

A SYSTEMIC REVIEW OF UNITED STATES ACADEMIC LIBRARY GUIDES

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this research project is to examine the state of mental health library research guides in the United States as well as the services offered by academic libraries. This paper highlights the informational background, mental health resources and tools and support services available besides academic library guides.

Methodology/Approach: The methodology centered on a systematic review of mental health library research guides currently available in 2025. A search using the Google search engine was conducted to identify relevant research guides. Keywords searched included: mental health library research guides.

Results: A systematic review of mental health academic library literature reveals that there is a lack of academic literature on United States academic library guides and identifies mental health resources for the academic community.

Limitations of Study: The study's empirical data is limited by a myriad of factors, the size and geographic focus of the systemic review, focusing on the United States, as well as focusing on library research guides from academic libraries.

Originality/Usefulness of the Research: This study is designed to identify mental health library resources available to the general public to assess the mental health self-help resources available to the public. There is a need for mental self-health resources due to a myriad of factors, including propensity of certain populations (e.g. adolescents) to have a need for mental health services.

Keywords: Mental Health; United States; Academic Library Guides

1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, “more than half of global suicides happened before the age of 50 years¹” and intentional injuries caused deaths in approximately “23,811 people between the ages of 35-54²” in 2022 which suggests that mental health is a continuing issue in the United States and other countries. The uptick in preventable deaths within middle aged adults and across the lifespan highlights the need for mental healthcare. However, across the United States the “average waits ranged from 20 days for orthopedic surgery to 68 days for rheumatology³” with “no shows and cancellations tend to increase after 14 days⁴” which makes it very important that the public have access to self-health resources to help themselves and potentially reverse the upward trend in preventable deaths. Also, the “projected shortage of 87.150 full-time equivalent primary care physicians by 2037⁵” coupled with the current shortage of primary care physicians, who are on the front lines of mental health care, and the shortage of psychiatrists results in “about 59 million Americans or nearly a quarter of the population, had a mental illness—yet 46% received no treatment⁶.” America is desperate for ways to help those who receive no mental health treatment, this is where there is also an increased need for mental health self-health resources.

One of the places to seek mental health self-health resources are academic libraries as academic libraries are “campus sustainability hubs⁷” meaning that all members of the academic community (e.g. students) converge on them as well as external collaborators (e.g. researchers) and other external parties (e.g. accreditation agencies) which makes academic libraries an ideal place to have mental health self-help resources available to all.

Attention is now turned to a literature review to survey how existing literature, chiefly journal articles, recommend using academic library resources to address mental health self-help concerns.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

While Hall et. al. (2021) provides a general overview of library mental health resources, the review focuses broadly on over-viewing the library resources available at both academic and public libraries, Hall et. al. (2021) does not solely focus on academic libraries which characterizes the study as a background study in the same vein as Bladek (2021)'s study finding that "well-being initiatives interventions⁸" are broad scoping internal measures an academic library can take to improve student mental health, e.g. changing space configuration.

However, Bladek (2021)'s internal measures and Green (2020)'s external measures, e.g. staying atop regulations or using pet therapy, are external resources that are not readily accessible to the academic community in the same fashion as library guides.

Knapp, et. al. (2023) succinctly states that the the role of the library is to guide "patrons to desired resources⁹", which is exactly what mental health library guides are doing in academic libraries in the United States. Dietrich, et. al. (1998) further refines that "a list of psychiatric Internet resources¹⁰" is an important resource for library patrons, however Dietrich, et. al.'s application is restricted to psychiatric hospitals. So, the question of what self-help resources are needed for academic libraries remains unanswered.

3. HYPOTHESES

To answer the question of what self-help resources are needed for academic libraries, the hypothesis that the academic library guides mental health library guides are a mental-health resource for the entire academic community and beyond is set forth. To prove this hypothesis, a systemic review of academic available in 2025 is conducted using the Google search engine

*<https://www.google.com>). A list of Ivy League colleges and universities (n or number=8) is found through the University Reviews ranking on the University Reviews website. Ivy League universities and colleges are chosen because they are apt to have the resources (e.g. money, staff) to complete the mental health library guides as well as access to subject matter experts in a variety of mental health disciplines whose advice and counsel can aid in the creation of mental health academic library guides.

