The impact of online counseling on youth mental health

Presenter

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Story of "shadow"

I wrote you many times before and I would like to write you one more time. This will be one of my last posts. I am 15 years old. I don't have an average teenage story. I don't have any friends, I am ashamed of myself and I don't really see a way out of this. I know that what I'm about to do will make parents sad. However, I also know that they will survive.

…

I decided that I will end my life at the age of 15 with a jump. I planned it all. Yes, it will again sound like I'm just looking for attention but I just can't take it no more when people tell me I'm ugly, incompetent and that I should just kill myself.

Slowly you start to believe them.

"This is me" prevention program

Online counseling

- Offering professional help and expert opinion online.
- …

School prevention program

Prevention activities for developing:
- positive and realistic self-esteem,
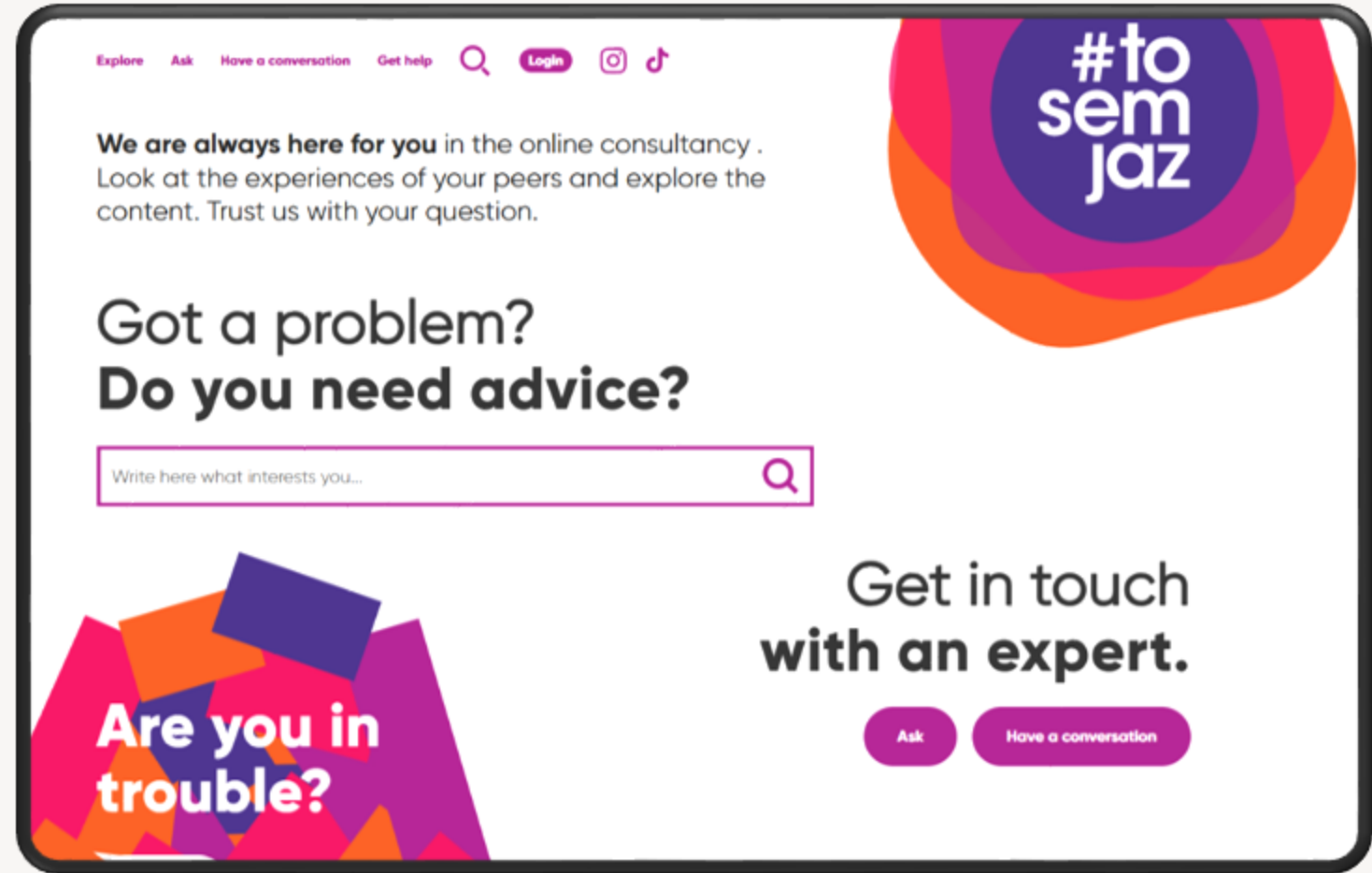- social and emotional skills
- mental resilience.

Our goal: to inspire and support the development of a healthy personality

#tosem jaz

The largest youth web counseling service in Slovenia

Since 2001 providing adolescents with:

- **Free**
- **Anonymous**
- **Public access to expert advice**

Website: www.tosemjaz.net

We are always here for you in the online consultancy . Look at the experiences of your peers and explore the content. Trust us with your question.

