

# College Students Need Mental Health Care

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# Abstract

This paper asks the questions *'How can college students get access to mental health care?'* and *'How can colleges support students who need mental health care?'*. Using qualitative research, this paper presents an analysis of the fact that many college students need mental health care but aren't reaching out. They may feel embarrassed, so they ignore that they need help. If colleges promoted and supported mental health more, students might not feel as embarrassed because it will be more normalized.



# Chapter 1: Introduction

Many college students tend to struggle throughout their college years due to the lack of mental health services on campus. When there are on-campus services, students don't go because they may feel embarrassed because mental health isn't talked about enough. Since most college students do not have a job, they cannot afford to get off-campus help. This results in students developing mental illnesses, like anxiety and depression. Mental health is an important aspect of our overall well-being. It refers to our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Good mental health enables us to cope with the challenges of life, work productively, and build healthy relationships with others.

Poor mental health, on the other hand, can lead to a range of issues such as anxiety, depression, addiction, and even suicide. It is critically important to take care of students' mental health by practicing self-care, seeking professional help when needed, and reducing stigma around mental health issues. Remember, it is okay to not be okay, and seeking help is a sign of strength. Mental health is a critical issue for college students. The transition to college can be stressful, and many students struggle with the academic and social demands of college life. Common mental health issues among college students include anxiety, depression, and substance abuse. It is important for colleges and universities to prioritize mental health services and resources for their students, such as counseling, support groups, and mental health awareness campaigns. Additionally, students can take steps to prioritize their own mental health, such as practicing self-care, seeking support from friends and family, and reaching out for professional help when needed. By prioritizing mental health, college students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Economic pressures and shifting societal dynamics may also play a role. The demands of modern life, rapid technological changes, and uncertainties in the job market can contribute to heightened stress and anxiety levels. Economic recessions and global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have been associated with increased mental health challenges due to factors like job insecurity, financial strain, and disrupted social connections. Academic pressures, particularly in competitive educational environments, can contribute to rising mental health concerns among students. The pursuit of success and societal expectations for high achievement may lead to increased stress, burnout, and the development or exacerbation of mental health conditions.

Additionally, changes in lifestyle and societal structures, such as decreased face-to-face social interactions and increased screen time, may impact mental well-being. Environmental factors, including pollution and urbanization, have also been studied for potential links to mental health issues. It's crucial to note that the increase in reported cases of mental health problems doesn't necessarily mean that the absolute prevalence has risen dramatically. It could also be attributed to improved diagnostic criteria, increased awareness, and a greater willingness among individuals to seek help. Despite these challenges, the growing recognition of mental health issues has prompted increased efforts to address and support mental well-being on individual, community, and societal levels.

Mental health issues are a complex and multifaceted set of conditions that can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender, or background. These issues can take many forms, from anxiety and depression to more severe conditions like bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. Mental health issues can have a significant impact on a person's quality of life, affecting their ability to work, socialize, and enjoy life.



## Chapter 2: Historical and Theoretical Background

The mental health of college students is a critical and growing concern, reflecting broader societal shifts and the unique challenges faced by individuals in higher education. College life is often characterized by a combination of newfound independence, academic pressures, social expectations, and the transition to adulthood, all of which can significantly impact mental well-being. The transition from high school to college represents a pivotal period, with students facing not only academic challenges but also navigating new social environments. The pressure to succeed academically, coupled with the need to establish a sense of identity and belonging, can contribute to stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. Additionally, the demands of coursework, exams, and the quest for future career paths can intensify the stressors experienced by college students.

Social factors also play a crucial role in the mental health landscape of college campuses. Issues such as peer relationships, social expectations, and the desire for acceptance can influence students' emotional well-being. The prevalence of social media and its impact on self-esteem and interpersonal dynamics further adds complexity to the mental health landscape in colleges. However, the stigma surrounding mental health issues can hinder students from seeking help. Concerns about judgment, academic repercussions, or social alienation may prevent individuals from reaching out for the support they need. As a result, colleges and universities have been increasingly recognizing the importance of providing mental health resources and support services to address the unique challenges faced by their student populations.

