



Key findings from a review of digital interventions for children and young people at risk of mental health problems



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Arts and Wellbeing

Acknowledgements:

Who contributed to this project?

YOUNG PEOPLE

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I. A note to the reader



Professor Vicky Karkou

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Technology can be understood as both a potential risk and a valuable resource, particularly for younger generations who are immersed in and shaped by rapid technological advancements. This report summarises how digital technology is being used to offer treatment, management and overall support for children's and young people's mental health, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. When used appropriately, for example, video-based consultations with qualified professionals, technology offered opportunities for early support. This report brings together the latest research evidence, providing invaluable insights that can shape policy and practice.

This review provides a comprehensive report on the landscape of research on digital mental health support for at-risk young people. While there have been notable advancements in the field, significant gaps persist. Future research should encourage co-production and explore factors affecting sustainable usage and uptake.



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The evidence from this review directly informs both clinical practice and service design in relation to utilising digital mental health technologies to support the mental health of targeted groups of young people. It highlights the strength of evidence for acceptability and impact as well as the need for increased co-design of digital technologies with young people and further research focusing on a wider range of mental health presentations.

Evidence such as this strengthens our understanding of how digital mental health technologies can better reach children and young people most at risk. These insights help inform more equitable, context-responsive practice, policies and guidelines at national and global levels.



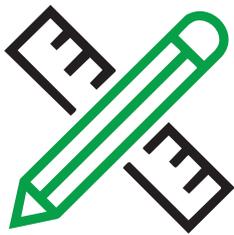
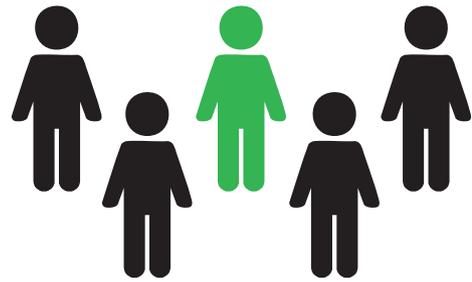
Mr Bertrand Moses

Psychotherapist
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2. Why is this project important?

1 in **5**

children and young people may experience a mental health problem.



Children and young people from marginalised or disadvantaged backgrounds, and those with specific experiences, are at increased risk.

There is a large amount of evidence suggesting that technology can be used to complement existing efforts to mitigate this crisis.



Reducing mental health inequalities is a key priority for many countries, communities and families most in need.

“After presenting this information to clinicians, parents and young people, they asked us to find out a bit more about digital interventions for children and young people from marginalised and disadvantaged groups.”

- Researcher



3. What did this project aim to do?

This project aimed to map the available evidence on digital mental health support for children and young people at-risk of experiencing mental health problems.

The research team also worked together to address the following questions that young people, parents, and practitioners wanted to know more about:

1. What types of digital mental health support have been used with children and young people at increased risk of mental health problems?
 - a. Are they helpful?
 - b. Do young people enjoy using them?
2. Which mental health problems do the digital mental health resources target?
3. Where is the evidence coming from?



“It was nice to work with the research team to come up with a clear plan to answer these important questions.”

- Parent



“Only a few studies targeted children and young people involved with the justice system.”

4. What did we learned?

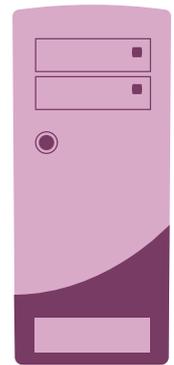
Which groups of young people did the research studies target?

“Most studies targeted children and young people who experienced mental health difficulties because of having a physical health problem or diagnosis.”

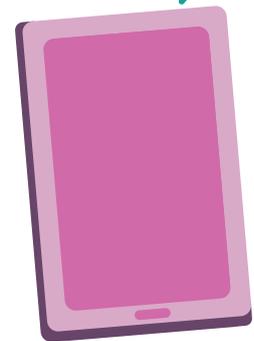


What types of digital mental health support were used?

