

Research briefing

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What factors influence the mental health of university students in the UK: A rapid review of the evidence.

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About the research

Poor mental health of further and higher education students is a growing concern.

It is estimated that **1 student in 5** has a mental health diagnosis, and almost half have experienced a serious psychological issue.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a worsening of mental health amongst young people.

We carried out a rapid review of research literature on factors influencing student mental health.

We looked for research published in the United Kingdom since 2010.

Key findings

We identified and included 39 relevant studies in the review.

Factors which place students at greater **risk** of poor mental health are: being exposed to **childhood trauma** before university; having an **existing or previous** mental illness; having a **family history** of poor mental health; categorising self as **LGBTQ+**; having low levels of **mental health literacy**, having poor **help seeking behaviour**; and having poor **social skills**.

Parenting styles can influence the ability of young people to **adapt to the changes** that transition to university entails.

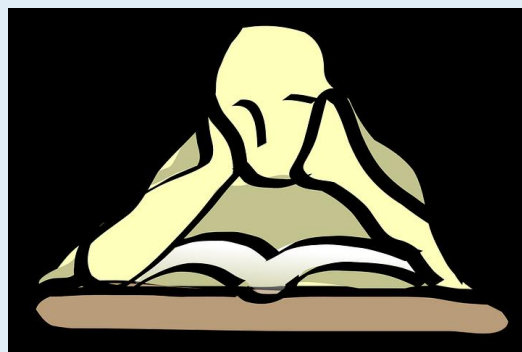
Older students appear to be at less risk of developing poor mental health than students who arrive at university straight from school.

Positive **coping behaviours** enable students to adapt to change.

A sense of belonging and a supportive social network are important **protective factors**.

Implications

- **Interventions before university** should include preparation of young people and their families for the transition to university.
- **Interventions at university** should include activities which aim to foster a sense of belonging; and the creation of environments for building key social networks.
- There is a need to improve **mental health literacy** and access to high quality **support services**.
- **University induction programmes** can help with better mental health.
- There was **mixed evidence** in regard to the influence of financial stress, and accommodation factors on mental health.
- Research is needed to explore the acceptability and feasibility of identifying **students at risk**.



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