UNIVERSITY of York

PROJECT REPORT

DIGITAL SKILLS IN PEOPLE WITH SEVERE MENTAL ILL HEALTH

Mental Health and Addiction Research Group - University of York

JANUARY 2022

CLOSING the GAP

NIHR | Applied Research Collaboration Yorkshire and Humber

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Digital skills in people with severe mental ill health

1. A summary of the Skills and Proficiency in Digital Essential Requirements (SPIDER) project

S. P. I. D. E. R.

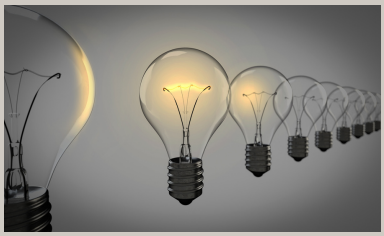
Access to the internet and knowing how to use digital devices are important for everyday life and work. The SPIDER project looked at whether people with severe mental ill health (SMI), such as psychosis and bipolar disorders, have the essential digital skills to take part in the online world. As health services and information are more often being provided digitally (e.g., websites, apps, online appointments), it is important to make sure people with SMI are not left out.

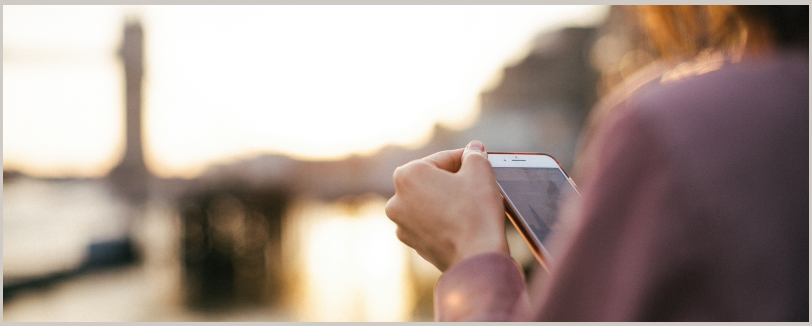
Do people with serious mental illness use the internet and digital devices?

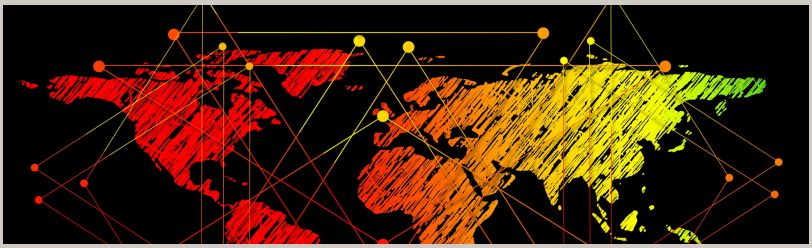
Before the SPIDER project and during the pandemic restrictions in 2020, we asked 367 people with SMI to complete a survey (on the computer, over the phone or paper copies) about their use of the internet and digital devices. We found that although most people who completed the survey had access to the internet and a digital device at home, over 60% did not use the internet or only used it in a limited way during the pandemic restrictions. This was particularly the case for older people and those with psychosis disorders. The things that made it hard to use the internet were a lack of interest, knowledge or skills, as well as security concerns. So, most people with SMI were limited or non-users of the Internet during the pandemic, and this was because of a lack of interest and skills, rather than lack of devices or internet connection. You can read about this more here.

2. What did we do?

In early 2021, we asked 249 adults with SMI across England to complete a survey on the computer, over the phone or on paper. They provided information on their digital skills based on the Essential Digital Skills (EDS) framework. This included questions about very basic digital skills as well as the digital skills needed for life and work. We also asked people about their use of and access to the internet and digital devices.







