

# The Mental Health Effects of Publication on Young Creative Writers

Tane Kim

Irvington High School

## Abstract

This study explores the impact of publicizing one's creative work, or in simpler terms, undergoing the publication process, on the mental health of young writers, a topic that has received little attention in academic research. The criteria for what constitute "being published" can vary widely, from traditional book and journal publications to posts on personal blogs or social media platforms. This variability adds a layer of complexity to studying the publication phase in the modern digital age, which we've decided to address by counting all forms of sharing work publicly (not in a closed group setting)—from open mics to social media self-publication—as a form of artistic expression and vulnerability to a broader audience, which is the heart of publication. In the context of this study, the concept of publication and sharing one's work publicly are used interchangeably. Through a large-scale survey of predominantly young, published writers, this research investigates how the processes of sharing one's artistic work influences self-reported mental wellbeing. The study reveals that publication plays a crucial role in enhancing self-confidence, motivation, self-expression, and a sense of belonging within the literary community for young writers. The findings not only expand our understanding of the long-established therapeutic relationship between creative writing and mental health but also underscores the transformative power of publication in the lives of young writers, an extension of the writing process that has yet to be studied. It calls for a more supportive and inclusive literary culture that recognizes and actively supports the mental health of young writers through encouragement towards publication and the provision of platforms for sharing their work.

## Introduction

*“Writing means sharing. It’s part of the human condition to want to share things – thoughts, ideas, opinions.” - Paul Coelho*

This investigation began with the personal inspiration of the researcher, stemming from the profound mental health benefits he experienced personally through creative writing and publication. The process of sharing had a positive mental benefit on the writer, inspiring him to question whether this feeling could be analyzed in a large group statistically. Noticing a gap in existing literature regarding the specific impacts of publication on young writers' mental health, the study aimed to help begin to fill this void. The initial literature review revealed a lack of research on the effects of publication on writers in any setting or demographic, and little research conducted in regards to analyzing a large sample of young writers in any regard. Though there was not a clear reason behind the lack of research on the field of youth literature despite its prevalence in high schools throughout the country, we have attributed this lack of academic literature to the challenge of accessing a diverse and significant sample of writers who have experienced publication. However, as the editor-in-chief of two youth literary journals, *The Stirling Review* and *The Incandescent*, the researcher was in a unique position of being able to draw data from a large audience of talented young writers who constituted the submitters and followers of the magazines, opening access to a niche market of

young, often-published, creative writers, which would have been difficult to otherwise access.

This paper explores the intricate relationship between publication—the process of voluntarily sharing one's writing in a public setting—and its impacts on the mental health of young writers. Publication, in this context, refers to the dissemination of written work through various platforms, including print and online literary magazines, social media, open mics, and self-published collections. It is the culmination of the creative process, where private thoughts and narratives are shared with an open audience, fostering a sense of accomplishment, recognition, feedback, goal-setting, and community engagement.

This study will define the types of writing published by the respondents as the following: creative writing as the art of crafting imaginative literature, serves as the foundation for this exploration. It encompasses a range of genres, each with distinct characteristics and contributions to the writer's voice. Poetry, with its rhythmic and often compact form, allows for the expression of complex emotions and thoughts through metaphor, symbolism, and structured versification. Fiction, through narratives and characters, offers writers the canvas to explore alternate realities, human conditions, and interpersonal relationships. Creative nonfiction, straddling the line between factual recounting and storytelling and not to be confused with literary realism or casual journaling, is a genre that combines factual

accounts with literary techniques to create factually accurate narratives. Creative nonfiction commonly has descriptive imagery, setting, plot, conflict, characters, metaphors, and other literary elements commonly attributed to fiction. Encompassing a vast array of different types, such as autobiography, memoir, and journalism, creative nonfiction often also involves an arduous revision process.

The differentiation among these genres lies not only in their structural elements but also in their therapeutic potentials. Poetry, with its brevity, can offer immediate emotional release and a deep sense of connection to universal human experiences. Fiction, through the development of characters and plots, allows writers to process their realities through the lens of another, often leading to catharsis or a greater understanding of self and others. Creative nonfiction, by navigating the truth with narrative, encourages introspection and the transformation of personal experiences. While all three have been shown to have therapeutic uses, poetry therapy is the most widely studied form (Jones, 1997), and this study explores the different ways these three genres affect the mental health of young writers.

