

Portfolio: Community Needs and Business Development

Element 1: An Investigation into Mental Health Support Needs Among University Students in Romania

1. Introduction

Mental health is an important factor influencing educational achievement, personal development and social participation. University students often experience significant changes in their lives, including increased academic responsibility, financial pressure, independence and uncertainty about their future careers. Although these experiences can support personal growth, they may also contribute to stress, anxiety, depression and academic burnout. This essay investigates the mental health support needs of university students in Romania, examines the main barriers to accessing assistance and compares the situation with findings from international research. Secondary research is used to identify unmet needs and consider how community organisations and businesses could respond effectively.

2. Identifying the Main Community Needs

One important need among university students is access to affordable and reliable psychological support. Students may experience difficulties balancing lectures, examinations, employment and personal responsibilities. Financial pressures can make these difficulties more challenging, particularly for students who live independently or rely on limited family support.

Research by Moghimi et al. (2023) examined mental health experiences and treatment needs among post-secondary students in Canada. The study involved 448 students and identified several barriers to obtaining support, including financial difficulties, long waiting times, insufficient resources, time constraints and stigma. Although these findings relate to Canada rather than Romania, they demonstrate that the challenges faced by university students can extend beyond individual circumstances to the availability and organisation of support services.

Romanian research also provides relevant evidence. Ionescu, Chendea and Licu (2023) investigated the relationship between satisfaction with online learning and symptoms of depression, anxiety and insomnia among medical undergraduates in Romania. Their research highlights the importance of considering students' educational experiences when examining psychological well-being. Academic demands and the organisation of learning should therefore be considered alongside personal coping strategies.

A second community need is greater awareness of available mental health services. Even when universities or external organisations provide support, students may not know where to find it, what assistance is available or how to access it confidentially. This creates a difference between the existence of a service and its practical accessibility.

4. Applying Relevant Theories

Maslow's hierarchy of needs provides one useful theoretical perspective. Maslow (1943) argued that human motivation is influenced by different categories of needs, including safety, belonging, esteem and personal development. Applied to university life, students may find it difficult to concentrate on academic achievement when they experience financial insecurity, isolation or persistent psychological distress.

However, Maslow's model should not be interpreted as a rigid sequence in which every need must be completely satisfied before another becomes important. Students can pursue educational goals while experiencing personal difficulties. The model is more useful as a framework for recognising that well-being depends on several interconnected factors.

A second useful perspective is the social ecological model, which considers how individual behaviour is influenced by interpersonal relationships, institutions, communities and wider social conditions. From this perspective, student mental health cannot be addressed solely through advice about time management or resilience. Universities must also consider workload, access to counselling, inclusive policies and the quality of relationships between students and staff.

Together, these theories support a comprehensive approach that combines individual assistance with improvements to the wider educational environment.

5. Critical Evaluation of the Evidence

Secondary research offers an efficient way to identify existing problems, compare findings and develop practical recommendations. Academic journal articles and systematic reviews are particularly valuable because they provide evidence gathered through established research methods.

Nevertheless, several limitations must be acknowledged. Findings from Canada, the United Kingdom or other countries cannot automatically be generalised to Romania. Differences in healthcare provision, income, cultural attitudes and university policies may influence students' experiences. Furthermore, survey studies often depend on self-reported information and may not represent every student population.

For these reasons, secondary research should be supplemented by local evidence. Universities could conduct anonymous questionnaires, organise student focus groups and consult counselling professionals. Such methods would help establish which services students currently use, what prevents them from seeking help and which forms of assistance they prefer.

6. Conclusion

The research indicates three important areas of unmet need among university students: affordable psychological assistance, greater awareness of available services and stronger social connections. International studies suggest that these challenges are influenced by both personal circumstances and the organisation of educational institutions.

Although further Romanian-specific research is necessary, the available evidence supports the development of accessible, confidential and student-centred services. These findings provide a foundation for the second portfolio element, which proposes a social enterprise designed to connect students with professional assistance, peer support and practical well-being resources.

References

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Lui, Sagar-Ouriaghli and Brown (2024) reviewed research into barriers to seeking help for common mental health difficulties among university students. Their findings identified self-reliance, stigma and limited mental health literacy as important obstacles. Some students may believe that they should manage their difficulties independently, while others may worry about being judged by friends, family members or lecturers. These barriers suggest that providing counselling alone is insufficient; services must also communicate clearly, build trust and encourage early help-seeking.

A third need concerns social connection. Students who move away from their families or begin studying in unfamiliar environments may struggle to establish supportive relationships. International students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds may face additional challenges associated with language, culture or financial circumstances. Opportunities to develop friendships, participate in group activities and discuss everyday problems in a safe environment can therefore complement professional services.

3. Comparing Local and International Needs

Evidence from different countries suggests that student mental health is not exclusively an individual problem. It is also influenced by educational institutions, social relationships, economic circumstances and access to professional services.

Osborn et al. (2022) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis examining university students' use of mental health services. Their review included 44 studies and highlighted substantial variation in service use across populations and settings. The authors also identified limitations in the available international evidence, particularly regarding how services are connected and accessed. This suggests that a single support model may not meet the needs of every student group.

Similarly, Pointon-Haas et al. (2024) reviewed peer-support interventions in higher education. Their findings suggested that peer mentoring and peer learning could offer benefits for certain student outcomes, including stress and anxiety. However, the authors also highlighted difficulties in evaluating the effectiveness of different approaches. Peer support should therefore be treated as a complementary intervention rather than a replacement for qualified mental health professionals.

These findings are relevant to Romania because universities operate within different financial, institutional and cultural environments. Students in large university centres may have access to a wider range of organisations, while those studying in smaller towns may have fewer alternatives. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to assume that all Romanian universities have identical problems. Local surveys and consultations would be required to establish differences in demand, affordability and service availability.

The evidence also suggests that some needs are common across countries. Students frequently require affordable assistance, clear information, flexible appointments and non-judgemental environments. Consequently, a successful local response should combine international evidence with research into the experiences of students in the particular community being served.