

# Minder for Younger Minds: Using Focus Group Sessions to Adapt a Mental Health and Substance Use E-Intervention for Secondary School Students

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## Introduction

- As a transition to adulthood, secondary school serves as a crucial developmental stage and a period when mental health and substance use (MHSU) difficulties often emerge. Therefore, it presents a significant opportunity for early detection and intervention of MHSU issues
- An accessible and evidence-based method of early intervention is through digital interventions.
- One such existing digital tool is *Minder*, a mental health and substance use e-intervention developed for university students, currently being evaluated in an RCT.

## Research Objective

To collect qualitative data from secondary school students to better understand their MHSU needs, and to obtain their input on how to adapt *Minder* for their age group.

## Methods

- 43 students from 8 secondary schools in Metro Vancouver participated in 8 focus group sessions
- For a wider representation of different school types, public, private, and alternative education programs were included.
- Participants discussed MHSU needs, user-tested the *Minder* app, and provided input on possible adaptations
- Central themes were extracted from notes recorded during engagements with students
- Questions included:
  - What is mental health & how is it discussed?
  - How do you know when support is needed?
  - What factors impact your mental health?
  - What substances are used among your peers?
  - What are reasons to use or not use substances?

## Minder Overview



## Central Themes

### 1. Sources of MHSU support

- Friends and peers, though concerned about overburdening & also privacy
- Anonymous online forums and peer groups
- School counselors

### 2. Obstacles to using MHSU resources

- Hesitancy to share with teachers
- Concerns regarding counselor confidentiality
- Stigma and cultural differences
- Cost

### 3. Substance Use

- Alcohol and cannabis
- Vaping (e-cigarettes)
- Pills (prescribed & non-prescribed)
- Psychedelics
- Anabolic steroids
- Opioids
- Caffeine

### 4. Use of digital tools

- Digital journaling
- Mindfulness and meditation apps
- Online resources & anonymous communities

### 5. App Adaptation

- Shorter, more accessible content
- Greater ability to personalize app
- Badges, streaks and other incentives to check-in daily

## Discussion

- With the rise of MHSU e-interventions in the digital age,<sup>1</sup> it is essential that these tools are adapted appropriately for their target populations
- Participatory research (co-development) is crucial for ensuring that interventions are appealing and effective
- Various obstacles such as cost, stigma, and confidentiality may present challenges for secondary school students looking to access in-person MHSU resources
- MHSU psychoeducational content must match the needs of secondary school students, and must address more recent trends such as social media use<sup>2</sup>, body image, cyberbullying, and the prevalence of e-cigarettes<sup>3</sup>
- A greater ability to personalize interfaces and reward students for checking-in may increase appeal and adherence

## Future Directions

- These findings suggest a need for e-interventions to foster student connections and to feature psychoeducational content on newer substance use trends.
- Participants' input on their MHSU needs, alongside specific feedback on the *Minder* app, will contribute to a more effective adaptation of the digital tool for secondary school students.

## References

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