This paper aims to shed light on how the act of publication influences the mental health of young writers. By examining the impacts of sharing one's work within the broader context of creative writing, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of writing as a multifaceted and multi-step therapeutic activity,

challenging the notion of writing as solely a solitary endeavor and highlighting for publication to be incorporated alongside forms of existing writing therapy in addressing and overcoming mental health obstacles. Through this investigation, we aim to illuminate the connections between the art of writing, the act of sharing, and a step towards psychological resilience and growth. Through our research, we strive to answer the following questions: What are the self-reported mental health benefits of sharing work publicly on young writers? How do these effects vary by genre (poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction)? What role does age play on the positive mental benefits of creative writing? How can publication influence self-confidence, sense of belonging, motivation, and ability to self-express in young writers? The theoretical rationale of the research lies upon the reliability of self-reported mental health improvements. Though the mental health improvements reported by participants in this study are not medically verified, the fact that surveyed artists themselves, upon reflection, believed their mental health state to be changed for the better since the start of their writing journey is believed to be meaningful in and of itself, and provides a first step towards exploring the positive effects of artistic sharing, which can be expanded upon in future studies.

## Literature Review

### Part 1: Therapeutic Benefits of Writing and Literature

In McArdle's 2001 Paper Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing, he amalgamated some of the main uses of literature therapy that show the variety of potential benefits of literature and other forms of expressive writing on the minds of patients. Having gained prominence starting in the 1980s, nurses, doctors, and other healthcare professionals have utilized therapeutic writing and reading in various ways to help clients explore problems and express painful thoughts and feelings (Gersie & King, 1990; Esterling et al., 1999). Literature, particularly poetry, has been instrumental in enabling individuals to understand and express their feelings about traumatic life events, providing a meaningful language for otherwise inexpressible experiences (Jones, 1997). Poetry therapy is the longest-established writing therapy in the US and has the practicality of brevity and the ability to encourage creative play with imagery. Freud also notes the cathartic effects of literature, describing how it can liberate tensions and allow individuals to enjoy their own daydreams without self-reproach or shame (Freud, 1985). Therapeutic writing has, in the past, been used to increase insight (Wenz & McWhirter 1990), self-awareness (Gersie 1991), and adaptive and healthy functioning (Torem 1993) and to assist with diagnosis, providing information on personality functioning (Wenz & McWhirter 1990, citing Silverman 1986). Some research findings indicate reduced depression compared with control groups (Smith et al. 1997, Esterling et al. 1999). In the UK, much of the literature on the use of poetry with mental health clients is concerned with its value in psychotherapy and counseling (Stearns 1989, Cox & Thielgaard 1994, Jones 1997) and as an expressive activity, in enabling creativity and empowerment (Kane 1992, King et al. 1996, Bolton 1999) and promoting healing (Sampson 1999). Killick (1998)

outlined ways in which writing poetry helped older clients with dementia express themselves. Recently, the social initiative 'Arts on Prescription,' which includes poetry writing and storytelling, has been introduced in various parts of the UK. This project aims to relieve depression and anxiety (Stockport Healthcare NHS Trust and Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, undated leaflet), increase empowerment, and 'reduce dependence on antidepressant drugs' (Dalton & Mackenzie-Reid 1998). Furthermore, King et al. concluded that the process of sharing one's writing with others in a group setting was generally a "positive," "helpful", and "encouraging" experience (King et al., 2012).

## **Part 2: Psychological Insights from The Process of Creative Writing**

Creative writing therapists informed by psychoanalytic theory have reported on the benefits of sophisticated forms of writing in constructing identity and sense of self (Hunt, 2000; Hunt & Sampson, 1998). Poetry in particular is assumed to have value in the process of maintaining and restoring the balance of mental health because it gives structure to chaotic feelings and thoughts (Philips et al 1999). Writing poetry can be seen as a process of symbolisation of experiences, thoughts and events. This symbolisation creates and communicates meaning for self and society (Fine 1999). Lerner, considered by many authorities to be one of the originators of poetry therapy, asserted: 'poetry has the potential to help you be your best possible self . . . It brings us back to our own humanity' (cited in Irwin 1998, p. B2). Hartill (1998), a writer and

lecturer facilitating creative writing groups in adult education for the purpose of self-development, found poetry writing to be a healing experience: 'when we make a poem, we make something of ourselves, and the world, anew'.

Narrative and storytelling have been identified as essential elements in constructing identity, sense of self, and connectedness to others, serving as powerful tools in creative therapy (Smyth, 1998; Wright & Chung, 2001). Processes of re-authoring one's life story are integral components of the recovery process from a traumatic incident, granting individuals a sense of authoring and owning their stories (Roe & Davidson, 2005). While writing, the poet connects with his inner self in relation to the world around him, which creates personal meaning. Professional writers, in response to the question "Why do you write?" have described their relationship to writing in complex, metaphorical terms, such as writing as a servant to "a great cold elemental grace which knows us" (Williams, 1998, p. 11), as a search for acceptance and approval (Salter, 1998), as a license to tell the truth (Jong, in Arana, 2003), or as a form of giving voices to the experiences of those whose voices have been neglected (Doyle, 1998).

