EATING DISORDER APP EVALUATION SUMMARY REPORT

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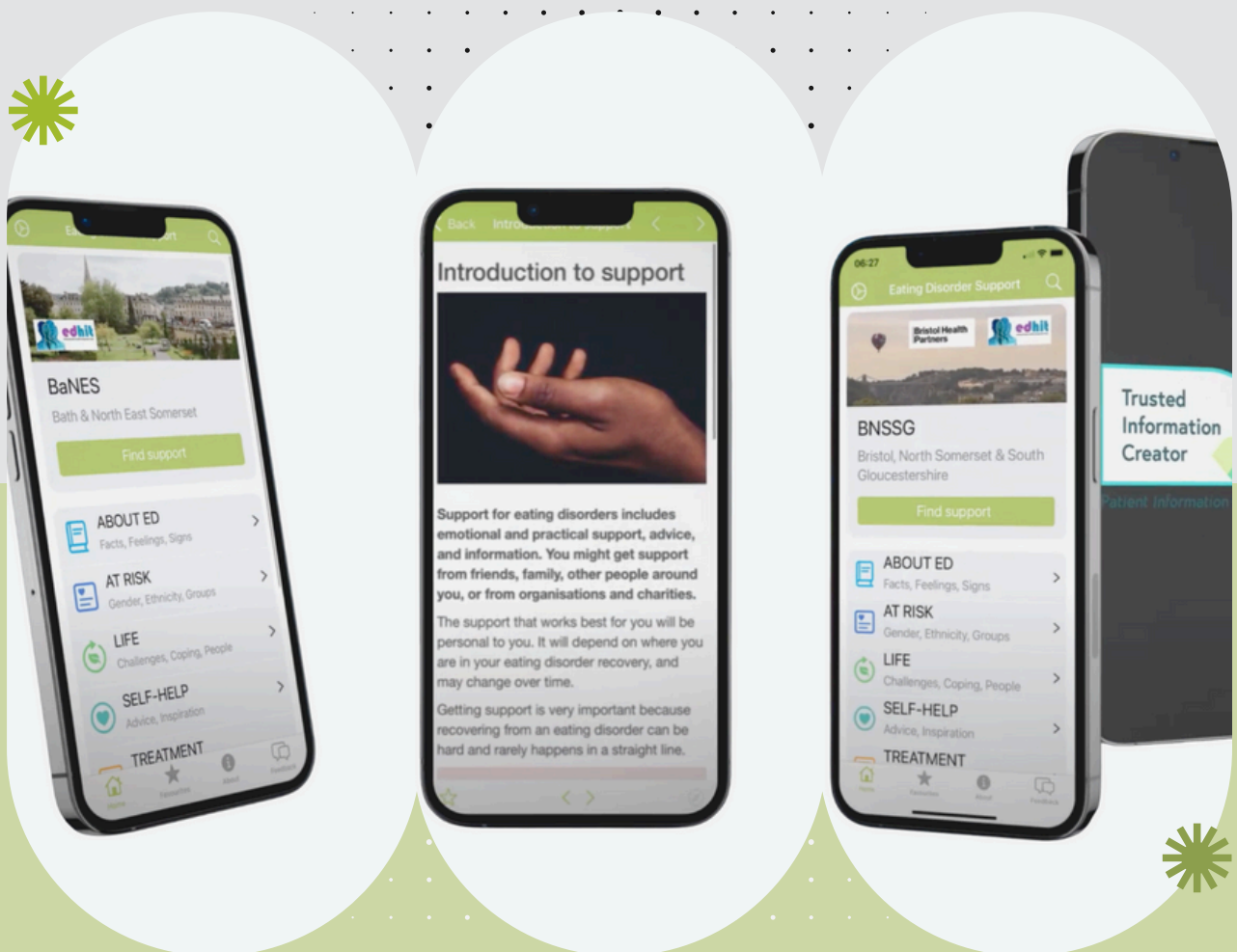
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Note: When we use the term 'eating disorders/EDs' in this summary report, we are referring to diagnosed eating disorders and undiagnosed disordered eating. We recognise that there is unequal access to diagnosis due to bias and discrimination, and not having a diagnosis doesn't mean that someone is struggling less.

