



WHITE PAPER

# Supporting Gen Z: Understanding the unique stressors impacting the mental health of a generation

[togetherall.com](https://togetherall.com)

  
togetherall

# Foreword

Talking about student mental health is one of my favourite activities, as many of you will know. So when a paper is published that adds to the evidence base, shines a light on what is happening for students, and helps us to better understand them, it always feels like a positive step forward for the sector, even if some of the findings worry us.

I am delighted to share with you this new paper from Togetherall, which assesses the concerns of students in the UK (and further afield) beyond their daily stress over academic work, money, housing, or relationships.

Those of us who work with students are very familiar with the challenges they face in everyday life, but it is fascinating and enlightening, whilst sometimes upsetting, to hear what they are wrestling with in the wider world and society.

Racism, climate change and the perils of social media are just some of their key concerns, and it is vital that we understand their viewpoint on these.

It can be easy to criticise Generation Z for ‘talking about their mental health too much’, when in fact the last decade has seen a huge rise

in campaigns encouraging them to do just that. They have been told ‘it’s time to talk’ or that ‘it’s ok to be not ok’ whilst witnessing a climate crisis, cultural revolutions, a pandemic, and a recession. It may not therefore be unreasonable for them to experience more feelings of anxiety, or distress, and to want to talk to the people they trust on campus about their worries.

Life is not likely to get easier for a while yet, so taking time to reflect on the world our students are immersed in is never wasted.

University and campus staff work immensely hard to support the next generation, and face a constant increase in demand for support, so anything that helps shape the support and advice provided is to be welcomed. This paper has a powerful role to play in understanding Gen Z, ensuring that UK university support and wellbeing services respond appropriately and in tune with student needs.

**‘Supporting Gen Z’ will update and inform us, guiding us as we guide the next generation of students.**



**Dr Dominique Thompson**

Mental Health Expert and Former University GP



# Introduction

Recent articles in mainstream media outlets share to the rest of the world what many of us in higher education have known for several years now: today's Generation Z students are significantly more distressed than prior generations of students.

Many of the articles imply Gen Z's increased distress is related primarily to the pandemic—how their learning experience has been impacted, the disruption in their social lives, and the economic and job uncertainty confronting them.

And while that's all true, it misses the real story behind Gen Z students' distress.

We have to dig deeper than that—and farther back—for the answers.

Because those of us in higher education know their increased distress started well before the pandemic hit.

This paper will draw on research evidence, survey results, and the voices of current students to identify and examine some of the unique stressors facing Generation Z even before the pandemic hit. We will also introduce a developmental model to provide a meaningful context for better understanding the impact of cumulative risks on coping with adversity, a defining element of “resilience.”

In providing this heightened focus on the struggles many Gen Z students are grappling with, it is our intention to encourage readers to fundamentally re-frame their views regarding both today's students as well as those members of Gen Z who will start university across the decade to come. In deepening their understanding of their students, universities can move to devise and revise policies and practices to more effectively respond to their students' mental health needs and promote their positive wellbeing.



## Author

**Katharine C. Staley, PhD**

Licensed Psychologist

Founder/Principal, River Rocks Consulting



# Who is part of Gen Z?

First, let's define who is part of Generation Z. There is no single organization that sets each generation's birth range years but the most commonly used dates cited by various research organizations identify Gen Z as those individuals born between 1997 and 2012 (Milotay, 2020; Statista, 2022). So, members of Gen Z are currently between 9 years and 25 years of age. That means virtually all of today's students are part of Gen Z.

## The generations defined

### Generation Z

Born: 1997 - 2012  
Age in 2022: 9 to 25

### Millennial

Born: 1981 to 1996  
Age in 2022: 26 to 41

### Generation X

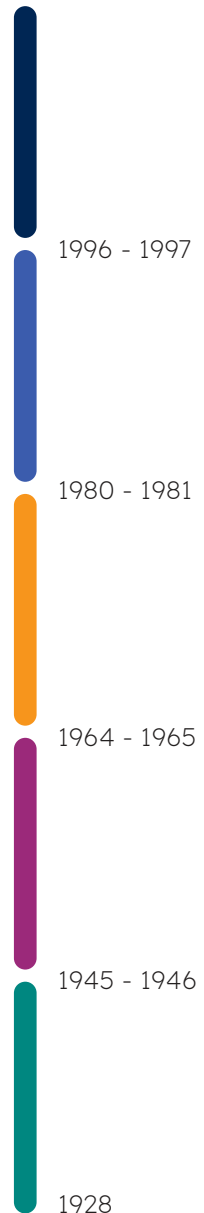
Born: 1965 to 1980  
Age in 2022: 42 to 57

### Baby Boomer

Born: 1946 to 1964  
Age in 2022: 58 to 76

### Silent Generation

Born: 1928 to 1945  
Age in 2022: 77 to 94



# Is Gen Z more distressed than previous generations?

If you talk to staff at your university you might hear a lot of comments such as, “students just don’t seem as stoic or resilient as they used to” or “I can’t tell you how many times I have students crying in my office now. I would never have done that when I was a student” or “They are telling me things I don’t want to hear and don’t know what to do with when I do hear it. I’m not a therapist.”

And if you talk to therapists at student counselling centres around the United Kingdom you are likely to hear comments like this, “we have waitlists for students to start therapy that are weeks-long now. That never used to happen” and “It’s like working at a crisis centre now.”

**The notion that student mental health and wellbeing has been getting significantly worse and that demand at university counselling services is increasing has become a common refrain across UK Higher Education, as well as in other countries, such as the United States.**

It’s been written about in research journals, in books, in a raft of government-commissioned reports, and in the popular media—starting well before the pandemic’s onset (Brown, 2018; Hill, et al., 2020; Marsh, 2017; Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2021; Thorley, 2017; see Xiao, et al., 2017 for a review of this issue in the U.S.). Indeed, both university counselling services as well as mental health treatment within the National Health System (NHS) have been experiencing strained resources, challenging both speed of access and continuity of care issues, the latter made worse by students moving back and forth between school and home.

**There is a wealth of evidence illustrating that Gen Z students are more distressed than those in prior years.**

In the United Kingdom, a 2017 report by the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) used an approach combining analyses of several different datasets on students’ mental health and wellbeing, an extensive review of the published literature, plus a new survey of UK universities, and concluded that “over the past 10 years there has been a fivefold increase in the proportion of students who disclose a mental health condition to their university.” (p. 5; Thorley, 2017).

