which include One Good Coach, One Good Teacher and the Lidl Book of Listening, have supported parents, guardians and those working with young people in being that ‘One Good Adult’, thus improving the lives of young people.

Another key finding – that the internet is the most popular source of mental health information among young adults – has directly influenced policy in the area (e.g. Technology, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention in Ireland) and has inspired the launch of jigsawonline.ie – a site that offers mental health information for young people, their parents and guardians, and those who work with young people.

The findings from MWS are presented online by various government organisations, such as Children and Young People’s Service Committees, and the findings have contributed to the development of many policies which directly impact on young people and those working with young people, including Healthy Ireland, LGBTIreland Report, Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools, and Action Plan on Bullying.

For example, a key finding from MWS was that not talking about problems is linked to suicidal behaviour: this finding, and others, has contributed to the development of Connecting for Life, Ireland’s National Strategy to Reduce Suicide. The Principal Investigator of MWS, Professor Barbara Dooley, also sits on the Advisory Group for this initiative.

The National Youth Mental Health Task Force Report specifically mentions MWS in noting that more large-scale research needs to be conducted in this area (p.20), thereby demonstrating the importance and impact of this research to the lives of young people.

### Impact of My World Survey in quotes

*“A great topic that needs much more awareness and research in Ireland. Good mental health comes from the support systems around us, and we all need to be able to say when we need help and not be ashamed that we may have a problem.”*

Female participant, age 22

*“Great survey, mental health issues are totally swept under the carpet, particularly amongst young males my age. We’re just programmed to get on with it and not really talk. I’m all for getting it out of your system!”*

Male participant, age 21

*“We know that the transition to adulthood is a challenging personal journey for each of us, and of course, our families. Our world is changing, and so are our bodies, brains and minds. This has been well captured by the hugely valuable “My World” survey of young people in Ireland, conducted recently by Dr Barbara Dooley and the Headstrong/UCD team.”*

Professor Pat McGorry, Executive Director of Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health Australia



## REFERENCES

### *My World Survey main report:*

(also available on the websites of the Health Research Board, the European Network for Mental Health Promotion, ChiMat – Child and Maternal Health Observatory and Jigsaw)

<https://researchrepository.ucd.ie/handle/10197/4286>

### *My World Survey emerging themes:*

[http://archive.headstrong.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/MWS\\_Emerging-Themes.pdf](http://archive.headstrong.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/MWS_Emerging-Themes.pdf)

### *My World Survey in the media (a sample):*

<https://www.irishtimes.com/sponsored/15000-young-people-to-be-consulted-in-largest-ever-study-of-irelands-youth-mental-health-882640.html>

<https://www.thejournal.ie/youth-mental-health-survey-4220196-Sep2018/>

<https://www.thejournal.ie/report-1-in-3-young-people-have-experienced-mental-health-problems-452769-May2012/>

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### *My World Survey in organisations working with young people (a sample):*

<https://jigsawonline.ie/>

<http://www.pcicollege.ie/articlerelationshipsandmentalhealth>

<https://www.bodywhys.ie/resources-for-schools/research-on-body-image-in-ireland/>

<http://fermanagh.gaa.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Play-In-My-Boots-Pack-1.pdf>

<https://www.pchei.ie/index.php/student-mental-health>

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### *My World Survey impact on training and education (a sample):*

<https://www.jigsaw.ie/gavan/campaigns/one-good-adult>

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[https://www.jigsaw.ie/jigsaw\\_dublin15/content/docs/Jigsaw\\_EducationTraining\\_Brochure.pdf](https://www.jigsaw.ie/jigsaw_dublin15/content/docs/Jigsaw_EducationTraining_Brochure.pdf)

### *My World Survey in national reports and policies (a sample):*

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<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/connecting-for-life/publications/technology-mental-health-and-suicide-prevention-pdf.pdf>

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<https://www.cypsc.ie/data/participating-in-society-1798.html>

<http://belongto.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/LGBT-Ireland-Full-Reportpdf.pdf>

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Resources-Guidance/Well-Being-in-Post-Primary-Schools-Guidelines-for-Mental-Health-Promotion-and-Suicide-Prevention-2013.pdf>

<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Action-Plan-On-Bullying-2013.pdf>

<https://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/YMHTF-Final-Report.pdf>

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