“Telehealth/video calls were the most commonly used modality to support children and young people. 43 research studies used telehealth/video calls and 35 research studies used computer-based platforms and websites”



Text/email
communication



Combination of multiple
technologies



Artificial Intelligence/
Chatbot

“Technology can play a valuable role, but only when designed with safety and ethics in mind, ensuring digital tools do not introduce new risks.”

- Practitioner

Are digital mental health interventions helpful?

7 8

research studies reported that digital mental health interventions showed varying levels of helpfulness in:



Early identification and assessment of mental health problems.



Treating, managing and supporting mental health symptoms.



Preventing mental health problems.



Promoting good mental health and wellbeing.

Do young people enjoy using digital mental health support?

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research studies reported that children and young people liked using digital mental health support because they are:

- Easy to use
- Easily accessible
- Engaging
- Useful



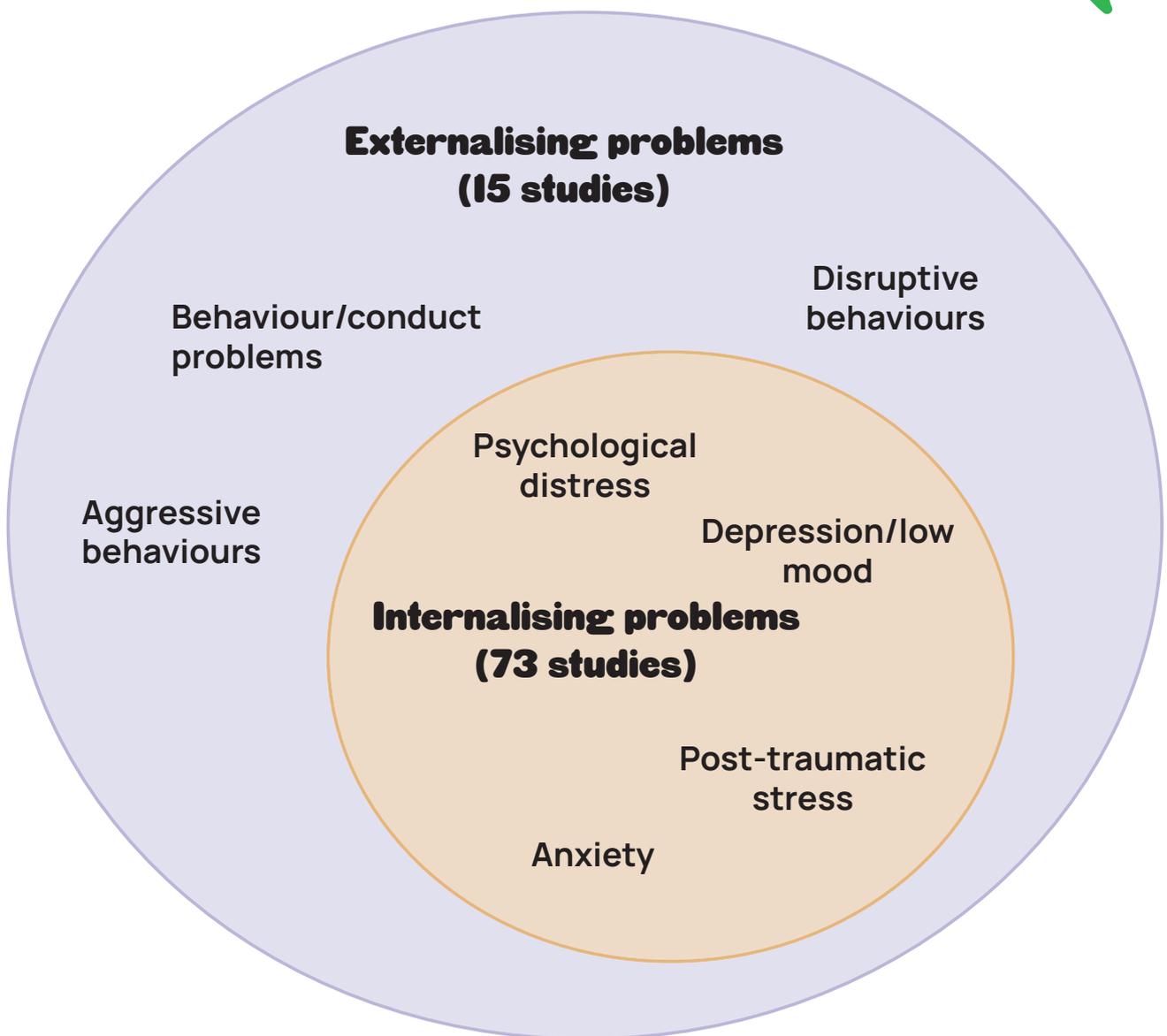
Despite these benefits, some studies reported dissatisfaction with digital support if they had:

- Technical difficulties
- Unappealing features (e.g., dense text and insufficient images)
- Concerns around safety



Which mental health problems do the digital mental health resources target?

Most research studies focused on children and young people with internalising problems, while fewer studies focused on externalising problems.



“There is a lot of emphasis placed on emotional problems. However, sometimes as a young person, when we feel low our behaviour changes, so more support with behaviour problems is also needed.”

- Young person

5. Where is the evidence coming from?

What sources of evidence did we find?

“125 research studies describing 116 interventions were found and contributed to this review (see references).”



How were the interventions used in the reviewed research?

“Most of the interventions in the reviewed research studies were self-guided. These included online tools or apps that young people or families used on their own.”

Were children and young people involved in the development process of the reviewed digital mental health interventions?

“Only 40 articles out of the 125 reported that children or young people were consulted or involved during the development phase of the intervention.”

Were the reviewed interventions still available or accessible at the time of this evidence review?

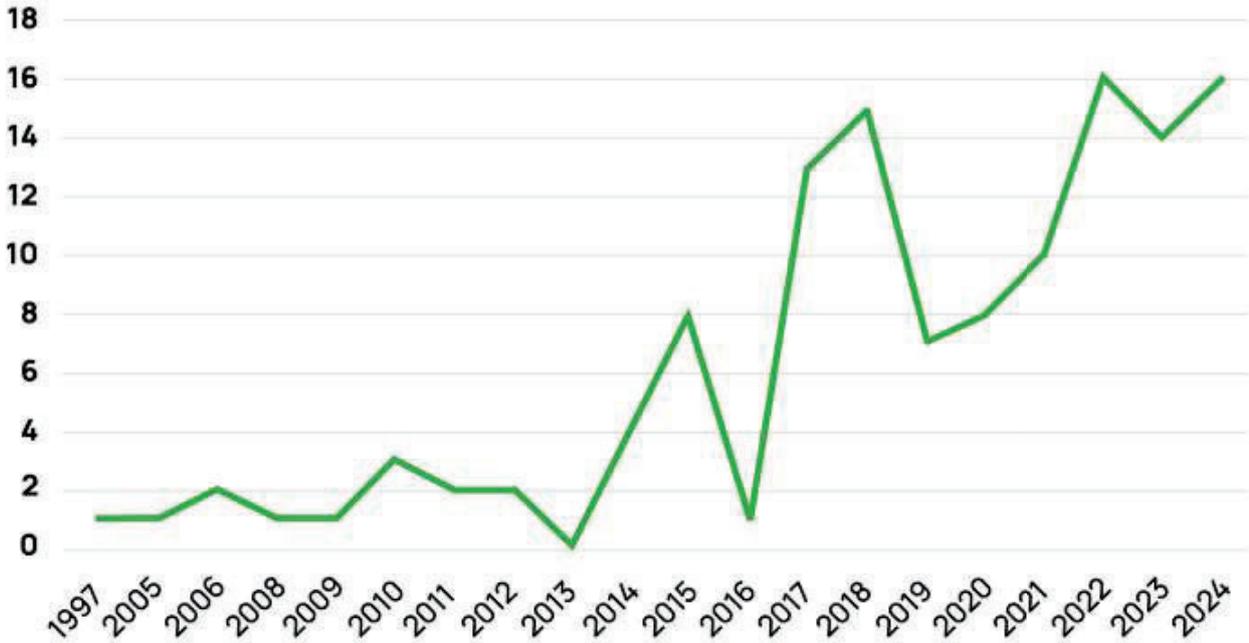


“Only 48 interventions out of the 116 were still available or accessible at the time of this evidence review.”