- 16-24 year olds in England experiencing a ‘mental health condition’  
**15% in 2003 vs 19% in 2015-16**
- Overall proportion of students sharing that they had a mental health issue  
**5% in 2006-7 vs 17% in 2015-16**
- The number of UK domiciled first year students disclosing a mental health issue  
**Five times greater in 2015-16 vs 2006-7**
- A “record number” of students with mental health issues dropped out of university in 2015-16  
**210% increase compared to 2009-10**

(Thorley, 2017)



Likewise, a large 2016 survey of UK students by YouGov UK (participants were self-selected) found that 1 in 4 or 27% of students reported having some type of mental health issue, with more women reporting this (34%) compared to men (19%) and more LGBTQ students (45%) than heterosexual (22%). As per many other studies, among participants who said they had a mental health issue, most reported experiencing depression (77%) or anxiety (74%) and 74% said they had both anxiety and depression. Eating disorders was the next most common mental health issue at 14%. Last, 63% of all students surveyed said they felt stress that interfered with their ability to carry out daily activities (Aronin & Smith, 2016).

Furthermore, the Higher Education Funding Council for England, now a part of the Office for Students (OfS) stated that they found a 42% increase between 2010/11 and 2015/16 in the number of students self-reporting a mental health issue on their university application (from report by Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2021).

**Looking more closely at a serious mental health issue, another study of UK students by the Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention showed that the suicide rate among students increased 56% in the UK from 2007 to 2016, from 6.6. per 100,000 to 10.3 per 100,000 with particular increases among females.** Specifically, the rate of suicide doubled between 2012 and 2016 for females in England and Wales even though the prevalence rate in 2016 for male student in the UK overall (at 15.7 per 100,000) was higher than for females (6.0 per 100,000; Bothwell, 2018; Pinkney, 2018; Wright, 2018). And a 2020 study found that non-suicidal self harming behaviours were significantly on the rise among English 16-24 year olds between 2000 and 2014 in both students and same-age non students (McManus & Gunnell).

And looking at the most recent data on student mental health and wellbeing, a 2022 Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) survey of over 10,000 students (Neves & Brown) revealed that, when compared to a survey of the general public, today's university students are experiencing less happiness and lower life satisfaction (according to 2021 Office for National Statistics data):

- 16% are experiencing happiness compared to 33% of the general population
- 12% are satisfied compared to 26% of the general population

Further, the 2022 student survey asked students about loneliness for the first time in its history:

- 20% reporting feeling lonely "most of the time"
- 36% said they feel lonely "at least once a week."

**Turning our attention to demand for counselling services at UK universities, we can see that increasing rates of distressed students are putting a strain on their capacity to meet the demand.** A 2017 article by The Guardian newspaper cited data they had obtained from UK universities showing a rise of 28% between 2013-14 and 2015-16 in the number of students seeking counselling at their university (note: this comparison does not account for any increase in the total number of students attending university across this time period; Marsh). The Guardian article noted the data showed that increased demand for counselling services was accompanied by increases in wait times to start counselling.

**And the 2017 IPPR report found that 94% of reporting universities cited an increase in demand for counselling services at their university in the 5 prior years, with 61% of these saying that there was over a 25% increase in demand in that time period (Thorley).**

In line with these findings, a 2018 survey of 113 UK higher education (HE), further education (FE) and sixth form colleges (SFCs) looked at counselling centre data from the 2013-14 academic year. The report found that FE and HE institutions experienced increased demand for services in the three years prior (2011-2014), and this increased demand held despite anticipated rises in students attending university.

**In FE institutions:**

- 2% of students sought counselling services in 2011-12 vs 6% the following year

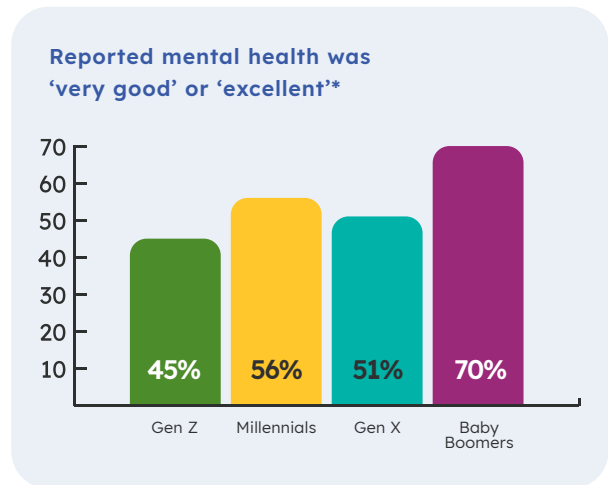
**In HE institutions:**

- 6% of students sought counselling services in 2011-12 vs 18% the following year

The study did not measure changes in wait times across years but did find that average wait times for the initial face-to-face meeting were only about one week but then the wait between ongoing sessions, especially at HEs, was an average of 17 days (Broglia, et al., 2018).

**And last, according to a 2021 comprehensive report by the Royal College of Psychiatrists, not only has the number of students seeking counselling services increased in recent years, but so has the severity and complexity of their presenting issues.**

**In the United States, the data shows similar trends in rising mental health rates among Gen Z students and Gen Zers overall.** The American Psychological Association (APA) produces an annual Stress in America report, and in 2018 it focused on Gen Z. That report showed that compared to older generations, Gen Z adults (18-23 year olds) expressed the least positive assessment of their own mental health compared to older generations, including Millennials. Only 45% of Gen Z members surveyed reported their mental health was “very good” or “excellent” compared to 56% of Millennials, 51% of Gen Xers, and 70% of baby boomers.



Looking more specifically at trends across time among college students seeking mental health care (not the general population of students in college), the 2020 Center for Collegiate Mental Health annual report (CCMH, 2021) showed steady increases from 2012 to 2020 in lifetime prevalence rates of a number of very serious indicators of student distress, such as non-suicidal self-injurious behaviours and serious suicidal ideation. In addition, the 2021 CCMH annual report showed a continuing steady increase from 2012 to 2021 for a number of traumatic experiences (e.g., unwanted sexual contacts and harassing, controlling or abusive behaviours). Further, the 2021 CCMH annual report also included a measure of student self-reported distress (CCAPS-62) that revealed a steady decade-long increase in generalized anxiety, social anxiety, depression, and eating concerns (CCMH, 2022).

Lastly, similar to the rising pressure experienced by UK university counselling services, CCMH data revealed that demand for services at campus counselling centres across the U.S. rose 30-40% between 2009 and 2015 even though enrollment only rose about 5% during that same time (CCMH, 2016). This makes clear that the increase was not related simply to enrollment increases during this time period but rather that the percentage of students seeking mental health services grew.