The visibility of mental health problems has shown a drastic increase over the years, reflecting a complex interplay of societal, environmental, and individual factors. One

contributing factor is the heightened awareness and decreased stigma surrounding mental health issues, leading to greater recognition and reporting. As societies become more open about mental health discussions, individuals are increasingly willing to seek help and disclose their struggles, contributing to the apparent rise in documented cases. Technological advancements and the pervasive influence of social media have also been implicated in the escalation of mental health problems. The constant connectivity and comparison facilitated by digital platforms can contribute to feelings of inadequacy, social isolation, and heightened stress.

In recent years, there has been a growing movement to destigmatize mental health concerns, promote awareness, and enhance access to mental health services on college campuses. Student-led initiatives, counseling services, and educational programs aim to create a more supportive and understanding environment for those grappling with mental health issues. The background of mental health in college students thus reflects a dynamic interplay of academic, social, and individual factors, highlighting the need for comprehensive and student-centric approaches to promote well-being in educational settings.



## Chapter 3: Literature Review

Mental health issues can refer to a wide range of conditions that affect a person's mood, thinking, and behavior. Some common mental health issues include anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and eating disorders. These conditions can be caused by numerous factors, including genetics, brain chemistry, life experiences, and environmental factors. It is important to seek help if you are experiencing symptoms of a mental health condition, as early intervention can improve outcomes. Treatment may include therapy, medication, lifestyle changes, or a combination of these approaches. It is also important to prioritize self-care and to seek support from loved ones and mental health professionals.

### **College Security Gets Closer to Student Mental Health Needs**

Anonymous (2011) talks about how the University of Florida Police Department (UFPD) “has been selected to act in a mentor role to help other law enforcement agencies across the country improve their responses to people with mental illnesses”. UFPD is one of the six sites selected to help. The other five are the Houston Police Department, the Los Angeles Police Department, the Madison (Wisc.) Police Department, the Portland (Maine) Police Department and the Salt Lake City Police Department. The article also talks about “Throughout the United States, a large number of people with serious mental illnesses are cycling through the criminal justice system”.

## **Stress, Mental Health Symptoms, and Help-Seeking in College Students**

Hubbard, Reohr, Tolcher and Downs (2018) talk about a survey conducted by the American College Health Association in 2017. They found that “45.1% of college students reported experiencing higher than average levels of stress” and there were 12% of students who had more stress than normal. The American College Health Association conducted a similar study where 87% of students felt overwhelmed with their responsibilities and 84% felt mentally exhausted. The article also mentioned “The most common stressors rated by students as “traumatic or very difficult to handle” were academics, finances, intimate relationships and sleep problems”.

## **College students need mental health care**

McGill (2013) talks about how American colleges need to do a better job at helping and accommodating students who have mental health issues. She talks about the National Alliance on Mental Illness survey, “765 students diagnosed with illnesses such as depression and bipolar disorder between August 2011 and November 2011 who attended college in the past five years”. Out of all those students, 62% said they knew how to get mental health help on campus and 57% said they never accessed those services because of the fear of being judged by others.

## **Mental health needs of college students**

Many college students eventually develop a form of mental illness while at school. The common mental health illnesses that happen in students are depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety and even schizophrenia. According to “Mental-health needs of college students,” written by The

Chicago Tribune (2007), “Parents, professors, administrators, youth advocates, coaches, students, and campus mental-health professionals should work together to become aware of the signs and symptoms of mental illness in their students.” Mental health should be talked about more in colleges to help students and “to ensure that every student's needs are addressed, and each student can achieve his or her dream of obtaining a college degree.”

### **College students to help meet peers' mental health needs**

Edwards (2008) meets with Isabella Burton, project director at the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill of Greater Chicago, and she talks about how it’s impossible to ignore that college students have many personal issues and have a lot on their plate. Burtan says, “On top of that, it's an age of onset for serious mental illness, 18 to 24”. A survey of 1,026 college students was conducted in 2004. It was stated that “one-third of college students reported symptoms of serious mental illness”.

