## How to read a research report

A good research report has four parts:

1. **AN INTRODUCTION. This clearly states:**
   - The aims of the study and what new knowledge it will provide
   - The findings of other relevant studies, and any inconsistencies between them
   - The question (or hypothesis) to be investigated, and any alternative hypotheses if appropriate, including reasons for any predictions.
2. **THE METHOD. This describes:**
   - How the study was conducted
   - The participants, their backgrounds, how they were selected, who was excluded and why
   - The questions asked, the equipment and procedures used, tasks that the participants performed and their instructions.
3. **THE RESULTS. These are presented using:**
   - Tables, graphs and descriptive summaries
   - Statistics, which are usually included to indicate the likelihood that the results are significant and did not merely occur by chance.
4. **THE DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS. These assess the results in the light of:**
   - The question under investigation
   - What is currently known about the subject
   - Any limitations in how the study was conducted
   - Their significance and potential benefits.

how to read a research report

consider...

**The reader must consider the following:**

- Is the research biased in its design?
- Does the method test the hypothesis?
- Are important factors missing?
- How do the results compare to the predictions and to what is currently known?
- If there are inconsistencies, why? Were the predictions wrong, the methods weak?
- If the results are as expected, what are the implications for the short-term, for the long-term?

**How can I find out more?**

- Ask your mental health practitioner for information
- Participate in mental health research projects.

**Access,**
**Skills and**
**Participation in**
**Research on...**

**Mental**
**Health for a**
**Caring**
**Australia**

contact

### Who to contact with a question, compliment or complaint about mental health research?

- The chief researcher of the project in question
- The Human Research Committee that approved the research

National Standards require that the names of the chief researchers involved and the relevant Human Research Committee be listed on information sheets which must be provided to study participants.

**Australasian Society for Psychiatric Research**

www.aspr.org.au

MENTAL HEALTH COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

www.mhca.org.au

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# Mental Health Research

treatments
interventions
prevention
services

**TIPS – For better mental health and wellbeing for all Australians**

## Mental health research
## Why do we need it?

People with physical illness expect to receive 'best standards practice' for their care. This means the most effective and reliable assessment, procedure or treatment for their particular symptoms and circumstances.

People living with a mental illness also have a right to expect 'best standards practice' assessments, procedures and treatments.

best standards practice

In 'best standards practice', a particular assessment, procedure or treatment is selected because it is known to work best (effectively) and to work most consistently (reliably) in the particular circumstances.

Evidence from mental health research is used to determine which assessment, procedure or treatment is effective and reliable under which circumstances. This is called Evidence-based Practice.

## Who benefits from mental health research?

Everyone! A better understanding of mental illness and well-being, through research, helps to limit the adverse effects of such illness on individuals affected, families, friends, community services and society at large.

who benefits

## Mental health research: The TIPS approach

Many types of research are needed to bring about mental wellbeing.

Different kinds of research provide different answers. Some offer immediate benefits, while others add to the pool of knowledge that will eventually provide long term solutions for people with mental illness.

### Mental Health Treatments Research

Examples:

- Basic laboratory studies to understand how different chemicals work in the body
- Randomised controlled trials to test the effectiveness of new treatments on unwell populations
- The assessment of psychological treatments on both healthy and unwell people
- Interviewing people on treatment side effects and their quality of life
- Studies investigating ways of maintaining positive treatment outcomes.

### Mental Health Interventions Research

Examples:

- Identifying those at higher risk of mental illness and monitoring them for changes in thinking, behaviour or emotion which may indicate that they are becoming unwell
- Determining the most appropriate intervention following a traumatic event to prevent memories from interfering with daily life and producing long-term negative effects
- Developing first aid approaches to mental health so that families, friends and work colleagues can help someone who may be developing a mental disorder.

### Mental Health Prevention Research

Examples:

- Investigating whether lifestyle changes such as increased exercise and the use of relaxation techniques may help people avoid mental health problems
- Identifying the risk factors for developing a mental illness
- Finding the genes involved, leading to preventative measures for people at risk.

### Mental Health Services Research

Examples:

- Evaluating mental health services to see which are most effective for particular groups such as youth, recent immigrants and indigenous people
- Quality assurance audits to ensure mental health services perform well
- Surveys, interviews and long term follow-up studies to determine the most effective way of treating people in the community to prevent hospitalisation and any deterioration of their mental health.

## Responsible conduct of mental health Research

### What makes mental health research ethical?

- Independent review of the research
- The informed consent of the participants
- Freedom of participants to withdraw
- Maintenance of data confidentiality
- Favourable balance of risks and benefits
- Good science.

### Who is responsible for the ethical standards of mental health research?

Individual researchers are responsible for:

- The design and conduct of their own research
- Communicating their findings to others
- Ensuring that their studies conform to professional regulations, such as the Australian Psychological Society's Code of Ethics, or the code of practice for the use and care of animals for scientific purposes.

### Institutions in which research takes place are responsible for:

- Ensuring research in their institution complies with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research
- Putting in place procedures to review the ethical standards of research carried out in their institution.

### National bodies governing research practice are responsible for:

- Determining jointly national standards of practice. These standards are described in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. In Australia, the relevant bodies are:
  - The National Health and Medical Research Council
  - The Australian Research Council
  - The Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee.

responsible conduct