Got a problem?
Do you need advice?

Write here what interests you...

Are you in trouble?

Get in touch with an expert.

Ask   Have a conversation

#to sem jaz

Explore   Ask   Have a conversation   Get help   Login

How do we help?

➤ **Professional literature and content about health and mental health**

➤ **Online self-help courses based on CBT** (anxiety, understanding emotions)

➤ **Online counseling**
- Professional help via Forum
- Professional help via Chat
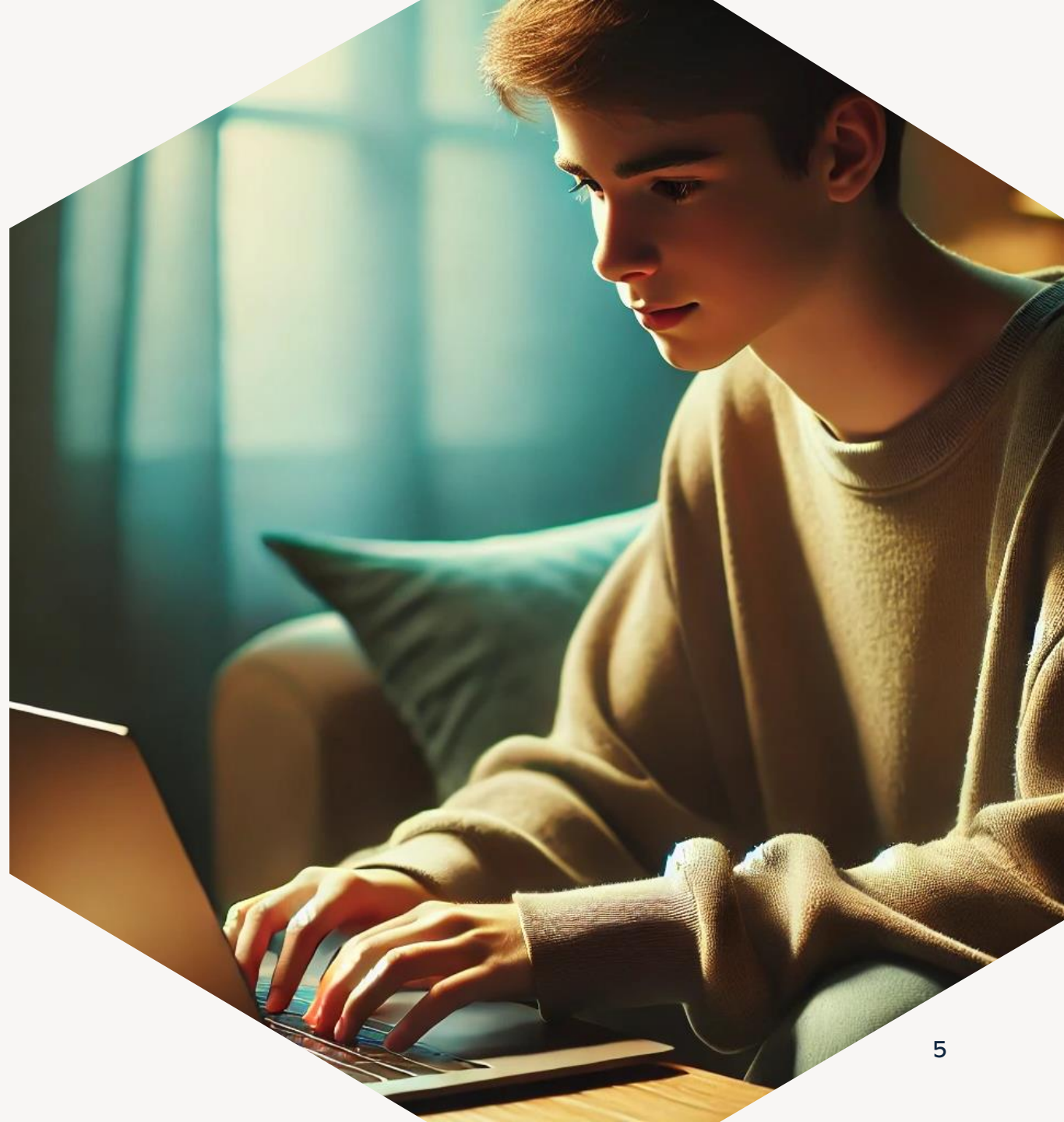
Who is helping?