**So evidence confirms what many of us in Higher Education have been observing and experiencing first-hand in the past several years:**

1. Student distress has increased significantly in recent years, even prior to the pandemic's onset
2. Distressed students are seeking support and help in greater numbers at university counselling services
3. Students are presenting at university counselling services with more serious levels and types of distress
4. Students are sharing their distress more openly (e.g., in their classes, with staff, on their university admissions applications)





# It's ok to not be ok...

Before we go any further, it's very important to understand that one of the reasons why more students are coming forward and letting us know they are distressed—via online forums, on campuses across the UK, and in so many other venues—is because we asked them to.

## Sounds paradoxical—but it's true.

Think about it: for the past several decades, the United Kingdom has run a host of local, and national public health campaigns on a range of mental health and wellness topics. Campaigns include those trying to increase help-seeking behaviours to ones focused on raising awareness about mental health issues to others aiming to de-stigmatize mental health problems and help people better understand how to identify mental health issues and get help quickly (e.g., suicide prevention hotlines) to name just some of their varied goals (Mental Health Foundation, 2019).

## The truth is that these efforts have shown mixed success;

The more complex the behaviour or attitude being targeted, the less effective most public health campaigns are (Rao, et al., 2019). For example, there is less demonstrated efficacy for stigma reduction campaigns (because stigma is a multi-layered, culturally-influenced phenomenon; Rao, et al., 2019) than for increasing awareness of mental health issues and help-seeking, such as calling a hotline when distressed (Pirkis, et al, 2019). Further, many public health campaigns are simply not designed and rolled out with sufficient methodological rigor to even allow for an analysis of their effectiveness (Pirkis, et al., 2019).

So, while there is some evidence suggesting these campaigns can help explain the rise in awareness of distress and help-seeking behaviours that we see among Gen Z students, they do not explain the increases in the severity and type (anxiety, depression, suicidality, and other serious psychopathology) of their distress nor the significantly higher percentages of students that report feeling distressed. **In other words, public health campaigns cannot explain why there are more members of Gen Z presenting with more intense or severe mental health distress.**



# So why is Generation Z so distressed?

The big answer, as with many complex issues, is that there are a number of contributing factors but for our purposes, we will focus on the unique circumstances/stressors Generation Z have been coping with and trying to manage. Some of these factors have been gaining traction and impact and so are just beginning to show up in the research literature, in emerging workforce trends, and in the voices of some Gen Z students we interviewed. **And while this paper examines and shares research on stressors distinct to Gen Z, ones that help us**

**better understand their rising distress rates, it is critically important to keep in mind that today's students, like past generations of students, are also coping with other stresses that affect their day-to-day mental health and wellbeing, such as academic pressures, concerns about future employment, and issues with family and friends (Aronin & Smith, 2016).**

The latter are well recognised as stressors, so this paper will focus on some of the more recently identified unique stressors for Gen Z students.



# Social media

**In terms of stressors uniquely impacting Generation Z, perhaps the most obvious factor to start with is that members of Gen Z are the first generation to grow up in a digital technology-focused world, and one with high social media saturation.** According to *Statista*, smartphone usage in the UK has increased dramatically in the past 10 years among all age groups. In 2012, among 16-24 year olds, 66% had smartphones and by 2021 that figure had risen to 99%. Interestingly, while older age groups lagged further behind in 2012 in terms of usage, 60% for 25-34 year olds and 43% for 35-54 year olds, they also both rose to 99% by 2021 as well (O’Dea, 2021), illustrating the quick and comprehensive uptake of this once new technology.

And according to a 2020 report surveying almost 2200 UK children and teens (5-16 year olds) by Childwise, 53% of respondents say they owned a smartphone by the time they were seven years old, and 57% said they sleep with their phone by their bed (WARC). Further 44% of respondent said they would feel “uncomfortable if ever left without a phone signal,” and 39% said they “could not live without” their mobile phone (WARC, 2020). And in 2022, a Childwise survey with 7-16 year olds in the UK revealed they spent an average of 3.3 hours per day online in 2021, primarily on YouTube, playing games such as Minecraft, using the chat platform Discord, and viewing Tik Tok (Shah, 2022).

As Jean Twenge, a researcher at San Diego State University in the U.S. who studies generational characteristics, wrote in a 2017 article, “It’s not an exaggeration to describe iGen [her early name for Gen Z] as being on the brink of the worst mental-health crisis in decades. Much of this deterioration can be traced to their phones.... the twin rise of the smartphone and social media has caused an earthquake of a magnitude we’ve not seen in a very long time, if ever. There is compelling evidence that the devices we’ve placed in young people’s hands are having profound effects on their lives—and making them seriously unhappy....”



This assessment is particularly interesting in light of a newly released multi-year study on 84,000 UK children and adolescents' (ages 10-21 years) examining the relationship between social media usage and well-being which showed that both males and females have sensitive periods in which social media usage, when heavy, can negatively impact life satisfaction. The researchers found that one period occurred around puberty, thus at slightly different ages for each gender, and a second period of sensitivity occurred around age 19 for both males and females.

According to the study's authors in contrast to the pubertal period of sensitivity suggesting a neurobiological connection, "...this [second period] might be related to changes in the social environment such as a move away from home and subsequent disruptions in social networks" (p. 5, Orben et al., 2022).

When interviewed by Togetherall about social media's impact, as part of the development of this paper, one female student said,

“

My social media use was higher when I was younger. I spent a lot of time mindlessly scrolling—on FB, Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok—about 6-7 hours/day... and over time I noticed this negative impact on my mental health.

”