### **Part 3: Effects on Young Writers**

Previous studies have hinted at the challenges faced by creative writers, especially in traditional academic settings, and the therapeutic value

they find in writing (Goertzel et al., 1978; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Some of these findings indicate that creative writers overcome negative contextual influences, or use writing as a way to cope with negative experiences. For example, 67% of fiction and poetry writers described childhood homes as unhappy, as compared with 44% of eminent people (Goertzel et al., 1978). In addition, 70% did not like school or do well in school (Goertzel et al., 1978). Creative writers, especially, found little outlet for their creativity in the classroom, because restrictions such as time, grades, and topics limited them. For these students, extra-curricular writing was a conduit of emotions (a way to vent emotions on the page) and a mediator of emotions (or a way to transform negative emotions into positive emotions). Olthouse's 2012 findings from interviewing a group of talented young writers reveals that there was conflict between values associated with creative writing and those associated with academic writing, and that students associated creative writing with individuality, freedom, and imagination—in essence, the "openness" of expressing oneself apart from academic constraints. Olthouse also concluded that writing competitions generally deepened students' relationships with creative writing and allowed students to form intrapersonal goals for writing (Olthouse 2012).

### **Literature Review: Takeaways**

In conclusion, this research stands out as the first in the field of creative writing-related academia, and further, in the broader fields of

mental health and psychology, to take a large sample of published young writers to investigate the mental health effects of writing and publication. The work breaks new ground by focusing specifically on the impact of publication, a critical milestone in a writer's career that can significantly influence their mental well-being, yet a topic whose effects have, surprisingly, never been studied before. This project represents a pioneering effort to understand the unique challenges and experiences of young writers in the context of publication. By shedding light on the emotional health effects of writing and publication, this study has the potential to inform and support literature-related mental health programs for young writers and promote an increased access to publication resources and other mediums through which young writers can express themselves to a broader audience.

## **Methodology**

### **Objective**

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the mental health effects of publication and sharing of creative work among young writers. Given the notable gap in existing literature regarding the impact of the publication process on writers of any demographic, this study aimed to explore both the psychological benefits, not only of writing at a young age, but those associated with the very process of sharing creative writing publicly.

### **Survey Design**

The survey was designed to gather data on young writers' experiences with sharing their writing in a public forum, and the subsequent self-diagnosed effects on their mental health. The survey consisted of multiple questions targeting different aspects of the writers' experiences and self-perceptions of their mental state prior to and during or after their publication and creative writing journey.

### **Gathering Demographic Insights**

The survey began by inviting respondents to share basic demographic information to better understand the background of the participating young writers. Questions included:

- Age: The form asked, "How old are you?" providing a text box for a numerical response.
- Gender Identification: Participants were prompted with, "What gender do you identify as?" offering choices of Male, Female, Non-Binary, and Prefer Not To Say.
- Writing Genre: To gauge the primary interest area, the question posed was, "What genre of writing is your main area of expertise?" with options including Poetry, Fiction, Critical Writing, Creative Nonfiction, and Film and/or Spoken Word.

### **Exploring Writing and Publication Experiences**

Subsequent sections delved into the participants' writing journeys and their

experiences with mental health:

- **Duration of Writing Practice:** The survey queried, "How long have you been writing? (To the nearest year)" through an open text field for the duration in years, allowing for participants to input any number of years they saw fit.
- **Mental Health Challenges:** A two-part question investigated participants' past experiences with mental health, starting with "Have you ever suffered from mental health difficulties?" with Yes or No options. If Yes was selected, a follow-up prompted, "If yes, please specify," inviting an open-ended response.
- **Publication Experience:** To understand their sharing experiences, the form asked, "Have you ever been published, or otherwise shared your writing with an audience?" again with Yes or No options.

### **Delving into the Effects of Publication on Mental Health**

For respondents who indicated having been published, the form led them to a publication-focused segment, which delved into their:

- **Primary Sharing Platform:** The question, "What is your primary platform for publishing or sharing your writing?" listed Social Media, Online Literary Magazines, Print Literary Magazines, Open Mics or other Spoken Word Events, Self-Published Books or Collections, and an "Other" option with a space to specify.

