

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Working on better mental health

Dr Vanessa Rose and Associate Professor Janette Perz from the Centre for Health Research have been awarded funding to continue work on measures to improve the mental health of young people who are unemployed. The study, which is supported by Australian Rotary Health, is part of a decade-long cognitive behaviour program called Walk the Talk. This phase will explore interventions among 17- to 25-year-olds who are out of work.

“Unemployment is a major risk factor for poor mental health among young Australians, whose unemployment rates are two to three times higher than for older Australians. Young people who are unemployed report poorer general mental health, including higher stress levels and reduced happiness, and higher rates of depression and anxiety and other serious mental illness, than young people engaged in employment, training or education,” says Dr Rose. “There is also some suggestion that the earlier a person is unemployed, the greater the personal health burden into the future.”

The Walk the Talk program is an online self-help mental health promotion program that was developed by psychologists and is based on known principles of “self-help” cognitive behaviour therapy. It has been tested with different groups in different settings, with demonstrated improvements in the mental health, optimism, attitudes to work and employment history of participants.

To explore its relevance to out-of-work youth, Dr Rose will use Facebook, online job websites such as Seek, and other youth and employment-focused organisations to recruit 160 young participants nationally. Participants will watch videos about coping with unemployment, job hunting, attending interviews and holding down a job once in the workforce. They will also do online quizzes, keep a



diary and engage in other activities. As a Phase II study, this is focused on piloting and feasibility.

Young people are at higher risk of unemployment and are more likely to be put out of work when there are societal shifts in job markets. Risks to mental health come from repeated job rejection and instability, poverty, boredom, social isolation and substance abuse. The significance of this research is three-fold: it has the potential to prevent serious mental illness, offering a public health benefit; it taps into the smart phone medium where young people spend most time, making its take-up more likely; and it is cost-effective and flexible.

Project Title: Walk the Talk: Phase II study of an online population-based intervention to improve the mental health of young people who are unemployed

Funding has been set at: \$68,574

Contact Details: j.perz@uws.edu.au

URL - <http://www.uws.edu.au/centreforhealthresearch/home>

June 2014