### **Researching college options for students with mental health needs**

Chung-Brcak (2014) talks about two surveys about college students’ mental health experiences. In the 2013 American College Health Association’s study, “40% of college students surveyed felt hopeless or overwhelmingly anxious in the past school year”. However, as stated in the 2012 National Alliance on Mental Health’s study, “73% of students previously diagnosed with a mental health condition experienced a mental health crisis at college”. Given these statistics, parents who have a child in college should educate themselves on the college mental health services, especially if their child is struggling.

### **College students need access to mental health treatment**

Taha (2019) talks about how she's a first-generation college student. She came from a low-income background and did not have access to mental health care. When she went away to college, she was able to get that care. She was struggling in her first year of college, so she decided to try out the counseling center. She said that mental health was never a topic in her household when she was growing up. When she went away to college, she noticed that she was struggling so she decided to try the on-campus counseling center. Taha said "Unfortunately, after my first few visits, I was told I would need to see an off-campus provider, even though I didn't have a car. I spent the rest of my college career untreated. I didn't realize how bad things were until I received adequate treatment years later". College mental health centers need to be more prepared for students who are struggling.

# Chapter 4: Methods

## **Introduction: research design**

To develop this project, qualitative study of library databased research was used to understand how college students can get access to the mental health care they need and how colleges should support students who need mental health help.

## **Selection criteria**

To put together my findings and to reach my goal for a well-written paper, the research included many scholarly articles, peer-reviewed articles, surveys and journals. In addition to scholarly articles, helpful material was obtained from APA's Monitor, an outward-facing bulletin of the APA. I also included an article by a college student about her experiences and it caught my attention the most.

## **Search terms**

While searching for my research, I used many different keywords to help me. For example, I wanted to find some articles on how college students suffer from mental health problems. I went into the Purchase College Library Database and searched up the words "students", "depression" and "anxiety", and I immediately found what I needed. It was very easy for me to find articles and journals on this topic.

### **Data collection and analysis methods**

To get to my goal of finding out how college students can get access to the mental health care they need and how colleges should support students who need mental health help, I decided to use qualitative research to better my understanding. Many of the studies I used had collected and analyzed qualitative data.

### **Study quality and risk of bias**

This study is high-quality due to the number of scholarly peer-reviewed sources. While this topic has certain connections to me personally, I was careful not to let any experiences or biases on my part color my research.

### **Conclusion:**

This study was designed according to standards in the field of Social Sciences and applied methods are commonly used in Social Sciences disciplines. Overall, the study, while qualitative, does include analyses of quantitative data. The next chapter will present my results through analysis and discussion.

## Chapter 5: Findings

### Anxiety

Anxiety has become an omnipresent companion in the lives of college students, overshadowing the excitement and opportunities that higher education promises. “Feelings of anxiety and other mental health issues may be a result of various stressors experienced by a college student” (Naceanceno, Capps, Whittenburg, Ortiz, 2020). The reasons behind the prevalence of anxiety in this demographic are multifaceted, reflecting the intricate interplay of academic, social, and personal factors that characterize the college experience.

One of the primary contributors to anxiety among college students is the formidable weight of academic expectations. The transition from high school to college brings with it a heightened level of academic rigor, challenging students to adapt to a faster pace, more demanding coursework, and increased self-directed learning. The fear of academic failure, coupled with the pressure to excel, can lead to heightened stress levels and persistent anxiety about one's performance and prospects. According to "A Comparison of Anxiety Levels Among College Students" by Naceanceno, Capps, Whittenburg and Ortiz (2020), “Some of the main causes of stress college students may encounter include financial obligations, social interactions, and academic workload”.