- **Impact of Publication/Sharing:** This comprehensive section presented a series of statements about the perceived mental health impacts of sharing or publishing their work. Respondents rated their agreement with statements like "Being published has helped me to actively express myself," "Feel validation for my self-identity," "Feel heard in an environment where I wouldn't be otherwise," among others, using a Likert scale (1-7) from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. These statements covered feelings of self-expression, validation, being heard, inspiration, acceptance, processing feelings, isolation, boredom, confidence as a writer, confidence as an individual, optimism, clarity of thought, relaxation, anxiety, and problem-solving ability.

### **Assessing Creative Writing's Role in Mental Health Management**

Finally, all participants regardless of publication history evaluated creative writing's influence on their mental health through statements comparing their mental states before and after (or during/ongoing) their writing endeavors. They rated the extent to which writing has helped them manage their optimism, insight about the surrounding world, feelings of usefulness, level of relaxation, energy levels, cheerfulness, confidence, finding new things to take interest in, clarity of thought, and overall life appreciation before and after engaging in creative writing. They were then

asked to rate the extent to which writing has helped them manage specific mental health symptoms and aspects of their well-being. The statements included: Feelings of Loneliness and/or Isolation, Feelings of Anxiety and/or Depression, Bereavement, Other ongoing mental health symptoms, and financial difficulties. In the context of this study, depression and anxiety were defined as mood disorders, with depression causing feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and reduced energy, and anxiety creating feelings of nervousness, worry, or dread. Participants were provided with a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Completely) to rate the extent to which creative writing has helped them manage each of these aspects.

### **Distribution and Recruitment of Survey**

The survey was intended to target a niche group of relatively young (middle-school, secondary, or undergraduate-aged) individuals who had been actively engaged in creative writing during their middle or high school years. Participants were recommended to be those who have either been published or have shared their writing with an audience in some capacity.

The survey was disseminated through multiple channels to reach a broad audience of young, passionate writers. Social media accounts of the Incandescent Review and the Stirling Review played a crucial role in this outreach. Additionally, the survey was shared with editorial staff at the Incandescent and the

Stirling via Instagram and Discord. Collaborations with youth-run literary magazines like Seaglass Lit, Haluhalo Journal, Outlander Zine, The Globe Review, and Trailblazer Literary Magazine further amplified the survey's reach. These platforms were chosen for their substantial followings and the shared demographic of high-school to college-aged writers and literary enthusiasts. Calls for participation emphasized the importance of contributing to a better understanding of the mental health impacts of publication, appealing to potential respondents' shared experiences within the realm of creative writing and self-expression, as well as shared interests in increasing the exposure of creative writing and publication in the world of mental health.

### **Data Collection**

The survey was available for a duration of one month, striking a balance between allowing ample time for participation and maintaining a manageable timeline for analysis. This period was deemed sufficient to gather a robust set of responses, and it succeeded in doing so, attracting 62 responses and providing a rich dataset for analysis. The Google Forms platform was used for survey distribution, enabling efficient collection and organization of data.

### **Results**

The survey respondents were predominantly young, with 85% falling between the ages of 15-21. The majority of respondents, 68.3%, identified as female, while 13.3% identified as



non-binary, 13.3% as male, and 5% preferred not to disclose their gender. Respondents had a wide range of experience in creative writing, ranging from 1 to 42 years. However, the majority had between 3-10 years of experience. 45% expressed that their primary interest was poetry, 43.3% expressed it was fiction, and 10% expressed a primary interest in creative nonfiction. Only 1.7% of respondents expressed a primary interest in critical writing, and because of the lack of a sufficient sample size, this category has been removed from the discussion of our findings. Out of the respondents, 92% stated that they had, in the past, been published or shared their work with a broader audience, which reaffirms the validity of the sample, as the target audience of the survey was writers who had previously been published. The primary method of publication, or sharing work, for respondents was through online literary magazines (52.5%), followed by on social media pages (22%). The rest of the respondents were split between open mics, school clubs, print literary magazines, and self-publications.

The percentage of respondents who had faced mental health difficulties was, intriguingly, much higher than the global average, which claims that about 5% of people will experience depression, and 4% an anxiety disorder (depression and anxiety were found in both our survey and in most worldwide studies to be the most common form of mental disorder). The majority of respondents for this study, 78.3%,

reported facing mental health difficulties in the past, with depression and anxiety (constituting 60% of the mental health conditions reported and affecting ~49.8% of total respondents) being notably above global averages.

When asked to rate how creative writing helped them to manage certain mental health aspects on a Likert scale of 1-5, 1 being not at all to 5 being extremely, respondents generally agreed that creative writing helped them manage anxiety/depression (average score of 3.23/5) and feelings of loneliness/isolation (average score of 3.33/5). Poetry was found to be the most effective genre in managing these symptoms.