How recent is this evidence?

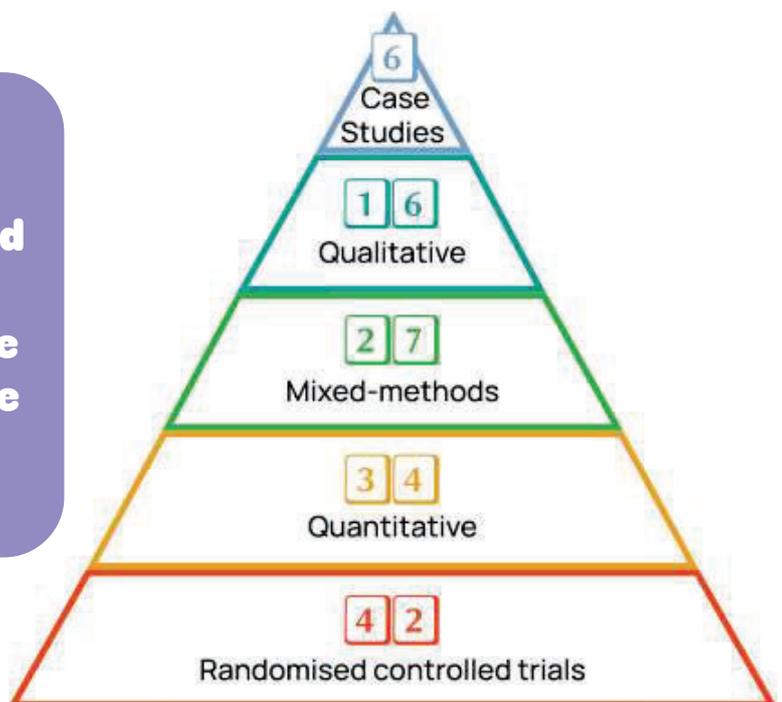
“Most of the studies were conducted in the last 10 years. 108 studies were conducted between 2015 and 2024.”

Number of studies



What type of research studies were reviewed?

“Most of the research studies were designed as randomised controlled trials. This design randomly assigns people to different groups to see which type of support works best.”



