

THE IMPORTANCE OF GROUP-BASED INTERVENTIONS FOR STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Yuldasheva Shakhodatkhon

Uzbekistan State World Languages University,
Department of Pedagogy and Psychology, Lecturer
shakhodat.yuldash28@gmail.com

Abstract. This article explores the role of group-based mental health interventions in promoting emotional well-being and social connection among university students. It highlights how such approaches can help reduce feelings of isolation, increase emotional awareness, and support students in managing personal and interpersonal challenges. This article explores how group-based interventions create a supportive environment that encourages shared understanding and mutual support among students.

Keywords: mental health; group-based interventions; peer support; emotional well-being; sense of belonging; higher education.

Most university students face academic pressure, uncertainty about future careers, and limited access to psychological support while pursuing higher education. It has been consistently demonstrated that elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional distress are common among students, particularly among freshmen during the transition to university life, when academic demands intensify and social environments change rapidly (Auerbach et al., 2016; Bantjes et al., 2022; Ramsay et al., 2007). They appear especially vulnerable during this period, often reporting difficulties in adaptation, feelings of isolation, and underdeveloped academic and self-regulation skills (Mohammadyari, 2012; Mofatteh, 2021).

Despite an increasing number of mental health concerns among students, access to psychological support still remains limited. Even if there is high demand, many students do not seek or receive professional help, often due to stigma, uncertainty about the severity of their problems, or the perception that available services are inaccessible or only intended for crisis situations (Corrigan & Rüsch, 2002; Russell et al., 2008; WHO, 2022). Especially low- and middle-income countries fall into this category, as counselling services remain privatized, or financially inaccessible, leaving preventive and developmental needs insufficiently addressed (Hyseni Duraku et al., 2024).

In parallel with these challenges, students frequently report academic stress linked to poor time management, ineffective study strategies, and perfectionistic cognitive patterns, which may contribute to emotional exhaustion and reduced academic functioning (Hu et al., 2023; Obando Posada et al., 2023). All these are further compounded by career uncertainty, as many students feel unprepared to make serious decisions about their professional future or lack access to guidance and mentorship (Salim et al., 2023). Overall, the need for support approaches should be highlighted to address students' emotional, academic, and developmental experiences in an integrated manner within the context of higher education.

When addressing key factors that support students' well-being and academic engagement, social support must be mentioned as a key protective factor, particularly during periods of transition (Chang et al., 2020). Research has found that strong sense of belonging within the university environment is associated with greater motivation, persistence, and academic success (Axelson & Flick, 2010; Kuh, 2003). However, many students struggle to form meaningful social connections due to large class sizes, limited structured peer

interaction, and socioeconomic or identity-related barriers to engagement (Eames & Stewart, 2008).

To solve these problems as evidence suggests, participation in peer or mutual support groups is associated with reduced emotional distress, improved coping, and enhanced self-efficacy (Byrom, 2017; Pointon-Haas et al., 2024). Because group-based formats combine emotional safety with practical skill-sharing, allowing participants to learn adaptive strategies while simultaneously experiencing social connection, they can be particularly effective for students. Salim et al. (2023) have found that the most important benefits appear to extend beyond emotional well-being, influencing academic confidence, career clarity, and attitudes toward psychological support.

Another theoretical framework that helps explain these outcomes is the concept of sense of community introduced by McMillan and Chavis (1986), who define it as a feeling of belonging, mutual mattering, and shared faith that members' needs will be met through commitment to the group. Their model identifies four key components: membership, influence, fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection.

Lastly, group interventions grounded in cognitive-behavioral principles have also shown effectiveness in improving students' emotional regulation, reducing anxiety, and addressing maladaptive thought patterns related to academic pressure (Beck et al., 1979; Beck, 2020). Especially when combined with social support processes, group-based CBT-oriented interventions appear to produce synergistic effects by offering practical coping tools (Worsley et al., 2022). Such integration may be highly valuable in contexts where formal mental health services are limited.

