

White Paper: Mental Health Issues Among College Students

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Mental Health Issues Among College Students

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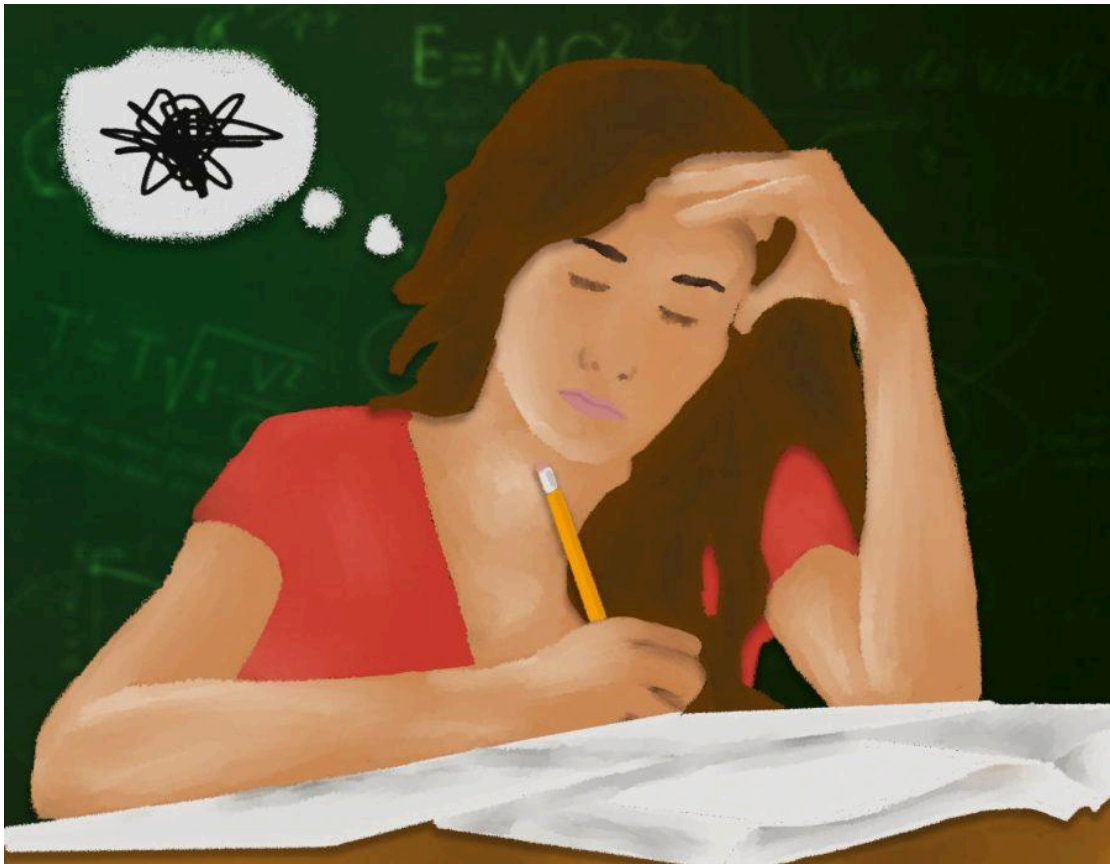


Fig 1. Shows the negative effects of mental health on students. [8]

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Introduction

The college experience is a period of exciting changes, academic growth, and tons of new social and personal experiences. However, it can also be a time full of stress, changes, and emotional obstacles for students. College students are faced with significant issues and unique challenges, particularly when it comes to mental health problems. This white paper discusses the question: How can colleges address the growing mental health challenges among university students?

Imagine being 18 years old, fresh out of high school, going to a college far from your home, living away from your parents for the first time, trying to figure out what you want to do with the rest of your life, while also worrying about finances, making friends, and getting good grades. Stressful right? That's why mental health issues in college students are rapidly growing.

There are over **19 million** college students enrolled in just the U.S alone, with new students enrolling all the time [5]. This number is constantly growing and changing, as millions of students attend university seeking a higher education. Of those millions of students, nearly **60%** reported having one or more mental health challenges, including issues such as **anxiety, depression, and burn out** [5].

These rates are alarming and are constantly rising as stress increases for students. When mental health issues go unaddressed, it can lead to **social withdrawal**, substance abuse, **decreased academic performance**, **feelings of loneliness and isolation**, and even suicidal thoughts.

Throughout this white paper, we will address these problems and provide a solution by implementing free mental health campus wide resources for college students. By developing **counselling services** and peer to peer **support groups**, universities can offer students the support they need to pursue academic excellence while prioritising overall well-being.