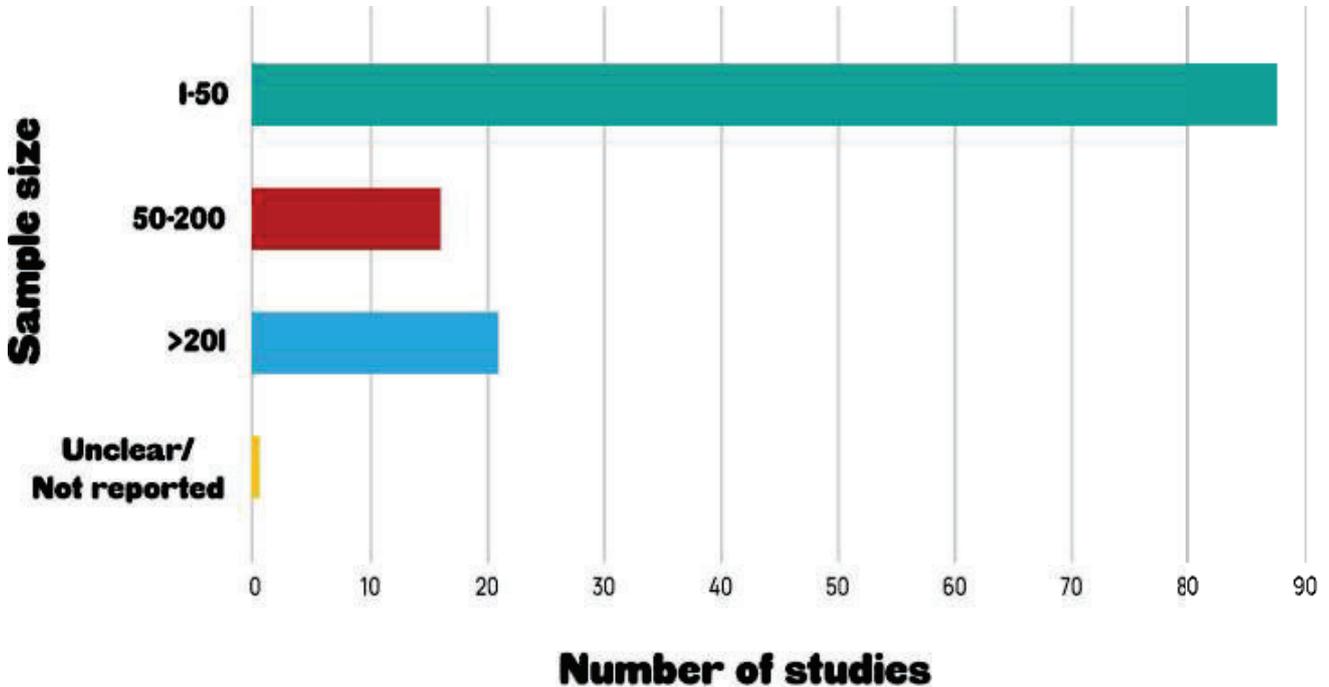
Which countries were the research studies conducted in?

"Most of the research studies were conducted in the United States of America (USA)."



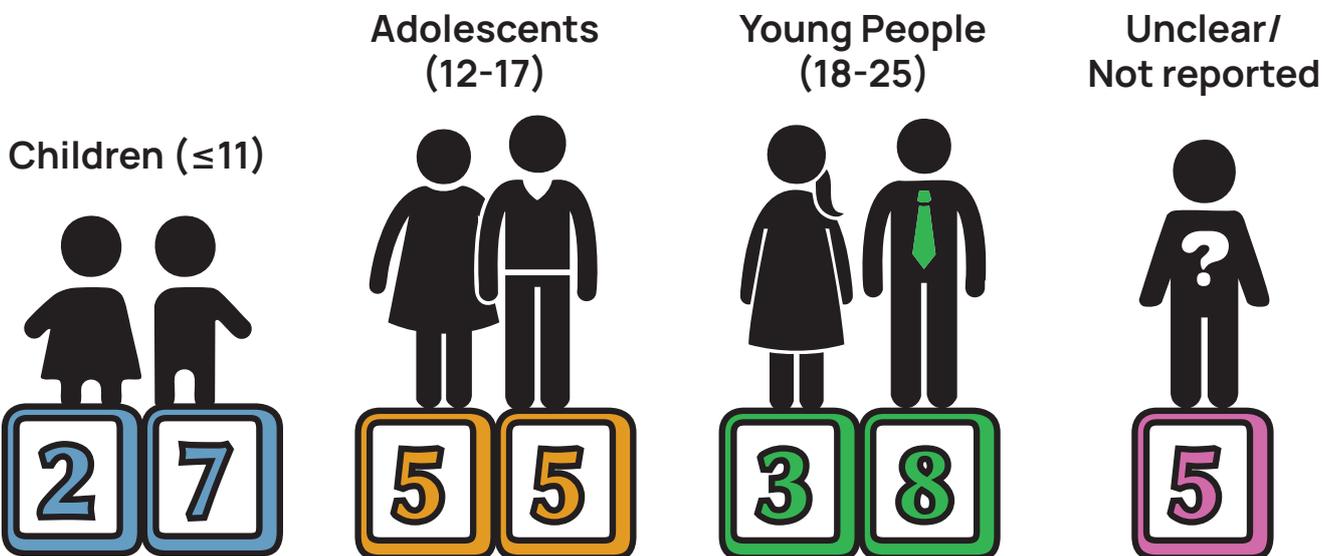
How large were the research studies?

