

# Moving Away From Ableism: Creating Accessibility In Youth Mental Health Research

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## Introduction

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines disability as an impairment, physically or cognitively, which significantly impairs or limits one's ability to function in their daily life (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Globally, 190 million individuals aged 15 and beyond were documented to experience disability in 2021 (World Health Association, 2021). Despite there being a significant rate of disabled individuals, globally, academic research is often inaccessible to them. In youth mental health spaces, research methodology is often geared towards nondisabled individuals. This includes the co-design of research questions, study design, recruitment (study advertisements), and sharing of knowledge. This creates barriers for diverse young people to participate in research and show up in ways that are not generalized and intended for a non-disabled person. Without incorporating accessible research methodologies and acknowledging ableism, there is a risk for lack of representation and inaccuracy in the data gathered. Through co-creation, consultation, and intentional implementation of accessibility measures in all parts of the research design and implementation, the inclusion of disabled and/or neurodivergent individuals can be done in a meaningful way.

## Objectives

Moving away from non-Western models and a non medical model approach of disability, we hope to examine the methods in which accessibility can be established in youth mental health research, while acknowledging the systemic impacts of ableism.

## Approach/Methods

We consulted with disabled and/or neurodivergent youth community advocates in understanding what accessibility measures could be implemented, and how ableism has shown up in their experiences in mental health research and in youth mental health space . We also examined past internal studies, at Foundry, that implemented greater accessibility measures.

## Results

In sharing the findings of the literature review and discussions from youth themselves, in a table top discussion, we hope to promote greater accessibility in the way that youth mental health research is conducted, allowing for the experiences of disabled youth to accurately be represented.

## Conclusion

The lack of co-creation in youth mental health had led to many disabled and neurodivergent people further being oppressed and harmed, having to fit into the standards of non-disabled individuals in order to have

representation (Bogard & Dunn, 2019). This round table will highlight the lack of meaningful or safe recruitment for disabled individuals in youth mental health research studies, putting at risk the opportunity to understand disabled individuals' experiences. The roundtable will highlight the challenges of neurodivergent and/or disabled individuals having to abide by abled ways, and we will propose solutions for research to be more accessible, allowing for those voices to be better represented. As there is a greater movement towards accessibility in the youth mental health space, allowing for the implementation of accessible research procedures is essential for all youth to engage in full and meaningful ways.