Multidisciplinary approach
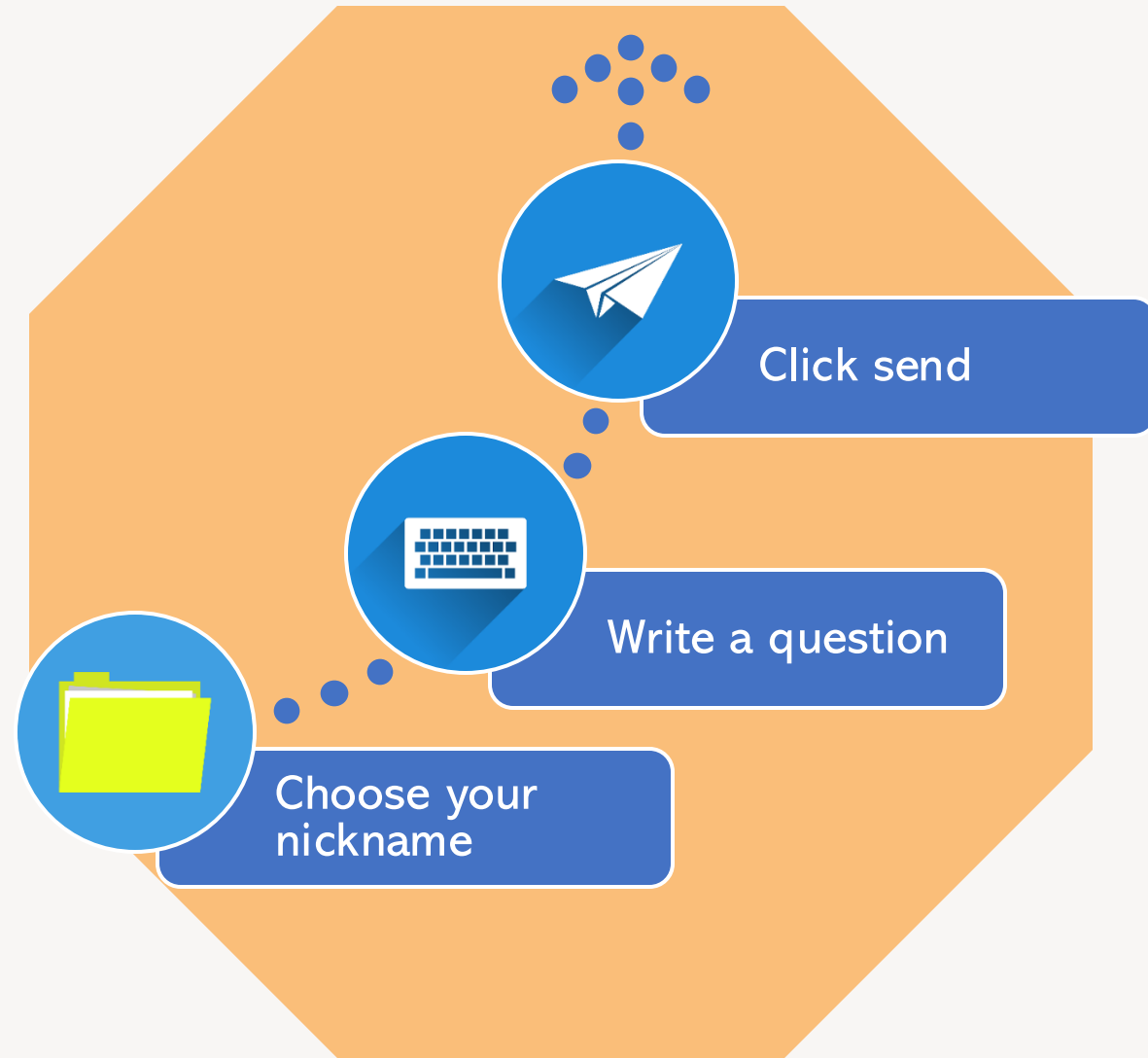
Experts from different fields

Psychologists, medical doctors, social workers, school counsellors, etc.

Volunteers

Since 2001... more than 45.000 answered questions.

More than 350 articles about (mental) health.

How does it work?