A male student who identified social media as a major stressor for him said,

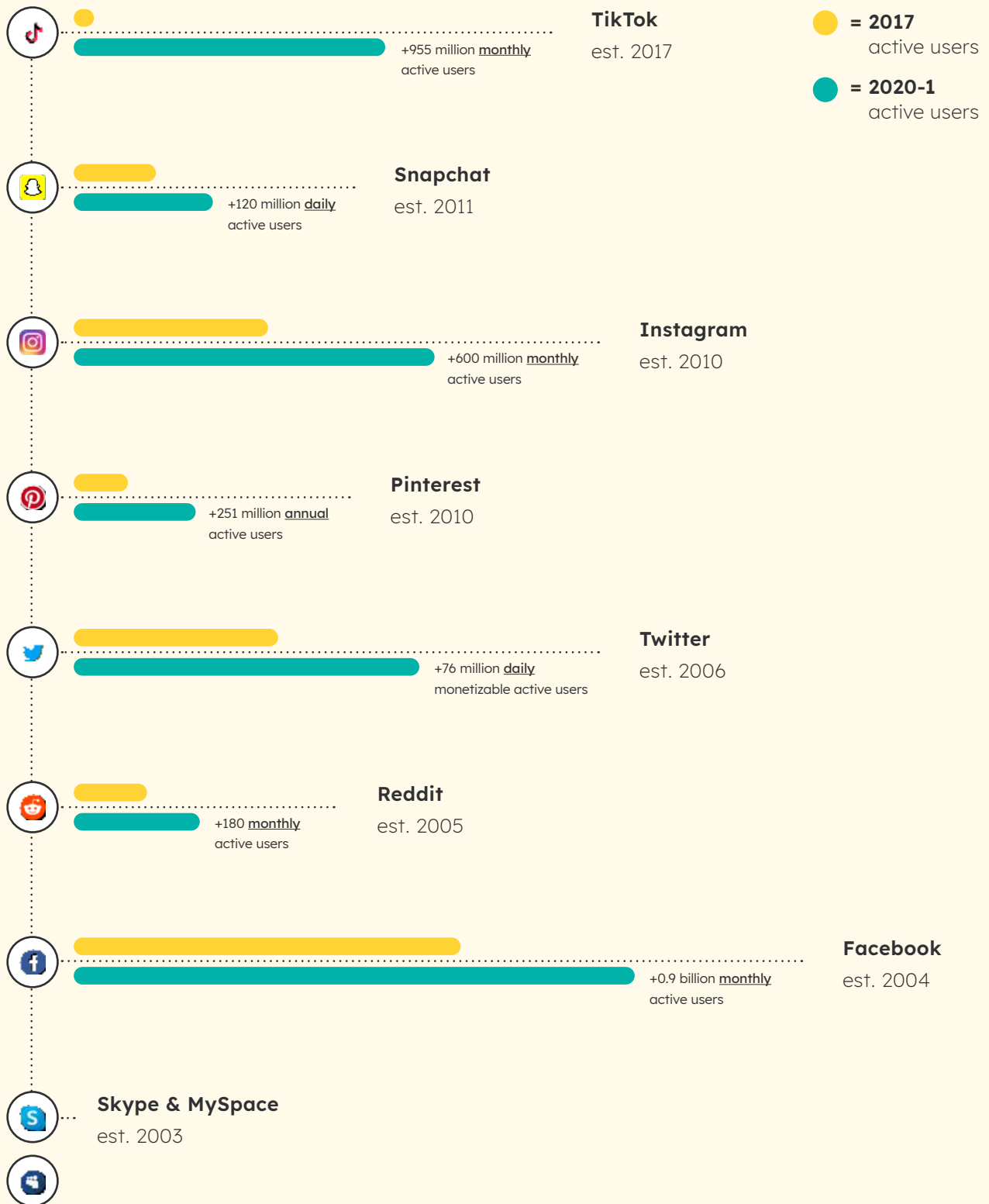
“

It impacts me, my friends, my roommates. It has such a huge reach—definitely makes it so you feel you have to manicure yourself—give people what they want to see. It exacerbates social pressures to act in a certain way, to conform.

”



## Date of creation and uptake of social media channels



**Teens and young adults use social media for a variety of reasons, such as seeking a sense of community, reducing loneliness, and looking for resources and support, and there is evidence that these can be found online. However, most social media sites are not intentionally built to provide a safe space for online users of a variety of ages and with different vulnerabilities. As a result, considerable evidence has emerged over the last several years about the adverse impacts of social media on teens and young adults.**

First, significant evidence exists regarding the prevalence of cyberbullying on formal and school-based (e.g., classroom chat groups) social media among 10-19 year olds, with one large review study of U.S students finding rates as high as 41% for perpetration of cyberbullying and 72% for victimization. Research shows that negative impacts of cyberbullying include difficulty sleeping, anxiety, depression, suicidality, and experiencing a variety of somatic-symptoms (Selkie, et al., 2016).

Cyberbullying, while sharing many of the same characteristics of “traditional” bullying in terms of its impact on victims, is often considered more toxic because posts targeting someone can be viewed by a potentially limitless audience that a) likely includes many of the victim’s peers, b) can be anonymous, c) can be viewed repeatedly day or night, and d) are difficult for parents, teachers and others adults to effectively monitor (Mir, et al., 2022).

For those with mental health vulnerabilities, social media can be a landmine. Review papers have shown a significant link between social media use and body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviours among adolescents and young adults (note studies in both review papers included participants from countries in Europe, Asia, North America and beyond; Faelens, et al., 2021; Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). Even social media’s attempts

to offset damaging impacts by requiring self-disclaimers regarding idealized images have proven ineffective (Livingston, et al., 2020).

To give an example of how un-monitored “support-oriented” social media sites can be harmful, another review paper that mostly focused on studies with UK and Canadian 19-21 year olds examined social media sites for users engaging in deliberate self-harming behaviours (Dyson, et al., 2016). This review paper demonstrated a number of adverse impacts, including increases in suicidal ideation, normalization of self-harming behaviours, and increased social isolation. Interestingly, despite guidelines about permissible content on social media, the review concluded that users routinely found ways around these restrictions, and few social media platforms had mental health professionals monitoring postings that might have prevented such postings. As a result, the authors found that incidents of trolling (deliberately provocative posts), flaming (mocking or encouraging self-harming behaviours and thoughts), and posting of videos depicting self-harm were common.

**In summary, without clinical monitoring, social media sites can be destructive, serving as fertile ground for the development or exacerbation of mental health issues among users. This may negate the positive social connectedness and sense of community that many are seeking.**

Though we will come back to discussing Togetherall more later, it’s worth noting that by providing an online peer-support forum that provides the benefits of connectedness and community to its users but directly addresses the vulnerabilities of most social media forums, Togetherall stands out as both a responsible and responsive online mental health resource for Gen Z students to find comfort and help.



# Climate change

**Let's now turn to another major stressor in the lives of Gen Zers, one they have grown up with and that only recently has begun to receive the attention it should: climate change.**

A 10-country study (including the UK) led by a University of Bath researcher of 10,000 16-25 year olds conducted in May 2021, examined participants' feelings and thoughts about climate change as well as their respective government's responses to climate change (Hickman, et al., 2021). Results showed that overall 59% of respondents endorsed feeling "extremely worried" or "very worried" about climate change, and 75% agreed that the "future was frightening". Looking specifically at the UK participants' responses, 49% reported feeling "extremely worried" or "very worried" with another 31% agreeing they were "moderately worried." Only 6% of respondents reported they were "not worried". UK participants also endorsed experiencing a wide range of negative feelings in response to climate change, such as feeling sad (63%), helpless (54%), anxious (60%), afraid (61%), angry (55%), and powerless (55%). Given their level of distress, it makes sense that 28% of respondents said their feelings about climate change adversely affected their daily lives, and only 25% endorsed feeling optimistic about climate change. Hand in hand with this data, respondents were asked to say whether they agreed or not with a series of statements based on their feelings and thoughts about climate change. UK participants' answers were striking: 37% agreed they were "hesitant to have children", 51% that "humanity was doomed", and 72.5% agreed that "the future is frightening".

