

Causes, traits and strategies of improving mental health among different university student groups

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Topic Description

Nowadays, mental health challenges are increasing in the university student population. It can negatively impact the health and academic performance of these students. Many studies show the increasing needs of mental health supports in higher education. Although student support centers often provide related service on campus, many people can not get expected services. Worse, some students do not seek help for difficulties because different reasons such as stigma. Based on the domain research, the team aims to design an online mental health counselling and community app for university students. The application provide a platform for students to share emotions and feelings on the community page, or send letters to university counselor anonymously. Some messages can only be viewed by staffs or peers in order to improve privacy.

The team value high on meeting the university students’ needs for mental health. However, the target user -- university students, contains a large number of people with different ages, backgrounds and traits. The stress and mental health differences may exist between student groups. Therefore, it is essential to investigate different target users’ needs and preferences, so that we can provide effective and customized services on mental health.

The study focuses on the perspective of different student groups, including their counseling needs, causes of mental health problems, and other influencing factors. University student population can be divided into: international and local students, graduate students and undergraduates. The following articles focused on different student groups. The purpose of the research is to refine the target users, understand their needs, preferences and characteristics, and provide customized counseling and community functions in the project application.

Prieto-Welch, S. L. (2016). International Student Mental Health. New Directions for Student Services, (156). <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.20191/abstract>

This article describes the mental health status of international students in universities of U.S., unique challenges and their impacts on mental health, and suggestions for ways to address these challenges. According to the article, some factors such as cultural difference, language barrier and limited social support networks. Notably, the cultural gap may be a significant obstacle for international students getting mental health support. The article help gain a better understanding of causes and barriers for international students concerning mental health. Besides, it provides many constructive suggestions for counselling with the international students, which is also beneficial to the online counselling function for the group project.

International students are defined as individuals who leave their home countries in search of opportunities for education and degree in a different country. Apart from some similar challenges and stress as domestic students, many of them also struggle with language barriers, unfamiliarity with the educational system and changes in social support networks. These challenges often result in feelings of isolation, loneliness, and homesickness, which may lead to mental health issues. Besides, cultural misunderstandings, racial discrimination, and cultural isolation may increase their burden.

Research indicates that international students’ usage rates of counselling centre services are lower than those of domestic students. Language differences and low language proficiency may be one of the barriers to help-seeking. Also, the conflict between values embodied in therapy and different cultural values may cause an additional obstacle to treatment-seeking for this student group. The article pointed out many recommendations for counsellors, and some of them may achieve the same effects on the mental health app. According to the report, it is essential to respect and understand the culture difference and focus on the methods to help international students. When looking at international students’ psychological adjustment, it is helpful to look specifically at stress and coping. Also, peers, domestic students or more senior international students, who have successfully navigated campus may help connect the international student to others and adapt to a new social network.

The research focused on international students who study in the United States, especially for students from Asia. Therefore, some other situations and articles need to be considered for further judgment. For this article, the description of mental health status and advice for international students still provides suggestions for customizing effective content and approach for improving foreign students’ mental health.

Fang, L., Tarshis, S., McInroy, L., & Mishna, F. (2018). Undergraduate Student Experiences with Text-Based Online Counselling. The British Journal of Social Work, 48(6), 1774–1790. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcx111>

The study helps gain a better understanding of the benefits, challenges and user experiences of a text-based online counselling programme for undergraduate students. Since the one of the primary function in the team’s project is text-based counselling, and the majority population on campus is undergraduate students, this study is highly close to team’s project and gives systematical instruction with the case study.

Online counselling can provide a sense of safety to those who find traditional face-to-face counselling intimidating, and allow increased accessibility and flexibility. The user experience of using text-based online counsellings is different among those undergraduate students. While some users appreciate the cathartic and therapeutic effects of writing, enjoying the sense of privacy, others felt frustrated or burdened by writing. This finding indicates the needs for different interaction methods. Providers are suggested to consider other delivery mediums, such as audio and video.

