Research Questions

What MHIs have been developed across Canada for university students on campus? Are there recreation components? Do they address all students and few will target students who have concerns about coping.

Methods

The methodology for this project was cross-sectional & mixed-methods. The two sections of this study were A) An environmental scan of promising MHIs offered on Canadian university campuses and B) Follow-up interviews conducted with coordinators of six selected MHIs.

The method of analysis was an environmental scan of promising MHIs offered on Canadian university campuses and B) Follow-up interviews conducted with coordinators of six selected MHIs.

Environmental Scan: MHIs were found by gathering information from previous environmental scans, using online databases of campus MHIs, & Google-searching Canadian universities by using each university name combined with keywords. Once MHIs were identified, they were categorized based on a stepped-care model. Additionally, MHIs addressed, the target student population, and medium used are reported.

Selective Interviewing: Coordinators of those projects most relevant to a ‘Strategies for Resilience’ MH education plan were contacted by telephone & asked some follow-up questions about the MHI. Each interview was semi-structured & lasted no longer than one hour. Data gathered from the interviews were coded & analyzed using NVivo software to be grouped & regrouped until categories & themes emerged.

Results & Findings

Quantitative Data: As predicted, the majority of MHIs discovered in this environmental scan were targeted towards the general student body with a ‘treatment’ approach. Proportionately fewer MHIs were directly targeted at students who have concerns about coping with a ‘prevention’ approach. 88 MHIs were analyzed in this scan, many of which fell under more than one framework level for a total count of 120. Out of those initiatives:

- 56.7% = Framework levels 1 to 3
- 22.5% = Framework levels 4 & 5
- 20.5% = Framework level 6 & 6

From this scan, we were able to hone in on those MHIs which fell within levels 1 to 5 & 5 & identified key terms such as Peer support, Self-management, Social determinants of MH, Anxiety & Depression, and Substance Abuse Prevention.

Of these MHIs, 41 fit the criteria to be included in the final Master Table. Of those 41 MHIs, the 6 identified in Fig. I were chosen for follow-up interviews with their developers/coordinators.

Fig. 1: The top 6 MHIs chosen for follow-up interviews & the framework level they fall within.

Fig. 2: Framework for Post-Secondary Student Mental Health

Fig. 3: Emergent Categories & Themes

Discussion

According to the data obtained from participants, most institutional services function within separate ‘silos’. These divisions affect how student MH issues are or fail to be addressed. The importance of informed planning & critical evaluation were also heavily emphasized. It is important that when developing MHIs we do not repeat that which has already been done & shown to be ineffective. There was surprisingly little mention of recreation & leisure as a recommended coping strategy. Staying physically active was recommended, more in the vein of holistic-wellness as opposed to the more intrinsic therapeutic benefits. However, Welltrack© is a MHI deeply invested in the preferred leisure/recreation activities participants self-report as being particularly rewarding & encourages students to engage in them.

Limitations: The MHIs chosen for follow-up interviews were very different in their background & implementation methods. This made it difficult to find specific recurring themes. However, a variety disparate MHIs to take lessons from may be more beneficial than taking information from fewer, connate MHIs.

Conclusion

This study suggests that it would be most beneficial to increase the number and, especially the quality of MHIs that target students who are experiencing stress and have concerns about coping. MHIs which focus on self-management, peer support, social determinants of MH, substance abuse prevention & leisure/recreation may reduce the number of students seeking out counselling services & reduce the strain on an overburdened system. This project has found educational tools, resources, & workshops and has laid groundwork for developing a network of interested practitioners & researchers.

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References


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