What Can Self-Help Support Groups Offer Young People Who Experience Mental Health Issues?

An Explication Of The Self-Help Support Group Experiences of Young People

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This study sought to explore what Self-Help Support Groups (SHSGs) might have to offer young people who experience mental health issues. By definition, these non-profit support groups are run by and for people who come together on the basis of a shared experience. Although much research has been conducted on SHSG involvement among adults, there has been little investigation on the experiences of young people; this is despite the importance of youth mental health. Although several bodies of knowledge contributed to this study, they offered a limited understanding to the findings. Consequently, a more encompassing social capital framework was used to illuminate and challenge the findings. Among the varied understandings of social capital are two oft-cited perspectives – that of Bourdieu (1986) and that of Coleman (1988). However, that applicability of social capital to this study necessitated a theoretical extension of these two perspectives. The present study offers valuable direction to improve current social policy. This includes increased training opportunities for human service providers to raise awareness and appreciation for the unique role filled by SHSGs; the demonstration of explicit support for SHSG’s in social policy that is relevant to mental health, substance use issues, and young people; and the establishment of a New South Wales clearing house. The thesis closes by attesting the potential benefits associated with SHSGs; if not for the potential benefit they offer young people with mental health issues, and the communities to which they belong, then as a valuable area for future investigation.