Empowering Minds: Academic Libraries Leading the Charge in Student Mental Health

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Background on Mental Health in Higher Education

Prevalence of Mental Health Issues: Over 60% of college students met the criteria for at least one mental health problem during the 2020–2021 academic year (Health Minds Network, 2021).

Anxiety and Depression Rates: In the 2021–2022 academic year, 44% of students reported symptoms of depression, and 37% reported anxiety disorders—the highest recorded rates in the history of the 15-year-old survey (Health Minds Network, 2022).

Suicidal Ideation: Approximately 15% of students reported having seriously considered suicide in the past year (Health Minds Network, 2022).

Impact on Academic Performance: Two in five students say their mental health significantly affects their ability to focus, learn, and perform academically (Health Minds Network, 2022).

Help-Seeking Behavior: Less than half (40%) of students believe their institution is doing enough to support mental health, and only 20% of those with fair or poor mental health sought help at school (Health Minds Network, 2022).

Background on Mental Health in Higher Education

Counseling Services Utilization: One in eight students at Oxford University (UK) sought counseling in 2023, primarily due to anxiety (University of Oxford, 2023).

Consideration of Withdrawal: Four in ten college students have recently considered withdrawing from college, with emotional stress cited as the primary reason (Gallup & Lumina Foundation, 2022).

Historical Trends: The percentage of U.S. college students with lifetime diagnoses of mental health conditions increased from 22% in 2007 to 36% in 2017 (Lipson et al., 2019).

COVID-19 Impact: 80% of college students reported that COVID-19 has negatively impacted their mental health (Active Minds, 2021).

Suicide Rates: Suicide is now the second-leading cause of death among college students, with around 1,100 students losing their lives each year (Massie, 2007).

History of Bibliotherapy and Libraries

Bibliotherapy dates back to Ancient Greece, where reading was considered therapeutic in healing temples (Rubin, 1978).

Modern bibliotherapy gained prominence during World War I, helping soldiers recover from mental trauma (Rubin, 1978).

In the 1960s, bibliotherapy became more widely used in public and academic libraries for mental health support (Rubin, 1978).

Libraries began curating self-help and motivational books as part of bibliotherapy initiatives (Hynes, 2019).

History of Bibliotherapy and Libraries

Children's bibliotherapy programs emerged, using books to address social and emotional learning (Heath et al., 2005).

Today, bibliotherapy is a key component of library programs addressing anxiety, grief, and resilience.

Public libraries often collaborate with counselors to provide reading programs as mental health interventions. Academic libraries should start doing the same.

Research highlights bibliotherapy's ability to foster empathy and understanding among readers (McCulliss & Chamberlain, 2013).

Digital bibliotherapy has expanded access, allowing libraries to use eBooks and online materials to support mental health.

Library Staff Mental Health and Wellness

Library staff face increased stress due to evolving job demands and budget constraints.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated burnout among academic and public librarians.

Wellness programs, such as mindfulness sessions, help staff manage workplace stress.

Flexible scheduling and remote work options reduce burnout among library workers.

Peer support groups within libraries foster camaraderie and shared solutions.

Library Staff Mental Health and Wellness

Access to Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) through HR aids in addressing mental health challenges present in academic library staff.

Wellness workshops developed by Human Resource Departments or designated Wellness Committee offer tools for managing anxiety and work-life balance.

Leadership training emphasizes supportive management practices to mitigate stress.

Acknowledging staff contributions improves morale and fosters a positive work culture.

Libraries benefit from prioritizing staff mental health by reducing turnover and improving service quality.

Mental Health First Aid Training

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Training is an evidence-based program designed to equip individuals with the skills to recognize, understand, and respond to signs of mental health challenges or crises. It is comparable to physical first aid training but focuses on mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, substance use disorders, and psychosis (Mental Health First Aid USA, n.d.).

Relevance to Libraries: In library settings, MHFA enables staff to better support patrons experiencing mental health challenges, creating a safe, inclusive environment while also equipping them to handle crises effectively. It complements libraries' broader mission of serving as community resource hubs. Recommended that academic librarians receive this free training and keep their MHFA certification current (Mental Health First Aid USA, n.d.).