College represents a unique social landscape where students are thrust into an environment teeming with new faces, diverse backgrounds, and a multitude of social dynamics. The desire to fit in, form meaningful connections, and establish a sense of belonging can be a source of immense pressure. Social comparisons, fear of judgment, and the challenges of

navigating new relationships contribute significantly to the prevalence of anxiety among college students.

The college years coincide with a critical period of personal and identity development. Students often grapple with questions of self-discovery, purpose, and identity, compounded by the pressure to make decisions about majors, careers, and future life paths. The uncertainty that accompanies this transitional phase can be a breeding ground for anxiety as students confront the unknown and grapple with defining their sense of self during change.

The cost of higher education, coupled with the financial burden of tuition, living expenses, and student loans, adds another layer to the anxiety experienced by college students. Concerns about financial stability, part-time employment, and managing expenses can create stressors that impact both academic performance and overall well-being.

In the digital age, the constant connectivity afforded by technology has transformed the way college students experience and perceive the world around them. While social media provides a platform for connection, it also amplifies social comparisons and the pressure to present curated, idealized versions of one's life. The ubiquity of digital interactions can contribute to feelings of isolation, inadequacy, and the fear of missing out (FOMO), all of which are associated with heightened anxiety.

The prevalence of anxiety among college students is a complex phenomenon influenced by a myriad of interconnected factors. Acknowledging the multifaceted nature of these challenges is crucial for universities, educators, and support services to create environments that foster resilience, promote mental health, and equip students with the tools to navigate the complexities of higher education successfully. By addressing the root causes and providing comprehensive support, institutions can contribute to a more positive and nurturing college experience for all students.



## **Depression**

Within the bustling halls of academia, a silent epidemic persists—the prevalence of depression among college students. According to “Depression and academic engagement among college students: the role of sense of security and psychological impact of COVID-19” “Depression is an emotional disorder characterized by frequent experiences of intense feelings such as pain, emptiness, and hopelessness” (Tang, He, 2023). Beyond the veneer of academic achievement and social engagement, a significant number of students grapple with the heavy burden of depression, a mental health challenge that poses unique hurdles in the pursuit of higher education.

The intense academic demands of college life can serve as a breeding ground for depression among students. Juggling coursework, exams, and deadlines while striving for academic excellence can lead to a pervasive sense of inadequacy and hopelessness. The fear of failure and the pressure to meet unrealistic standards can contribute to a downward spiral of negative thoughts and emotions. “Academic struggles caused by depression may, in turn, impact mental health, potentially exacerbating anxiety and depressive states, thus creating a vicious cycle” (Tang, He, 2023).

Despite being surrounded by peers, college students with depression often experience a profound sense of social isolation. Feelings of alienation, difficulty forming and maintaining relationships, and the weight of interpersonal expectations can create a cycle of loneliness, further deepening the impact of depression. The fear of judgment and the stigma surrounding mental health issues may prevent students from seeking the support they desperately need.

For many students, college represents a significant transitional phase, marked by newfound independence and autonomy. The stress of adapting to a new environment, managing

increased responsibilities, and grappling with the uncertainties of the future can exacerbate pre-existing mental health conditions or trigger the onset of depression.

The financial strain associated with college life, including tuition costs, living expenses, and student loans, can contribute to the burden of depression. Students facing economic challenges may experience heightened stress, impacting their mental health and well-being. The fear of financial instability and the pressure to secure a successful future can compound the struggles associated with depression.

Despite increasing awareness of mental health issues, many college campuses still grapple with inadequate resources for mental health support. Long wait times for counseling services, a shortage of mental health professionals, and limited access to affordable treatment options can leave students with depression feeling overlooked and underserved.

College students with depression often employ various coping mechanisms, some of which may be maladaptive. Substance abuse, self-isolation, and avoidance of responsibilities can become destructive patterns, exacerbating the impact of depression and hindering academic and personal growth.