Click send

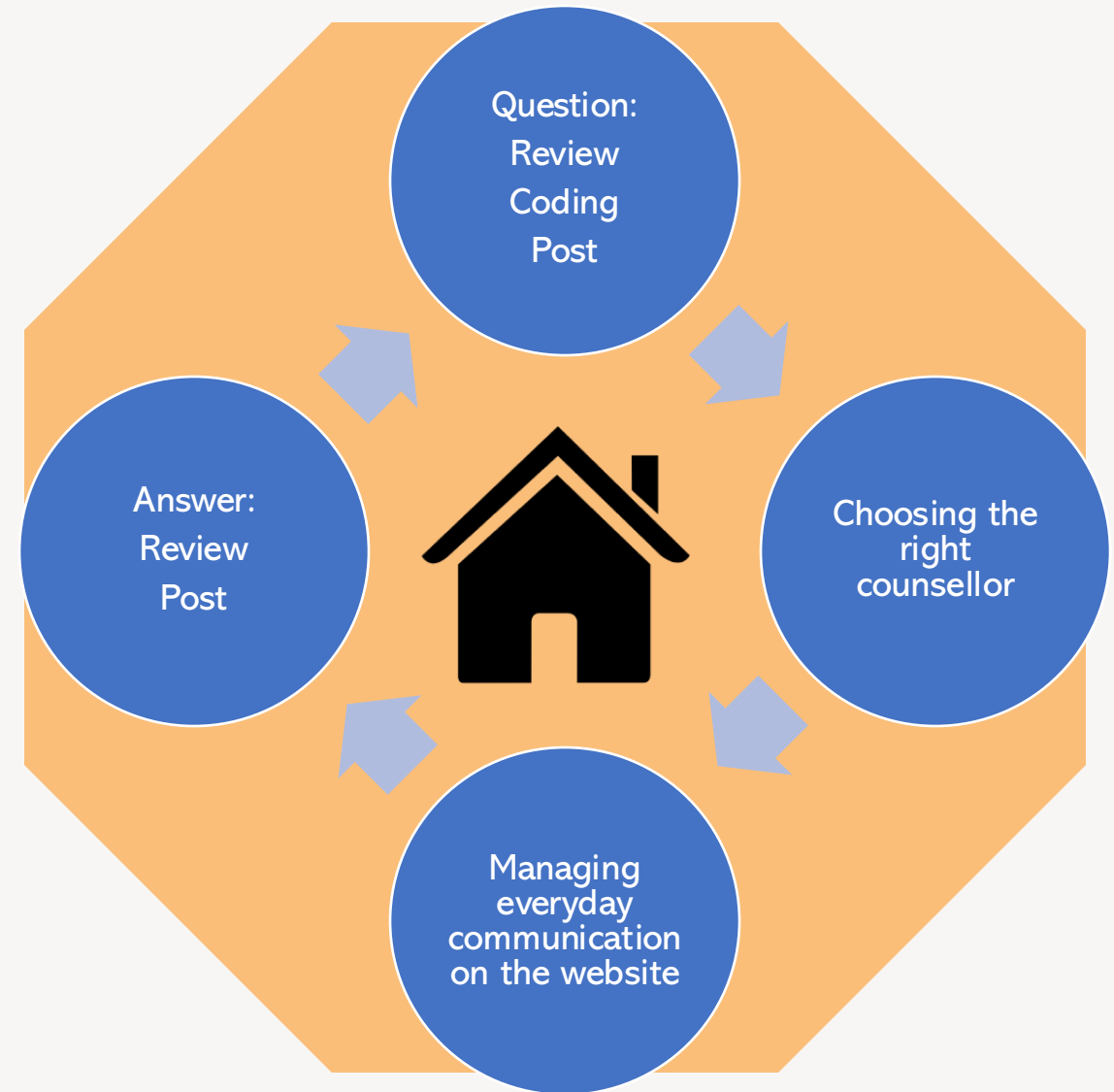Write a question

Choose your nickname

Safe space for everyone

Every question and answer is reviewed by a professional editor.

Anonimity is a priority.

Goal: safe user experience when sharing personal information.

This is them...
examples of questions

Becoming confident

»I'm 14 years old… I don't know why but I'm always embarrassed, I always do some kind of mistake to look like a loser, probably this is because of my low self-esteem, I want to become self-confident and decisive. How can I become confident?

Is he in love with me?

