

Beyond Stigma: Designing mental health support that reaches the next generation of diverse learners

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The Need:

The need for mental health solutions that modern, diverse students will actually use

Student mental health needs and institutional investment are increasing:

- 57% of UK students report mental health issues, 7X increase in the last decade²³
- 29% who drop out cite "mental health" as most common reason, 3X increase in those with mental health challenges dropping out in last decade^{6,7,5}
- 73% average increase in investment in mental health support at UK universities since 2020, some 600% increase¹

However, student utilisation and satisfaction of traditional services has remained low:

- 66% of students never used institution's counselling center support in 2024, 52% that don't receive support have low mental health^{8,9}
- 57% of students rate current overnight and out of office support as ineffective¹⁰

Moreover, the need-use gap is even lower for diverse students:

BME + International Students

- Higher incidence of mental health challenges in diverse students¹¹:
 - Asian students: higher prevalence of depression
 - Black students: higher prevalence of suicidal ideation
 - International students: 81% are concerned about their mental health v 63% of UK-domiciled students¹²
- Low rates of help seeking behaviour in diverse students¹³:
 - 23% of Asian students, 26% of Black students sought help v 46% of white peers
 - International student barriers included long waiting times, stigma, and lack of culturally sensitive services¹⁴

LGBT+ Students

- Higher incidence of mental health challenges^{15,16,17,18}
 - 45% disclose mental health condition
 - 1.5 x more likely to have depression & anxiety
 - Higher risk of suicidal behaviour & self-harm
 - Non-binary and trans students reported highest mental health needs
 - Help seeking barriers persist such as fear of discrimination and lack of affirming care¹⁹

The Solution:

Incorporate research-informed best practices to support solutions to enhance diverse utilisation and engagement

- 1 Provide users the option of choosing diverse, culturally-affirming counsellors to enhance rapport and treatment efficacy

Research shows:

- Cultural similarities between counsellor and user boost efficacy of care:²⁰
 - More consistent engagement
 - Reduced dropout rates
 - Increased patient satisfaction
 - Faster & stronger therapeutic rapport
 - Sense of cultural safety
- Patients report feeling:²¹
 - More understood and supported
 - Deeper empathic response
 - Reduced dropout rates
- Research from UK's IAPT programme showed:
 - 86% of UK users receiving counsellors expressed a preference to choose at least one aspect (e.g. counsellor gender, ethnicity, language, session time)²²
 - "Therapist characteristics (such as gender, age and ethnicity), cultural sensitivity and the language... important for improving treatment delivery for people from minoritised ethnic group."²³

- 2 Understand structural barriers that diverse users may face, such as transportation, childcare needs, and hours of availability, and offer options such as online counselling, out of hours appointments

Research shows:

- Notable trends identified within university settings: Asian, Black, and Multiracial students accessed fully virtual mental health services at a higher rate²⁴. Hypothesis is that online counselling limits common barriers to care for marginalised populations:
 - Stigma
 - Structural barriers
 - Privacy
- Clinically-robust online counselling is as effective as in-person care, with comparable outcomes in symptom reduction²⁴, patient satisfaction²⁴, and therapeutic alliance²⁵

- 3 Ensure solutions align with modern consumer expectations for speed, ease, and personalised quality to enhance use.

- Immediacy: Provide rapid access to booking appointments, same-day appointments where possible
- Provide easy, frictionless access to counselling: online booking in minutes, on-demand access, and self-scheduling of appointments. Limit non-transparent exclusionary criteria to access counselling where possible
- Provide high quality, personalised support: Accredited counsellors specialised and trained specifically to support students

Research shows:

- Impact of immediacy:
 - Counselling wait times in universities resulted in higher dropout rates, worsening symptoms, increased complexity, and academic decline^{26,27}
 - According to UK's IAPT programme's research - "The sooner the appointment the more likely to attend."²⁸
- Easy, frictionless access:
 - 72% of young users globally prefer to book healthcare appointments online²⁹
 - 94% would switch to provider that offers online scheduling³⁰
 - According to UK's IAPT programme's research - an online, user-informed booking form increased self-referrals (50 to 90%) and reduced do not attends³¹
- Impact of quality:
 - Negative experiences in counselling are often key driver of therapy discontinuation²⁴

Case Study:

How New Jersey universities and colleges enhanced mental health support using best-practice informed solution, Uwill

→ Problem

- New Jersey saw rising mental health needs among diverse/non-traditional college students:
- 70% increased stress and anxiety in 2021 than 2020
 - 50% of students are BME
 - 33% are 25+ years old, with rising part-time students
 - Low out-of-hours mental health support

→ Case

- In 2023, New Jersey launched historic state-wide partnership with Uwill, the leading global student mental health and wellness solution and wellness programming.
- Students at 45 institutions have no-cost, 24/7/365 access to counselling (same day appointments, student choice of counsellor), a direct crisis connection, and wellness programming 24/7/365. This partnership minimises barriers to care and enhancing utilisation and outcomes.

→ Result

- New Jersey institutions saw increased engagement and satisfaction, especially from diverse students and students who had not engaged prior. Key insights to date include:
- 50%+ of students who previously did not engage accessed care
 - 115,000+ counselling sessions, 30% accessed support out of hours including 27,000+ sessions during holidays and breaks, 2,000 crisis connections
 - 85% seek support from BME counsellors, 9% from bilingual counsellors
 - 9.5/10 student feedback rating

¹ The Times

² Student Minds

³ UK Parliament

⁴ Cibly

⁵ HEPI

⁶ The Guardian

⁷ ACE

⁸ Student Mental Health Survey 2024

⁹ Student Mental Health Survey 2025

¹⁰ Accenture

¹¹ RCPsych

¹² Student Minds

¹³ Lipson et al., 2018

¹⁴ Emenike et al., 2025

¹⁵ Trevor Project

¹⁶ Rethink

¹⁷ UCAS

¹⁸ TASQ

¹⁹ Crockett et al., 2022

²⁰ Mollah et al., 2018

²¹ Sue et al., 2009

²² Williams et al., 2016

²³ IAPT 2023

²⁴ Edlund et al., 2002

²⁵ Seyedeh et al., 2024

²⁶ Williams et al., 2016

²⁷ Hughes et al., 2025

²⁸ IAPT

²⁹ Doctify

³⁰ Medcity News

³¹ IAPT

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