

Badger Mental Health

Background

Thousands of people including UW-Madison students struggle with mental health. Some are able to figure out what they are going through and are able to take necessary steps to recovery but some find it immensely frightening to seek help or be vulnerable in front of people or even a licensed professional. Waiting out to see if the problem fixes itself becomes an easy way out. However, there are great softwares out there that provide Internet-based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (iCBT) that have proven to be effective a large percentage of times. Even UHS provides us with a free application called SilverCloud (<https://www.uhs.wisc.edu/mental-health/silvercloud/>), an online self- guided, mental health resource. The best part about online tools such as this is that this app doesn't require a referral from a mental health professional to get proper help. In fact, over 2000 students at UW-Madison already use Silver Cloud.

Problem and Proposed Solution

Although these Cognitive Behavioral Techniques do well to provide short and long term relief and coping strategies, there is often a lack of a personal touch to these programs and exercises. While using SilverCloud, I still felt like I was all by myself and that only worsened my panic attacks - feeling like no one in this world gets you. This is how I had the idea of creating an app that not only provides coping tools and techniques but also provides a means to bring together a community of students going through similar struggles to connect with each other, help each other through rough days, share stories, videos, posts, advice and much more. This can be a great way of not feeling like you are not alone in this because this community will be a non-judgemental zone for anyone who is afraid to socialize because they have feared judgement, have felt people don't understand them or what they go through. Students might finally be able to find friends who they can relate to on many levels, and that can boost one's mental health.

Key Features of app

1. A compassionate community of students who struggle with mental health or are interested in learning more about it → This will have an interface similar to common social media chatting services where students can:
 - send friend requests
 - chat
 - Make audio or video calls (a reach goal)
2. Coping cards - A scrollable series of cards that helps with mindfulness, stress relief, mindset shifting and staying optimistic in general. Additional functionality can be included where the app sends alerts randomly throughout the day as notifications at random times.
3. A page for people to post write ups, thoughts, opinions, videos they believe might be helpful, advice etc.

4. Quick workout videos - <https://www.fitnessblender.com/videos> (10 - 30 mins) to motivate people to take care of physical health to improve mental health. App might redirect students to given URL above or Scrape data (potential legal issues here that will need more attention)
5. An animated guide to meditation - A simple audio file and a captivating animation that guides students through a 5 - 10 minute easy-to-follow breathing exercise.
6. Personalized programs/exercises for students based on assessment results - Recommending solutions through customized programs/exercised to people requires medical expertise and while iCBT (Internet-based cognitive therapy) can be integrated with this app, further research is required since it often requires paying for an existing CBT software or creating a custom software using machine learning methods and a lot of professional intervention. Alternatively, creating an account for free and taking a quick test based on symptoms we diagnose from a quiz the user will take when they sign up, about how they feel on most days of the week, can provide insight into what aspect of their mental health they might want to focus on. Users can then take the respective formal assessment for free for better understanding at <https://screening.mhanational.org/screening-tools/> .

Customer and End Users

I have two potential customers for this app, one is a Clinical Psychologist, Dr. Ritu Mudgal, who I took sessions with last summer. She can help me through the technical knowledge requirement to create the quizzes, coping cards, and potentially the customized solutions using CBT. Another is a friend who has suffered from severe depression and anxiety in the past and has graciously agreed to give me insights when needed. End users for the app would be UW-Madison students.

Platform

I believe we can build this app using both iOS and Android since both provide all basic functionality and Machine learning tools like Create ML and ML Kit respectively, which might be of importance if we decide to take the ambitious route and try to provide users with customized CBT programs.

Summary

This app will be absolutely free for all students, unlike a lot of mental health apps in the market currently. I hope to collaborate with UHS to find out a way to provide students with not just iCBT but also the features I suggested for my app. I also plan to contact a mental health counselor from UHS that I know personally, and have taken counselling from as a potential way to contacting the right people at UHS who might provide support and guidance for this project.