“Most of the reviewed research studies recruited up to 50 participants.”



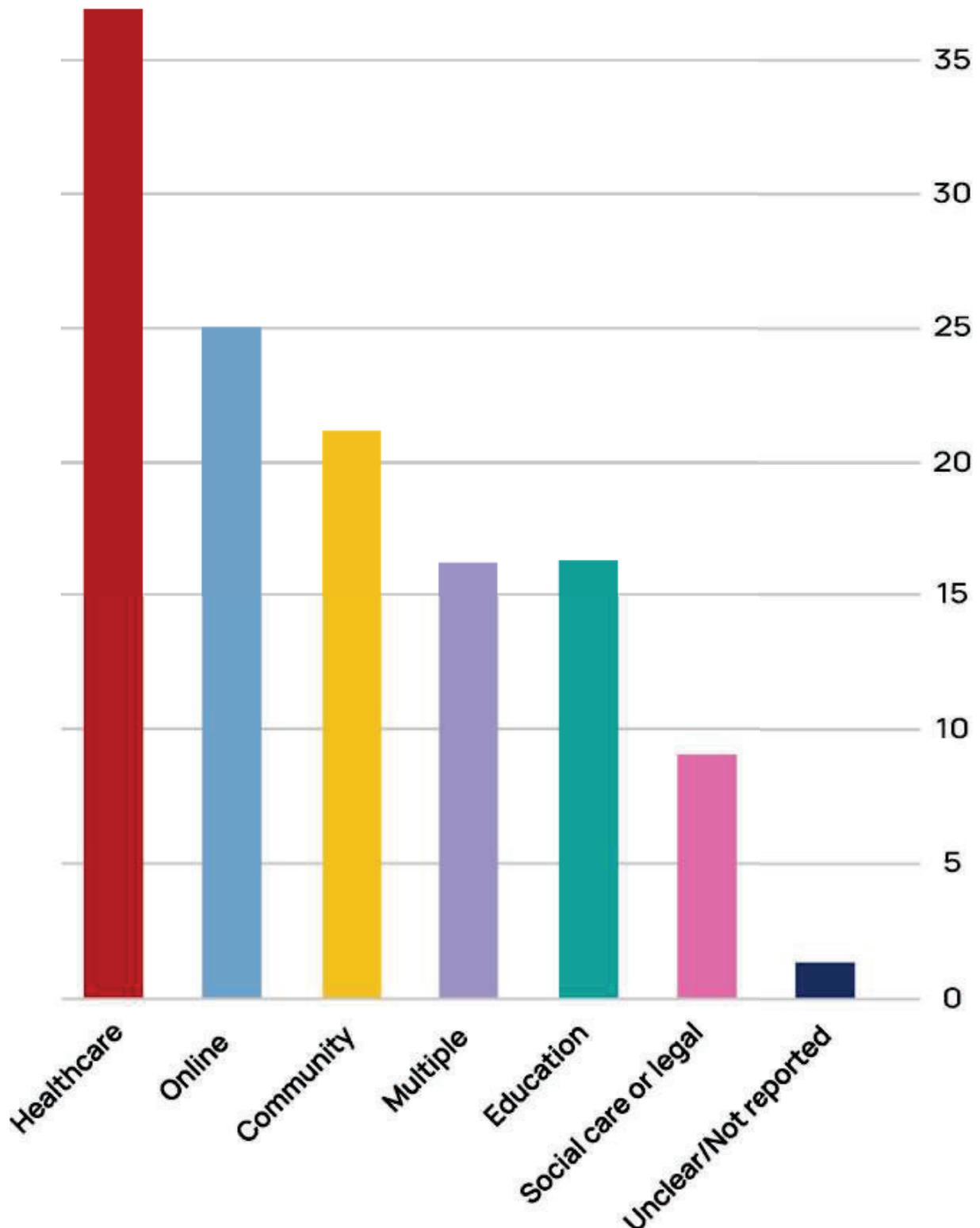
What were the ages of children and young people who participated in the research studies?

