Awareness and Use of University Student Support Services on Mental Health

KWANTLEN POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

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Introduction

Anxiety, depression, and stress are common in university students (Leppink et al., 2016; Li et al., 2022). This can result negative consequences, including low self-esteem and comorbid mental illnesses (Leppink et al., 2016; Li et al., 2022).

The Study Demands-Resources theory outlines that academic well-being is shaped by two factors (Bakker & Mostert, 2024):

- **Study demands -** Aspects of studying that require significant psychological effort (e.g., high workload, academic pressure). These demands can lead to anxiety, fatigue, and burnout.
- **Study resources –** Supports that counter the negative effects from study demands (e.g., peer support, sense of belonging).
- Universities can provide targeted resources, such as peer support, Indigenous student services, and wellness courses, which have been proven effective in reducing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress (Currie et al., 2011; Grégoire et al., 2024; Smith et al., 2023).

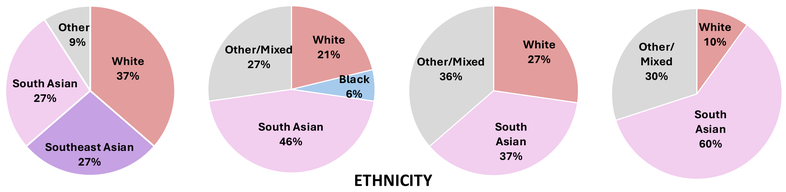
Yet, students seem unaware of the resources provided, causing some to not use them when they may need to (Yorgason et al., 2008). Therefore, this study aimed to examine the interaction between use and awareness of university resources on stress, depression, and anxiety.

Hypothesis: Students who have high awareness and are currently using or previously used university mental health resources would have less stress, anxiety, and depression symptoms than students with low awareness and no use.

Methods

Participants (*N* = 65)

Condition 1:	**Condition 2:**	**Condition 3:**	**Condition 4:**
Low Awareness, Use (n = 11)	*Low Awareness, No Use (n = 33)*	*High Awareness, Use (n = 11)*	*High Awareness, No Use (n = 10)*
Age: 19-25	*Age:* 19-39	*Age*: 18-28	*Age:* 21-27
Gender: Men (18%), Women (73%), Gender-expansive (9%)	*Gender*: Men (21%), Women (76%), Gender-expansive (3%)	*Gender*: Men (18%), Women (73%), Gender-expansive (9%)	*Gender:* Men (10%), Women (80%), Gender-expansive (10%)



Materials

DASS-21: To assess depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms, participants were asked to complete the 21-item Depression, Anxiety, and Stress scale (DASS-21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). It has three 7-item subscales rated on a 4-point Likert scale (0 = *Did not apply* to 3 = *Applied to me very much*). The depression, anxiety, and stress subscales showed good reliability (α =.88, .81, and .81, respectively), with higher scores indicating greater symptom severity.

Awareness: Students reported their awareness of the Student Support Services provided by Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU) on a 3-point Likert Scale (0 = *Never heard of it*, 1 = *Heard of it and/or know a little about it*, 2 = *Know a lot*). Total summed scores (0-10) were categorized into "low awareness" (≤4) and "high awareness" (≥5).

Methods (Cont.)

Materials (Cont.)

- **Use:** Participants were categorized based on their support service history. Those reporting current or past use of the five categories listed were classified as "use", while participants who reported no use were categorized as "no use".
- Student Support Services included five categories:
  1. KPU Counselling services and/or the TELUS 24/7 Counselling App
  2. Peer Support Services
  3. Indigenous Student Services
  4. Multi-faith Centre
  5. KPU Courses (ARTS 2000, PSYC 4600, KPU 101)

Procedure

- Participants were recruited through KPU's SONA system using convenience sampling. They completed the survey on the online platform, Qualtrics, which included demographic questions, followed by the DASS-21, and questions regarding their awareness use of KPU student support services. Upon completion, participants were compensated with 0.5% course credit.

Results

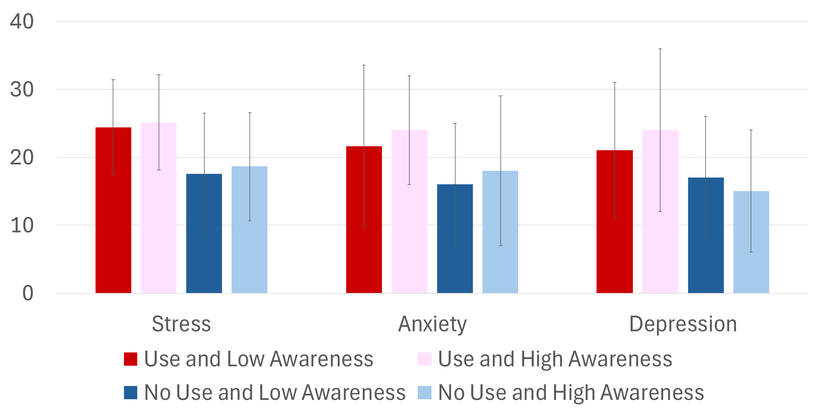
This study employed a 2 (use; use vs. no use) X 2 (awareness; high vs. low) between-groups factorial ANOVA on the dependent variables of stress, anxiety, and depression. For stress and depression, all assumptions were met. For anxiety, normality was violated in the groups of "use" and "high awareness".

As displayed in Figure 1, students who are currently using or have previously used the services have higher stress, anxiety, and depression.

As seen in Table 1, there was no interaction and no main effect for awareness, but use was significant for all dependent variables.

Figure 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Use and Awareness on Stress, Anxiety, and Depression



Note: Higher scores indicate greater symptom severity.

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Results (Cont.)

Table 1

Two-Way Analysis of Variance for the Dependent Variables Stress, Anxiety, and Depression

	$F(1, 61)$	p	η^2_p
Stress			
Use	8.11	.006	.12
Awareness	0.15	.700	.00
Use X Awareness	0.01	.939	.00
Anxiety			
Use	4.40	.040	.07
Awareness	0.84	.364	.01
Use X Awareness	0.01	.945	.00
Depression			
Use	6.40	.014	.09
Awareness	0.00	.991	.00
Use X Awareness	0.61	.439	.01

Discussion

- Our data did not support the hypothesis. Instead, we found that students who used student support services had more stress, anxiety, and depression symptoms than those who had not used any, regardless of awareness.
  - We interpreted this finding to mean that students experiencing greater symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress are seeking university supports to alleviate these symptoms (Lesener et al., 2020).
  - However, 68% of students were not aware of KPU's support services.
- ***Limitations:*** Convenience sampling, combined with small and unequal sample sizes across conditions, limited both statistical power and generalizability.
- ***Strengths:*** The DASS-21 is a reliable measure which increases confidence in our findings.
- ***Implications:*** Students seek post-secondary support services to alleviate symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. Therefore, universities should consider investing more in these programs to advocate for student mental health (Bakker & Mostert, 2024; Lesener et al., 2020). Additionally, universities should prioritize promoting the services to ensure students are getting the support they may need.
- ***Suggestions for Future Research*:** Future research ought to have larger and equal sample sizes across conditions. Furthermore, a longitudinal design to explore changes resulting from use of mental health services would be beneficial.

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