

# CLAHRC BITE

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A bite-sized summary of CLAHRC research: Imaginator: Supporting Young People who Self-Harm



**A technology based intervention supporting  
young people to reduce self-harm**



## **What?**

Imaginator is investigating how young people respond to taking part in a trial of a short imagery based psychological therapy for self-harm.

## **Who?**

We are aiming to recruit 40 young people between the ages of 16-25 onto the study.

## **Why?**

Self-harm is common in young people and is linked to suicide risk. Self-harm can lead to a range of very adverse health, social, and financial impacts on the young person themselves, their families and communities. Guidelines recommend that young people who self-harm should receive a short psychological intervention. However, this does not often happen and young people are often left with no support. This study could lead to a larger clinical trial of the intervention, which could lead to its use in everyday clinical practice.

It is known that, if we imagine doing something, we are more likely to do it. Our psychological therapy harnesses the motivational power of imagery to help young people who are distressed imagine using adaptive behaviours as an alternative to self-harm. The idea is that when the young person is distressed they will be more able to engage in these helpful behaviours instead of self-harm.

We have worked with young people with lived experience of self-harm to help us develop the methods for our study. They also collaborated with a local app designer to create the Imaginator app which supports young people to practice the techniques they learnt in the therapy.

So far, 25 young people have joined the study. From the data we have collected already, we have found that most of the participants also met the criteria for diagnosis of a mental illness even when they had no contact with mental health services prior to their enrolment onto the study. In line with previous research, we found that most of our participants had some suicidal thoughts, highlighting the importance of intervention in this group. Most of the participants also reported negative mental images, often featuring self-harm. These images, in turn, led to engaging in self-harm. Having experienced the power of imagery, our participants reported being enthusiastic about using helpful images to make positive changes in their lives.

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## References

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- Dargan, P., Reid, G. and Hodge, S. 2016. Exploring the role of mental imagery in the experience of self-injury: an interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Behavioural and cognitive psychotherapy*, 44, 92-103.

## What is NIHR CLAHRC East of England?

The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care (CLAHRC) East of England is a five year programme of applied health and social care research which focuses on the needs of people with complex problems, often vulnerable, when multiple agencies are involved in their care: young people, frail older people, those with dementia, learning disabilities, acquired brain injuries or mental ill health.

The CLAHRC East of England collaboration encompasses some thirty-six organisations, with research hubs in the Universities of Cambridge, Hertfordshire and East Anglia working closely with individuals and organisations involved in the whole care pathway.

Service users and care-givers are at the heart of what we do, in parallel with an ambitious public health research programme. Co-production and collaboration at all stages of the research process are fundamental to making a positive impact through applied health research.

Read more about this study on our website

<http://www.dahrc-ee.nihr.ac.uk/2016/06/imaginator-pilot-study-brief-technology-based-intervention-reduce-self-harm-young-people-harnessing-mental-imagery/>

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