“Most of the reviewed research studies focused on young people between 12 and 25 years.”



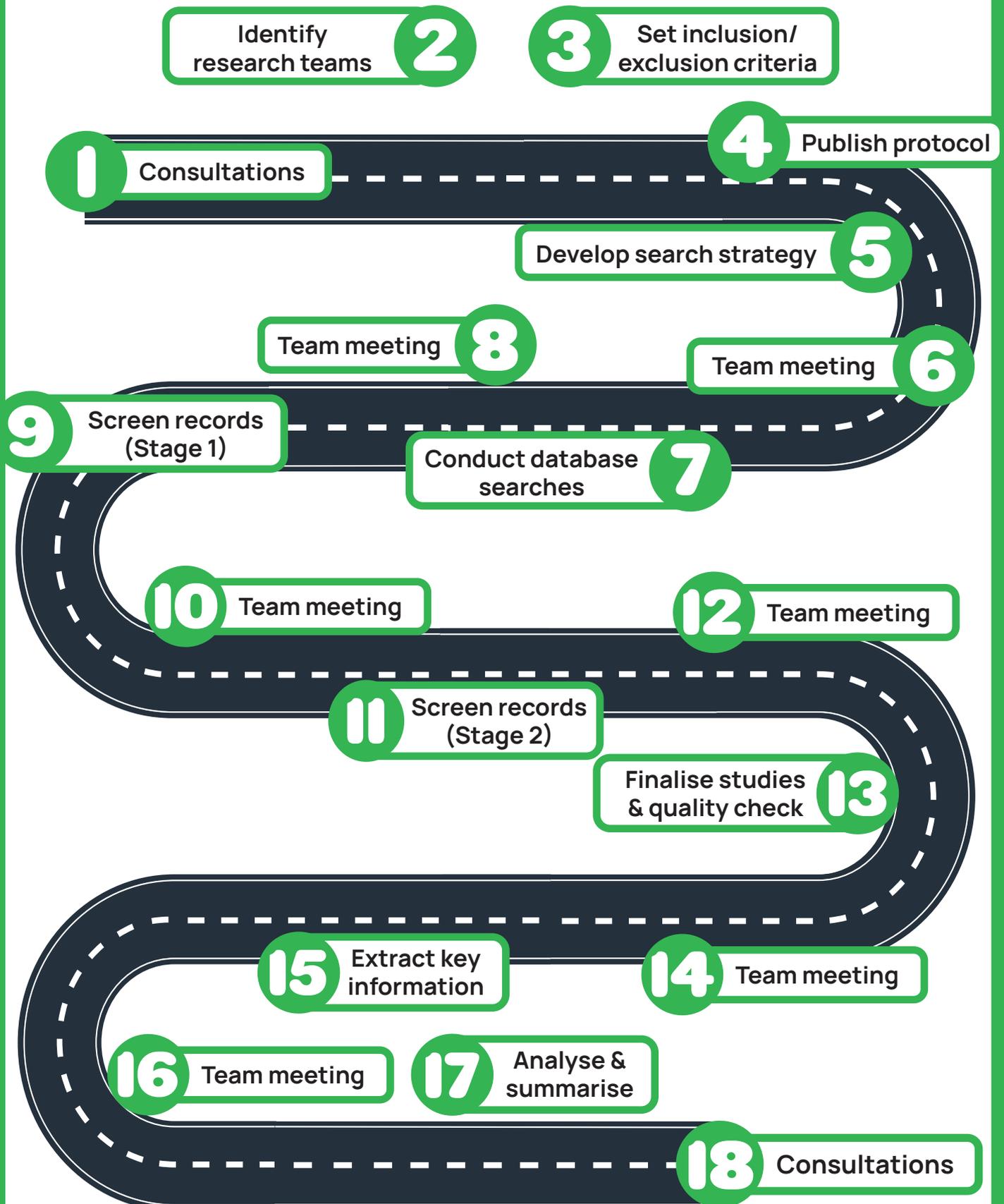
Where were the children and young people who took part in the research studies identified and recruited?