They were asked to compare their overall mental health state before and after their writing journey, being prompted to select a point on a Likert scale of “not at all” to “extremely” based on how their self-perceived mental-emotional wellbeing had shifted prior to, and during/after their creative writing journey. Out of these, all but feeling relaxed and having energy to spare shifted from a negative leftwards distribution towards “not at all” to a rightwards distribution leaning towards “extremely” from before and after commencing their creative writing journey. In simpler terms, participants reported markedly positive improvements in optimism, insight, relaxation, clarity of thought, confidence, interest in new things, and cheerfulness. All categories showed some rightward shift, but deep insight, appreciating life, and finding new things to take

interest in were the three mental health categories that benefited the most.

Out of 55 published writers, \_\_\_ agreed that being published (or otherwise sharing my writing with an audience) had helped them to:

	Feel excited as if I've been chosen for an important job	Feel inspired and motivated to write	Feel better able to express my feelings	Feel less isolated	Feel less bored	Build my confidence as a writer
Strongly agree	25	24	24	15	21	24
Disagree	41	41	41	35	29	41

Most importantly, the survey found that publication had a positive impact on mental health for many respondents. They reported increased confidence as both a writer and an individual, motivation to write, and the ability of self-expression as key benefits. From analyzing responses from 55 “shared” writers, it was identified that being more inspired and motivated to write, confidence as a writer, actively expressing oneself, and building confidence as an individual were the greatest mental health improvements from publication, and the ones that had the greatest number of respondents at least slightly agree, or strongly agree. Out of these positive effects, those of ability to self-express were the most pronounced in the under-18 age group, in which 25 out of 29 respondents agreed that writing allowed them to more actively express themselves. The other mental health gains were most pronounced in the 18-20 age group. When compared against genres, publication’s positive effects were equally balanced across all three genres of writing, except in the case of publication’s gains in the ability to self-express and to build self-confidence as a writer, which was more concentrated in fiction writers.

## Discussion

While numerous studies have delved deeply

into the writing process, exploring the intricacies of brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing, a gap remains in our understanding of the journey beyond the final draft: publication and the sharing of work. This final step, critical as it may be, has not received the attention it deserves in academic research. In fact, to our knowledge, there have been studies in the past exploring publication’s specific effects on writers. The reason for this oversight is not a lack of interest but the challenge of accessing a sufficiently large and diverse sample of writers who have experienced publication.

The act of publishing or sharing one's work can be seen as the culmination of the writing process, where the private act of creation enters the public sphere. Despite its importance, there is a scarcity of data on how this transition from personal to public impacts the writer, particularly in terms of mental health and well-being. This oversight is understandable, given the difficulty in tracking the publication journeys of a wide array of writers. Traditional publishing routes are notoriously selective, and self-publishing, while increasingly popular, presents a heterogeneous group that can be hard to quantify and study systematically. This lack of research and exposure to publication, especially in youth writing, leads very few budding artists to take the extra step to publish their work—not for a lack of interest, but due to a lack of familiarity and of opportunities in the field. By failing to explore the effects of

publication and sharing, we miss out on a crucial piece of the puzzle: how the transition from private to public domain influences writers' perceptions of their own work, their self-esteem, and their sense of connection with a broader community.

Access to a large sample of talented young writers, predominantly published, is what makes this research novel. Never before in literature have the mental effects of creative writing been studied in talented young writers on such a scale, and further, never have the effects on sharing work, specifically in the context of publication, been investigated on any demographic of writers. The finding that publication and sharing of their work had a positive impact on writers' mental health is a novel discovery and will hopefully make this study the first of many more exploring the immense therapeutic value of sharing one's creative work with others, adds to the growing body of literature regarding the therapeutic implications of various steps in the writing process (Gersie & King, 1990; Esterling et al., 1999).

The preference for poetry among respondents and its high effectiveness in managing mental health symptoms is a secondary yet still significant finding of this survey. This aligns with previous research that has highlighted the unique therapeutic benefits of poetry. The finding that poetry was particularly effective in helping young writers manage feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and bereavement aligns with

past research that writing serves as a valuable tool for emotional expression and processing. (Philips et al., 1999; Hartill, 1998). The positive shift in mental health reported by respondents after starting their creative writing journey is consistent with the literature on the mental health benefits of creative writing (Stearns, 1989; Cox & Thielgaard, 1994). This suggests that creative writing, especially when coupled with publication and sharing of work, can be a valuable therapeutic tool for young writers.