When asked about what their government/other governments are doing in relation to climate change, UK respondents said they felt their government was "lying about the effectiveness of the actions it is taking" (61%), "betraying me and/or future generations" (57%), and more generally that "[governments] are "failing young people across the world" (65%; Hickman et al., 2021).

## Hickman, et al., 2021

Survey of 10,000 16 – 25 year olds across 10 countries:

**60%**

'extremely worried' or 'very worried' about climate change

**75%**

said the 'future was frightening'

**56%**

agreed that 'humanity was doomed'



Organizations looking only at UK Gen Zers have found similar results. A survey conducted by Togetherall in November 2021 of approximately 350 Gen Z students asked “what do you think are the main challenges facing students in your generation?” The second highest response was “climate change” at 67.9% (after “influence of social media” at 83.6%).

And both the 2020 and 2021 Deloitte Global Millennial Survey revealed UK Gen Z’s significant concerns about climate change and their climate anxiety. Even as the pandemic continued its spread around the world in spring 2020, 29% of UK Gen Z respondents identified climate change as their top concern, ahead of both health care/disease prevention (22%) and unemployment (23%; Deloitte Insights, 2020). In the 2021 survey, UK Gen Z continued to list climate change as the top concern (as did Millennials), and 60% said that seeing the positive environmental changes that occurred as the world shut down increased their optimism that climate change could be reversed. Even so, 58% of Gen Z respondents thought that businesses and the government would make climate change less of a priority as a result of the pandemic (Deloitte, 2021a; Deloitte, 2021b).

The UK is not alone: a number of studies in the United States indicate high distress about climate change. As an example, a 2020 American Psychiatric Association survey revealed that 67% of U.S. adults were “somewhat or extremely anxious” about climate change. And regarding the impact of climate change on their own mental health, this concern rose among all surveyed

adults from 47% in 2019 to 68% in 2020 with Gen Z adults in the survey (18-23 year olds) the most concerned of any generation (67%), These high levels of eco-anxiety were similar regardless of race/ethnicity or gender—making this a particularly robust finding.

As Hickman and her colleagues (2021) the authors of the 10-country study, concluded

**“...the realities of climate change alongside governmental failures to act are chronic, long-term, and potentially inescapable stressors. These factors are likely to increase the risk of developing mental health problems, particularly in more vulnerable individuals, such as children and young people, who often face multiple life stressors without having the power to reduce, prevent, or avoid such stressors”**

(p.e871).





And this is echoed in the words of students themselves. One of the students interviewed as part of the development of this paper, when asked to rate climate change as a stressor said, “It’s an existential fear that our lives are contributing to the demise of our planet—we have to drive cars, use computers, use water, and there is nothing we can do about that, no agency to do otherwise. It’s anxiety-producing. I think about it frequently.” Another student echoed this. **“Climate change comes to mind immediately as a major stressor. Reading the news, things are not changing. This kind of large-scale issue feels out of reach. I don’t feel like I have a lot of agency.”**

Interestingly, both references to the notion of agency highlight an important consideration as we explore the reasons driving Gen Z distress. **And that’s because it turns out that having a strong sense of agency is considered a key factor in positive well-being.**

According to Martin Seligman (2020), the eminent researcher and leader in the field of positive psychology, agency is “one’s belief that he or she can change the world for the better.” Having a subjective sense of agency is associated with feeling more in control and experiencing more positive well-being, whereas lacking a sense of agency is associated with increased feelings of fear, anxiety, and loss of control (Christensen, et al., 2019; Haggard, 2017; Rao & Napper, 2019). Indeed, it could be said that the psychological “opposite” of a sense of agency is learned helplessness, which is the belief that one has no control over what happens to oneself and there is nothing one can do to change that. Importantly, research studies have shown that learned helplessness is associated with depressive symptoms, burnout, lack of motivation, anxiety, and higher stress (Ackerman, 2022). Students’ own voices and the surveys in the UK, the US, and in countries across the globe indicate that Gen

Z’s anxiety, despair, and distress about climate change are often accompanied by a strong disbelief that their governments are willing to take the necessary actions to create meaningful change.

**Given all this, it seems reasonable to suggest that part of what drives Gen Z’s increasing mental health symptoms in recent years may be related to a decrease in their sense of agency in the face of stressors (climate change and the others identified here) that feel overwhelming and beyond their control to impact.**

That’s why groups such as UK Student Climate Network (UKSCN), a group of mostly Gen Zers organising and mobilising protests around the UK to compel the British government to take action on climate change may be so powerfully important. According to their website, they organized 850 demonstrations in 2019 alone, including the September 2019 Global Climate Strike in which over 300,000 people took to the streets around the UK. The impact of this group and others like it across environmental and social justice issues may be felt not just in terms of creating changes in policy or people’s awareness of issues, but potentially in terms of increasing Gen Z’s sense of agency and thus in reducing their sense of helplessness and despair. Indeed, Gen Zers are activists in many domains, a strong indicator of their underlying resilience in the face of the unique stressors they face.



# Sexual harassment & sexual assault

Turning to another key stressor for members of Gen Z in the UK, sexual harassment and sexual assaults are widely experienced by women primarily, as well as by men, though at lesser rates.

Among the students interviewed for this paper, all the women identified this as a significant stressor—. One student said, “As a female, it’s horrible to think about. I know people it has happened to. It’s always on my mind.” And another said, “I am really concerned about how it’s handled—a lot of people don’t believe women [when they say it happened].”

## What makes this stressor unique for Generation Z—and perhaps contributes to their perception of it as significantly stressful—seems likely to relate to a myriad of recent cultural changes.

The #MeToo movement in both the U.S. and the UK has galvanized women into speaking out about their sexual assault experiences and served to put pressure on schools, employers, and other organizations regarding how sexual misconduct should be addressed. This has occurred due to a number of factors such as the changes universities have begun making in the wake of a powerful 2016 Universities UK “Changing the Culture” report, the emergence of groups highlighting sexual assault incidents of students (e.g., Revolt Sexual Assault), and the rise of social media sites sharing stories of abuse, such as Everyone’s Invited in which 10,000 cases of sexual harassment were posted, and the myriad of media articles about sexual harassment/abuse concerns at boarding schools, universities, and among Generation Z more broadly (Batty, 2021; Elks, 2020; Makoni, 2021; Ott, 2020; Topping, 2021).

Concern about sexual assault incidents is not a new stressor, but there are a number of reasons why UK Gen Z students might be particularly concerned about it. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) data for 2021 showed that it was a record high year for “police-recorded” sexual offences across England and Wales, up 22% from 2020 and up 13% from 2019. Of the total number of sexual offences that were police-recorded in 2021, the highest number ever of rapes (37%) was reported, representing a 21% increase from the prior year (ONS, 2022). Sexual assault incidents reported to the police are acknowledged as an under-count given that many sexual crimes are not reported.

