

Symposia Abstract Book - Main Abstract Book with Submissions and Programme (All Symposia)

Student Mental Health (0076)

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Chair: Kieran Balloo¹ ,

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Rationale Text: In recent years, general concern for university students' mental health and wellbeing has risen substantially. The number of students declaring a mental health condition has increased five-fold over a 10-year period (Thorley, 2017), and over a third of students are thought to hold a lifetime mental disorder (Auerbach et al., 2018). The majority of individuals who attend university are young adults, which is the period in which the onset for common mental disorders is most likely (Lewis et al., 2021). This makes students a particularly at-risk group. Indeed, poorer mental health in young people has been found to be associated with lower academic achievement at university (Eisenberg et al., 2009), worse employment outcomes (Calderwood & Henderson, 2018; Clark et al., 2017), and a higher likelihood of developing a mental disorder later in life (Essau et al., 2014). This symposium aims to bring to light some of the mental health challenges faced by individuals both in the lead up to, and during, their time at university. The studies in this symposium use a variety of methodological approaches and draw on samples from multiple countries to offer a thorough exploration of the issues that some students experience. In the first presentation, Crook will establish the importance of focusing on student mental health by providing a historical perspective of the issue. This backdrop will help to inform our current understandings of the topic. In the second presentation, Balloo et al. will explore whether mental health problems during adolescence impact on the likelihood of young people attending university, as well as the type of university they go to. In the third presentation, Cogan et al. investigate some of the mental health challenges experienced by international students as they adapt to studying in a new country. Finally, Duffy et al. bring us up-to-date on the matter by looking at students' mental health outcomes over the course of the pandemic. The Discussant will end the symposium by synthesising the implications of the papers to highlight ways forward for dealing with this ongoing issue. It is anticipated that the symposium will offer delegates a detailed exploration of an important aspect of the student experience that cannot be ignored. In doing so, it is hoped that delegates will be provided with evidence-informed guidance on how to support their own students, as well as directions for future research. Presentation 1: Student mental health: the view from history (Presenting author: Sarah Crook) Presentation 2: Academic Pressures and Mental Distress During Adolescence: Associations with Participation in Higher Education (Presenting author: Kieran Balloo) Presentation 3: Mental health challenges associated with adaptation and acculturation among international students studying in Scotland (Presenting author: Nicola Cogan) Presentation 4: University student mental health over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic: Findings from the U-Flourish study (Presenting author: Anne Duffy)

Discussant Amy Zile

Linked Submissions:

Academic Pressures and Mental Distress During Adolescence: Associations with Participation in Higher Education (0239)

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Research Domain: Student experiences (SE)

Paper Abstract: Recent evidence suggests that adolescents with mental health issues are more likely to go on to attend university. Reasons for this point to academic pressures that may cause mental distress potentially being greater for those who plan to attend university. We aimed to investigate this hypothesis further by examining whether the extent to which mental distress is elevated relates to the selectivity of university that young people go on to attend. Logistic regression analyses were performed on survey responses from a nationally representative data set. Young people going on to more selective universities had elevated levels of mental distress at 15 and 17. By age 25, symptoms were no longer elevated for those who had attended either type of university. We argue that additional support needs to be provided during times that adolescents complete qualifications they perceive as being high-stakes.

University Student Mental Health over the Course of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Findings from the U-Flourish Study (0308)

Nathan King¹, William Pickett², Simone Cunningham³, Daniel Rivera⁴, Jin Byun⁵, Mimi Li⁶, Anne Duffy⁷

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Research Domain: Student experiences (SE)

Paper Abstract: **Rationale:** The pandemic has been a major source of stress for the general population of young people, as well as presenting specific and unique challenges for university students. **Methods:** In three successive years (2018-2021), first year undergraduate students entering a major Canadian university were invited to complete an electronic biannual survey at the start and completion of the academic year. Surveys included validated screening measures of anxiety,

depression, self-harm and substance use.

Findings:

Clinically significant anxiety and depressive symptoms along with self-harm increased at entry to university in the Canadian cohorts, while alcohol bingeing and illicit drug use declined.

Conclusion:

The pandemic and associated restrictions and uncertainties has culminated in reduced student mental health. Longitudinal data is needed to determine the trajectory of student mental health as the pandemic resolves.

Mental Health Challenges Associated with Adaptation and Acculturation among International Students Studying in Scotland (0397)

Nicola Cogan¹, Xi Liu¹, Yvonne Chau¹, Steve Kelly¹, Tony Anderson¹, Colin Flynn¹, Patrick Corrigan²

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Research Domain: Student experiences (SE)

Paper Abstract: Research has yet to explore the understandings and experiences of mental health, disclosure and help-seeking drawing upon international students’ perspectives within the Scottish context. A series of studies were carried out using a multi-method approach including in-depth qualitative interviews with international students studying in Scotland and cross-sectional online surveys comparing domestic and international students in terms of mental health literacy, disclosure and help seeking behaviour. Qualitative data analysed using a thematic approach revealed that adaptation and acculturation difficulties, negative beliefs, stigma and fear of judgement adversely impacted on international students’ mental health. Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis of the survey data showed that mental health literacy was positively associated with psychological adaptation, and lower stigma was positively associated with help seeking intention among international students. Supporting international students involves addressing the challenges and barriers in overcoming adaptation and acculturation difficulties that may inhibit disclosure and help seeking for mental health problems.

Student Mental Health: The View from History (0451)

Sarah Crook¹

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Research Domain: Student experiences (SE)

Paper Abstract: Few periods are as freighted with social expectation as university years, but until now we have known little about how previous generations of students navigated mental health concerns. This paper sets out the impetus for the establishment of university health services and puts

student-produced materials alongside health professionals' views to offer some early thoughts about how exploring the history of student mental health can illuminate the present — a present made urgent by Covid-19. The paper suggests students have long found university to be an emotionally complex environment. This, I argue, destabilises arguments that today's students are a 'snowflake generation': by looking at the student voice in the past we can construct a history of student mental health that shines productive light on contemporary discourses around student mental health.

(0685)

Research Domain:

Paper Abstract:
