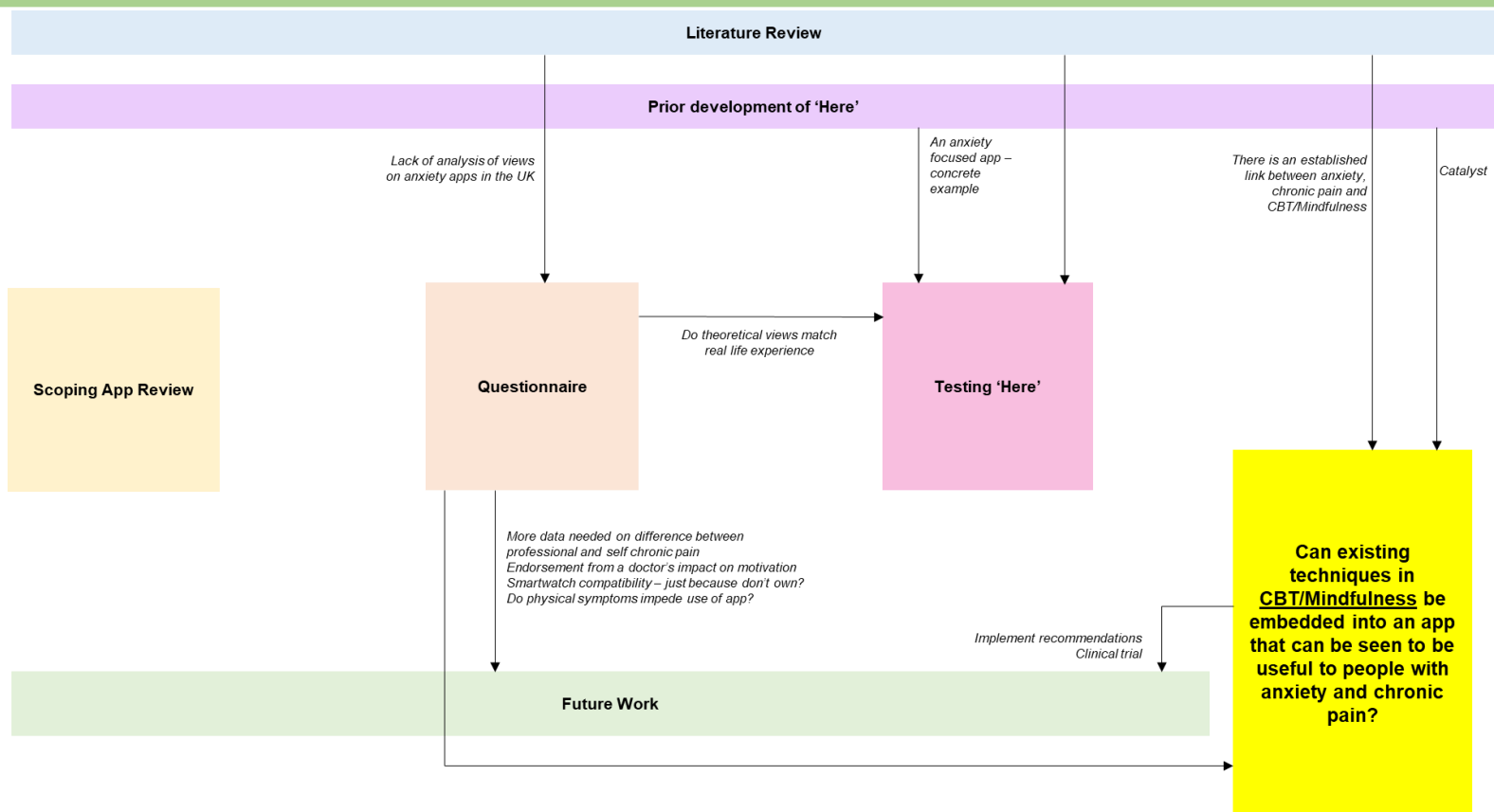




# THE TAP

Technology, Anxiety, Pain

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Issue 20



## PANEL MEETING

On 3rd March I had my progress meeting with my panel of supervisors. I gave a 15 minute presentation on my work so far, as well as the future studies I have planned. We then spent the next hour discussing my work. The panel were very positive about what I had done, and said that all their comments and suggestions were against a strong backdrop of work.

The key thing to come from this meeting is that I don't need to do all of the additional studies I had planned; the panel felt there is already great strength in the work I have done. They suggested that I focus on the studies I already have—an app review, questionnaire study, and testing 'Here' - with the potential of running a small focus group to tie up remaining loose ends. I won't be able to decide if I need to run the focus group until I have thoroughly analysed the data from the testing 'Here' study.

Overall it was a great meeting, and I am so excited to press on and finish my PhD.

# ABSTRACT WRITING

I spent some time in March working on an abstract for my questionnaire study to submit to a conference. An abstract is a short summary of your research which gives an overview of your study. When you are applying to present at a conference it is common practice that you first submit an abstract. This is then read by the conference organisers who decide who they would like to invite to present. This is only the second time I've written an abstract, but I feel like it was a massive improvement on my first. I won't find out if I've been accepted to the conference for a few weeks, but regardless of that I feel that working on my abstract has helped to improve my writing.

