



February 2021

ARC BITE

Brokering Innovation Through Evidence

Does a smartphone app for psychosis supported self-management show enough promise to warrant a large trial?



For adults recovering from psychosis, supported self-management has shown the potential to reduce psychological distress, promote recovery, improve adherence to medication and reduce the likelihood of future hospital admissions.

However, supported self-management strategies are only patchily used in NHS clinical settings, and there is a lack of well-evaluated tools to increase their use and effectiveness. More research is needed to identify promising approaches that are worth testing on a large scale.

What was the aim of the project?

The project aimed to address this evidence gap by testing the feasibility of a supported self-management app called 'My Journey 3'. The app was the product of collaboration with adults with experience of psychosis and experts in digital mental health, and adapting existing paper-and-pen self-management tools.

We aimed to find out whether the app was acceptable to service users and clinicians in an early psychosis service and whether a larger-scale effectiveness trial of this intervention is feasible and warranted.

The eventual aim of the project is to increase the uptake of self-management approaches by adults with first-episode psychosis and improve recovery via the use of a smartphone app.

What did we do?

The 'My Journey 3' app allows users to create a digital relapse prevention plan, set recovery goals, develop a plan to follow in a mental health crisis, track their symptoms and medication adherence, and access psycho-education.

We recruited 40 users of Early Intervention in Psychosis (EIP) services, with half randomly selected to receive 'My Journey 3' on their Smartphone during the one year study period.



We collected anonymised usage data straight from the app, and also conducted qualitative interviews with service user participants, and the clinical staff that supported them with the app.

What we found and what does this mean?

We were able to successfully deliver 'My Journey 3' to all participants in the treatment group. Engagement with the app varied between participants. On average, participants used the app 16.5 times during the study period, with the symptom tracker being the most frequently used. For many service users support with 'My Journey 3' from clinicians was important for encouraging use, but was infrequent. We assessed clinical outcomes at 4 and 12 months after the study started. However, as this is a small feasibility trial, we did not have the ability to detect differences in outcomes between the group with

with the app and the group without. Retention was high, with 83% and 75% of participants completing research assessments at 4 and 12 months.

The project demonstrated that it was feasible to recruit and retain participants, and that 'My Journey 3' can be delivered and effective in a trial setting. Further evaluation assessing its impact on mental health in a large scale effectiveness trial is needed.

Recommendations

In a future trial effort will be made to increase the delivery and implementation of the app in the participating EIP services, in order to increase effective uptake and use. The use of a digital placebo in the control group would help to control for non-specifics of smartphone use, and to help prevent participants from knowing which group they are in.

What next?

Future research should investigate the effectiveness of the 'My Journey 3' app in preventing relapse and improving recovery. We are also currently looking at the qualitative interviews in more depth to identify what helps and what hinders engagement with the app.

Who needs to know

Clinicians working with people with first-episode psychosis and digital health researchers.

Find out more

Steara T, O'Hanlon P, Eskinazi M, Osborn D, Lloyd-Evans B, Jones R, Rostill H, Amani S, Johnson S. Smartphone-delivered self-management for first-episode psychosis: the ARIES feasibility randomised controlled trial. *BMJ Open* 10, 8 (2020). <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/10/8/e034927>

Steara T, O'Hanlon P, Eskinazi M, Osborn D, Lloyd-Evans B, Jones R, Rostill H, Amani S, Johnson S. App to support Recovery in Early Intervention Services (ARIES) study: protocol of a feasibility randomised controlled trial of a self-management Smartphone application for psychosis. *BMJ Open* 9, 3 (2019). <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/9/3/e025823>

Useful links

Study homepage: <https://www.arc-nt.nihr.ac.uk/research/projects/evaluation-of-supported-self-management-app-for-psychosis/>