The key novel finding of this study is the positive impact of publication on the mental health of young writers. We based our theoretical rationale of this research upon the reliability of self-reported mental health improvements. The survey results indicate that publication and sharing of work can lead to increased self-reported confidence, motivation to create, and fulfillment in self-expression. By uncovering the mental health benefits of publication, this study challenges the notion that writing is a solitary and potentially isolating endeavor. The revelation that publication acts as a catalyst for improved mental health among young writers prompts us to reconsider the stereotype of the solitary writer, hunched over a manuscript, isolated from the world. By highlighting the positive psychological impacts of sharing one's work, this study illuminates writing as a communal act, one that thrives not in isolation but in the exchange of ideas, emotions, and experiences. It suggests that the act of writing, far from being a solitary

pilgrimage, is deeply embedded in a social context where the visibility and acknowledgment of one's work can foster a sense of belonging, validation, and therapeutic release. It challenges educational systems, literary communities, and publishers to create more inclusive and supportive spaces for writers to share their work, not just in the confines of the classroom with only a teacher, but to spread and therefore nature creative voices on border platforms outside the classroom. It underscores writing as a journey of connection, not just with the self, but with the wider world—a antidote to the alienation and solitude that can sometimes shadow creative pursuits. The positive effects of publication on confidence, motivation, and self-expression echo the findings of previous studies on the therapeutic value of writing (Lerner, 1998; Hunt & Sampson, 1998), but this research delves deeper than any study in the past has in analyzing publication specifically targeting the specific niche of talented young writers. By highlighting the unique positive impact of publication on confidence, motivation, and self-expression, as well as the unique therapeutic benefits of poetry, this study provides valuable insights that can inform interventions aimed at supporting the mental health and well-being of young writers. Notably, this survey discovered that the positive mental health trends attributed with sharing work generally was far more pronounced than the benefits of only writing poetry, or any other form of creative writing for that matter. Thus,

we believe this paper can be used as a crucial initial piece of evidence to spark further discussions and research on the mental benefits of sharing writing and/or publication, whose positive mental effects, we believe, if emphasized in therapeutic settings or educational environments, even have the potential to be more beneficial than the widely studied effects of the act of writing itself.

In summary, this study represents a novel contribution to literature by both being the first large-scale survey of a group of dedicated, talented, predominantly young writers, as well as novel in its focus on the mental health effects of publication. The survey's comprehensive nature, encompassing a diverse sample of predominantly published young writers, provides a unique and valuable insight into the emotional health effects of writing and publication.

## **Conclusion**

This study represents a pioneering exploration into the psychological effects of publication on young writers, a significant departure from existing literature which has predominantly focused on the general, or medical, benefits of creative writing on a generally older demographic without delving into the nuanced impacts of publication or creative writing's effects on young writers. By surveying a vast and varied cohort of young, published writers, this research has uncovered the ways in which publication can influence a writer's mental

health, offering insights that were previously undocumented due to the specificity and uniqueness of the population studied. Publication, as we have defined and explored, acts as a catalyst for increased self-confidence, motivation, self-expression, and a sense of belonging within the literary community.

Though this study opens up the door to publication and sharing being used as vital tools in mental growth, it does not necessarily explain the details of why such growth occurs, an understanding that may be vital in determining the settings and manners under which the sharing process can be implemented effectively. More research should also be conducted to differentiate the influence of various types of publishing platforms and audiences of varying magnitudes on the mental health outcomes of young writers. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking the mental health trajectories of young writers' post-survey, through adulthood, could be another area to explore, in answering the question of whether publication's impacts carry over past adolescence. Finally, future studies should also be conducted aiming to capture a more objective assessment of young writers' mental health trajectories, rather than solely relying on self-reported measures that may be subject to bias. One approach could involve tracking mental health through a series of diagnostic questions administered by trained professionals or researchers. This would provide a more standardized and reliable assessment of mental

health outcomes over time, allowing for a clearer understanding of the impact of publication on young writers' well-being. Another approach could involve incorporating the perspective of objective observers, such as family members or friends, who can provide insights into changes in the writer's behavior, mood, and overall mental health. This would offer a more holistic view of the writer's mental health trajectory, complementing self-reported data with external observations.

The implications of this study extend beyond the immediate findings. For literary publications, these results should prompt a reconsideration of how material is solicited and curated. Publications might benefit from creating more inclusive submission processes that recognize the emotional investment of young writers. Providing feedback and fostering a sense of community by offering opportunities for young writers to engage with their peers can enhance the positive mental health outcomes associated with publication. Educators also have a critical role to play. The current educational landscape often introduces students to the concept of publishing at the college level, primarily through creative writing courses or research assignments, or sometimes even later at the graduate level, in the pursuit of MFA degrees. However, given the significant benefits highlighted by this study, there is a strong argument for integrating lessons on publication earlier in the educational journey. Middle and high school curricula could incorporate

modules on the process and benefits of publishing, preparing students for both the challenges and rewards of sharing their work publicly. This early introduction can demystify the process, reduce anxiety, and empower young writers to see publication as a valuable and attainable goal.

