

Understanding Academic Educators' Work in Supporting Student Wellbeing

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Supporting Student Wellbeing

“**26%** [of students] reported **severe or extremely severe** symptoms on one or more [depression, anxiety, or stress] scales”

Larcombe et al., (2014, p. 7)

“prevalence was significantly **higher** than the **general population**”

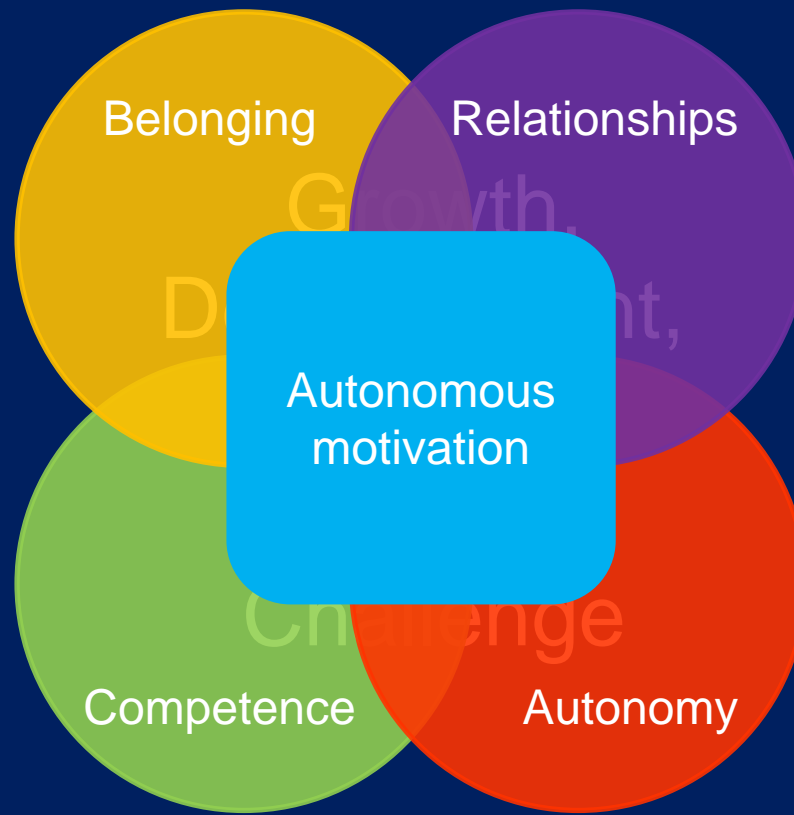
Stallman, H. (2010, p. 249)

“**worsening** of **psychological well-being** across the degree”

Bewick et al., (2010, p. 641)

