

What do peer advisors from around the world think about active ingredients for preventing and supporting depression and anxiety?



Rúben from Portugal



My name is Rúben, I am 23 years old, I am Portuguese, a practicing psychologist and a Peer Advisor on the Active Ingredients Project. One of my goals is to help people and I have always wanted to get involved in projects that could help others to overcome difficulties, namely in the field of mental health. Some members of my family suffer from anxiety and depression, including my sister. Therefore, I understand how important it is to be able to help people suffering from it and that is why I decided to join the project.

Fortunately, the opportunity arose to participate in this fantastic project, which aims to help both young people to deal with their anxiety and depression difficulties and professionals to be able to help young people, for themselves. I was very excited to be part of this team because this was an opportunity to deal with different people from abroad and to share important information regarding anxiety and depression. These are global issues that young people have to deal with.

As for the project itself, it was an incredible opportunity for personal growth. During the project, I attended and help to facilitate Portugal focus groups, with young people and professionals discussing and prioritizing 26 active ingredients that may be used for prevention and intervention of anxiety and depression in young people. It was really interesting to see the young people's vision and compare it with the professionals' perception.

I connected with people from many different countries and hear their experiences and I have always felt a very positive energy. Despite the language differences, there was always a common goal that was to help young people to prevent and deal with anxiety and depression.

We are all different, we deal with adversity differently and we use many resources to face problems. That is why we should hear those who are suffering with these issues. Although we are different, we are the same. We all go through less good phases and we may need help to overcome those struggles.

And that is why I hope that the results of this investigation may be used in future prevention and intervention programmes. So that young people may deal better with difficulties related to mental health. I hope that more qualitative research will be carried out. I also expect that there will be more and more openness for people not only to talk about mental health, but also be predisposed to see a professional, if they need to, without prejudice.



Isabella from Brazil



Hi! My name is Isabella, I'm sixteen years old and I currently live in the south of Brazil. I grew up surrounded by people who have always been open to listening to me and accepting my feelings. My mother has worked with ASEC (Associação Pela Saúde Emocional de Crianças) for nine years now, so this made everyone in my house get used to talking about this matter.

With the openness I had at home, I understood the importance of talking about my feelings, at any age, but especially while being younger, as it is a significant period for a person to develop their beliefs and personality.

Talking about mental health and trying to spread this important information worldwide has become one of my priorities. That is why, as soon as I received the opportunity to participate in this amazing project, I accepted without hesitation.

I've worked with incredible people during my time as a Peer Advisor. It was extremely gratifying for me to take part in this project and observe how immense our world is, as well as the differences between people from other countries. Additionally, as much as I didn't think about it before, people within a large country like Brazil are also very different. From this experience, I could see this with my own eyes, as diverse opinions, priorities and concerns emerged due to people's realities and contexts.

Moreover, I realised that young people all over the world are in need of mental health knowledge and resources and that everyone involved cares about the future of our generation. At all times, the researchers gave us a voice within the project, regardless of age, wanting to know our ideas and respecting it. And that's how we could organise and update the Active Ingredients list. An example of this was adding "Being kind and respectful to yourself and reduced self-criticism and pressure", which for me is extremely relevant. It previously did not exist, but came from the opinion of all Peer Advisors, who recognises its importance.

Personally, this experience was very enriching and I am happy to have represented my country and, above all, the people who live in it and their difficulties in such an important discussion, alongside Peer Advisors from different parts of the world.

This project is crucial for young people today. We have to show that we are all united for the same cause: the conversation about mental health. I hope that all this material will be accessed by many young people who desires to know themselves better and who feel lost, hence they will be able to understand the importance of these resources to deal with our feelings.

To find out and access more content on mental health and other important topics, I would recommend visiting the project page on the CORC website (<https://www.corc.uk.net/>), some profiles of the project researchers (Twitter: @CORCcentral, Instagram: @euroyouthmentalhealth), as well as the social networks of Movimento Saber Lidar - ASEC (Instagram: @movimentosaberlidar) and UNICEF (Instagram: @unicef). These are some that I follow and can guarantee that they bring very pertinent and helpful content!

Elmas from Turkey



Hello everyone, I'm Elmas. I'm from Turkey. I am a young psychologist at the age of 23 and I have a second degree from the social services department. There is a primary reason of my interest in child and youth mental health. It is about my personal experiences... I want to take you to my high school years. I was an adolescent raised by a mother who had struggled with obsessive-compulsive disorder in the past, and parents who often applied a perfectionist attitude towards her children. I started my high school education in one of the most successful schools in the city. In a classroom full of bright students, my anxiety started to increase gradually. Since I wanted to work with a perfect discipline, I started to display compulsive behavior. After my first year, the sudden and abnormal decline in my academic achievement negatively affected my self-perception, my relationships and my social life, causing me to have difficult years. After treatment, these features affect my life more positively now and they are a part of my character.

In Turkey and the UK, I had the opportunity to volunteer with neglected children. In my opinion, this is a reality that exists in many countries. Therefore, it is very valuable that this project cares about the thoughts and experiences of children and young people on depression and anxiety and to conduct an intercultural study.

In our peer advisor meetings, we were together as peer advisors from different countries and cultures. Although we were young people from all over the world with different cultures, different lives, we were able to share our common experiences of depression and anxiety. In this meeting we were all united despite the differences and in fact we were all in the same place despite the distance. We shared our own experiences, our observations of the children and young people around us, our culture and our circumstances.