Overall, the impact of online counselling on undergraduates is positive. Compared with traditional counselling, it has benefits like higher privacy, time or location flexibility and accessibility. In the case, the user experience is excellent, and the consultation is reported to be effective. This is strong support for the team project. The team can adjust the project concept according to the advantages and challenges mentioned in the case, in order to meet the consulting needs of undergraduates. However, this article also has some limitation. The research only studied the case of undergraduate online counselling, so the results were not compared with other groups. Besides, there is less introduction to counselling details and the situation of the students because of privacy. Therefore, it is unclear whether the findings have special significance for undergraduate groups. In order to achieve the project objectives, it is still necessary to investigate online consultations for different groups of university campuses from more relevant cases.

Laidlaw, A., Mclellan, J., & Ozakinci, G. (2016). Understanding undergraduate student perceptions of mental health, mental well-being and help-seeking behaviour. Studies in Higher Education, 41(12), 2156–2168. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2015.1026890>

The research is about the undergraduates’ perceptions of mental health and mental well-being. Also, the student’s preferred methods of dealing with mental health difficulties and reasons were discussed. The article help finds undergraduates’ preferred approaches to achieving positive mental well-being, which is beneficial to improving the app functions for undergraduate students.

According to the article, undergraduate students face two sources of stress that influence the mental health condition: short term academic stress and a transition to independent life and development of being an adult. Although most of the students considered mental health and mental well-being as different concepts, it didn’t affect where and how they seek helps for mental health difficulties.

It is found that undergraduate students are more likely to seek help from peers. However, whether this experience is useful is less clear in the article. It is worth mention that students carefully consider who to speak to when they are experiencing problems. The listeners are more likely to be family members, or the peer they trust. But sometimes listeners were initially tolerant but lost that tolerance after a while. Due to stigma or worries, some students refuse to share their emotions with certain people. Besides, the result shows that undergraduate students gain a sense of belonging and structure from being a part of the student community, which indicates that the social community may have a positive effect on their mental well-being.

What factors do influence help-seeking decisions for mental well-being is still unclear in the article, but it shows that social community’s positive effects on undergraduates’ mental health condition, which provide evidence of the effectiveness of community function of the application. Also, it pointed out the preferred methods for them to seek help and its limitation. These findings help customize features for these undergraduate students and provide them with professional advice.

Hyun, J., Quinn, B., Madon, T., & Lustig, S. (2007). Mental Health Need, Awareness, and Use of Counseling Services Among International Graduate Students. Journal of American College Health, 56(2), 109–118. <https://doi.org/10.3200/JACH.56.2.109-118>

The research is about mental health needs among international graduates students. It examined the prevalence of the requirements, knowledge and use of mental health and counselling. Although several studies thoroughly researched international students or graduate students’ mental health condition, this study is unique because it investigates the influence of international graduate students’ relationship with their advisors. According to the result, international students who have a more functional relationship with their advisors were less likely to have mental health issues and using counselling services. Also, those who have higher financial confidence were less likely to use counselling services.

According to the paper, international students often face several broad challenges, which includes language and cultural barriers, social isolation, financial hardships, and difficulties finding jobs. However, they may not use counselling services because of the lack of awareness of their mental health needs. Besides, the cultural stigma associated with emotional expression, health-related beliefs and practices from their home countries is two other factors which affect international students.

Particularly for international graduate students, financial condition and relationship with advisors have substantial impacts on their mental health conditions and influence the time they use counselling services. The research pointed out that adequate orientation and administrative support are critical factors in successful transitions. Equally important is the presence of knowledgeable counselling staff members can cope with mental health concerns in international students.

To conclude, the study indicates that the cultural and social background of home countries has a strong influence on international student’s opinions on mental health and counselling. Adequate orientation and administrative support are needed for their successful transitions. When helping international graduate students, it is essential to provide high-quality advice to meet their needs.