Furthermore, mental health professionals and school counselors should be aware of the potential therapeutic benefits of publication. Encouraging young writers to submit their work for publication, whose opportunities are becoming increasingly available to young writers, can be part of a broader strategy to support mental health and well-being, offering an outlet for self-expression and a means to connect with others who share similar experiences.

In conclusion, this study not only broadens our understanding of the intersection between creative writing and mental health but also opens the door to the transformative power of sharing processes, publication, and intentionally publicizing one's creative work in the lives of young writers. The act of publication, irrespective of the medium, emerged as a significant milestone in the creative process, imbuing young writers with a sense of validation and achievement. It challenged the traditional perception of writing as a solitary activity by revealing how sharing one's work can foster a supportive community, alleviate feelings of isolation, boost self-confidence and self-expression, and encourage

continuous engagement with the craft. This research calls for a reevaluation of how we support young writers—that encouragement towards publication and the provision of platforms for sharing could be integral to nurturing their mental health and artistic development. This work serves as a call to action for a more supportive literary culture that pursues the maximization of every step of the creative process—from inspiration to publication—in improving young writers' mental health, and it paves the way for further research into specific interventions and support systems that can enhance the positive impacts of sharing one's work publicly on young writers' mental health.

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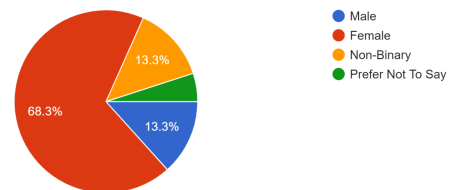
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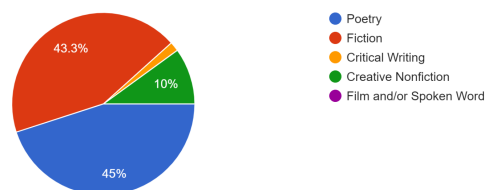
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## Tables and Figures

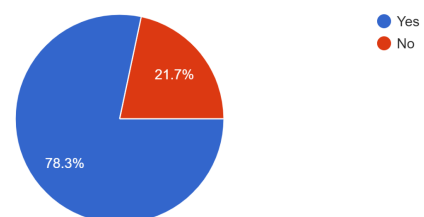
What gender do you identify as?  
60 responses



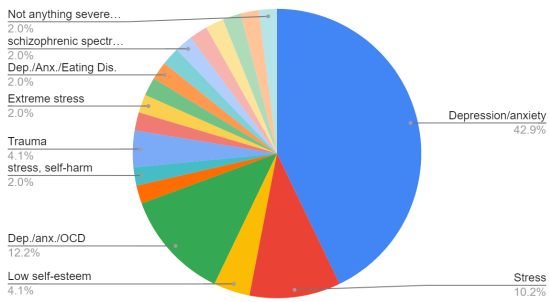
What genre of writing is your main area of expertise?  
60 responses



Have you ever suffered from mental health difficulties?  
60 responses

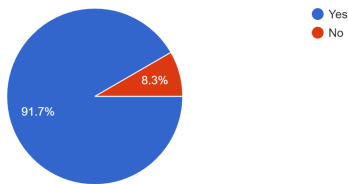


Count of If yes, please specify.

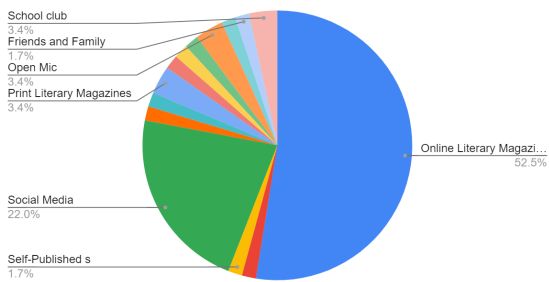


Caption: Pie Chart depicting responses from the follow up question to “Have you ever suffered from mental health difficulties?”, depicting the distribution of different types of mental health issues self-reported from those who answered “yes” to the previous question.

