

## 'My World Survey 2': Improving Youth Mental Health in Ireland

Dr Amanda Fitzgerald (Co-Investigator)  
 Prof. Barbara Dooley (Principal Investigator)  
 Dr Clíodhna O'Connor (Postdoctoral Researcher)  
 Dr Aileen O Reilly (Co-Investigator)

Youth Mental Health Lab, UCD School of Psychology and Jigsaw - The National Centre for Youth Mental Health



ACADEMIC



HEALTH



POLITICAL



SOCIAL



TRAINING

### SUMMARY

My World Survey 2 (MWS-2), led by UCD School of Psychology, is Ireland's largest national survey on youth mental health. This research has made significant contributions to practice and policy in youth mental health. This research builds on My World Survey 1 (MWS-1), published in 2012. MWS-1 has informed national policy debate, and is referenced in various policy documents, such as the Healthy Ireland Framework and Connecting for Life, Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide. MWS-1 also provided a body of evidence to community-based services like Jigsaw, The National Centre for Youth Mental Health, helping them plan services and supports for young people aged 12-25 and plan for the future.

The second report, MWS-2, published in November 2019, has been presented to mental health organizations, third-level institutions, education research centres, schools, and governmental representatives, providing an opportunity for this

research to influence practice and policy. The findings from MWS are therefore contributing to enhancing our knowledge of the psychological wellbeing of young people across the country.

*"Mental health often has a negative and stigmatising connotation, and I like that in our My World Survey, we address the protective factors of mental health as well as the risk factors. A better insight into a young person's mental health and wellbeing will help to inform us about how young people navigate their way in this world and what coping strategies they use to deal with the challenges that they face."*

Amanda Fitzgerald, UCD School of Psychology

### RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

In Ireland, 17% of the population are aged 12-25 years (Central Statistics Office, 2016) and the MWS findings add to our knowledge about the mental health of these young people. Mental health difficulties can influence a young person's cognitive, emotional and social development, educational attainment and their potential to live a healthy and productive life. Mental health difficulties are the number one health issue among young people as adolescence, and early adulthood has been identified as the peak time for the onset of mental health difficulties. Despite this, many young people do not get support at this critical time. This has been described as a "crisis in care" internationally. Moreover, mental health difficulties cost Ireland's economy €8.2 billion a year.



Launching 'My World Survey 2' in Dublin, November 2019  
 Dr. Aileen O Reilly, Dr. Amanda Fitzgerald, Prof. Barbara Dooley & Dr. Clíodhna O Connor

Developed by UCD School of Psychology and Jigsaw - The National Centre for Youth Mental Health, My World Survey 2 (MWS-2) is Ireland's largest and most comprehensive study of youth mental health and wellbeing. It captures the views of more than 19,000 young people between the age of 12-25 in order to understand what can lead to an increased risk of mental health difficulties, and what can help to protect and support a young person's mental health and wellbeing. It builds on the findings of My World Survey 1 (MWS-1), the first-ever survey of its kind in Ireland, published in 2012.

MWS-2 is unique in several aspects. Not only it is the most extensive study in Ireland about this topic, but it also captures a broad age range (12-25 years). In comparison previous studies usually focus on either the age groups of 12-18 or 18 years and older. Additionally, the researchers valued the contribution of young people to the research and consulted with them before and after collecting data. The report also presents a more balanced picture of mental health. It focuses not only on aspects such as depression and anxiety, but also considers positive aspects of mental health such as life satisfaction, resilience, optimism, social support and potential coping strategies.

In MWS-2, young people are asked questions about relevant issues such as social media, gender identity, sexual orientation, sexual consent and use of pornography, alcohol/drugs consumption. However, some questions remained the same as MWS-1, enabling a comparison between the surveys and identifying changes over time.

*Prof. Barbara Dooley presenting at the launch of the My World Survey 2 report, Smock Alley Theatre, November 2019*

## KEY FINDINGS

The scope and richness of the data gathered by MWS-2 allow us to see how different elements and experiences in the life of a young person may be related to their mental health. Some key findings are:

- There has been a notable increase in anxiety and depression among young people since 2012.
- Levels of protective factors such as self-esteem, optimism and resilience have decreased between 2012 and 2019.
- Females, in particular, report increased levels of anxiety and decreased levels of self-esteem, body esteem, resilience and other protective factors than males of the same age.
- Young people from seldom heard groups (i.e., young people attending Youthreach, Colleges of Further Education and engaged in community training, and young people with a physical disability) showed particular vulnerability with heightened anxiety and suicide attempts than their age-matched peers.
- Social media can be used to build and extend social connections in real life; however, there was a significant relationship between time spent online (more than three hours) and higher levels of depression and anxiety and lower levels of body esteem.
- As in MWS-1, the findings show relationships may be inextricably linked to young people's mental health. In particular, the presence of a One Good Adult® is important in the lives of young people.
- Physical activity and good sleep hygiene were clearly linked with better mental health.
- Fewer adolescents and young adults reported drinking alcohol in MWS-2 (2019) than MWS-1 (2012).



## RESEARCH IMPACT

Understanding what supports and challenges young people's mental health, and what works best to help them, is vital in identifying what prevents mental health difficulties and what improves outcomes. Since MWS-2 was published in November 2019, the findings have been part of the public discourse on mental health. They have informed the development of both practice and policy in Ireland. See References to the impact of MWS-2 below.

### Extensive Media Coverage

The MWS-2 report and its findings were covered extensively by the media. There was coverage in:

- **Printed media** such as The Irish Times, The Independent, The Irish Post, Irish Examiner, Irish Mirror, The Sun, The Herald.
- **Radio stations** such as RTÉ Radio 1, Newstalk, Today FM, RTÉ 2FM, FM104, Galway Bay FM, East Coast FM, Midlands 103, LMFM, Midwest Radio, KFM, Limerick Live 95.
- **Online platforms** (not including reach through social sharing). The report's website, [www.myworldsurvey.ie](http://www.myworldsurvey.ie), had over 2,200 users by the end of November, and 47% of the traffic was direct, which highlights the strength of the media and event. There were 1,000+ full report downloads in November. The traffic to [www.Jigsaw.ie](http://www.Jigsaw.ie) was more than doubled after the launching of MWS-2. At the same week as the launch of the report, #MyWorldSurvey was trending #2 on Twitter.

### Input for Professionals and Policymakers

#### Mental Health Services and Supports

- **Jigsaw** | A specific subgroup has been formed to look at MWS-2 findings and consider how it can be used to inform clinical service delivery, community training and youth participation. Two workshops have been given to Jigsaw's staff, with discussion on the report's findings and what they mean in practice.
- **Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) North Dublin** | A presentation of the MWS-2 findings specific to CAMHS North Dublin has been delivered.
- **SpunOut.ie** | Presentation to the Board and the team.
- **Crisis Text Line** | Informed their marketing campaign to promote help-seeking among young people.

#### Education

- **Irish Life Health Schools' Fitness Challenge 2020** | Presentation about the link between physical health and young people's mental health.
- **Educational Settings** | MWS-2 findings delivered to Jigsaw

Connect webinar for Post Primary Teachers- My World Survey 2 and Teachers Research Exchange (T-REX) Expert Chat on Wellbeing.

- **Psychological Counsellors in Higher Education in Ireland (PCHEI)** | A one day Autumn Workshop was held on findings from the My World Survey-2 on mental health in third level institutions.
- **Higher Education Authority Seminar Towards a National Framework for Mental Health in Higher Education** 4th March 2020.

#### Policymakers

- **Women's Health Taskforce** | Presentation focused on gender-related findings of the report, to the new task force established by the Department of Health to improve women's health outcomes and experiences of healthcare.
- **HSE North Dublin Connecting for Life** | Dublin North City and County Conference
- Connecting for Life quarterly meeting of all leading departments, chaired by the Department of Health
- **Government representatives** | The report has been discussed with James Browne, TD and Senator Máire Devine and Mary Mitchell O Connor.

### Applying the Report's Recommendations in Educational Institutions

Comprehensive individual reports of the MWS-2 findings are being produced and shared with the educational institutions who took part in the research, so they can apply recommendations which are specific for them. This way, data can benefit those who participated in the research, as schools and third-level institutions can use it to plan their own mental health support services. Reports are being prepared for over 80 schools, colleges, universities, and a report for those with physical and sensory difficulties. So far, the feedback is positive, and the demand for reports is strong.