SUMMARY

Eating disorders (EDs) are serious issues that affect people all around the world, and they can be really harmful, even deadly. In response to this challenge, mobile health (mHealth) interventions, like apps on your phone, could be a big help in getting support to people who need it. The Eating Disorder Support App was made by a group called the Eating Disorder Health Integration Team (EDHIT). They wanted to create something that could give a lot of support to people struggling with eating disorders, as well as their friends, family, and the healthcare professionals who help them. To see if the app really works and if people like using it, we asked people with lived experience, their supporters, and healthcare professionals to give their thoughts

We asked sixteen people to share their thoughts in an online survey and follow-up interviews. We looked at both numbers (like how much they used the app) and what they said about it. Overall, feedback was positive, people found it easy to use, liked the information it gave them, and felt supported while using it. The non-judgmental language of the app was highlighted. There were also some suggestions to make it even better. To provide more resources, the app to be more interactive, and to consider how it could be helpful for people with different needs. It was expressed the app could use more pictures or videos and help with not feeling overwhelmed by too much information.

The findings highlight how crucial it is to design digital tools for people with lived experience with their needs in mind. By listening to what users have to say and understanding their experiences, developers can make apps and other digital resources that are more helpful and enjoyable to use.

In the future, it's important for researchers to include people from different ethnic backgrounds. They should also look at how well these tools actually help people improve their wellbeing. This means doing bigger studies with more diverse groups of people over a longer period of time to see if these digital tools really make a difference in people's lives in the long run.
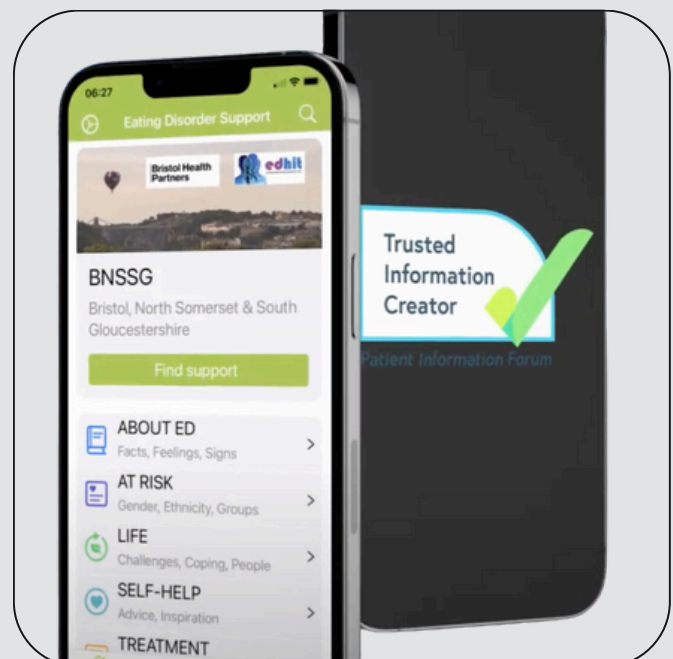
PROJECT OVERVIEW

Background

Eating disorders (EDs) are serious mental health problems that can be really harmful and costly, affecting a significant portion of the population. EDs have been on the rise, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, affecting people worldwide, including young adults. They often come with other physical and mental health problems, low quality of life, and cost to healthcare systems. There's been a rise in using mobile health (mHealth) apps to help with access to care. These apps are handy because almost everyone has a smartphone nowadays, making it easier and cheaper to get help. However, even though studies show that these apps can be helpful for mental health problems including EDs, there are also challenges with using technology. Many people don't stick with using the apps for long, and there are worries about how safe and good they are. These concerns make it harder for these apps to reach their full potential in helping people with lived experience, their supporters and healthcare professionals.