Mental Health First Aid Training

MHFA fosters an inclusive environment by reducing mental health stigma in libraries.

MHFA equips staff to identify and respond to mental health crises.

It provides strategies to de-escalate situations involving mental health challenges.

Training focuses on conditions like depression, anxiety, and substance abuse.

MHFA enhances staff confidence in offering initial assistance to patrons in crisis.

Mental Health First Aid Training

- Libraries with trained staff are better equipped to support neurodiverse patrons.

- Training encourages empathy and active listening among library employees.

- MHFA aligns with libraries' mission to provide holistic community support.

- Implementation improves library workers' well-being, equipping them to manage stressful situations.

- Libraries offering MHFA training are seen as proactive in addressing community needs.

Reasons Why Librarians Should Receive Suicide Awareness Training

- **Increased Patron Interaction with Vulnerable Populations:** Libraries often serve as safe spaces for individuals experiencing crises, including mental health challenges, making it essential for staff to recognize warning signs of suicidal ideation.

- **Enhanced Crisis Management Skills:** Suicide awareness training equips library staff with strategies for de-escalation and appropriate referral to mental health professionals, helping prevent crises from escalating.

- **Supporting the Community's Mental Health Needs:** Libraries serve diverse populations, including students, the elderly, and marginalized groups, many of whom may be at risk of mental health challenges and benefit from supportive environments.

- **Reducing Mental Health Stigma:** Proper training helps library staff use non-judgmental language and approach patrons with empathy, contributing to a more inclusive and supportive library space.

Reasons Why Librarians Should Receive Suicide Awareness Training

- **Compliance with Ethical Standards:** Libraries committed to social responsibility should align with professional ethics that emphasize promoting community well-being and reducing harm (American Library Association, 2017).

- **Improving Staff Confidence and Preparedness:** Staff who receive suicide awareness training may report feeling more capable of assisting patrons experiencing mental health crises.

- **Creating Safer Public Spaces:** Libraries are one of the few accessible public institutions where vulnerable individuals seek refuge, and training staff ensures the library remains a safe space for all patrons.

Mental Health Professionals on a Local Level

Identify local mental health professionals by collaborating with regional mental health organizations.

Create a curated list of licensed counselors, therapists, and psychologists available at your institution and in the greater geographic region that can be shared widely at your academic library and throughout your institution.

Include contact information, specialties, and availability (days/hours, if available) in the curated list.

Partner with local hospitals and clinics to identify telehealth providers. Indicate which local providers offer telehealth appointments.

Collaborate with community organizations to expand mental health resource access.

Mental Health Professionals on a Local Level

Make	Make the list widely available via library websites (e.g.LibGuides, library homepage), newsletters (e.g. library, university), and bulletin boards (e.g. library, student center, cafeteria).
Update	Regularly update the directory to ensure current and accurate information.
Encourage	Encourage feedback from patrons about the accessibility and usefulness of the resources.
Host	Host workshops or Q&A sessions with professionals on the curated list for library or university staff.
Partner	Partner with mental health organizations to offer informational programming through your academic library.

Collaborating with Mental Health Services

Host	Host joint mental health awareness events with campus health services.
Collaborate	Collaborate on wellness campaigns during high-stress periods like exams.
Share	Share resources, such as referral lists and support group schedules.
Develop	Develop telehealth spaces in libraries in partnership with health services.
Offer	Offer mental health workshops co-led by library and health services staff.

Collaborating with Mental Health Services

Create	Create integrated programs promoting both academic success and mental wellness.
Use	Use shared data to track student mental health needs and adapt services accordingly.
Cross-promote	Cross-promote services via campus-wide communications.
Include	Include mental health services information in library orientations for new students.
Ensure	Ensure seamless collaboration through regular planning meetings and shared goals.

Need for Telehealth Spaces

- Telehealth spaces in academic libraries can provide private, secure areas for mental health consultations.