Bradley, G. (2000). Responding effectively to the mental health needs of international students. Higher Education, 39(4), 417–433. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1003938714191>

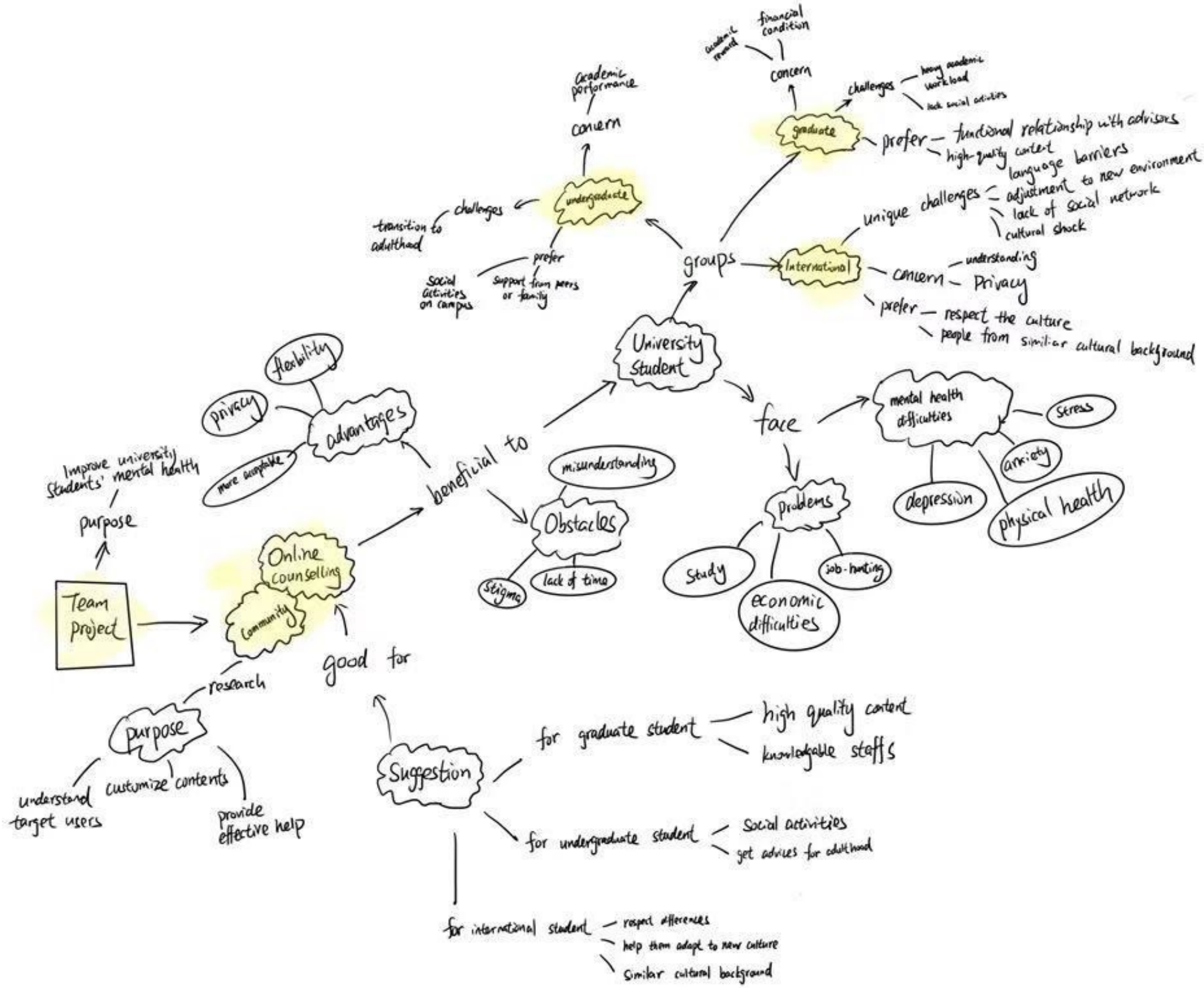
The article discussed difficulties that academic staff experience when responding to international students with mental health problems. Actions and suggestions are also contained for responding to the needs of the student group effectively. From this article, we can deeply understand the difficulties of providing mental health support for international students from the counsellor’s perspective. It helps us gain more inspirations for improving the practicality and effectiveness of the mental health app.