"Hey! Yesterday a guy asked me out for a drink and of course I said yes! And then we went to my best friends house, into her room, where we started to kiss,… I feel so guilty. I fell in love but I'm afraid to tell him because I have a feeling that he's just using me. I don't know what to do?"
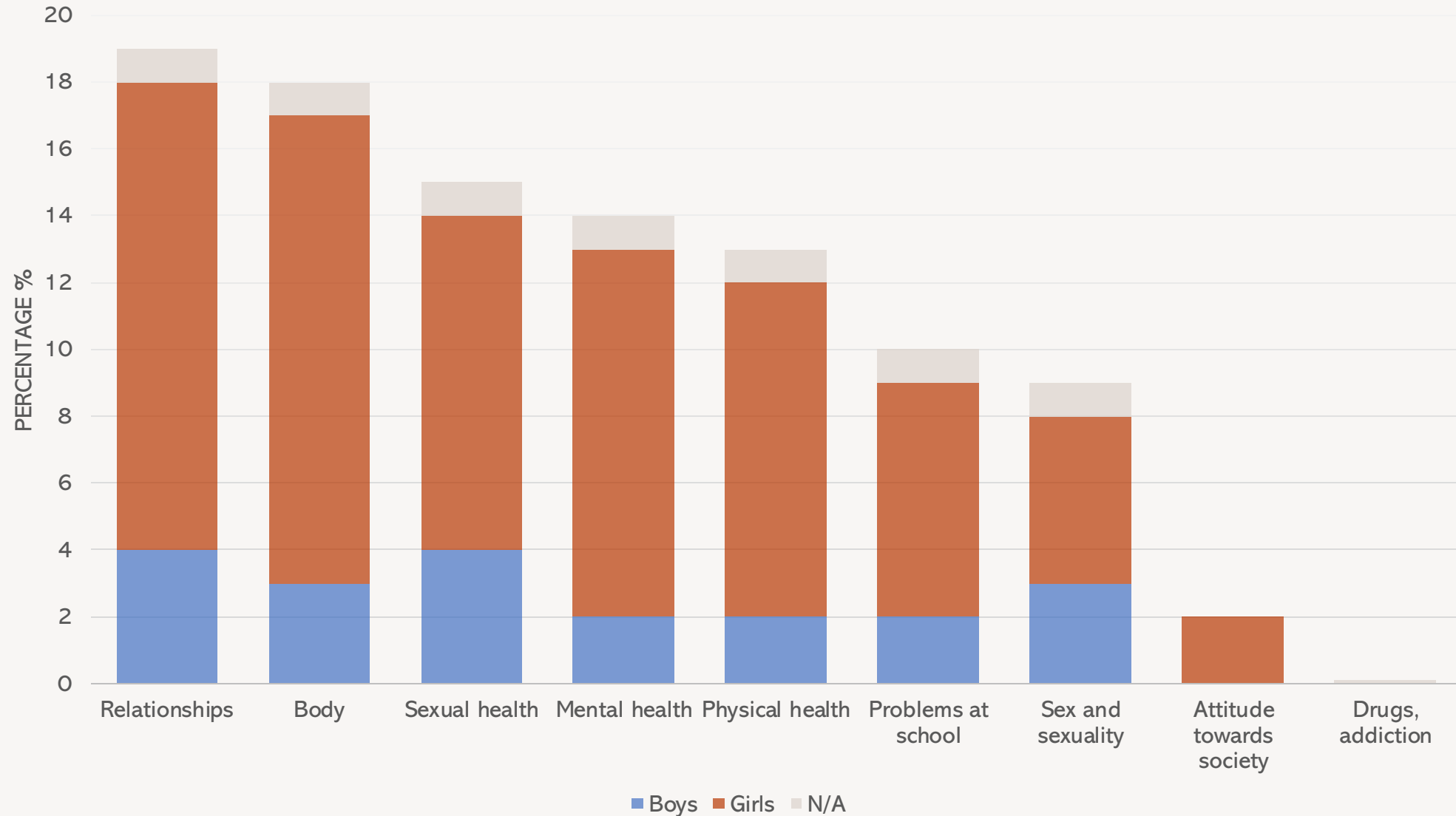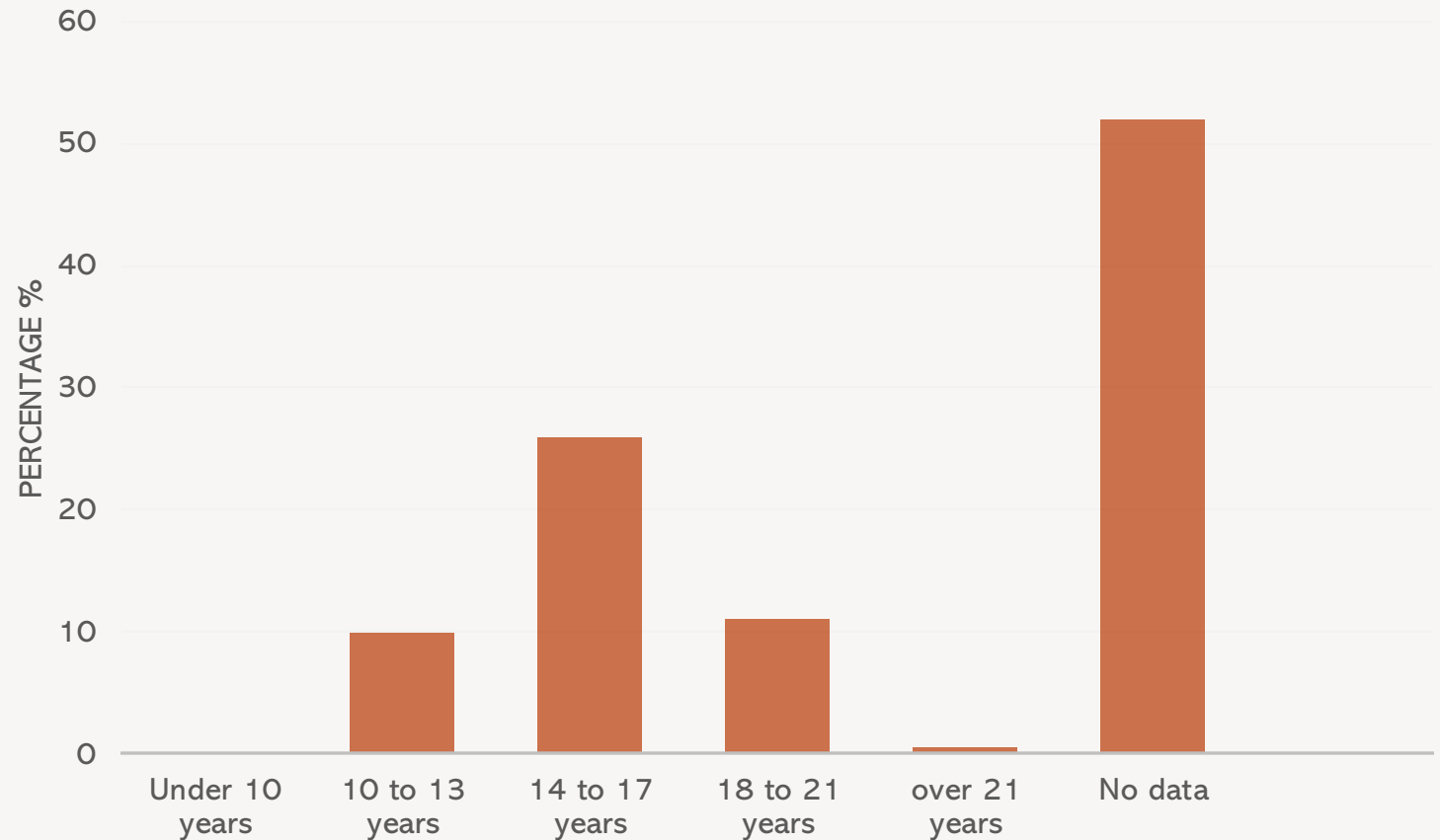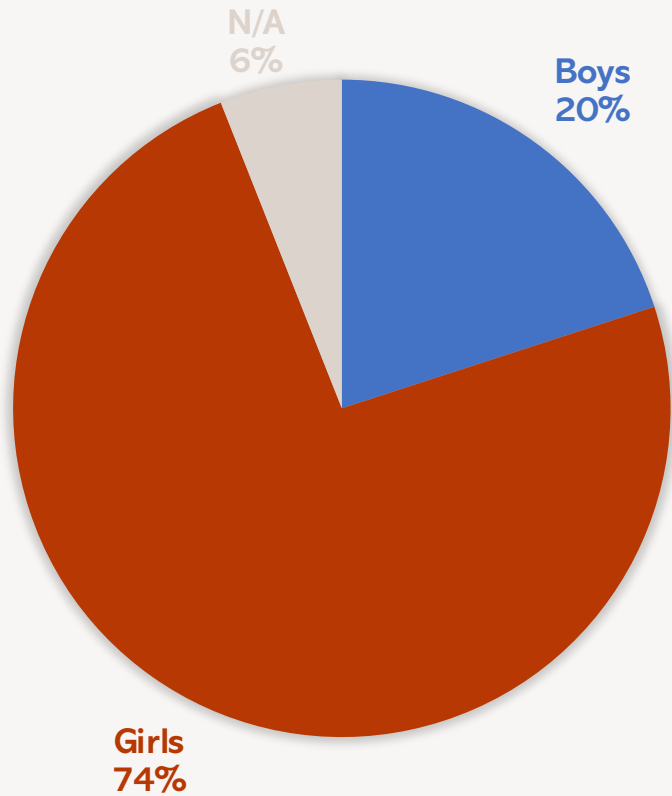
How to study and not be lazy