Recognizing and addressing depression among college students is crucial for fostering a supportive and inclusive educational environment. By prioritizing mental health services, reducing the stigma surrounding mental health discussions, and implementing proactive strategies to identify and assist students in need, colleges can play a pivotal role in breaking the silence surrounding depression. Through collective efforts, we can create a campus culture that promotes well-being, resilience, and the realization that seeking help is not a sign of weakness but a courageous step towards healing and success.

## **Suicide**

In the realm of higher education, the issue of suicide among college students casts a dark shadow on the pursuit of academic and personal growth. The increasing prevalence of suicide rates on college campuses underscores a critical need to delve into the multifaceted factors that contribute to this alarming trend.

The intense academic pressures inherent in college life can exact a toll on the mental well-being of students, potentially contributing to an increased risk of suicidal ideation. The relentless pursuit of perfection, fear of failure, and the weight of expectations can create a toxic environment, pushing vulnerable students to the brink of despair.

Despite growing awareness of mental health issues, a pervasive stigma still surrounds discussions and seeking help for mental health concerns. The fear of judgment and societal misconceptions about mental health can deter students from reaching out for support, exacerbating feelings of isolation and hopelessness that may contribute to an elevated risk of suicide.

College experience often coincides with a period of significant transition, marked by new environments, social dynamics, and increased responsibilities. Students grappling with the stress of adapting to these changes may find themselves vulnerable to mental health challenges, including suicidal thoughts, as they navigate the complexities of this transformative phase.

The seemingly bustling and socially vibrant college environment can paradoxically contribute to feelings of isolation, loneliness, and disconnection. Students away from home, lacking a robust support system, or struggling to form meaningful connections may experience heightened vulnerability, potentially elevating the risk of suicide.

College campuses may inadvertently provide access to lethal means, such as medications or other harmful substances. This accessibility can be a contributing factor to increased suicide

rates, necessitating comprehensive preventive measures and awareness campaigns to limit access to potentially lethal methods.

Insufficient mental health resources on college campuses pose a significant challenge to effectively addressing and preventing suicides. Overburdened counseling services, limited availability of mental health professionals, and gaps in crisis intervention support can leave students in distress without the necessary resources to navigate their mental health challenges.

To combat the rising suicide rates among college students, proactive prevention strategies and robust mental health support systems are imperative. Campuses must prioritize destigmatizing mental health discussions, increasing accessibility to counseling services, and fostering a culture that encourages open dialogue about mental well-being. Educational institutions, along with mental health professionals, play a pivotal role in providing resources, support, and intervention strategies to identify and assist students at risk.

Understanding and addressing the complex web of factors contributing to suicide rates among college students is essential for creating a campus environment that prioritizes mental health, resilience, and community support. By fostering a culture of empathy, awareness, and accessible mental health services, colleges can strive to diminish the shadows that loom over the well-being of their students and promote a path toward hope, healing, and academic success.

### **Stress**

For students with mental health issues, the journey through college can be an arduous one, marked by the persistent shadows of anxiety, depression, or other conditions. The academic demands, social pressures, and transitional challenges inherent in higher education often magnify the stressors experienced by these students, creating a unique and formidable struggle. “Year one

students reported the highest levels of academic- related stress and year three students reported the lowest levels of academic-related stress” (Naceanceno, Capps, Whittenburg, Ortiz, 2020).

The already demanding nature of college coursework can become an overwhelming burden for students grappling with mental health issues. Concentrating on studies, meeting deadlines, and participating in class discussions can be formidable tasks when the mind is clouded by anxiety or weighed down by the symptoms of depression. The fear of falling behind, coupled with the pressure to perform, exacerbates the stress these students face in their academic pursuits.

College life is renowned for its social vibrancy, but for students with mental health issues, navigating social dynamics can be an isolating experience. The fear of judgment, social stigma, and the challenge of forming meaningful connections can lead to a sense of alienation. The pressure to fit in and maintain a facade of normalcy can exacerbate the stress these students endure, intensifying feelings of loneliness and disconnection.

