



Enhancing Student Mental Health: Evidence to Practice

Dr Aleisha Clarke

HSE Mental Health and Wellbeing



What do we mean by *Enhancing Student Mental Health*?

- Concerned with strengthening protective factors for good mental health
- Aim is to increase the wellbeing and resilience of student population
- Operates at three levels:
 - Strengthening individuals
 - Strengthening communities
 - Reducing structural barriers to mental health at societal level
- Mental wellbeing - associated with better physical health, positive interpersonal relationships and socially healthier societies
 - Positive impact on attainment
 - Positive impact on performance at work





Strengthening Individuals: Evidence base

- **Universal interventions** to improve students' mental health and wellbeing:
 - *Cognitive-behavioural therapy interventions*
 - *Mindfulness based intervention*
 - *Psychoeducational interventions*
- Skills training interventions effective in reducing symptoms of depression, anxiety, general psychological distress and improving social-emotional skills
 - Skills training interventions **with supervised practice** (Mean effect 0.45 vs 0.11 without supervised practice)
- Gaps in evidence base: Scale up and sustainability

Effects of mental health interventions for students in higher education are sustainable over time: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials

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PLOS ONE

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Supporting mental health and wellbeing of university and college students: A systematic review of review-level evidence of interventions

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A Meta-analysis of Universal Mental Health Prevention Programs for Higher Education Students

Colleen S. Conley · Joseph A. Durlak ·
Alexandra C. Kirsch



Strengthening Individuals: Evidence base

- **Targeted interventions** for at-risk higher education students with subclinical levels of depression, anxiety, distress
- Interventions effective in reducing symptoms at post intervention (Mean effect: 0.49).
 - Type of presenting problem moderated intervention effect.
 - Briefer programmes were as effective as longer ones (Conley et al., 2017)
- **Technology delivered interventions** effective in enhancing student outcomes
 - Universal interventions: Mean effect = 0.19
 - Targeted interventions: Mean effect = 0.37
 - Better outcomes with access to support (face to face or online) (Conley et al., 2016)

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A Meta-Analysis of Indicated Mental Health Prevention Programs for At-Risk Higher Education Students

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Prev Sci 17(6), 659–678.
DOI 10.1007/s11121-016-0662-3

A Meta-Analysis of the Impact of Universal and Indicated Preventive Technology-Delivered Interventions for Higher Education Students

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Strengthening Individuals: Evidence to Practice

- HSE Mental Health and Wellbeing & National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) & School of Veterinary Medicine UCD
- Development of universal and targeted mental health promotion and suicide prevention supports.
- Delivered as part of Professional Growth Module within 5 year degree



Minding Your
Wellbeing

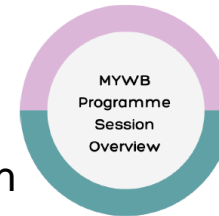


Strengthening Individuals: Evidence to Practice

- **Year 1: Minding your Wellbeing Programme** for first year veterinary students
- N = 20 facilitators trained
- Delivered Sept – Oct 2023 in groups of approx. 15 students.
- Process evaluation of programme (N = 72 participants)
 - Significant increase in self-care & positive mental health attitudes
 - Recommended need for further adaptation
 - **Next phase:** refinement co-development with students and staff, further testing, delivery model across higher education



Minding Your Wellbeing



- WEEK 1 Introductory Session
- WEEK 2 Session 1 Minding Ourselves
- WEEK 3 Session 2 Understanding Our Thoughts
- WEEK 4 Session 3 Exploring Our Emotions
- WEEK 5 Session 4 Building Positive Relationships
- WEEK 6 Session 5 Improving Our Resilience



Strengthening Communities: Developing an evidence base

- Need for ‘whole university approach’ to promote social connection, inclusion and belonging
 - Interpersonal difficulties (loneliness, lack of social support) one of most common sources of distress for college students
 - Potential role of **Social Prescribing** in addressing this need at “whole university” level



Strengthening Communities: Social Prescribing

Social Prescribing: way of connecting individuals with non-clinical services and supports in the community which can improve their mental health and wellbeing





Strengthening Communities: Social Prescribing

Social Prescribing: way of connecting individuals with non-clinical services and supports in the community which can improve their mental health and wellbeing



- Community supports:
 - Connecting with others – arts, sports, volunteering group
 - Support in relation to finance, housing, education
 - Step down support



Strengthening Communities: Social Prescribing

- **Ideal setting for Social Prescribing Model**
 - Diverse range of services and supports currently in place (e.g. clubs and societies, local community groups, digital resources, supports in relation to finance, housing)
- **Potential to address significant need** in relation to social isolation, loneliness
- **Key ingredient: Skilled Link Worker**
 - Ability to offer personalised support throughout pathway
 - Knowledge of supports available across the campus
 - Normalise mental health and wellbeing issues and development of resilience



Research and Innovation

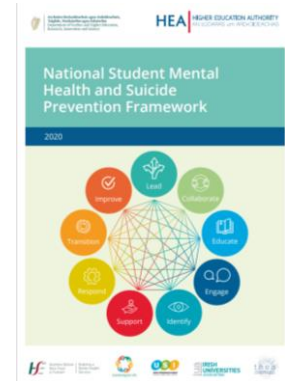
- Gaps in our knowledge of mental health and wellbeing in higher education
 - Effectiveness of interventions
 - Scaling interventions and sustainability





Research and Innovation

- Gaps in our knowledge of mental health and wellbeing in higher education
 - Effectiveness of interventions
 - Scaling interventions and sustainability
- HEA National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework
 - Cross disciplinary and evidence-informed approach to designing mental health and wellbeing supports
 - Co-designed by students and support staff
 - Embedding evaluation of interventions and services





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