PROJECT ID

TITLE
Skills and Proficiency in Essential Digital Requirements - SPIDER

FUNDER
Closing the Gap Network (CtG) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)

PROJECT TEAM
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SPECIAL THANKS TO:
Tees, Esk and Wear Valley (TEWV) NHS Trust and our *Lived Experience Panel* members for their valuable contributions

3. What did we find?

3.1. Internet use

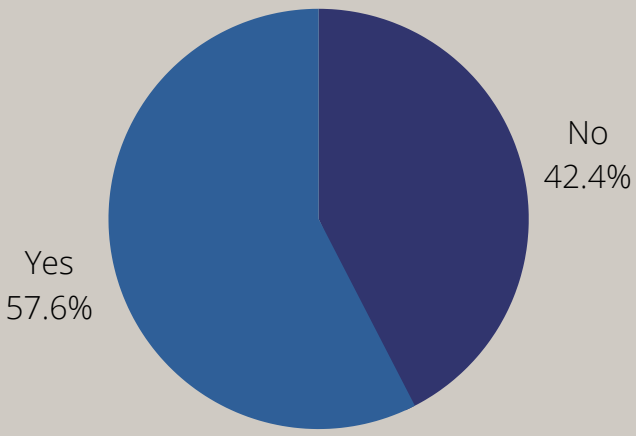
Just under half of the people with SMI who completed the survey used the internet 'just a little' or 'not at all'. However, most people (over 80%) did have access to the internet at home and a digital device (such as a computer, tablet or smartphone).

3.2. Foundation digital skills

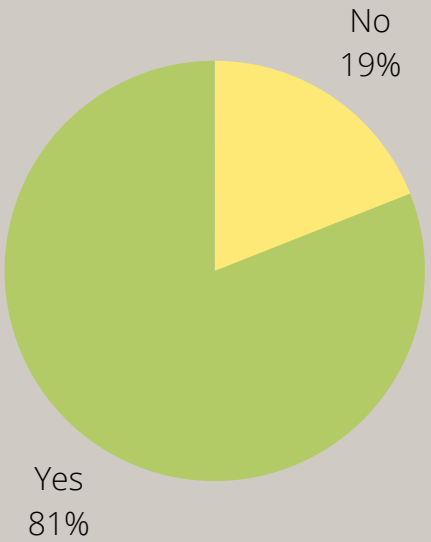
Just over half of people with SMI (57%) had 'foundation digital skills' but just under half (42%) didn't have them. These were basic things that people need to be able to do to access the internet or use a device. The tasks that people reported they could not do were using passwords, changing device settings and connecting to a secure Wi-Fi network.

This means that 42 out of every 100 people with SMI do not have the basic skills needed to get by on the internet. These people are considered to be digitally excluded. In comparison, in people who do not have SMI (i.e. the general population) 19 out of 100 people do not have these basic digital skills (as reported in the Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2021).

Foundation digital skills
For all 249 people with SMI



Foundation digital skills
In the general population

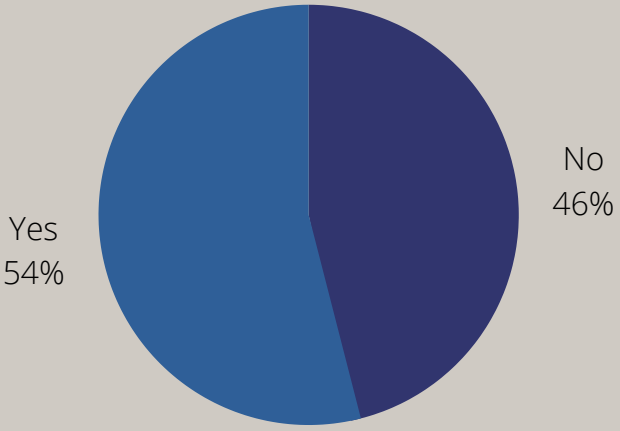


People were more likely to lack Foundation Skills if they were older, not in employment, had a condition that involved mainly psychosis rather than mood symptoms, or had no internet access at home.