The transition to college represents a pivotal period of change, and for students with mental health issues, this shift can be particularly daunting. Adjusting to new environments, increased responsibilities, and the uncertainties of the future can trigger or worsen mental health symptoms. The fear of the unknown and the pressure to adapt to a fast-paced and demanding lifestyle can compound the stress associated with this transitional phase.

While awareness of mental health issues has grown, the support systems in place on college campuses may still fall short of meeting the unique needs of students with mental health challenges. Limited access to counseling services, a lack of understanding from peers and faculty, and the persistence of mental health stigma can create additional barriers to seeking and receiving the necessary support.

Financial pressures add an extra layer of stress for students with mental health issues. Balancing the costs of tuition, living expenses, and potential medical treatments can become a significant source of anxiety. The fear of financial instability and the pressure to secure a stable future compound the challenges these students face in managing their mental health while pursuing their academic goals.

The pervasive stigma surrounding mental health issues can contribute to the stress experienced by affected students. The fear of being perceived as weak or incapable may lead to the concealment of their struggles, further isolating them from potential sources of support. Eradicating this stigma is crucial in creating an environment where students feel empowered to seek help without judgment.

The stressors faced by college students with mental health issues are multifaceted and pervasive, affecting various aspects of their academic and personal lives. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach, including increased awareness, improved accessibility to mental health resources, and the creation of a supportive campus culture that fosters empathy, understanding, and proactive intervention. By acknowledging and actively working to alleviate the unique stressors faced by students with mental health issues, colleges can strive to create an inclusive and nurturing environment that promotes the well-being and success of all students.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions

The availability and adequacy of mental health help for college students vary widely, and several factors contribute to the overall landscape. Many colleges and universities recognize the importance of supporting students' mental well-being and have established counseling centers

and mental health services on campus. These services typically offer individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, and educational programs to address a range of mental health concerns. However, despite the existence of these services, challenges persist in ensuring that college students get the mental health help they need. One significant obstacle is the high demand for mental health services on many campuses. Counseling centers may experience overwhelming demand, leading to longer wait times for appointments and potentially hindering timely access to support.

Additionally, resource limitations can impact the effectiveness of mental health services. Some colleges may struggle with budget constraints, leading to a shortage of mental health professionals and restricted program offerings. As a result, students may face challenges in securing consistent, ongoing care. Stigma remains a pervasive issue that can deter students from seeking mental health help. Fear of judgment or negative repercussions may prevent individuals from disclosing their struggles and accessing the necessary support. Cultural factors, including differing attitudes toward mental health within various communities, can also influence help-seeking behaviors.

Mental health services on college campuses can vary widely depending on the institution. Many colleges and universities offer counseling services to students, which may include individual or group therapy, crisis intervention, and referrals to outside mental health professionals. Some schools also have psychiatrists or other medical professionals on staff who can prescribe medication for mental health conditions. Additionally, many campuses offer mental health resources such as support groups, workshops, and wellness programs. However, there can be barriers to accessing these services, such as long wait times, limited availability, and stigma surrounding mental health issues. It is important for colleges and universities to prioritize mental health services and reduce these barriers to support their students' well-being.

To address these challenges, colleges and universities are implementing various initiatives. They are increasingly focusing on mental health awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and promote a culture of openness. Some institutions are expanding their mental health services by hiring more counselors, incorporating telehealth options, and offering peer support programs. These efforts aim to create a more supportive environment and enhance access to mental health resources for college students. Despite ongoing challenges, the commitment to improving mental health support on college campuses is evident, reflecting a broader recognition of the importance of student well-being.

Mental health issues can refer to a wide range of conditions that affect a person's mood, thinking, and behavior. Some common mental health issues include anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and eating disorders. These conditions can be caused by numerous factors, including genetics, brain chemistry, life experiences, and environmental factors. It is important to seek help if you are experiencing symptoms of a mental health condition, as early intervention can improve outcomes. Treatment may include therapy, medication, lifestyle changes, or a combination of these approaches. It is also important to prioritize self-care and to seek support from loved ones and mental health professionals.



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