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Half the young people seeking mental help online had contemplated suicide

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Suicidal ... Nearly half the young people contacting online mental health service Reachout had contemplated suicide. Picture: Thinkstock.

Nearly half the 61,000 young people who contacted the online mental health service ReachOut in March this year had thought about taking their own life.

The concerning insight into the levels of depression and anxiety being felt by young people has emerged in an evaluation of the service being conducted by the [Universities of Melbourne](#) and Wollongong.

However, researchers say the fact these young people sought help is a positive sign.

“There is some emerging research showing as many as 50-60 per cent of people withdraw rather than try to do something about it,” said University of Wollongong medical researcher [Dr Coralie Wilson](#) who is working on the project.

She says other research she is doing shows when people become suicidal they suffer a huge fatigue.

“They spend so much time trying not to go under with depression they have no energy for anything else,” she said.



Retreat ... Depressed people often withdraw from family and friends when they are contemplating suicide. Picture: Thinkstock Source:ThinkStock

They cut themselves off from family, friends and other support networks and “won’t seek help from anyone”.

ReachOut researcher Atari Metcalfe says this is why online mental help services can be so valuable.

[ReachOut](#) offers a moderated forum where depressed young people can chat with trained peers and professionals who share tips on staying safe and how to access local clinical services.

The site also has a lot of stories and videos on young people’s lived experience with mental health problems and shows how they got through tough times.

The high level of suicidal thoughts among people seeking help online is a real challenge for ReachOut.

“We didn’t present our site as a suicide prevention site, we are more about prevention and early intervention,” says Mr Metcalfe.



Support ... It is important young people who are thinking about taking their own lives seek help. Picture: Thinkstock Source:Supplied

The evaluation of ReachOut will track users of the service at four time periods, when they first contact the site, one month, three months and six months later to see how they fared.

The research will be used to improve the service and ensure it provides the kind of help young people are looking for.

Already, the study has shown there is a greater need for help for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transvestite people because they have a higher level of suicidality, Mr Nicholas said.

The research is in its infancy and the service says it has no insight yet into whether any of those contacting the service with suicidal thoughts actually took their lives.

More than 29,000 young Australians aged 16-25 who engaged with the service had thought about taking their own life, 89 per cent were experiencing symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress.

ReachOut chief Jono Nicholas says the level of suicidality is very high and its critical these young people come to evidence based psychological help services first rather than google for help and end up on a website promoting suicide.

Recently, a depressed young man who sought help online through a euthanasia service sadly took his own life.