3.1. METHODOLOGY

The following Ivy League Schools are listed on the University Reviews website: Harvard University, Princeton University, Yale University, Columbia University, University of Pennsylvania, Cornell University, and Dartmouth College. The total number of Ivy League Schools is 8 and the library guides are locating by typing into the Google search box 'name of school followed by mental health library guides', e.g. 'Harvard University mental health library guides'. The capitalization of the school name and the usage of the plural guides or guide is irrelevant as it returns the same search results.

In the instance of Harvard University, the Center on the Developing Child offers: InBrief, Video, Working Paper, and Report categories under the heading "Resources in This Guide" on various mental health topics. Also, offered on a separate website for the Center on the Developing Child under the heading "Latest Resources" are Webinars, Briefs, Toolkit and Learning Module on a variety of mental health topics (e.g. toxic stress) in both English and Spanish.

The Harvard University Center on the Developing Child Mental Health Archives offers resource guides, podcasts, and videos on various mental health resources, e.g. Early Childhood, resources in times of crisis (which includes mental health resources), and supporting "well-being and mental health resources" for faculty, students, and other members of the academic community. Additionally, Harvard University offers a "Resources" page offering peer counseling and other mental health resources.

Brown University offers a couple of pertinent mental health websites, "Psychology- Library Guides at Brown University", "Core Health Sciences resources-Brown University", among others. Psychology library guides are most pertinent as they are subdivided into five guides: "Alcohol and Addiction Studies Collections", "Cognitive and Psychological Sciences", etc. which contain subject specific papers which may be self-help mental health resources.

3.2. LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

This study was restricted to examining the top-level information on each Ivy League College or University's website given the general scope of mental health resources, the study did not examine each school's mental health website or individual peer



counseling websites due time limitations of the study and the fact that the author was the only one conducting this study.

Due to the breadth of websites generated by the Google query, ‘mental health library guides’ and that there is only one person conducting this study, the study was restricted to comparing Harvard University and Brown University mental health library guides to avoid overloading the reader with information and potentially muddling the description and results of this study.

This study was intended to just focus on academic library mental health library guides, however the sheer number of mental health websites from each academic institution reveals that mental health resources is a very complex broad category and yields many results just based on a Google search which can be very frustrating and confusing for a layperson seeking self-help mental health resources on the fly.

4. RESULTS

The next question to address is how does searching for Harvard University’s mental health library guides compare to searching for other Ivy League University’s mental health library guides using Google. Conducting a Google search for Brown University’s mental health library guides does indeed yield a mental health library guide, one focusing on Psychology, which does meet the goal to locate academic library self-help resources on mental health however the library guide is incredibly difficult to find, it is akin to finding a needle in a haystack which may compound the searcher’s pre-existing mental health issues.

Also since the Brown University Library guide focuses on psychology, the searcher is unable to locate self-help mental health library guides that are on other topics, e.g. medicines, which are outside of the realm of psychology.

5. DISCUSSION

While Harvard University does offer many mental health resources on Child Health through the Center on the Developing Child, it is not intuitive to locate the appropriate resource, e.g. webinar, as users, ranging from children to parents, have to navigate multiple websites to locate the desired resource.

Also Harvard University’s fragmented approach to supporting the mental health of the academic community, chiefly having to rely on multiple websites ranging from counseling and peer support website to “resources in times of crisis” makes it difficult for someone having a serious mental health or substance abuse issue to locate a self-help resource because minutes, even seconds, matter to the individual during a mental health crisis (e.g. psychotic break).

6. CONCLUSIONS

Clearly there is a need for mental health for self-help mental health resources from the public and the academic community, including the academic library, for a myriad of reasons ranging from a shortage of primary care doctors to increased morbidity from untreated mental health conditions. A review of existing literature reveals that existing academic library mental health resources do not quite fit the bill to be true academic mental health library guides for myriad reasons, e.g. focusing too much on external resources.

A systematic review of Ivy League academic library websites in the United States of America identifies the diverse mental health resources offered by such academic institutions as Harvard University however also reveals that multifactors make it difficult to compare the mental health resources offered by one Ivy League institution to another Ivy League Institution which acknowledging the limitations of this study (e.g. just examining top-level mental health resources websites).

Further empirical, qualitative, and other types of studies on academic library mental health library guides and other resources are warranted to improve accessibility of mental health resources among the academic community, including the library, in light of the perennial need for self-help mental health resources. Compilations of website reviews, such as those in “Navigating the Web: Curated Website Reviews for LIS Professionals and the Public” as well as other mental health library guides, e.g. UC Berkeley library guide” may be more helpful mental health self-help resources as they are easily accessible and understood by laymen.

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