Objectives

Understanding the power of digital tools to offer help and knowledge, the Eating Disorder Health Integration Team (EDHIT) created the Eating Disorder Support App. This app is designed to give lots of useful resources, advice, and support for people with lived experience, their loved ones, and healthcare providers. Even though digital tools like apps have a lot of potential, getting people to actually use them can be tricky. That's why it's important to involve the people who will be using the app in making it. By working closely with them from the start, developers can make sure the app works well and that people like using it. This way, it's more likely to be helpful and meet the needs of the people it's meant for.

Scope

In this project, we're looking at how the app has affected people, what they think of it, and how it can get even better. We're using a mix of methods to do this. We asked people to fill out an online survey and then talked to some of them in more detail to get a better understanding. This way, we can gather both numbers (like how much they used the app) and their thoughts and feelings about it. This study aims to help improve digital tools that offer support for people with lived experience by using the feedback and ideas from the people who actually use them.

METHODOLOGY

Participant

Sixteen people agreed to take part in our study. These included individuals with lived experience, supporters, and healthcare professionals. Our participants varied in age, from under 25 to between 55 and 64 years old. Most of them identified as White females. We found our participants mainly through newsletters and social media posts related to eating disorders. To be part of the study, participants had to have used the Eating Disorder Support App and be comfortable with English language.

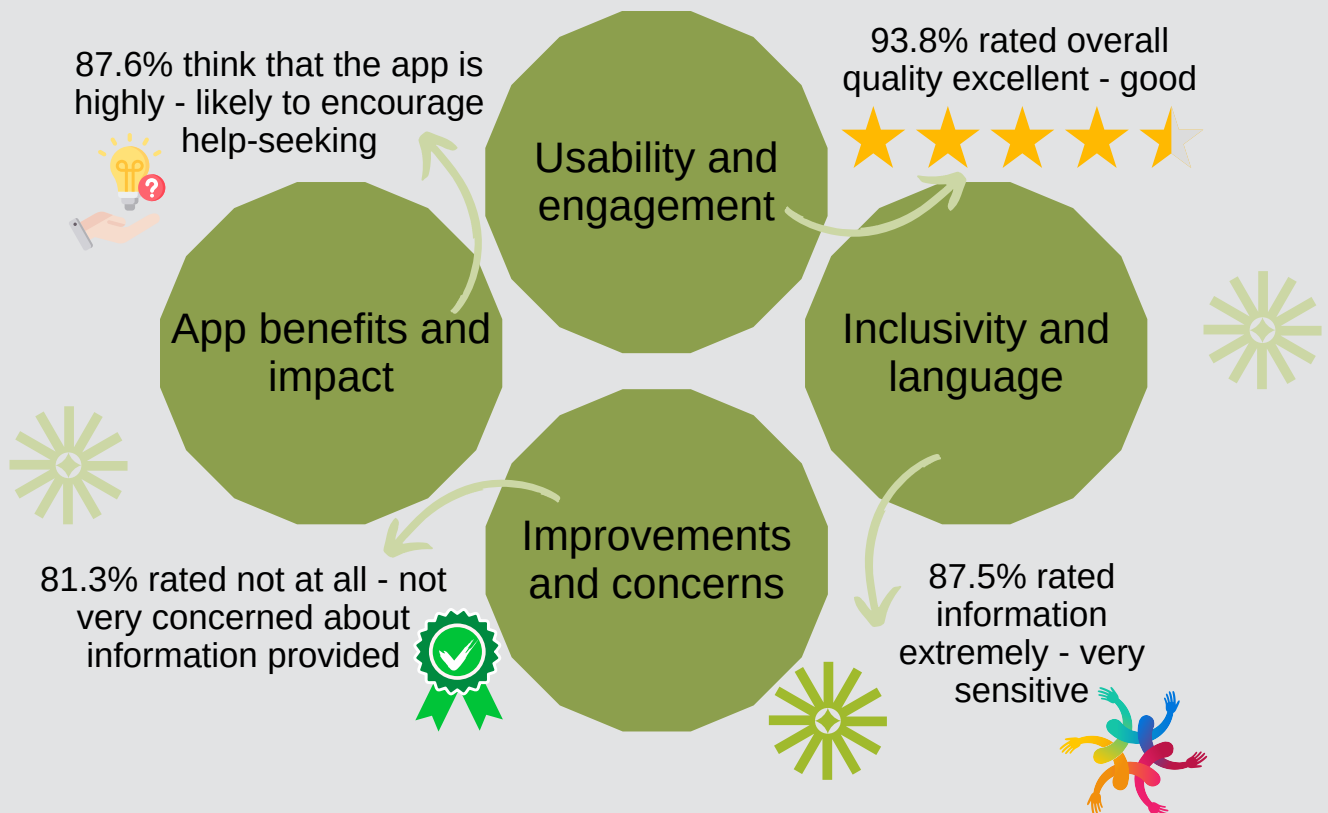| 16 participants	%
Personal experience with an eating disorder	43.8%
Supported someone with an eating disorder	25.0%
Both personal and supportive experiences	31.3%