Problem Statement

The continuous growing of mental health issues within college students is an issue which requires more attention. There are multiple reports from across the world that students have escalating rates of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. Those who suffer from mental health disorders develop them during late adolescence and early adulthood, with around 75% of people who suffer from mental health disorders developing them before the age of 25 [6].

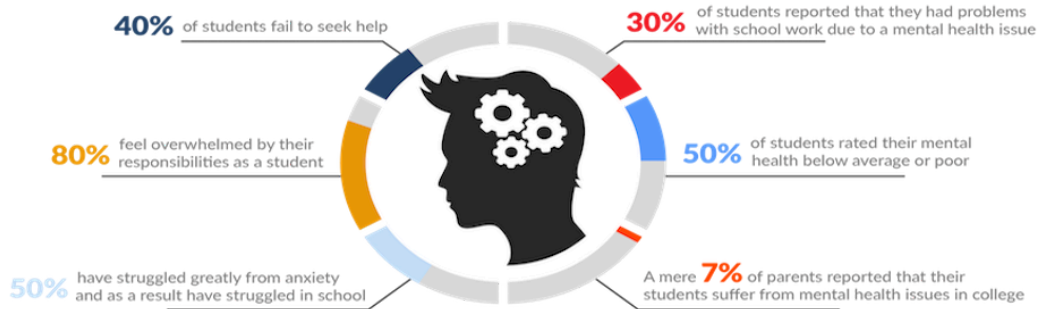


Fig 2. An image depicting the amount of college kids who suffer from mental health issues [4].

This means that those in college are much more susceptible to developing mental health issues, especially due to their increased amount of stress regarding academics, family and social life, and big life changes. It is important that universities and colleges address the rapidly growing issue, in order to help college students be as successful as possible, and prevent further mental health disorders.

When unchecked, mental health disorders can prevent people from living a normal life, and can seriously alter a person's quality of life. Providing students with resources and addressing these issues earlier in life can help people be more successful and allow students to get the resources they need.

Evidence

Mental health disorders among college students are very well documented and prevalent among the modern world. There are several factors which can influence college students' mental health, due to their unique set of challenges which contribute to the onset of disorders. College is a huge transition for young people, with most moving away from home, being on their own for the first time, plus added pressure to be successful and be responsible for themselves.

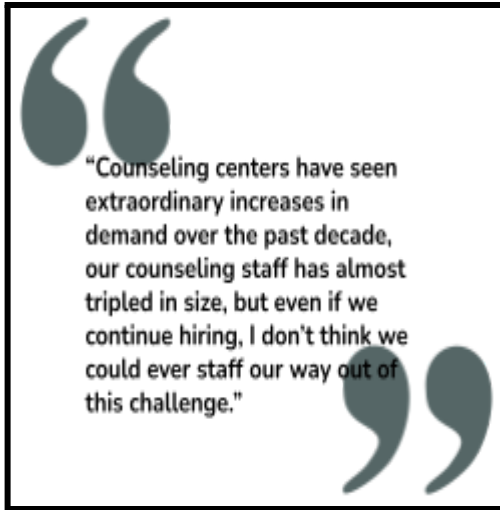


Fig 3. Quote by Michael Gerad Mason associate dean and counsellor at UVA [1].

According to a study done by Cambridge university, around 20.3% of college students who participated had reported symptoms or diagnosed psychiatric disorders, with nearly 80.1% of cases reportedly developing before graduation, showing the need for earlier intervention and resources on campus. Additionally, only 16.1% of these disorders went treated, leaving the majority of students health issues unaddressed [3].

In more recent studies, 60% of students met criteria for 1 or more mental health issues, with increased amount of students suffering from depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and suicidal thoughts [7]. These all can have severe effects on academic performance, social well-being, and longer outcomes on life.

Solutions

Given the overwhelming amount of evidence about the increased mental health disorders affecting college students, it is clear that higher education institutions need to take action to better support students. In order to address this, we propose schools offer more campus-wide mental health support systems.

Giving students access to free counselling services on campus is the best way to ensure student success. By providing professional mental health resources on campus, colleges can ensure that students have the support they need to navigate the specific challenges of the college experience and develop healthy coping mechanisms. This approach would also normalise the seeking of mental health support, removing the stigma that often prevents students from accessing these crucial services.