»Hey! So, I've got this…problem. I know I should be studying, but every time I try, my brain is like, "Nope, let's take a nap instead!". Any advice for a lazy student like me?
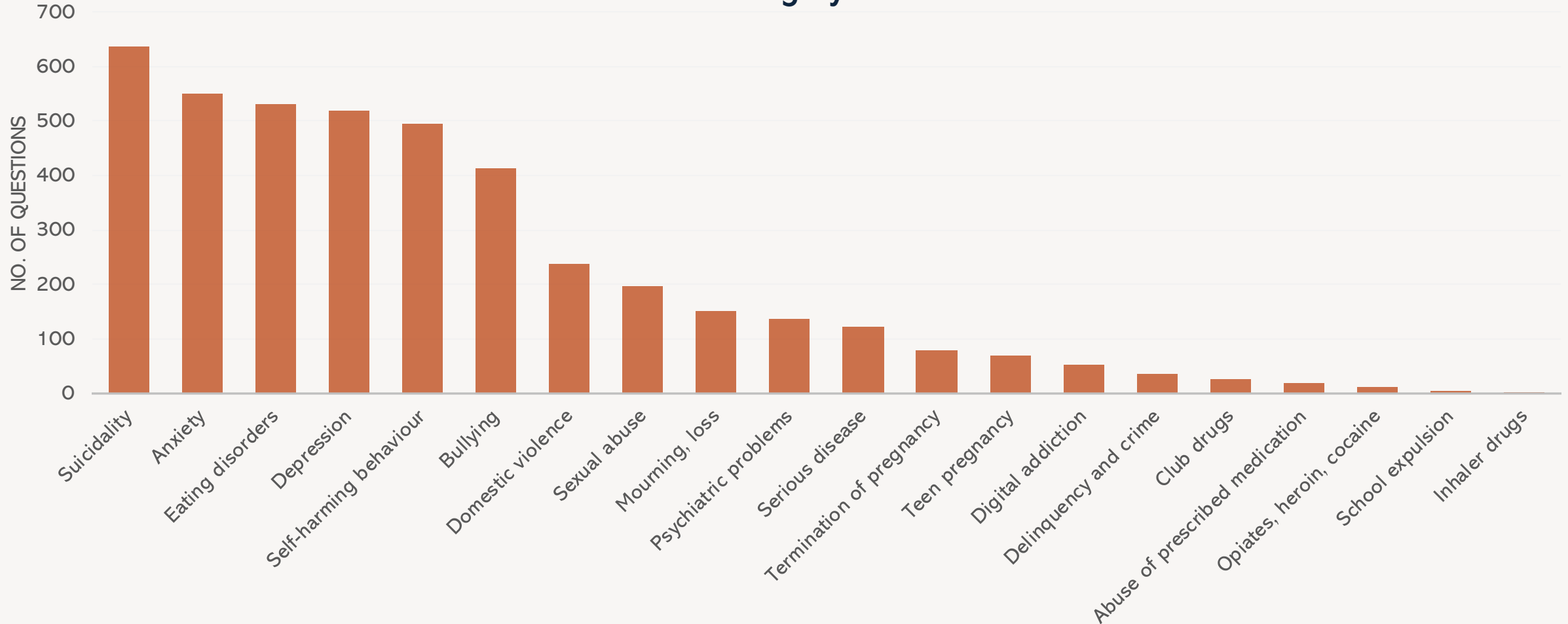
Questions by category (2012 – 2024) N = 23.833