“Most of the reviewed research studies recruited children and young people from healthcare settings.”



6. How was this project done?

Research roadmap



7. Recommendations and next steps

- Engage children, young people, parents and caregivers in the development of new digital mental health support services.
- Conduct research to explore the safety and potential of new technologies such as AI/Chatbots.
- Increase research activities among underrepresented groups (e.g., youth offenders, young carers and migrant youth)
- Explore ways to increase the sustainability and longevity of interventions.
- Learn more about what works, for whom, and why.
- Provide specific training for mental health practitioners on how to use new interventions.
- Support mental health providers to integrate digital interventions in their practice.
- Further explore the potential of technology to support early identification and assessment of mental health problems.

“Working with the young people, parents and practitioners to co-create the next steps helped to make the recommendations more specific. If carried out, these activities will have a big impact in the field.”

- Researcher



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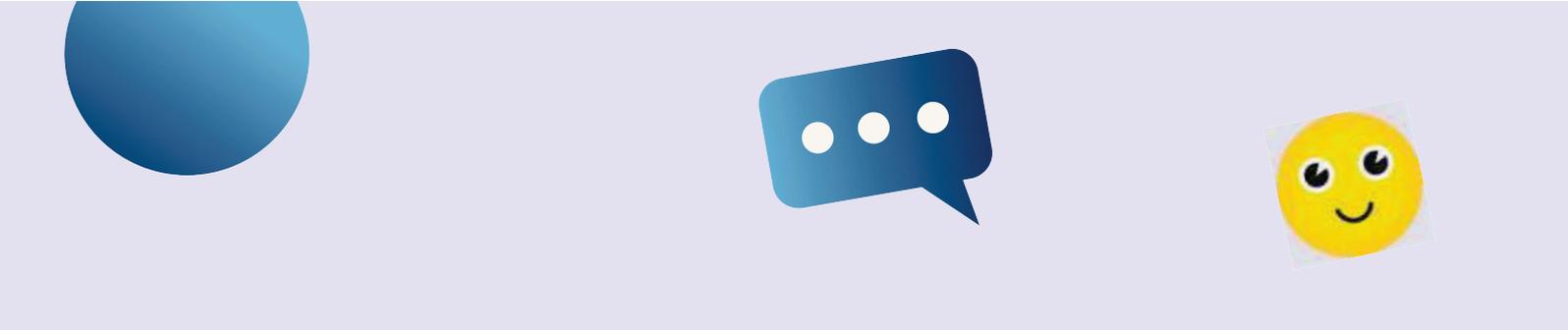
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“It was really fun being part of this project. It didn’t feel like research. It felt like our ideas mattered, and we were creating something other young people would actually want to read.”

– Young person



If you are in crisis or emergency, please be guided by the following advice:

- Ask for HELP
- Go to the nearest Accident & Emergency hospital department
- Call for an ambulance
- Contact your GP

If it is not an emergency but you require urgent advice, call 101 for non-emergency access to the police, or NHS 111 if you are in the UK.

Free 24/7 helplines for children and young people:

Childline: Call 0800 1111. See more information about Childline here.

<https://www.childline.org.uk/>

Kooth: Call +44 20 3398 9048. See more information about Kooth here.

<https://www.kooth.com/>

Samaritans: Call 116 123. See more information about Samaritans here.

<https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/>

Shout: Call 85258. See more information about shout here.

<https://giveusashout.org/>

Research Conducted by



**Edge Hill
University**

Research Centre for
Arts and Wellbeing

**Co-Designed with Young
People, Parents and
Practitioners across the UK**

Facilitated by

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**TO FIND OUT MORE, OR TO REQUEST A
MORE ACCESSIBLE VERSION, GET IN TOUCH**