It is found that international students experience a range of economic, social and academic pressures, which are different in level and often in kind from those experienced by domestic students. According to the study, the language barrier may be an obstacle not only for international students but also for counsellors. Cross-Cultural misinterpretation and misunderstanding of communication styles may cause challenges. International students often feel awkward to talk about critical emotional matters with second languages, while the counsellor is unable to provide useful suggestions under this situation. Besides, confidentiality is an issue that students worry about, for some of they were suspicious of the counselling service and counsellors.

The article pointed out that universities need to produce clear guidelines for staff and students which clarify communication chains, issues of confidentiality, roles and responsibilities. Also, international students may need more academic teams who have cultural awareness that can offer help for them, since these supervisors play an essential role for university’s useful response to international students’ mental health needs.

International students are increasing rapidly, and they may face higher pressures and challenges due to the effects of language and cultural differences. It is essential to consider their needs and provide a useful plan to improve their mental health. The article pointed out the main problems and showed recommendations and strategies for responding to their needs effectively, which can also be considered for the mental health app.

Concept map



Overview statement

According to the literature, university students' needs for mental health services are universal. The cause of mental health difficulties is mainly academic pressure, economic issues, interpersonal relationships and job hunting. In particular, the pressure of undergraduates is more focused on academic performance, changes happened during the transition to adulthood, etc., while graduate students are worried about thesis and research. Compared with local students, international students also face language barriers, cultural shocks and social factors, which can lead to mental health problems.

Many studies have reported that even universities provide free mental health support services, many students don't use the service. For undergraduates, they tend to communicate their difficulties to their peers or trusted acquaintances. In addition, social activities on campus for undergraduates play a positive role in improving their mental health. For graduate students, the financial situation and the functional relationship with advisors are vital factors that affect their mental health and the use of counselling services. It is suggested that they need more knowledgeable staff to provide high-quality advice.

The use of mental health services for international students is the lowest. Although this student group often faces higher pressure and more difficulties, they cared less about mental health, or know little about mental health service on campus. These are largely due to cultural differences and language barriers. In some cultures, mental health stigma makes people care less about their emotions and feelings, which is harmful to address psychological health support. Therefore, it is necessary to respect and understand the cultural background of international students, help them adapt to new values and humanities, and provide high-quality mental health support. The assist from employees or peers who have similar cultural backgrounds may have a positive effect.

Due to the various condition of each student group, different guidance suggestions are also provided in the literature for reference. It is found that mental health stigma frequently appears in various research, which can be considered as the primary obstacle between students and mental health supports. The stigma mainly comes from individuals' misunderstanding of mental health problems and social impacts. In this regard, online consultation is a way to help avoid the effects of stigma. Most undergraduate students in the research case said that online counselling protects the privacy and reduces the tension of face-to-face consultation. Without considering others' views, they can express their real emotions during the counselling process.

Overall, the target users are classified into different groups. By reading the literature, the team can investigate the commonalities and differences between student groups. Obviously, the cause, improvement methods and characteristics of university students' mental health problems are different. The team's project needs to have a deep understanding of these target groups, and customize the content according to specific conditions of each group, to effectively improve their mental health.

To conclude, this article analyzes the different mental health issues, causes and suggestions for undergraduates and graduates. Although some other potential influences remain to be discussed, such as the cultural and region difference, the study result provided specific methods and suggestions that the app needs to help different types of students effectively.