

# Stigma- Reduction & Help-Seeking in Australian Classrooms

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***A Research Report on the  
batyr@school Program***

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In collaboration with



**MACQUARIE**  
University



# Executive Summary

The prevalence of mental ill health among adolescents is a significant problem; in Australia and around the world. Sadly, **suicide is the biggest killer of young people**. Just as significant are the large numbers of those suffering who don't seek help. One of the **common reasons** for this (not seeking help) is **stigma**, or fear of negative reactions by others, and it means that too many young people are **suffering in silence and in isolation**.

batyr has been running school based programs directly targeting stigma and help seeking for almost six years now. There has been a plethora of anecdotal and qualitative evidence collected internally, and an Impact Report completed by Dr Alyssa Milton in 2016 which concluded that the programs are having a positive impact on improved attitudes relating to recovery and empowerment and on the likelihood of students seeking help.

In 2017, batyr engaged with researchers at Macquarie University to conduct a randomised controlled trial investigating the efficacy of the batyr@school program and found that they reduced stigma in young people and increased intentions to seek help.

*"Thanks to today, I'm going to visit the school counsellor. I haven't felt great for a while now and this has really helped push me to get help."*

- School Student



# Background

In an average group of

**30**

high school students

**7**

will be suffering from mental health issues

and only

**2**

of these will seek professional help

This means that

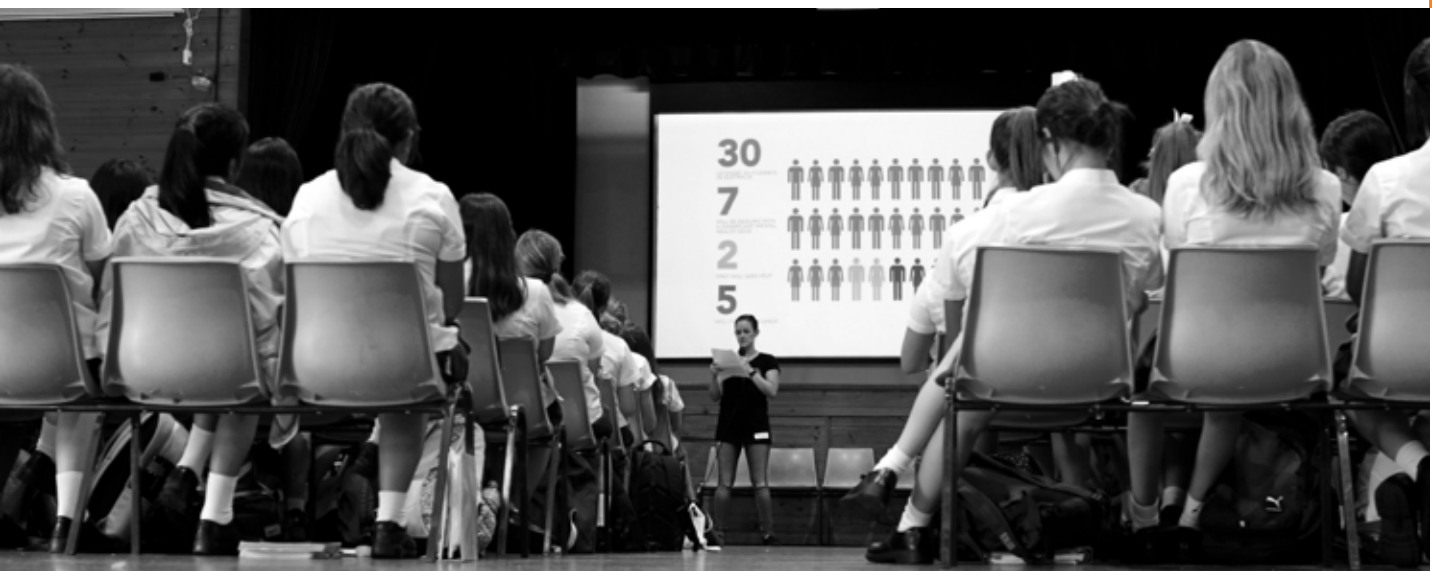
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will suffer in silence.