## ACADEMIC IMPACT

- Four Oral Presentations delivered by the research team at the **5th International Conference of the International Association for Youth Mental Health (IAYMH)**, Brisbane, Australia, 26th-28th October 2019:
  - Mental Health of Students in Higher Educational Settings
  - Help-Seeking Patterns among Adolescents in Ireland- Findings from MWS-1 and MWS-2
  - Social Media Use and Youth Mental Health
  - Examining the Role of Pornography in Youth Mental Health
- **Contributing to a panel at UCD Geary Institute** on Ireland's COVID19 Crisis Response: Perspectives from Social Science, including a presentation on mental health considerations for young people during COVID-19.
- **Participating in a discussion in Disability seminar at UCD Centre for Disability Studies:** Break the Stigma – Mental Health of Young Adults in Ireland – New Insights.
- **Additional research projects have been undertaken on the MWS-2 dataset** by students completing the Masters in Psychological Sciences and the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology in UCD School of Psychology who are completing projects on: 1) sexual minority youth and 2) suicidal behaviours in adolescence.
- **My World Survey-2 helps to build the reputation for UCD Youth Mental Health Lab @YMHlabUCD**, and to develop international collaborations. The lab works to translate its research findings directly into practice, aiming at supporting young people, parents, schools and relevant organizations.

*“This research helps us to identify what contributes to a young person’s distress and what helps a young person to overcome their difficulties, and for me, that is valuable and powerful.”*

Amanda Fitzgerald, UCD School of Psychology

*Dr. Amanda Fitzgerald presenting at the Discussions in Disability: Break the Stigma Conference, William Fry Theatre, Sutherland School of Law, August 2019*



## REFERENCES

### **My World Survey 2 reports:**

<http://www.myworldsurvey.ie/full-report>

The main MWS-2 report has been downloaded 1,398 times between 19th Nov 2019 and 8th April 2020. There were 4,354 new users visiting the [www.myworldsurvey.ie](http://www.myworldsurvey.ie) website during this time.

### **My World Survey 2 in the media (a sample of media outputs):**

#### ***The Irish Times:***

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/teenagers-who-spend-longer-online-have-higher-depression-rates-1.4087091>

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/steep-rise-in-rates-of-anxiety-and-depression-among-young-1.4087207>

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/young-people-and-mental-health-we-re-not-shocked-by-suicide-anymore-1.4087112>

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/staying-healthy-during-the-best-days-of-your-life-1.4120348>

<https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/health-family/mental-health-we-re-failing-our-young-people-1.4103045>

#### ***The Independent:***

<https://www.independent.ie/life/health-wellbeing/mental-health/girls-tend-to-bond-over-excluding-39000078.html>

<https://www.independent.ie/irishnews/health/study-shows-significant-increase-in-anxiety-and-depression-among-young-people-in-ireland-38705642.html>

#### ***RTÉ Radio 1 - Morning Ireland:***

<https://www.rte.ie/radio/radioplayer/html5/#/radio1/21658754>

#### ***Newstalk - The Pat Kenny Show from November 19th:***

<https://www.newstalk.com/listen-back>

#### ***Today FM - The Last Word (starts at 00:57 mins):***

<https://www.todayfm.com/listenback/2019-11-19>

#### ***Newstalk Breakfast on November 19th (coverage starts at 05:30 min - 10:00 min, continues at 33:00 min & then at 42:00 min):***

<https://www.newstalk.com/listen-back>

#### ***RTÉ 2FM - 9am & 10am News Bulletins***

<https://www.rte.ie/radio/radioplayer/html5/#/2fm/11116074>

#### ***Newstalk & syndicated news throughout the day - News Bulletins***

<https://www.newstalk.com/listen-back>

#### ***Galway Bay FM - The Keith Finnegan Show (starts at 22 min)***

<https://galwaybayfm.ie/podcasts/galway-talks-with-keith-finnegan/galway-talks-with-keith-finnegan-tuesday-november-19th-2019/>

#### ***MWS-2 mentioned by Psychological Society of Ireland in a statement to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health: To address development of mental health services and workforce planning.***

<https://www.psychologicalsociety.ie/source/Address%20development%20of%20mental%20health%20services%20and%20workforce%20planning%20submission%20to%20the%20Oireachtas%20Joint%20Committee%20on%20Health.pdf>