And the 2021 UN Women YouGov survey (APPG for UN Women) showed that:

- 71% of UK women respondents reported experiencing ‘some form of sexual harassment’ in a ‘public space’
- 86% of 18-24 year olds reported experiencing this
- 93% of full-time students reported experiencing this
- Only 3% of 18-24 year olds reported **not** having experienced any of the categories of identified sexual harassment.

(“Public space” includes online social media sites, but excludes work places and schools / universities.)



“Sexual harassment” is defined by the UN Women survey as “the continuum of violent practices against women and girls. It can take the form of various acts including rape, other aggressive touching, forced viewing of pornography, taking and circulating sexual photographs, as well as verbal sexual conduct” (p.9).

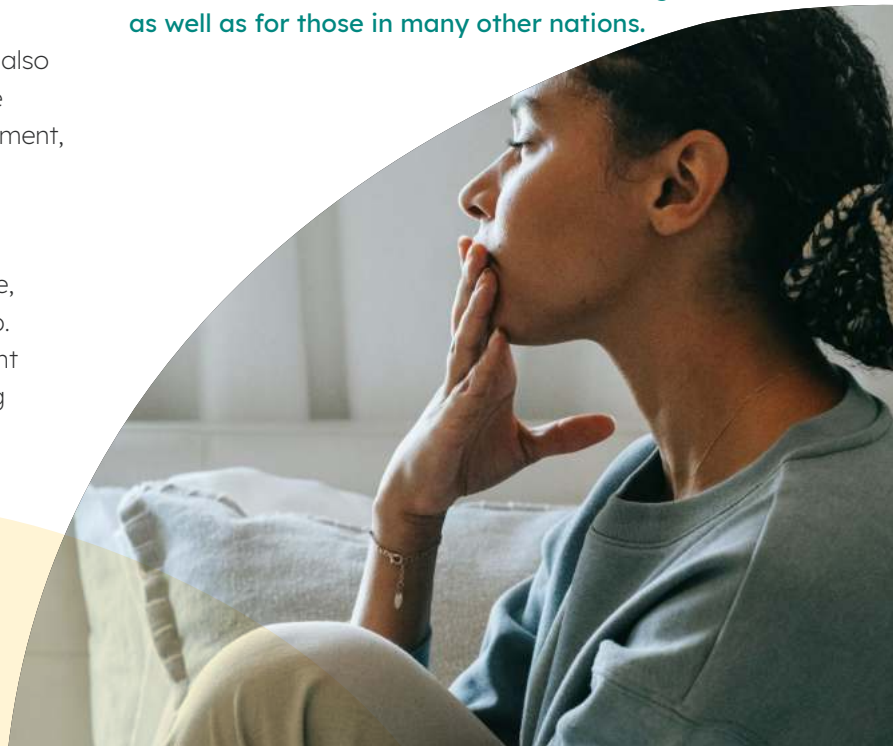
Looking at university student experiences in this domain, in 2015, 2000 students participated in online interviews about their experiences in the 12 months prior of “going out for a drunken night”. Results revealed that 54% of women and 15% of men said they experienced inappropriate or unwanted sexual comments or touching on drunken nights out (Drinkaware, 2016). Drink and needle spikings are another example of a stressful and potentially traumatic event that students may face. While spikings can occur anywhere and for any age person, evidence indicates that students, particularly female students, are disproportionately impacted, with university “fresher” weeks serving as higher risk periods (Bond, 2022; House of Commons report, 2022; SOS UK, 2021).

In response to issues of violence against women and sexual harassment, the 2016 “Changing the Culture” report by the Universities UK task force acknowledged that sexual assault at universities has occurred historically and continues to, that accurate numbers and data collection have been inconsistent, and that universities need to do more because “These experiences [the report also includes hate crimes] can have a considerable impact on student wellbeing, academic attainment, student retention, institutional reputation and future student recruitment. The evidence also suggested that despite some positive activity, university responses are not as comprehensive, systematic and joined-up as they could be” (p. 4). Encouragingly, a 2018 follow up assessment of universities’ progress towards implementing the 2016 report’s recommendations showed

universities were making progress. Primarily, this is occurring in prevention-oriented practices, among both students and staff, such as offering more bystander trainings, increasing awareness of the problem, embedding a zero tolerance policy at all levels, partnering and communicating directly with student unions, but also by taking steps towards using a case-by-case model for understanding and handling sexual misconduct situations (Universities UK, 2019).

Similar findings can be found in the U.S. as evidenced by a 2018 American Psychological Association report, showing that Gen Z adults endorsed experiencing significant stress about “widespread sexual harassment and sexual assault reports” in considerably larger numbers (53%) than adults overall (39%). A 2017 Chronicle of Higher Education article detailed how extensive these sexual assault and harassment complaints are at colleges and universities across the United States, stating that the #MeToo movement has had a galvanizing effect on reporting of both domains of sexual misconduct (Gluckman, et al.).

**In sum, members of Generation Z are coming of age during a critical time period regarding what has become an international discourse on the topic of sexual assault and sexual harassment. It’s not surprising then that this is a top stressor for Gen Z individuals across the United Kingdom as well as for those in many other nations.**



# Racism, Intersectionality, and Social Injustice

We cannot end the discussion of why Gen Z is so distressed without diving into a central aspect of Gen Z identity and the particular impact the current social and cultural climate in the United Kingdom has had on their psychological well-being.

First, it is important to know that Generation Z is the most racially and ethnically diverse generation ever in the United Kingdom (as of 2019, ethnic minorities are estimated by ONS to make up 14.4% of the UK population), even as “White British” remains the biggest group. Immigration and differences in birth rates primarily account for the rise in ethnic minorities, and England has by far the highest proportion of ethnic minorities at 16.1% within the UK (Jones, 2021).

To further understand the unique significance of this for Gen Z, consider the demographics of today’s UK students. Looking at entry rates into higher education from state schools at age 18 according to ethnicity, between 2006 and 2021, percentages of every major ethnic group (White, Chinese, Asian, Black, Mixed, Other) have grown considerably. And while Chinese students made up the highest percentage in entry rates (72.1%) in 2021, Black students had the greatest increase in admission rates (across all ethnic groups) in the 15 years between 2006 (21.6%) to 2021 (48.6%). The smallest increase was seen for White students, from 21.8% in 2006 to 33.3% in 2021 (UCAS, 2022).