Two theoretical lenses

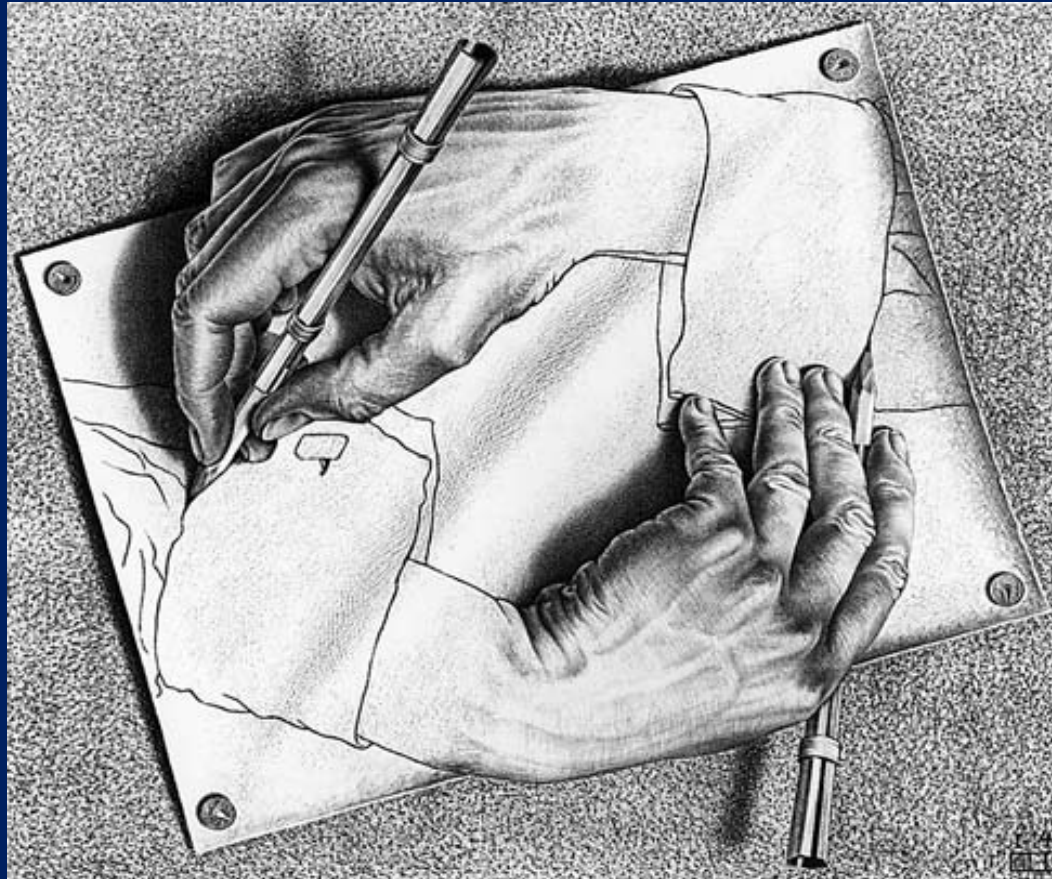
(i) Self-Determination Theory



= Psychological well-being

Two theoretical lenses

(ii) Developmental Systems Perspective



Escher (1948). *Drawing Hands*

Understanding academic teachers' experiences

- (i) How aware are academic educators of issues related to student wellbeing & distress?
- (ii) What strategies have academic educators used to support student wellbeing and mitigate distress?
- (iii) What kinds of departmental support do they see as helpful in promoting student wellbeing?

Participants:

- 315 respondents
- 8 disciplines, 3 universities
- Varying in year level (1st year to postgraduate)
- Varying in experience (-3 to 15+ years)

Online, anonymous questionnaire:

- RQ 1 (awareness): Rating items
- RQ 2 (strategies): Open-ended question
- RQ 3 (supports): Open-ended question

(2) What strategies do academic educators use to support mental health?

Theme

% 427 comments

Respond to Individual's needs 31.2 %

Building relationships 25.4

Teaching and learning activities 23.4

Promote mental health literacy 18.7

Not part of my/department's role 1.4

(3) What kinds of departmental support do academic educators see as helpful?

Theme	RQ2 % 427 comments	RQ3 % 296 comments
Respond to Individual's needs	31.2 %	48.6%
Building relationships	25.4	11.5
Teaching and learning activities	23.4	-
Promote mental health literacy	18.7	38.2
Not part of my/department's role	1.4	1.7

Responding to Individual's needs

Educators' strategies (31.2%)

“Providing special consideration around contributions in class”

“Regularly meet with students to help them better manage their workloads and challenges”

“Refer them on to appropriate services, such as the Academic Mentor and counselling”

Need for departmental support (48.6%)

“One of the most urgent tools we require is increased access to support for our students”

*“the policy framework is conflicted ...
Hard to know what we're supposed to do”*

“The inadequacy of sort of support came home when I needed support with an extreme case”

Building relationships

Educators' strategies (25.4%)

“Show that I know names and show an interest in their studies”

“Facilitating group work to reduce workload and foster friendships”

“Discussing general and specific issues and strategies with colleagues”

Need for departmental support (11.5%)

“There was [once] a dedicated support person within our faculty available to discuss issues”

“The department doesn't have an individual relationship with their students”

Teaching and learning activities

Educators' strategies (23.4%)

“Staggering assessment with other subjects to reduce pressure points”

“Clear communication about expectations from early on”

“Shifting away from traditional examinations, try to accommodate different learning styles”

Promote mental health literacy

Educators' strategies (18.7%)

“Talk about performance anxiety and general anxiety on placement, to de-stigmatise it”

“Talk to incoming students about mental health services at the University”

“Workshops about looking after physical and mental health on placement”

Need for departmental support (38.2%)

“Run PD sessions in mental health training, subsidize courses”

“Help me manage my safety and mental health”

“Materials detailing what services are available to students and teachers would be valuable”

Not part of my / department's role

Not educator's role (1.4%)

"It's not part of the University's culture"

"It's a difficult question - we are not mental health practitioners, we are teachers"

"Mental health issues are a private matter ... workload is not the issue, students are likely to have had these mental health issues regardless of their environment"

Not department's role (1.7%)

"I'm not sure that it's the department's direct responsibility"

"It is not our role to give psychological support - it is our role to help them get an education"

Implications & Conclusion

1. Educators are aware & concerned about student mental health; actively addressing issues
 - This is a reality of teaching for a diverse cohort of respondents.
 - Resource to help educators enhance student wellbeing: <http://unistudentwellbeing.edu.au>

Implications & Conclusion

1. Educators are aware & concerned about student mental health; actively addressing issues
 - This is a reality of teaching for a diverse cohort of respondents.
 - Resource to help educators enhance student wellbeing: <http://unistudentwellbeing.edu.au>
2. Educators need support around addressing these issues.
 - Clearer policies, access to services, training, information
 - National peer network: HEpsychwellbeing@gmail.com

Implications & Conclusion

1. Educators are aware & concerned about student mental health; actively addressing issues
 - This is a reality of teaching for a diverse cohort of respondents.
 - Resource to help educators enhance student wellbeing: <http://unistudentwellbeing.edu.au>
2. Educators need support around addressing these issues.
 - Clearer policies, access to services, training, resources
 - National peer network: HEpsychwellbeing@gmail.com
3. There is still a lot of work to do investigating other university systems.

Special thanks to:

- Academic educators who participated in our study
- The *Enhancing Student Wellbeing* project team
<http://unistudentwellbeing.edu.au>



- Australian Office for Learning and Teaching

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