## Willingness, Motivators and Barriers to using Anxiety-focused Apps in people with and without chronic pain: A Questionnaire Study.

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**Background:** Research shows that chronic pain is rarely seen in isolation; it often occurs alongside other conditions, such as depression and anxiety. The co-occurrence of chronic pain and anxiety has been shown to have a negative impact on a patient's outcomes and quality of life. A growing area of interest for supporting people with anxiety is the use of apps. However, despite widespread willingness to use such apps, an understanding of what motivates and acts as barriers to people using anxiety-focused apps is lacking. There is also a gap in knowledge surrounding what effects the presence of chronic pain has on people's views about anxiety-focused apps.

**Aims:** This study aimed to determine the willingness, motivators, and barriers of UK anxiety sufferers in using an anxiety-focused app and identify what demographic factors affected views, including looking at the differences in views between those who experience anxiety alone and those who experience anxiety and chronic pain.

**Method:** A digital questionnaire was shared online between June and December 2021. It was completed by adults currently living in the UK who experienced anxiety, with a subset also experiencing chronic pain. The questionnaire gathered demographic information including age, gender, self or professionally diagnosed anxiety (and chronic pain if relevant), length of time experiencing anxiety (and chronic pain if relevant), and areas of the body affected by chronic pain. The questionnaire then asked how strongly participants agreed or disagreed to 31 statements which focused on willingness, motivators, and barriers to using anxiety-focused apps. There were also opportunities for participants to provide free text responses if they felt that the options provided did not articulate their views. The responses to the 31 statements were analysed using descriptive statistics, the qualitative data was analysed using the Braun and Clarke six-phase thematic analysis, and comparisons between subsets of participants was analysed using binomial regression, focusing on effect size (odds-ratio) and confidence interval.

**Result:** The 187 completed, usable, questionnaires showed participants had a high level of willingness to use anxiety-focused apps, with 72.7% (n=136) liking the idea of using an app to help with their anxiety. Respondents were particularly motivated to use anxiety-focused apps if they had strong scientific backing (75.4%, n=141), helped them quickly (69.0%, n=129), included relevant information to the user's situation (83.4%, n=156), and allowed for independent use (89.3%, n=167). Barriers to use included the app being hard to use (68.4%, n=128), and not being "private and confidential". Comparisons between responses from participants with anxiety alone, and those with anxiety and chronic pain did not show any significant differences. Comparisons between all other demographic factors showed only age had an impact on two motivator statements: older participants were less motivated by being told that other people are finding that app useful, and by having used an app for a long time.

**Conclusions:** This study supports existing literature in that there is widespread willingness among UK adults who experience anxiety to use anxiety-focused apps. It also highlights which motivating and barriers factors affect a person's decision to use an anxiety-focused app. These findings align with the James Lind Alliance research priority for digital technology for mental health by investigating how anxiety affects how people engage with technology. Furthermore, this study begins to address the gap in knowledge concerning views on anxiety-focused apps of people with anxiety and chronic pain. This study found no strong evidence that views differ between those with anxiety alone and those with anxiety and chronic pain. This suggests that conclusions drawn about views on anxiety focused apps from people with anxiety can be applied to people with anxiety and chronic pain, at least in the areas covered.



# TROPHY AWARDS

I was so pleased to be told that my society, Students with Disabilities, had been awarded a Gold Trophy Award from the Student's Union. The Trophy Awards are an end-of-year award scheme that recognise the accomplishments that student groups have had in the past academic year, and to reward their hard work. As a society we had to submit evidence of how we had met a range of criteria—this included listening to society members feedback, celebrating success, promoting well-being, being inclusive, and being sustainable. I am proud of this society and all that we have achieved this year, and am so excited about what the future holds.

## SUPPORTING A PHD APPLICANT

In March a final year undergraduate student, who I had taught when they were in their first year, reached out and asked to have a chat about my PhD and the application process as they were applying for a PhD in a similar field to mine (computer science and health care). It was great to speak with them and share some of the things I've learnt over the past three years, as well as see their excitement about their topic of research. They said that they felt much calmer after talking to me as I was able to reassure them that an interview panel just want to get to know you and see that you are passionate and committed to four years of research—they aren't there to trip you up. I was so pleased to hear that they were successful in their application and will be starting their PhD in the next academic year!

## COVID

Unfortunately I tested positive for Covid for a second time, and it spread through the house with both my Mum and Dad also testing positive. Thankfully symptoms were not too severe and we are all on the road to feeling better. This meant that I took a week and a half off from my work to focus on recovering.



## DOING WHAT I LOVE

In March I went to see 'Once' in concert at the London Palladium, starting Carrie Fletcher and Jamie Muscato. This combined both a show and two performers who I love. 20 minutes into the performance, having just sung my favourite song 'Falling Slowly', the cast was ushered off the stage and the curtain came down. It was then announced that there was a technical problem. It took a very stressed looking sound team 20 minutes to fix the issue, but when the curtain came back up they re-sang 'Falling Slowly' which was amazing.

Due to Covid we then had to cancel other fun things we had planned, such as a Mother's Day dinner, but we will reschedule that for when everyone is better.