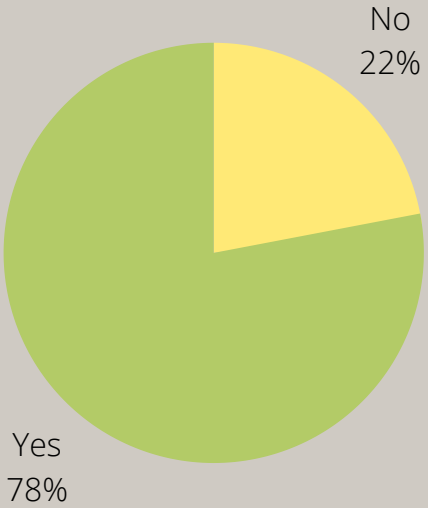
3.2. Digital Skills for Life and Work

46% (46 in every 100) of people with SMI did not have Skills for Life. This includes the 42 in every 100 people who do not have Foundation Skills to begin with as well as those who do have Foundation Skills but not the more advanced Skills for Life. In the general population (those without SMI) only 22 in every 100 don't have Skills for Life.

Essential Skills for Life
Foundation Skills AND Skills for Life for 249 people with SMI



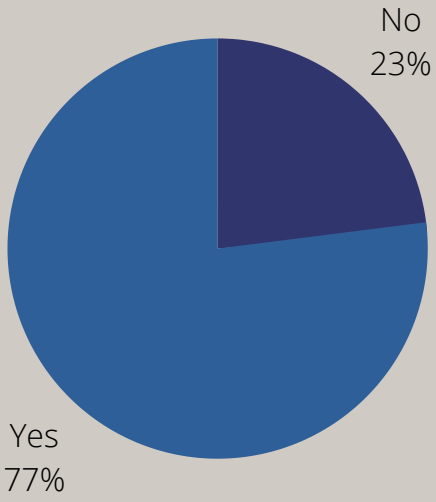
Essential Skills for Life
Foundation Skills AND Skills for Life in the general population



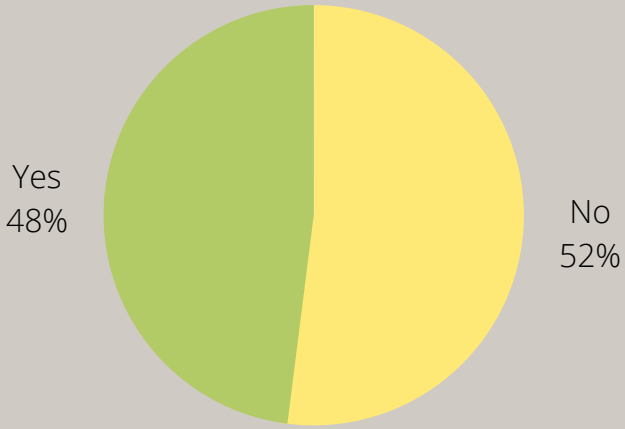
The skills for life that people most often did not have were doing online banking and shopping and using online tutorials to learn how to do something.

Among people with SMI who are currently working, 23% (23 in every 100 employed people with SMI) did not have Skills for Work. These people either did not have Foundation Skills to begin with, had Foundation Skills but not Skills for Life, or had both Foundation and Skills for Life but not Skills for Work. In the general population, 52% (52 in every 100 people who are employed) do not have Skills for Work.

Essential Skills for Work
Foundation Skills AND Skills for Life AND Work for the 69 people with SMI who were employed.



Essential Skills for Work
Foundation Skills AND Skills for Life AND Work in the general population who are employed



We found that if people with SMI had Foundation Skills then they were extremely likely to also have digital Skills for Life and Skills for Work.

4. What next?

People with SMI told us that they were interested in learning some of the digital skills that they did not have. We want to work with people with SMI to create some training in digital skills that will be useful to them. We believe that helping people with SMI to be 'digitally included' will help their health and wellbeing. For example, being confident finding trustworthy mental health information online and being able to access online support and appointments.

5. About us

We are researchers at The University of York and this research project was led by Dr Panos Spanakis. SPIDER was funded by the UKRI Closing the Gap Network and supported by the NIHR Yorkshire and Humber Applied Research Collaboration. We worked in collaboration with the University of Leeds and the Good Things Foundation. For further information please contact ruth.wadman@york.ac.uk.

You can read more about us on the SPIDER webpage. You can also watch YouTube videos about the SPIDER project and the SPIDER findings.

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