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THE JECH GALLERY

Young adults' reluctance to seek help and use medications for mental distress

Epidemiological data suggest young adults are a group least likely to seek help when suffering from mental disorder.¹ This is of public health concern in the context of high rates of suicide and deliberate self harm among this age group.² In a recent cross sectional survey of mental distress and help seeking in young adults aged 16-24 years,³ we found fewer than 10% of respondents with probable mental disorder⁴ had recently consulted a GP. The picture was drawn on a questionnaire returned as part of this survey by a young woman reporting severe symptoms and a suicide attempt. She described her experiences of seeking help as: "tried to speak to people, got passed around, got drugged", and was trying to self manage her symptoms, having withdrawn from medical services. In common with other respondents, her reluctance to seek help was in part motivated by a strong desire to avoid medication. Her picture was accompanied by the message: "For anyone whose job it is to help others, genuine heartfelt compassion, empathy, sympathy are needed along with the ability to not just hear but really listen....don't just prescribe pills as if it were eenie, meenie, minee mo, which pill shall we give a go?" Such data contribute a lay perspective to debates about drug treatments for depression and the need to reduce their use in young people.⁵

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