

Introduction

Mental health is a major concern for UT students, yet many are not completely aware of the resources available to them. It is important for the university to address their concerns and provide them with adequate information about the resources available and how to access them. By understanding what students know, want, and need, UT can better adapt a mental health program that properly helps and teaches students. We seek to address the lack of communication between UT and students regarding campus resources in order to better address a lack of supply for student mental health.

Problem Statement

What resources on campus can be synthesized and/or better promoted to create a more resilient mental health system?

Background

Through this research we examined steps 2 through 4 (Build your Community, Develop your Skills, and Talk about Your Concerns) by taking a holistic approach to mental health. The goal of our research is to determine how UT could better support students' demands for mental health services through the use of already available resources aside from counselors, given the ratio to students.

Policy Relevance

For four years, students spend their lives at UT. A lack of adequate resources, improperly conveyed information, and inaccessibility to mental health resources on campus can cause challenges for students as they work to earn their degree. While it is known how much UT dedicates funding towards these resources, a knowledge gap still exists for students. Without properly accessing mental health resources, students' education, social life, and emotional well-being can be affected. If UT addresses students' mental health, it can help address the inequities that cause students of color to be disproportionately affected by lack of access to mental health resources. Additionally, addressing the issue can help UT attract more students as mental health becomes a point of attraction for incoming students.

Methods/Approach

Our research included interviews with students to obtain a better grasp of the situation from both the practitioner and patient. Talking to students provided an understanding of what resources they would like to see implemented and what knowledge they possessed about available mental health resources. Students who were interviewed were picked at random. Interviews ranged between one to four minutes and included questions such as:

- How/Where have you heard of mental health resources?
- How do you define mental health?
- What could UT, if anything, do better towards improving student mental health?
- How would you describe a student's knowledge of mental health resources provided to them on campus?

- What resources do you think would be helpful for UT to have?

Findings

A total of 18 students were interviewed. From all the interviews there was a consensus that students were not aware of all the resources available to them, as well as students having to put in effort to learn about these resources. Students said UT has not made them widely known or accessible. Students also expressed that they know the university can do better than what it is currently doing.

Despite the overall lack of knowledge regarding available resources, many students displayed a broad understanding of what mental health is. Additionally, some mentioned receiving UT emails and reading flyers available within their dorms regarding mental health resources. However, students did express frustration towards UT's communication methods. A call for a more human and deeper connection was made, verses relying on emails that get skimmed through. We learned from Dr. Brownson that UT does market its resources, but they do not track which forms of communication are effective.

We also found how some students have relied on their community to maintain their mental health. Students say they find creative ways to take care of their mental health. This included talking to their peers, skipping classes as a "wellness day," and engaging in physical or creative activities. While these practices are beneficial to students, they should not be engaged in solely due to their lack of knowledge in available resources.

Throughout the interviews and our research, we learned that students believed in myths regarding the UT counseling center, likely due to a lack of knowledge. This includes the number of sessions students are eligible for and having to wait long periods of time for a session.

Conclusion

Throughout our research, we sought to address the lack of communication regarding campus resources in order to better address a lack of supply for student mental health. In order to do this, we interviewed a total of 18 students to obtain their knowledge of mental health resources available to them on campus. Throughout the interviews, we found students had a general understanding of what mental health is. However, they displayed confusion and an overall lack of knowledge when asked about campus mental health resources. From this lack of knowledge, students have developed various ways to support their mental health but stressed the importance of UT communicating these issues in a more meaningful manner. Given the amount of funding and time that has gone towards UT's mental health resources, more must be done to inform students about what is available to them.