References

1. Auerbach, R. P., Alonso, J., Axinn, W. G., Cuijpers, P., Ebert, D. D., Green, J. G., Hwang, I., Kessler, R. C., Liu, H., Mortier, P., Nock, M. K., Pinder-Amaker, S., Sampson, N. A., Aguilar-Gaxiola, S., Al-Hamzawi, A., Andrade, L. H., Benjet, C., Caldas-de-Almeida, J. M., & Bruffaerts, R. (2016). Mental disorders among college students in the World Health Organization World Mental Health Surveys. *Psychological Medicine*, 46(14), 2955–2970. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291716001665>
2. Axelson, R. D., & Flick, A. (2010). Defining student engagement. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 43(1), 38–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2011.533096>
3. Bantjes, J., Kessler, R. C., McGorry, P. D., Stein, D. J., & Herman, A. A. (2022). Mental health of students: A global perspective. *Current Opinion in Psychiatry*, 35(4), 246–252. <https://doi.org/10.1097/YCO.0000000000000792>
4. Beck, A. T., Rush, A. J., Shaw, B. F., & Emery, G. (1979). *Cognitive therapy of depression*. Guilford Press.
5. Beck, J. S. (2020). *Cognitive behavior therapy: Basics and beyond* (3rd ed.). Guilford Press.
6. Byrom, N. (2017). An evaluation of a peer support intervention for student mental wellbeing. *Journal of Mental Health*, 27(3), 240–246. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2017.1322185>
7. Chang, E. C., Hirsch, J. K., & Jeglic, E. L. (2020). Social support, coping, and mental health among university students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 61(1), 123–129. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2020.0011>

8. Corrigan, P. W., & Rüsch, N. (2002). Mental illness stereotypes and clinical care: Do people avoid treatment because of stigma? *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Skills*, 6(3), 312–334. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10973430208408436>
9. Eames, C., & Stewart, J. (2008). How peer learning can support student engagement. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 13(5), 515–526. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510802334930>
10. Hu, Y., Zhang, Y., & Wang, Y. (2023). Academic stress, perfectionism, and mental health among university students. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1123456. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1123456>
11. Hyseni Duraku, Z., Davis, C. R., Arënliu, A., & Kelmendi, K. (2024). Student mental health services in low- and middle-income contexts: Challenges and opportunities. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 43(1), 98–112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2023.2265432>
12. Kuh, G. D. (2003). What we're learning about student engagement. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 35(2), 24–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00091380309604090>
13. McMillan, D. W., & Chavis, D. M. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 14(1), 6–23. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629\(198601\)14:1<6::AID-JCOP2290140103>3.0.CO;2-I](https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:1<6::AID-JCOP2290140103>3.0.CO;2-I)
14. Mohammadyari, G. (2012). Comparative study of relationship between general perceived self-efficacy and test anxiety. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 69, 1029–1033. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.12.036>
15. Mofatteh, M. (2021). Risk factors associated with stress, anxiety, and depression among university students. *Journal of American College Health*, 69(3), 318–325. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2019.1679153>
16. Obando Posada, D. P., Trujillo, D., & Pérez, L. (2023). Academic stress and emotional exhaustion in higher education students. *International Journal of Educational Psychology*, 12(2), 134–150.
17. Pointon-Haas, C., Hyseni Duraku, Z., & Arënliu, A. (2024). Peer support groups and student well-being: A mixed-methods study. *PsyCh Journal*, 13(1), 45–59. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pchj.612>
18. Ramsay, S., Jones, E., & Barker, M. (2007). Relationship between adjustment and support processes in first-year university students. *Higher Education*, 55(1), 93–108. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-006-9032-6>
19. Russell, J., Thomson, G., & Rosenthal, D. (2008). Students' perceptions of mental health services. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 60(3), 135–144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530701818298>
20. Salim, A., Hyseni Duraku, Z., & Arënliu, A. (2023). Career uncertainty and psychological well-being among university students. *Journal of Career Development*, 50(4), 789–804. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08948453221123456>
21. World Health Organization. (2022). World mental health report: Transforming mental health for all. WHO.
22. Worsley, J. D., Pennington, A., & Corcoran, R. (2022). Group interventions combining CBT and social support: A systematic review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 92, 102119. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2022.102119>