

Understanding Attitudes Towards Mental Health and Wellness Apps Among College Students

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INTRODUCTION

- Mental health and wellness applications are digital apps designed to help improve well-being, mood, or other aspects of mental health and wellness. Most applications cater to individuals who want to improve their mental well-being, while a subset offer interventions for different mental issues.
- This subset of applications has been shown to be significant in causing a reduction in symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress, substance abuse, and schizophrenia.³
- A big challenge faced mental health applications is low user-engagement; 74% of users stop engaging with these apps after 10 uses, and only 3.3% of users continue using the app after 30 days.¹
- We developed a brief survey made up of questions addressing attitudes towards these applications to better understand:
 - 1) What college students find most helpful?
 - 2) What college students find most engaging?
 - 3) What criticisms do college student have?

METHOD

- We developed a Qualtrics survey asking a series of quantitative and qualitative questions regarding attitudes towards mental health apps
- Inclusion Criteria: Current undergraduate at University of Pennsylvania and reported using a mental health app in the past year
- N = 89 (79% female)
- Qualitative responses for each question were analyzed using thematic analysis.² A codebook was developed for each question, and two raters independently coded each response for each question.
- Interrater reliability was calculated using Cohen's Kappa
- For each qualitative question regarding college students' attitudes towards mental health apps, we were able to determine recurring themes among participants according to their frequency.

What do college students find most helpful about mental health apps?

Please describe any ways in which this app helped you.

| Themes | Percent Endorsement |
|---|---------------------|
| The app helped me in relieving stress and anxiety | 62.9% |
| The app taught me skills for coping with stress and anxiety | 24.3% |
| The app helped improve my sleep quality | 22.9% |

Which feature of the app did you find most helpful?

| Themes | Percent Endorsement |
|--|---------------------|
| Meditation and mindfulness exercises | 39.7% |
| The aesthetic and functional design of the application | 23.5% |
| Mood tracking features | 13.2% |

What do college students report as the most engaging aspects of mental health apps?

What aspect or feature of the application did you find most engaging?

| Themes | Percent Endorsement |
|--|---------------------|
| The aesthetic and functional design of the application | 42.7% |
| Meditation and mindfulness exercises | 33.3% |
| The ability to customize the app to meet my needs | 12% |

What aspect or feature of the application made it easy to navigate?

| Themes | Percent Endorsement |
|---|---------------------|
| The aesthetic layout of the application | 78.4% |
| The categorization of features within the application | 36.5% |
| The application was user-friendly and easy to learn | 36.5% |

What criticisms and suggestions do college students have about mental health apps?

If you could change one thing about the app, what would you change?

| Themes | Percent Endorsement |
|--|---------------------|
| Removing or reducing the cost of using the app | 44.9% |
| More scenario-specific meditation exercises | 18.8% |
| Improving the user interface | 14.5% |

What did you dislike about the app?

| Themes | Percent Endorsement |
|--|---------------------|
| The cost associated with using the application | 44.3% |
| The aesthetic layout of the application | 10% |
| The lack of options for meditation exercises | 7.1% |

RESULTS

What is the app you used most frequently?

| Themes | Percent Endorsement |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| Mindfulness/Meditation | 60.7% |
| Journaling | 13.5% |
| Stress Reduction | 12.4% |
| Mood Tracking | 6.7% |

When looking for a mental health app, how many people used professional resources?

| Professional Resources | Percent Referenced |
|---|--------------------|
| American Psychiatric Association's App Evaluation Model | 1.3% |
| American Psychiatric Association's App Advisor | 1.3% |
| PsyberGuide | 0% |

DISCUSSION

- Due to their ease of accessibility, mental health applications hold the potential to provide widespread treatment for different forms of psychopathology.
- Most helpful features:** Relief from stress and anxiety, and mindfulness exercises
- Most engaging features:** The aesthetic layout and functional design of the application
- Biggest criticism:** The cost associated with using the application
- Despite a large percentage of college students using mental health apps, a small percentage consult professional resources when selecting a mental health app

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