

Press Release  
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○ Goethestr. 10  
D-97980 Bad Mergentheim  
Tel. 0049-(0) 79 31. 99 27 30  
Fax 0049-(0) 79 31. 99 27 31  
info@media-k.eu

○ Gentzgasse 105/4  
A-1180 Wien, Austria  
Tel./Fax 0043-(0)1. 47. 000. 90  
vienna@media-k.eu  
www.media-k.eu

## Reaching young people with counselling and therapy offers

### EU project presents guidelines and training

The number of young people who need counselling or therapeutic help is increasing. But what is the best way to reach young people who need counselling or therapeutic help? Smartphones and online services via social media are a great opportunity that has hardly been exploited to date. The European initiative "Therapy 2.0" has developed guidelines and training materials for youth counsellors, therapists, teachers and people involved in refugee work.

"The times in which counselling and therapy took place exclusively in personal conversations are over," says coordinator and media k GmbH Managing Director Dr. Karin Drda-Kühn, "otherwise there is a danger that young people will not be able to be reached sufficiently. Because they have a fundamentally different communication behavior, which includes above all smartphones and on-line media such as Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter and Skype naturally and is an addition of the verbal communication. So if you want to reach young people in counselling and therapy, you have to deal with them and you have to deal with many questions of data and trust protection, practicality and ethics.

### Increase in mental illness among young people

The urgency of this approach is demonstrated by the German 2018 Doctors' Report of the German Barmer health insurance company: based on data from 2005 - 2016, it showed that psychological, psychosocial and psychosomatic disorders such as depression, anxiety or panic disorders are on the increase in young people. In Germany, for example, between 2005 and 2016, the number of 18- to 25-year-olds with mental illness and disorders increased by 38%

from 1.4 to 1.9 million. This means that in 2016 about 25% of this age group in Germany were threatened or affected by a mental illness.

The so called „Doctors' Report“ concluded that more low-threshold forms such as online services are needed to prevent mental illness and disorders and to reach young adults who are already suffering from depression or anxiety. Online services correspond to the habits of the "smartphone generation".

### **Online help for young people - opportunities and limits**

"Strictly speaking, we are facing an enormous socio-political task here," says Drda-Kühn. Since 2016, a team of European experts from universities, consulting institutions, hospitals, social services and mobile application developers has therefore been implementing the initiative "Therapy 2.0 - Counselling and Therapeutic Interaction with Digital Natives". The aim was to raise awareness of the potential of information and communication technologies (ICT) in therapy and counselling processes. The results should support practitioners in avoiding a potential deficit of visual or verbal communication in counselling or therapy.

The spread, simplification and cost efficiency of Internet-based (online) services has significantly expanded the possibilities for specialists in counselling and therapy. Nevertheless, the integration of ICT in counselling and therapy is not yet well developed in many European countries. While there are already sophisticated online counselling structures in countries such as Croatia or Slovenia, in Germany and Austria, for example, counselling and therapy services are mostly conventional.

### **New requirements for counselling and therapy practice**

Advisors, counsellors and therapists thinking about online services are faced with numerous questions: How much direct or indirect support do they want or need to give to their customers and patients? How much time flexibility is expected of them and how can this be achieved? Should they communicate in synchronous ('real time') or asynchronous (delayed) time? What are the advantages and possible limitations of online-based communication? Which services are suitable for which forms of counselling or treatment? What are the limits of online counselling and therapy?

In addition to technical questions, practical questions also arise: How secure are online services with regard to data protection and confidentiality? How high are the costs? What billing methods are available? Last but not least, there are also very fundamental questions concerning health care: For example, will this close gaps in rural health care?

## Exploiting online potential

The following tools have been developed that can be immediately integrated into counselling and therapeutic practice:

- **Guidelines** that enable counsellors and therapists to transfer their skills in personal counselling and therapy to an online environment;
- **Training materials** to complement the guidelines: They include various sensitisation, training and demonstration sessions for counsellors and therapists;
- a collection of **best practice** examples from around the world;
- an **electronic platform as a virtual learning environment** where all project materials are made available and complemented by interactive services such as access to forums, blogs, social networking applications and chat rooms.
- **mobile applications (apps)** of all materials for mobile devices (smartphones and tablets).

All materials and tools are available free of charge at <https://www.ecounselling4youth.eu> .

## Reaching young refugees

Such an online approach should also benefit young refugees. Most of them have had traumatic experiences, and many of them suffer from post-traumatic stress disorders. Their most important means of communication are smartphones. In view of the fact that their language skills in the host country are often still poor, conventional "language counselling" needs a complementary approach that makes use of the media in which these young people are at home. Last but not least, this also opens up ways of preventing violence, which can be associated with traumatic escape experiences.

## Therapy 2.0 materials may benefit professionals

Dr. Karin Drda-Kühn: "With these materials, we are now offering counsellors and therapists the free opportunity to learn more about online counselling and therapy for young people and thus further their qualifications. The materials have already been tested in seven European countries ("consistently successful"). Now she hopes "that the materials will benefit as many professionals as possible".

Contact: Dr. Karin Drda-Kühn, Tel. 07931-99 27 30; therapy2.0@media-k.eu

Further links:

- [www.ecounselling4youth.eu](http://www.ecounselling4youth.eu) : homepage and training platform of the initiative "Therapy 2.0".
- <https://www.barmer.de/presse/infothek/studien-und-reports/arztberichte/barmer-arztbericht-2018-144304> : Medical report of the Barmer health insurance company 2018

Image suggestion:



European expertise for online counselling and therapy

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