- These spaces help patrons without reliable internet or quiet environments at home.

- Academic libraries can partner with telehealth providers to expand access to care.

- The spaces support students and staff balancing academic and mental health needs.

- Equipping rooms with webcams and soundproofing ensures a professional setup.

Need for Telehealth Spaces

- Academic libraries can promote telehealth spaces through wellness events and awareness campaigns.

- Telehealth initiatives align with libraries' roles as community support hubs.

- Usage metrics can inform further development of telehealth programs.

- Spaces can be booked through user-friendly reservation systems.

- Incorporating telehealth spaces demonstrates academic libraries' commitment to holistic well-being.

Creating Supportive Collections and Spaces in Academic Libraries

- Develop gaming areas with board games, puzzles, and Legos for stress relief.

- Include video game consoles to encourage recreational engagement.

- Offer maker spaces for creative expression through arts and crafts.

- Incorporate wellness-themed reading corners with mindfulness and self-help books.

- Create quiet zones for meditation and relaxation within the library.

Creating Supportive Collections and Spaces in Academic Libraries

- Use flexible furniture to foster collaboration and creativity in spaces.

- Provide sensory-friendly areas to accommodate neurodiverse patrons.

- Offer interactive programs like gaming tournaments and craft nights.

- Collect feedback from users to tailor collections and spaces to their needs.

- Promote these supportive spaces as integral to mental wellness initiatives.

Use of AI for Mental Health and Wellness

Gamified AI applications encourage sustained engagement in wellness activities.

Libraries can collaborate with developers to create library-branded AI wellness tools.

AI tools can analyze user preferences to enhance program personalization.

Integrating AI into wellness programs demonstrates innovation in mental health support.

AI-based activities support diverse user groups, making wellness more accessible and inclusive.

Creation of LibList

The presenters created a LibList through Clarivate (ProQuest) which offers a list of eBooks covering mental health and wellness topics such as anxiety management, resilience, and mindfulness.

Curated collections address diverse mental health needs, from academic stress to trauma recovery.

LibList includes resources to support collection development by academic librarians on supporting students' mental wellness. The Mental Health and Wellness LibList was created by Linda Salvesen and Neil Grimes.

LibList's accessibility allows 24/7 access for library patrons seeking mental health support.

Resources are selected to reflect cultural diversity and inclusivity.

Creation of LibList

The collection encourages open conversations about mental health in academic settings.
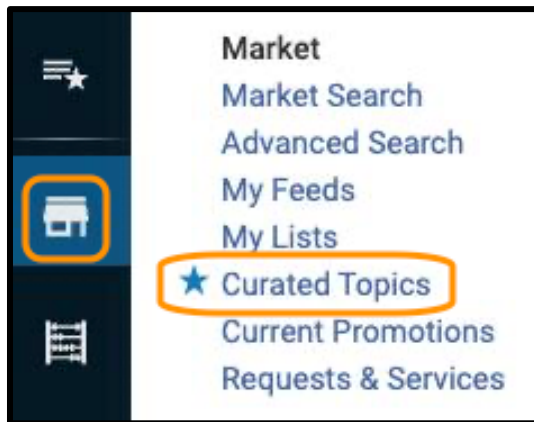
Data analytics help libraries track usage and identify trends in mental health topics.

Collaboration with publishers ensures regularly updated content in the collection.

Integrating LibList into library systems expands outreach to underserved communities.

Marketing campaigns around LibList promote awareness of mental health resources in libraries.

Mental Health & Wellness LibList: How to access

| LibList: Mental Health & Wellness | Curated by Neil Grimes, Education & Curriculum Materials Librarian, and Linda Salvesen, Systems Librarian, at William Paterson University of New Jersey, this list includes 50 ebook titles aimed at addressing mental health challenges and fostering wellbeing among undergraduates. | 09/05/2024 |

How to access the Mental Health & Wellness LibList: log into your preferred acquisitions platform and search for LibLists under the Curated Topics sections on LibCentral, OASIS and Rialto (example shown above)

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