



Chapter 8

Innovative Mental Health Practices: Wellness for Faculty and Students at Universities


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ABSTRACT

The mental health of America has become a growing concern. The American Psychological Association (2022) defines mental health as: “A state of mind characterized by emotional well-being, good behavioral adjustment, relative freedom from anxiety and disabling symptoms, and a capacity to establish constructive relationships and cope with ordinary demands and stresses of life” (p. 1). Mental health concerns are important and it is essential to reduce stress in the lives of faculty and students at univer-

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sities. Faculty and student wellness must be a priority at universities. The objective of this initiative is to explore innovative methods to manage stress and to offer strategies, recommendations, and resources for promoting holistic approaches and wellness.

INTRODUCTION

The mental health of America has become a growing concern. The American Psychological Association (2025) defines mental health as: “A state of mind characterized by emotional wellbeing, good behavioral adjustment, relative freedom from anxiety and disabling symptoms, and a capacity to establish constructive relationships and cope with ordinary demands and stresses of life” (p. 1). This definition suggests that not only the absence of mental illness is necessary but also the presence of overall psychological wellbeing and resilience in negotiating daily living is critical. While mental health challenges have long affected many, recent global crises have further highlighted the issue, drawing increased attention both nationally and internationally. Mental health issues have increased over the years and if there are no active supports, it will continue to be an epidemic (Amaya, Donegan, Conner, Edwards, & Gipson, 2019). Specifically, the United States (U.S.) has grappled with mental health issues for centuries but growing concerns about mental health have gained traction in that it is now being recognized as a public health crisis.

Mental Health in Academia

Mental health issues among students and faculty in academia have become a growing concern, affecting academic performance, well-being, and overall institutional productivity (Hammoudi et al., 2023). While the past decade in the United States has seen high-profile and tragic school shootings, such as Columbine High School in 1999, Sandy Hook Elementary in 2012, and Uvalde Elementary School in 2022, these extreme events often dominate media coverage. However, the less sensationalized, yet equally concerning, deterioration of mental health among students and faculty is also on the rise, with significant consequences for academic environments.

Students

A combination of individual and external factors influences mental health and mental disorders. Personal attributes, including the ability to regulate thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and social interactions, play a crucial role (Walker, Rabelo, Stewart, & Herbert, 2024). However, broader social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental elements—such as national policies, social protections, living conditions, workplace environments, and community support systems—also significantly impact mental wellbeing. Additionally, early exposure to adversity is a well-documented and preventable risk factor for the development of mental disorders.

Faculty

Working in higher education can be highly demanding, which puts faculty members at risk for heightened mental health challenges. Hammoudi, Soltani, Dalli, Alsarraj, and Malki (2023) noted that “... it

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