Have you ever been published, or otherwise shared your writing with an audience?  
60 responses

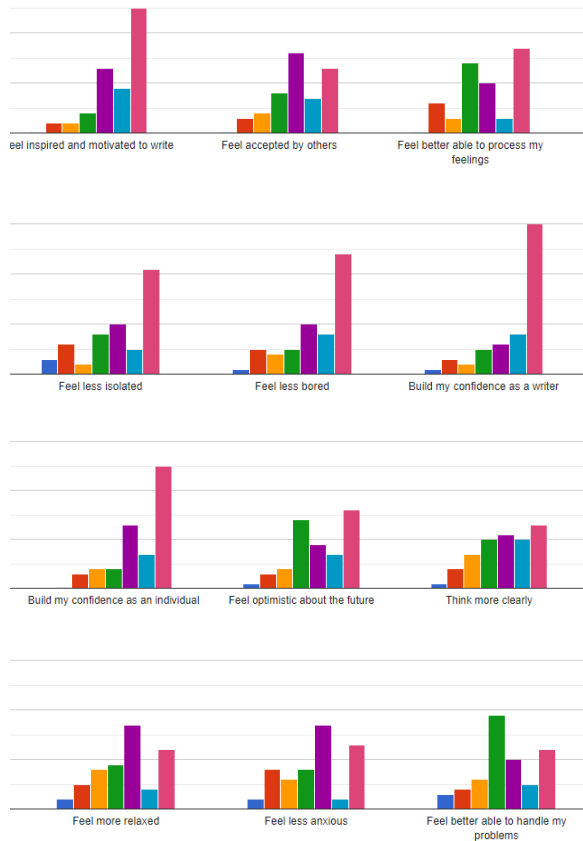
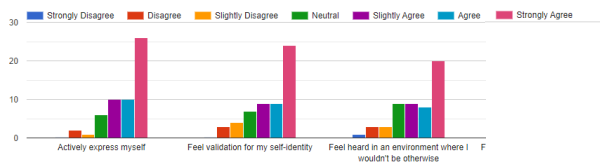


Count of What is your primary platform for publishing or sharing your writing?

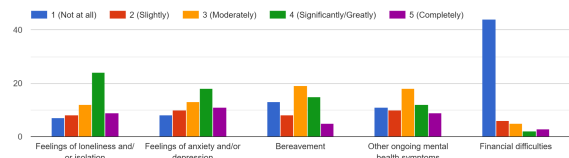


Please check the following boxes based on how much you agree with the statements regarding publication's, or another form of writing recognition's, effect on your mental health.

Being published (or otherwise sharing my writing with an audience) has helped me to...

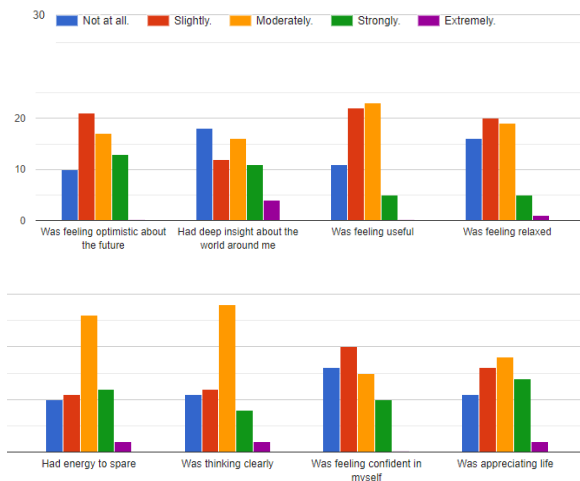


Please check each row with how much creative writing has helped you to better manage each mental health symptom. Creative writing has helped me to manage...



Please check the following boxes based on how much you agree with statements regarding your mental state PRIOR to beginning creative writing.

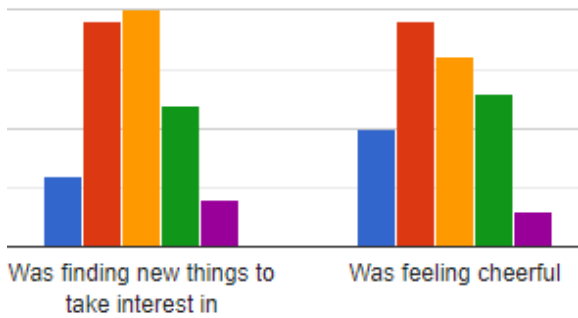
Before I began writing, I...



## Appendix

Link to the raw dataset consisting of all 62 responses can be accessed here:

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1abl\\_uYkdba0nwG1ynplyg\\_eZUt34BE~YU\\_VeZq8CGwA/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1abl_uYkdba0nwG1ynplyg_eZUt34BE~YU_VeZq8CGwA/edit?usp=sharing)



Please check the following boxes based on how much you agree with statements regarding your mental state DURING your creative writing journey

Since I began creating writing, I...

Legend: Not at all (blue), Slightly (red), Moderately (orange), Strongly (green), Extremely (purple).

NG your creative writing journey Since I began creating writing, I...