The EDHIT App

The Eating Disorder Support App is packed with helpful resources and information for people with lived experience, their supporters, and healthcare professionals. It was created by both the EDHIT and Expert Self Care. Inside, you'll find trustworthy info about symptoms, treatment choices, self-help tips, and how to support others. Before it was released, the app went through a careful review process to make sure it's reliable and trustworthy, earning it the Patient Information Forum 'PIF Tick'.

Procedure & Analysis

We asked people to fill out an online survey to tell us about how they used the app, what they thought about it, and how it affected them. Then, we talked to some of them more deeply in interviews to really understand their experiences. The survey had questions about different parts of the app, how easy or difficult it was to use it, and overall satisfaction, and the interviews focused on the app impact and suggestions for making it better. To make sure our questions were sensitive and accessible, we got advice from Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) representatives. After collecting all the answers, we looked at the numbers from the survey to see trends, and we carefully examined the interview responses to find common themes and ideas.

KEY FINDINGS

87.6% think that the app is highly - likely to encourage help-seeking

93.8% rated overall quality excellent - good
★★★★☆

Usability and engagement

App benefits and impact

Inclusivity and language

Improvements and concerns

81.3% rated not at all - not very concerned about information provided

87.5% rated information extremely - very sensitive

> "*Informative, easy to navigate, easy to understand.*" (Survey)

> "*With the app, there's **a sense of security** that I always have this, you know, it's not going to disappear.*" (Participant 3)

Summary

The people who took part expressed positive feedback about the Eating Disorder Support App and suggestions for improvement. It was expressed the app is easy to use, worked well with other care pathways, and gives reliable information one could trust. Some respondents also mentioned that using the app made them feel more motivated and confident, helped them change their behaviours in a positive way, and improved how they felt overall. They especially liked that the app inclusivity and non-judgmental tone, it made them feel supported and in control, giving them peace of mind and access to helpful resources. We also received helpful suggestions for making the app even better. It was suggested to add more resources and features, improve the look of the app, as well as giving users more options to personalise their experience. It was mentioned that sometimes it can feel there was too much information to take in, and it might be helpful to have realistic expectations about what the app could do before starting using it.