Today, if you look at Turkey, you would see a community trying to keep pace with a rapidly changing world, but still keeping traditional values. I have seen that young people do not define themselves and the society they live in as individualistic. Kinship, family and neighborhood relationships were identified by young people as important factors for depression and anxiety. On the other hand, they were aware of situations where relationships interfered with freedom, and how perfectionist parental attitudes negatively affect self-confidence and self-perception. In my opinion, the previous generation might not have been so determined and outspoken about it. And yes, we always need less financial worries and more hobbies, quality time to beat the depression and anxiety!

Group work we did in Turkey has led me to think about how the project can be produced to educate families and what can be done with the cooperation of institutions. I hope this project will be instrumental in the production of new projects aimed at educating families on topics such as child psychology.



What do peer researchers think about active ingredients for preventing and supporting depression and anxiety?



Inga - What is essential for feeling mentally healthy?

When I joined the team to work on the 'Active Ingredients' qualitative insights project I was expecting to be part of an interesting study and curious to learn more about the 'Active Ingredients' and how young people in other countries conceptualise mental health difficulties and what they think is helpful for the prevention and intervention of these. But I did not expect how incredibly exciting and inspiring the journey would become. My name is Inga, I am 25 years old and from Germany and supported the 'Active Ingredients' project as a peer researcher with Euro Youth Mental Health.

Focus Groups

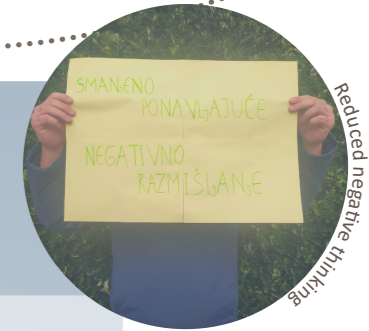
As part of my role as a peer researcher I attended different focus groups with young people or professionals from Pakistan, Turkey, India, and the UK and also facilitated a cross-country focus group with young people. The aim of these focus groups was to discuss a list of 26 'Active Ingredients' for youth mental health that have been proposed by researchers from different countries as the 'core components' for the prevention and intervention of depression and anxiety difficulties in young people aged 14-24. We wanted to know from the participants if this list makes sense to them, if they think there is anything missing or if there is anything especially relevant to their country context.

Even though the groups were conducted online and most of them in English I got glimpses of the individual cultures and some participants directly shared insights about their country. Keeping in mind the great stigma of mental health that exists in so many societies, e.g., thinking of mental health difficulties as a weakness, I was impressed by the openness and enthusiasm of the young people to share personal experiences and thankful for the rich discussions that often made me reflect on my own thoughts and experiences.

One of the situations that stayed in my mind was at the end of one focus group in Pakistan, which was conducted on the World Mental Health Day and all of us shared one positive message on the camera, for example I shared 'Believe in yourself'. I think that was a good demonstration of all the positive energy that was there during the focus group.

Hope for the future and next steps

All in all, it was an empowering experience to see so many people with such different cultural and personal backgrounds working together on this project. I hope we can make the most of this moment to create change towards more acceptance and better understanding of youth mental health, including more accessible treatment options. Even though I would say that in Germany we have a lot of support and awareness around mental health, I realised that we still need much more open discussions around mental health in our society, for example let young people grow up with the knowledge that it is okay to not feel okay and speak about mental health difficulties.



Milos - Openness of young people to speak about mental health

My name is Milos, I come from Serbia and I have lived in Brussels for the last three years. My academic background is in psychology and two months ago I have started my training to become a cognitive-behavioural psychotherapist. Even though people often think that mental health professionals do not have any difficulties with their mental health that is unfortunately not true. I have personal experience of accessing mental health services that helped me a lot while going through difficult periods and situations in my life.

Within the Active Ingredients Qualitative Insights project, I have the role of a peer researcher, as a representative of Euro Youth Mental Health. In the past 2 months, I had the opportunity to participate in and lead on focus groups in Brazil, Portugal, South Africa and Turkey. During the focus groups participants were discussing and prioritizing the 26 ingredients that may be useful in the prevention and treatment of anxiety and depression in young people. These days, my colleague Inga and I, together with the rest of the research team are working on the analysis of the data we gathered from the various focus groups. Even though we were online and in different time zones it was amazing to see how much energy and time both, young people and mental health professionals, were willing to invest. What was also very interesting from an analytical point of view were the different facial expressions and reactions of the young people who we spoke to about the different active ingredients. In many cases, their body language and expressions spoke louder than words.

The initial list of 26 active ingredients was suggested by researchers from all over the world. Nevertheless, there were several active ingredients that were not fitting in some cultures and participants of focus groups clearly explained why. There were also some ingredients that were not easily understood by young people both due to the terminology used and the formulation of the ingredient.

A common thing for all the focus groups and something that surprised me was the openness of both groups, especially young people, to speak about mental health, which remains a taboo topic in many countries and cultures. Apart from general discussions, many young people shared their personal experience to explain and illustrate why, in their view, some ingredients should be rephrased, added or removed.

For the future, I hope that the result of this research will be used by governments all over the world who will devote more resources for mental health programmes, especially programmes that include and value the views and experiences of young people. More generally speaking, I hope that our work leads to a gradual elimination of the stigma around mental health difficulties worldwide and that physical and mental health will start getting an equal level of attention and recognition.