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Module: Introduction to Independent Research Skills

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A Scoping Review of the Impact of Health Misinformation on Health-Related Decision-Making Among Young Adults

Background and Rationale:

The increasing use of social media and digital platforms has changed how young adults access health information. However, the rapid circulation of false or misleading health information can make it difficult for individuals to distinguish evidence-based information from unreliable claims. Recent UK evidence indicates that young adults are particularly exposed to online misinformation, while health-related misinformation remains a significant concern. Research also suggests that young adults use social media influencers as sources of health information, despite concerns regarding credibility and misleading recommendations (Pfender and Bleakley, 2024). Therefore, understanding how health misinformation may influence health-related decision-making is important for health and digital-health professionals.

Research Aim and Objectives:

The primary aim is to map existing research examining the impact of health misinformation on health-related decision-making among young adults. This will:

- Identify key themes concerning young adults' exposure to and responses to health misinformation.
- Explore how misinformation may influence health-related decisions and behaviours.
- Identify gaps in the existing evidence and implications for health and digital-health practice.

Methodology:

Scoping Review Framework:

A scoping review will be conducted using the framework developed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), involving identification of the research question, relevant studies, study selection, data charting, and collation and reporting of findings.

Research Question: How does exposure to health misinformation influence health-related decision-making among young adults?

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

Studies published in English within the last 10 years that examine health misinformation, young adults and health-related decision-making will be included. Non-peer-reviewed sources, studies focusing exclusively on children or older adults, and studies unrelated to health decision-making will be excluded.

Data Collection and Analysis:

A systematic search will be conducted using databases including PubMed, Scopus and Web of Science. Search terms will include “health misinformation”, “young adults”, “social media”, “health information” and “health decision-making”. Relevant data will be extracted and analysed using Aveyard’s (2014) simplified thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, similarities and gaps within the literature.

Expected Outcomes:

The scoping review is expected to identify key patterns in how health misinformation is encountered, interpreted and incorporated into health-related decisions by young adults. It will also highlight evidence gaps and potential implications for health professionals and digital-health practice.

Ethical Considerations:

As this study will use existing published literature and will not involve human participants or collection of personal data, significant participant-related ethical risks are not anticipated. Academic integrity will be maintained through accurate representation of findings, appropriate citation and Harvard referencing.

References:

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