Gender and age of users (2012 – 2024) N = 23.833

The most severe category 2012 - 2024

Between 2012 – 2023, altogether 11 % (2.564) of questions were categorized in the most difficult category

NO. OF QUESTIONS

Categories (left to right): Suicidality, Anxiety, Eating disorders, Depression, Self-harming behaviour, Bullying, Domestic violence, Sexual abuse, Mourning, loss, Psychiatric problems, Serious disease, Termination of pregnancy, Teen pregnancy, Digital addiction, Delinquency and crime, Club drugs, Abuse of prescribed medication, Opiates, heroin, cocaine, School expulsion, Inhaler drugs

Comparison between
2012-14 period VS 2020-22 period

No. of questions

Anxiety
Suicidality
Depression
Eating disorders
Self-harming behavior
Bullying
Domestic violence
Psychiatric problems
Mourning, loss

200

150

100

50

0

2012-14

2020-22

13
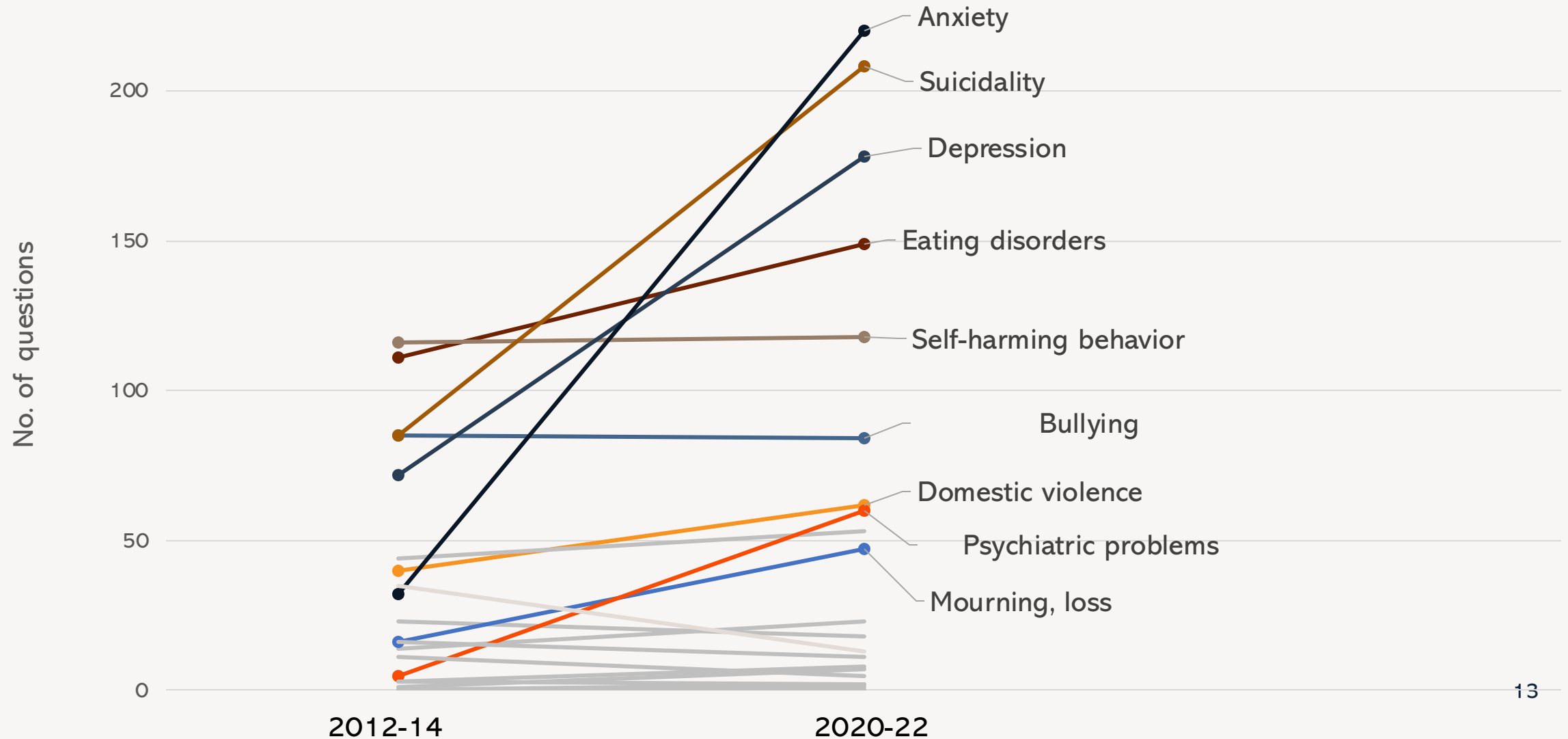
Benefits and limitations of online help-seeking