There are a range of reasons people generally, and adolescents more specifically, don't reach out and ask for help; but one of the most pernicious is the role played by stigma. That is, people, and especially young people, are ashamed and embarrassed and afraid of being judged negatively if they're seen to be suffering mental ill health. The fear of being judged as being weak or soft, incapable or incompetent, "crazy" or "nuts" is a very powerful fear.

**Notably, direct attempts to tackle stigma associated with mental ill health are relatively new and research into the causes and remedies somewhat limited. Which is what makes this research project so very important.**

In 2017, through a collaboration between batyr and Macquarie University's Centre for Emotional Health (Department of Psychology) a specially designed study was created to assess whether or not the batyr@school program effectively impacted on the variables they were designed to target – that is, primarily, mental health stigma and help seeking.



# What batyr Programs are Designed to do



*"You made a conversation seem more normal, less frightening, a conversation that shouldn't be a big deal."*

- School Student

**batyr@school programs** aim to **reduce** (or as batyr say, "**smash**") **the stigma around mental ill health** and to **engage, educate and empower young people to reach out and ask for help when they need it.**

Specifically designed to be delivered to high school students in years 9 to 12, the original (60-90 minute) batyr@school program can be described as both informative and fun, for students and teachers alike. Young, relatable speakers engage the students with their stories of hope, resilience and courage. The program educates students on the support networks and services available to them (including those services provided in and by the school), and empowers them to reach out for help when needed.



# Key Findings

As earlier studies into specially designed contact based interventions have predominately focussed on adults, the findings of this research are important, as they highlight the impact of stigma reduction and help seeking on young people.

In short, this 2017 study found that the batyr@school program produced two significant positive effects.

- 1. The program was successful in reducing stigma** young people had towards others experiencing mental health issues.
- 2. The program led to an increase in attitudes and intentions towards seeking help** from professional sources for mental health issues and suicidal thoughts.

It's also important to note that:

**The findings were maintained for three months after the program.**

Although actual help seeking was not measured in this study, by successfully targeting the behavioural attitudes and intentions of the help seeking process, it would appear that the batyr@school program would likely influence participants' actual behaviour of seeking help from mental health professionals.

**Overall, the present study provides evidence to suggest that the batyr@school program has value as a universal intervention in reducing public stigma towards individuals with mental health problems, as well as increasing young peoples' attitudes and intentions towards seeking professional psychological support.**



*"This was a great experience. Super encouraged by both speakers and now more likely to seek help."*

- School Student

# Recommendations

As well as the positive findings noted already, it is important to acknowledge that there are a few findings for further consideration.

- The reduction in stigma and improvement in help seeking seen in the majority of program attendees was not seen specifically in the high risk students. This may have been due to a small sample size of high risk students, and **further research should ensure a larger group of students is present.**
- While the program changed how young people viewed others, **they were less convinced after the program that others would judge them favourably if they had a mental health issue**, considering there was no significant reduction in the stigma they felt others would have on them.
- The program could focus more on **the positive role that friends and family can play in providing support**, as there was no significant change on the students' intentions to seek help from informal sources.

*"I would reach out for help after hearing these speeches."*

- School Student



# Conclusions and Future Directions

**The prevalence of mental ill health among young Australians has been, and remains a significant concern for all involved.**

The findings from this new research provide hope that the stigma associated with mental health, one of the main obstacles to help seeking, can be significantly reduced.

**The batyr@school program has been shown to reduce stigma associated with mental ill health and notably, improve and increase help seeking intentions.**

Although there's always room for improvement, and as always more research needs to be done, there's strong evidence now to continue to deliver batyr's programs and further, to find ways for them to be introduced into even more schools around the country (and the world).

*"Hearing stories from young people is relatable and a great way to show that it is OK."*

- School Student



# Acknowledgements

As is always the case, the report you are reading and the research upon which it is based is the culmination of inputs from many people. Accordingly, our thanks go out to:

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**The Schools & Students from:**

**St George Christian School**

**Marist College Eastwood**

**Kilvington Grammar**

**St. Philips Christian College, Gosford**

*"One of the most engaging sessions we have had about mental health."*

- School Student