IMPLICATIONS
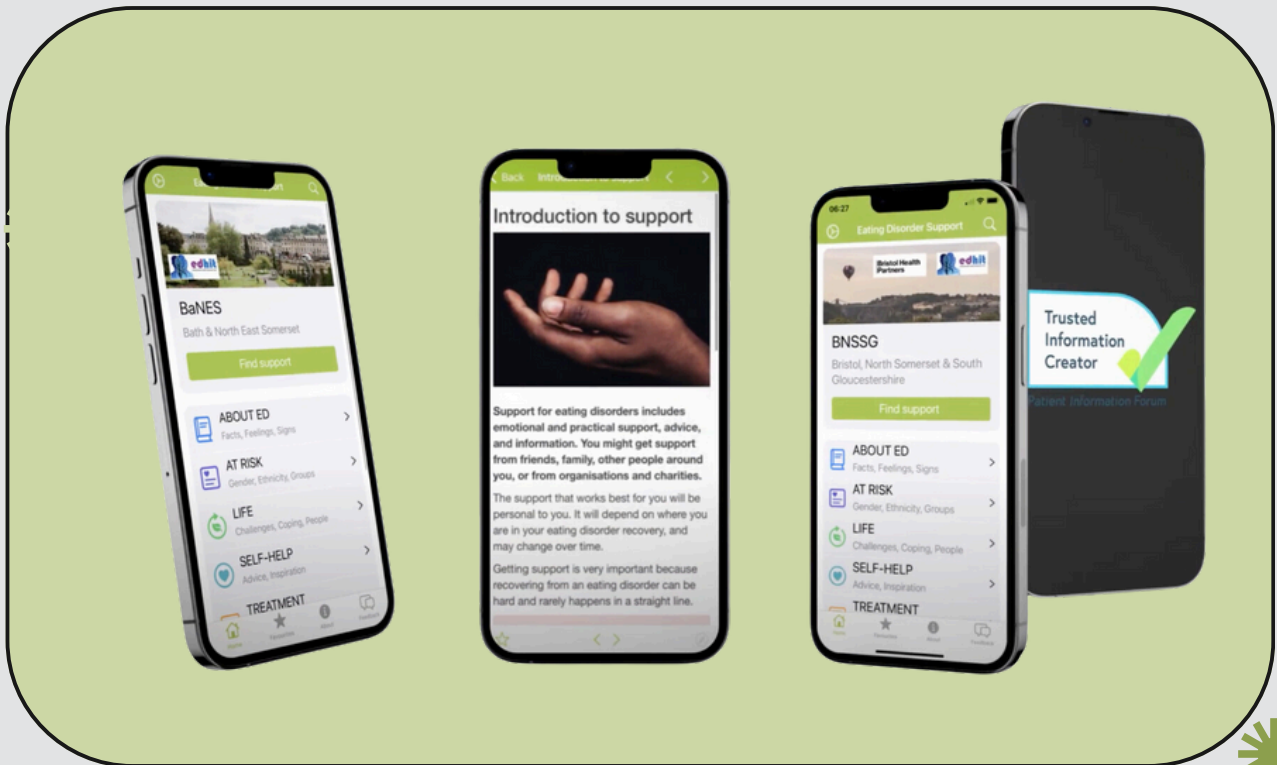
The results of this evaluation match up with what we've seen in other studies that focus on the importance of making digital tools with the user in mind. They highlight the need for apps to be easy to use, engaging, and to communicate in a way that includes everyone. What's more, this study confirms that digital tools can potentially be helpful for people with lived experience. It can provide access to information, ways to cope, and support when they need it.

Clinicians can use the app alongside their regular appointments to help support patients even when they're not in the office. And for the people who make these apps, they can use what we've learned from this study to make future versions even better. They should focus on making the app easy to use, letting users personalise it to their needs, and making sure all the information provided is reliable.

In the future, researchers should look into how people use the app over a long period of time and see if it actually helps improve their health. It would also be good to study a more diverse group of people to make sure the findings apply to everyone. Additionally, it's important to test these digital tools in real-life healthcare settings to see how well they work in practice. Finally, researchers should explore new ways to make the app more personalised and tailored to each user's needs.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, this evaluation shows that the Eating Disorder Support App has a positive effect on people with lived experience, supporters, and healthcare providers. While the app helps provide trustworthy and accessible information, there are some areas where it could be improved, like giving users more ways to personalise their experience, improving the resources and managing potential information overload. In the future, we need to look at how the app affects people over a long time and how it works in real life. It's also important to make sure the app is helpful for everyone, no matter who they are. Overall, this evaluation contributes to improving digital technology in this field, so that it is easier to use and more effective for the people who need them.

We want to thank everyone who took part in this project, including all the participants and the team at EDHIT. Your contributions have been invaluable to our work.

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