**So, while UK society as a whole has become more diverse across time, diversity in higher education settings –largely made up of Gen Zers—has outpaced that in recent years.**

**So what might be the implications of this increased ethnic and racial diversity on the Higher Education experience for Gen Z students?**

Few studies exist on the impact of being a racial or ethnic minority student in the UK, but a recent literature review examined the experiences of Black students at UK universities and their impact on Black student mental health and wellbeing (Stoll, et al., 2022).

**Stoll and colleagues identified evidence across a number of studies that universities can be “toxic spaces” for many Black students. Black students’ experiences of microaggressions, racial discrimination, low perceived support from friends and family and in some cases from university counselling services as well, often led to a decreased sense of belonging both academically and socially.**



Their review further revealed that this combination of factors also resulted in “poor mental health and mental illness in Black students” (p. 7). They found that Black students often felt stigmatized for having mental health issues, making it more difficult for them to seek help at university counselling services. In addition, Black students, aware that most therapists at counselling services are White, were concerned that they would be negatively stereotyped and felt a lack of trust about working with White therapists, further impacting their help-seeking. For those students that did go to counselling, many found these fears validated, leaving them feeling they had to educate their counselors on Black Culture, and on racism and its impacts (Stoll, et al., 2022).

These findings align with a 2019 report from the Office for Students (OfS) showing that (starting in 2016-17), full-time Black students who reported having a mental health condition had the lowest continuation rates (77.1%) of any ethnic group who similarly reported a mental health condition (the next lowest at 85.1% was for “Mixed” students). This was also lower than for full-time Black students who did not report having mental health issues (85.0%). By comparison, White and Asian students had notably higher continuation rates for those that reported a mental health condition (87.6% and 88.4%, respectively). Attainment (of degree) rates according to ethnicity showed similar disparities for Black students; both those who reported a mental health condition (53%) and those who did not (58.9%) had the lowest attainment rates compared to all other ethnic groups, including White students. It should be noted that White students had the highest attainment rates of any race or ethnic group, regardless of whether they reported a mental health condition or not, and the highest continuation rates among students who did not report a mental health condition (and virtually tied with Asian students for those who did report).

**The OfS concluded that “These gaps show that black students with mental health conditions are being failed throughout the student cycle. Barely three-quarters remain in study beyond their first year...” (pg. 6; 2019).**

In addressing issues that arise with greater diversity and a better understanding of intersectionality, it’s imperative to acknowledge the impacts of racism and other types of discrimination on mental health and wellbeing. It’s not news that, along with many other countries, racism has a long and traumatic history in the UK. Despite this, according to Dr. Emma Adam, a researcher in Adolescence at Northwestern University in the U.S., “Racial discrimination is a powerful stressor that is relatively understudied in the developmental literature on early adversity” (Adam, et al., 2020), thus less is known about its impacts on adolescents. Recent research addressing this gap shows converging evidence regarding the adverse impact of racial discrimination (direct and vicarious, online and in person) on adolescent well-being (Adam, et al., 2020; Benner, et al., 2018; English, et al., 2020; Hughes, et al., 2016; Levy, et al., 2016). As the authors of one large meta-analytic study concluded,

**“The findings reported in our meta-analysis clearly illustrate the pernicious effects of racial/ethnic discrimination across multiple domains of adolescents’ health and well-being, including their mental health, their engagement in risky health behaviours, and their educational success”**

(Benner, et al., 2018, p. 872).



While the Office for Students in their 2019 Insight report recognised the importance of intersecting identities and their impact on student experience and student mental health, it also acknowledged that data on other facets of identity, such as gender identity and sexual orientation, was very limited. As a result, the report recommended increased efforts to gather relevant data, to train counselling services staff in identity issues and intersectionality more broadly, and to commit to better understanding and better serving the needs of students with intersecting identities:

**“The challenge for universities and colleges is to recognise how identities intersect and overlap, multiplying the difficulties students with mental health conditions face. Universities and colleges need to listen to the affected students and ensure that their unique needs are met” (p. 6).**

Addressing this challenge is critically important to UK Gen Zers, as indicated by data from numerous surveys indicating they are more concerned with issues of identity and intersectionality, and their association with prejudice, racism, and discrimination, than prior generations. For example, according to a 2017 BBC survey of over 3000 16-65 year olds, when asked about issues that were “important to them” 20% of Gen Z said “racism” vs 6% of Baby Boomers (Ipsos, 2017). A 2021 survey further supported that Gen Z respondents were far more concerned about racism than Baby Boomers with, 39% of Gen Zers ranking racism as the biggest problem facing the UK after the pandemic. By comparison, only 7% of Baby Boomers believed that racism was a problem at all (DiversityUK, 2021).

The critical role intersectionality plays in better understanding and meeting the needs of under-represented students can be seen in the following example regarding students who are the first in

their family to go to university. A newly released longitudinal study following 7,700 members of a birth cohort born in 1989-90 in England showed that First-In-Family (FiF) students are an ever-growing group attending university (Henderson et al., 2020). This quantitative study, the only one of its kind in the UK as far as we know, found that 27% of that birth cohort achieved a degree by age 25, 18% of whom were FiFs. The intersectionality lies in the fact that ethnic minorities were (and are) significantly over-represented among FiF students. The study further found that FiF students, regardless of race or ethnicity, were significantly more likely to dropout before attaining their degree (Henderson, et al., 2020). Thus, circling back to the already-mentioned data on continuation and attainment rates, we can see that using an intersectional perspective allows us to better understand the complexities and experiences of a diverse student body. An intersectional perspective will thus lead to more subtle solutions.

**In short, racism and other social inequities in the UK and beyond have impacted Generation Z uniquely, and the cost for Gen Z’s mental health is significant.**



# Cumulative risk model

**To bring us full circle, while we have reviewed individual stressors, it is important to remember they don't exert their impact in isolation from each other.**

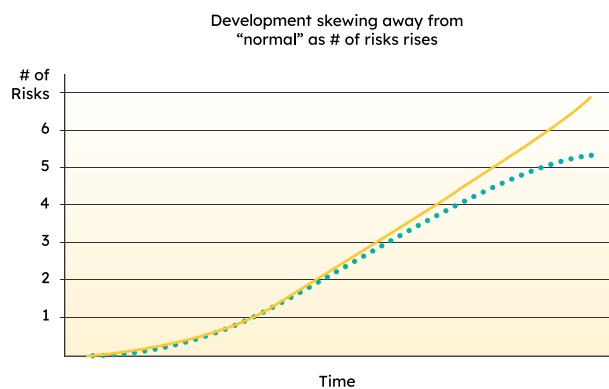
Indeed, members of Gen Z are grappling with all these stressors, though to different degrees, depending on each individual situation. For example, while climate change is a fact affecting the whole planet, it clearly has differential impacts depending on where one lives, one's socioeconomic status, and a host of other factors. In other words, the stressors discussed here do not exert equal impact on each member of Gen Z. And as mentioned earlier, UK Gen Z students, similar to prior generations, experience ongoing concerns related to financial, relationship, and academic stresses, adding weight to the cumulative risks they face and in turn, further challenging their ability to maintain positive wellbeing, let alone to thrive.