In addition to on campus counselling services, campuses could also develop student peer support groups. This could provide students with a sense of community and belonging, giving them more ability to cope with the stresses of college life. These

student-led groups, such as mental health awareness clubs and support groups, can promote empathy, understanding, and support, which are important for overall well-being.

Universities can also promote self-care and meditation techniques to students. By discussing ways to manage stress, regulate emotions, develop coping strategies and establish good relationships, universities can help better their students' mental health.



Fig 4. Ways to lessen and prevent symptoms of depression or anxiety [9].

Counter Argument

Although campus wide mental health resources have multiple benefits, there are several possible counter arguments which must be addressed. One of the primary concerns for this could be resources and cost. Expanding counselling services, promoting mental health education, and developing peer-to-peer support programs all require investments from

both financial and human resources. College admin may argue that these funds could be better used for academic programs, facilities, sports, or other university priorities.

However, there are long-term benefits for the university from implementing these programs. A study in 2022 found that these long term mental health issues lead to an increased risk of dropping out of school or severe academic underperformance. This can seriously affect universities, both losing them money financially, and making their academics less prestigious. Additionally, improved mental health from students allowed for a more engaged and productive student body [2].

Conclusion

The mental health crisis affecting college students is becoming more pressing, with significant disorders such as anxiety, depression, and burnout continuously affecting students. As the number of students enrolled in higher education continues to grow, so does the number of mental health disorders, which demands attention from universities.

Mental health disorders and symptoms should be taken very seriously, as they can alter students' quality of life significantly. Factors such as higher stress levels, financial problems, social changes, and academics, can drastically affect college students' mental health. If this issues go unaddressed, they can lead to social withdrawal, overall unhappiness, decreased academic performance, and even suicidal thoughts.

By expanding free counselling services, promoting mental health strategies, and establishing peer-to-peer support programs, higher education can allow their students to prioritise their well-being while pursuing their academic and personal goals.

The time for action is now. By implementing these solutions, colleges and universities can demonstrate commitment to their students and their well-being. These factors will create a higher education system that allows for healthy growth and development of students, and set them up for success in the real world.

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Reflection

As I began writing for this course, I didn't have much previous knowledge of rhetoric or the theories we used in class. I was able to really push myself outside my comfort zone, adapt to different writing styles, and overall use stasis theory to really take my writing to the next level. I had to really research into each different style of writing, preplan how I was going to write, and revise my papers to get them to the level of excellence which was expected of me.

For the first paper we wrote, the blog post, my rough draft was nowhere near what was expected, and I had a hard time adjusting to the more casual form of a blog post. It was difficult for me to switch from typical academic writing and I had to revise my rough draft multiple times. I was really able to use rhetoric and style to emphasise my point in my blog post about childhood trauma. Using the formatting we learned about in class, and the think tank as examples helped me perfect my blog post and write in a way that most readers could understand, and overall I was really satisfied with my end product. I was also able to really analyse what blog posts should look like and how they should read, and was able to adjust to the formatting and style elements typically used.

For the second paper, the internal evaluative report, I had the easiest time writing it because of the more formal tone that was used. I was able to really use evidence and style to compare and contrast the two products. I also learned how to use CRAPP resources in an effective manner which allowed me to compare and contrast in the best way. Using evidence-based comparisons, structuring logical arguments, and keeping an objective

throughout the whole paper was something I was really good at. Overall, the internal evaluative report felt like a more natural fit for my writing abilities and my personal preferences. I was able to use my formal thinking and analytical argument to produce a really good end product.

For the white paper, I knew good research was going to be essential in writing the best possible paper. I started by thoroughly researching the topic and presenting a clear, evidence-based argument. I knew the goal was to provide an informative yet persuasive overview of the problem and solutions, so I wanted to ensure my sources were credible and up-to-date. I did have somewhat of a hard time writing because the structure was slightly more freeform. Including graphs, quotes, and diagrams, was something else I struggled with because I typically wouldn't use them in an essay.

Throughout all these writing tasks and courses, I believe I've grown and developed as a writer in several ways. First, I've gotten better at analysing rhetorical situations and adapting my strategies to fit the assignment at task. I'm able to consider the audience, purpose, and context of a given writing assignment, and to make more intentional choices about things like tone, structure, and use of evidence. I've also learned how to research and find quality sources that really back up an argument. I've also gotten a much stronger sense of myself as a writer. I'm more confident in my ability to communicate my ideas in writing, and I have a better understanding of my own strengths, weaknesses, and preferred writing processes. I'm more willing to take risks, experiment with new techniques, and want to continue learning different styles and pushing myself.