

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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