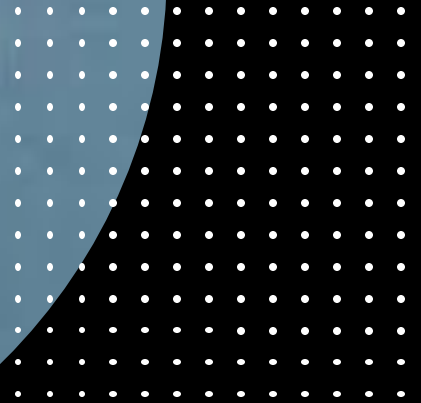
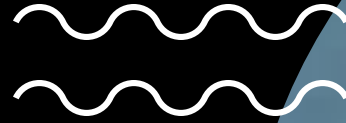


Title: An Exploration
of Barriers to Mental
Health Service
Access among
International
Students in UK Higher
Education



Introduction

Mental health is central to student wellbeing in higher education.

International students face distinct academic, cultural, and social challenges in the UK (Madhani, 2025)

Mental health services are underused despite high levels of psychological distress.

Identifying access barriers is essential for equitable and inclusive support (Advani, 2023).



Background and Context

Mental health service access in higher education is the right of students to seek and receive and use institutional support, in the form of counselling, wellbeing services and mental health interventions (Batchelor et al., 2020).

Academic pressure, stress of relocation, and social isolation convey a high level of mental health issues to international students (Shafaei et al., 2018; Alshammari et al., 2023).

It has been shown that anxiety, depression, and other psychopathological symptoms are highly prevalent among the international university students in the UK and across the world (Jones et al., 2019; Yeung et al., 2022).

International students have a low likelihood of using mental health services compared to domestic students despite similar or even greater levels of distress (Jones et al., 2019).



Key contributing factors

The academic stress is related to the performance expectations and new teaching styles (Shafaei et al., 2018).



The problems with cultural transition and cultural adjustment, such as the difference in the concept of mental health (Takeuchi and Sakagami, 2018).



Linguistic barriers to free communication and trust during professional support (Kambouropoulos, 2015).



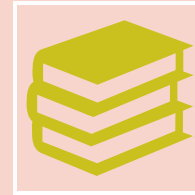
Stress factors supporting immigration and visa-related stress, such as financial strain and lack of knowledge about the status of residence (Minutillo et al., 2020).



Rationale for the Study



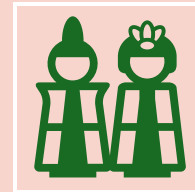
The literature exists on mental health challenges faced by international students, but research studies on service access difficulties in the UK are scarce (Jones et al., 2019).



University mental health services are frequently modeled based on the domestic student requirements and fail to be culturally sensitive and accessible to the international populations (Batchelor et al., 2020; Lennox et al., 2022).



There is also evidence of poor use of mental health services in international students regardless of high levels of psychological distress (Kambouropoulos, 2015; Maeshima and Parent, 2022).



The hindrances of stigma, awareness, and cultural inappropriateness of services still restrict help-seeking behaviour (Takeuchi and Sakagami, 2018; Janota et al., 2022).

This research is needed to

1

Disseminate knowledge gaps in the barriers of the situation in the UK higher education.

2

Influence popular health and social care practice.

3

Support service enhancement and policy formulation of the wellbeing of international students.

Research Objectives

Aim: To investigate the obstacles that stand on the way of acquiring mental health care services by international students studying in UK higher education institutions.

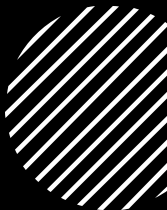


Objectives

To determine the perceived personal, cultural and structural access impediments to mental health services among international students.

To identify the experience and perception of international students towards university mental health services.

To explore how mental health services which are currently in place can be enhanced to be in a better position to serve international students.



Research Questions



What are the perceived personal, cultural and structural obstacles of international students in seeking mental health services in UK higher education?



What are the experiences of international students with mental health services in UK universities?



Which changes to university mental health services do international students think should be made to increase their access and cultural suitability?

Proposed Research Impact

Better knowledge of barriers to access mental health can benefit international students by promoting wellbeing and help-seeking (Maeshima and Parent, 2022).

Results may be used to create culturally sensitive and inclusive university mental health services (Jin and Acharya, 2022).

The research can be used in contributing to the strategies of public health and social care in reducing disparities in mental health service access.

The results can be used to help higher education institutions enhance their policy, service design, and student support structures (Lennox et al., 2022).



Conclusion

The problem of mental health service access among international students in higher education in the UK remains key because of the existing individual, cultural, and structural barriers.



Key Message

The proposed study can be applied to make a meaningful change in practice-based mental health services in universities and support diverse student communities inclusively.

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