✓ **Benefits**

- <u>Anonymity, ease of access and the immediacy of internet</u> are important facilitators of online help-seeking in youth (Best et. al., 2016).

- <u>Finding a community and connecting with others</u> who have similar experiences to their own (Bell et al., 2018).

- Youth with higher suicidal risks and higher social anxiety use internet for suicide-related purposes (e.g., information searching, help-seeking) more often than youth with lower suicidal risk and social anxiety (Bell et al., 2018).

- Online help-seeking acts as a <u>gateway behavior to further help-seeking in vivo</u> (Frost et. al., 2016).

✗ **Limitations**

- <u>Uncertainty about trustworthiness</u> (reliability) of resources and anonymity (Best et. al., 2016).

- It may reinforce <u>treatment avoidance</u> → certain communities may increase stigma surrounding mental health and psychiatric treatment (Birnbaum et. al., 2017).

- <u>Lack of immediate, crisis support</u> (Mar et. al., 2014).

Summary

- "This is me" program is a good example that we can create an online safe space/community for youth with (mental) health problems.

- Internet has the potential to assist all young people in accessing help, especially those who experience a great deal of stigma and those who want to be self-reliant.

Can online support (including AI) replace support in vivo?

Story of "shadow"

Shadow opened up about his pain, his fears…later also about his dreams.

Online counselor guided him, offered him support and encouraged him to reach out to others and seek professional help.

Online counseling service can offer more than just advice. It can be a lifeline. We can be seen, heard and valued in a way that may not be possible elsewhere.

Thank you!

Bell, J., Mok, K., Gardiner, E., & Pirkis, J. (2018). Suicide-Related Internet Use Among Suicidal Young People in the UK: Characteristics of Users, Effects of Use, and Barriers to Offline Help-Seeking. *Archives of Suicide Research*, *22*(2), 263–277. https://doi.org/10.1080/13811118.2017.1334609

Best, P., Gil-Rodriguez, E., Manktelow, R., & Taylor, B. J. (2016). Seeking Help From Everyone and No-One: Conceptualizing the Online Help-Seeking Process Among Adolescent Males. *Qualitative Health Research*, *26*(8), 1067–1077. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316648128

Birnbaum, M. L., Rizvi, A. F., Correll, C. U., Kane, J. M., & Confino, J. (2017). Role of social media and the I nternet in pathways to care for adolescents and young adults with psychotic disorders and non-psychotic mood disorders. *Early Intervention in Psychiatry*, *11*(4), 290–295. https://doi.org/10.1111/eip.12237

Frost, M., Casey, L., & Rando, N. (2016). Self-Injury, Help-Seeking, and the Internet: Informing Online Service Provision for Young People. *Crisis*, *37*(1), 68–76. https://doi.org/10.1027/0227-5910/a000346

Mar, M. Y., Neilson, E. K., Torchalla, I., Werker, G. R., Laing, A., & Krausz, M. (2014). Exploring e-Mental Health Preferences of Generation Y. *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, *32*(4), 312–327. https://doi.org/10.1080/15228835.2014.943457

Rickwood, D. J., Mazzer, K. R., & Telford, N. R. (2015). Social influences on seeking help from mental health services, in-person and online, during adolescence and young adulthood. *BMC Psychiatry*, *15*(1), 40. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-015-0429-6