



Utilization of peer-supported youth hotlines is on the rise

By Dr. Jessica Edwards

New data suggest that there has been a significant increase in the use of a peer-supported youth hotline between 2010 (~8,000 annual contacts) and 2016 (>12,000 annual contacts). Berit Kerner and colleagues evaluated >67,000 contacts made to a hotline based in Los Angeles, USA. They found that most contacts to this hotline seemed to be made by 15-16-year-old girls, but children <13 years old were also increasingly making contact. Calls to the hotline declined over the study period, while email and text-message-based contact increased. The top reasons for youth to reach out to this hotline in 2016 included stress and anxiety (~20%), closely followed by sadness and depression (~17%), suicidal ideation (~14%), and self-harm (~8%).

The researchers did not have access to complete demographic information for all the teenagers contacting the hotline. As such, questions remain as to whether reasons for contact differ according to race, sex, or age. In addition, it is not known whether those using the hotline also received mental health support in other forms. Nevertheless, the data clearly show that the overall number of adolescents using this particular peer-supported youth hotline for mental-health support has substantially increased. The researchers therefore propose that the hotline model might be able to identify youth at risk for depression, self-harm and suicide. It might also serve in prevention and early intervention. To achieve these aims, further work is needed to determine how these hotlines might be effectively linked up with other mental health resources.

Referring to:

Kerner, B., Carlson, M., Eskin, C.K., Tseng, C-H., Ho, J-M G-Y., Zima, B. & Leader, E. (2020), Trends in the utilization of a peer-supported youth hotline. *Child Adolesc. Ment. Health*. doi: [10.1111/camh.12394](https://doi.org/10.1111/camh.12394).