**It's also critical to keep in mind that social media serves as a multiplier of each stressor's impact, though again to different degrees. In this sense, members of Gen Z, given their high levels of social media saturation, are growing up with an amplification of their exposure to each stressor.** Indeed, Gen Z members are getting information about stressful, polarising, and/or traumatic events that individuals from prior generations might never have even heard about, potentially making it harder for Gen Z youth and young adults to self-regulate their exposure compared to prior generations. This

could further help us understand their distress, and the feelings of despair, anger, sadness, and betrayal they express.

Inevitably, for all of us, regardless of which generation we belong to, there is some personal mix of exposure to different stressful conditions and events that challenges our ability to cope with them and still thrive. Drawing from developmental theory to help explain this varying impact, the cumulative risk model states that the individual's (and perhaps the generation's) ability to adapt and "be resilient" is challenged by an increasing number of "risks" (i.e. adverse events or conditions; Evans, et al., 2013).

**The cumulative risk model predicts that as adverse events/conditions increase in number, our ability to adapt is increasingly challenged.**



**The solid line** = "normal" development  
**Dashed line** = the impact of cumulative risks, skewing away from normal to "abnormal" development



What can help us cope better are protective factors that serve to buffer a given individual from the exposure to, or impact of, stressors (e.g., a caring and responsive caregiver, a supportive, positive peer group, consistent and sufficient income to meet family needs, high quality, safe educational environments, good physical health, and so on). Thus, protective factors can increase our ability to adapt and be resilient in the face of increasing risk exposure.

**But only so far.**

If the number of risks (or their severity) outweighs our ability to cope effectively, if it overwhelms the buffering effect of whatever protective factors exist then the model posits that normative stress reactions may develop into more serious mental health problems, compromising our sense of well-being and our ability to function well.

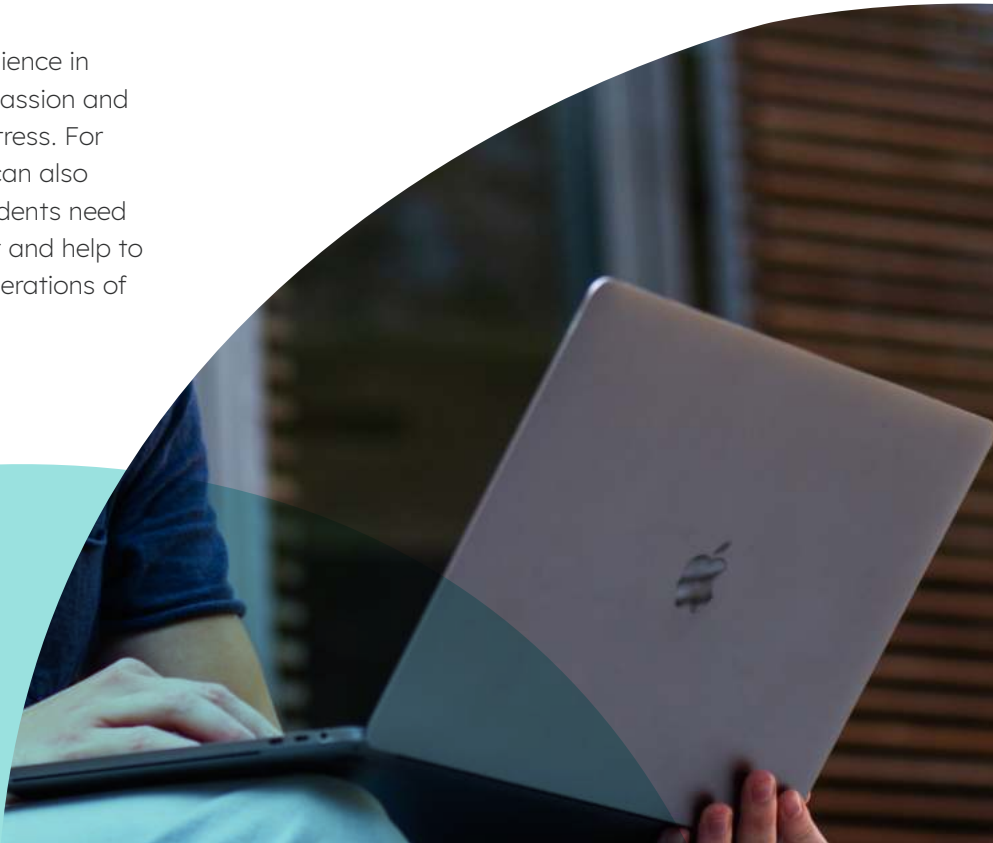
**The power of the cumulative risk model is in providing a frame for understanding the interaction among stressors, shedding light on how even the “healthiest,” most resilient individuals can be overwhelmed by the challenges they face, eroding their ability to cope effectively.**

When we think about stress and resilience in this way, we can bring greater compassion and understanding to Generation Z’s distress. For those of us in higher education, we can also more readily appreciate why our students need more avenues for accessing support and help to manage their distress than prior generations of students did.

**This review of Gen Z stressors demonstrates that they were exerting an adverse impact even prior to the pandemic . It is then critical to remember that the pandemic itself has been an additional major stressor, and one that has hit Gen Z particularly hard in many ways.**

As you might expect, evidence from numerous sources reveals that the pandemic has had a negative impact on the mental health of Gen Z individuals (including all ages of Gen Z, 9-25 years old) in the UK, the U.S., the European Union, and in many other countries around the globe. Studies show increases in a variety of mental health issues, including generalized anxiety, social anxiety, depression, eating disorders, self-harming behaviours, and suicidality (APA, 2021; Chen & Lucock, 2021; Milotay, 2020; Kwong et al., 2021; Racine, et al., 2021).

As a result, with the pandemic added into the cumulative risk exposure for Gen Z students, higher education institutions are looking for innovative, more scalable solutions to meaningfully address student distress.





# So what does this mean for higher education?

- 1. First, as you will understand, these stressors are not going away. Some, such as climate change, are predicted to worsen in terms of the depth and breadth of their negative impact. Others such as racism and sexual assault/harassment are hugely complex societal problems that, in the best of future visioning, will require time, compassionate and wise leadership, and widespread citizen engagement to meaningfully change for the better.**
  - So, we need to recognize that these stressors serve as ongoing challenges, presenting a “new normal” that compels us to find solutions now, to best serve the rising mental health and wellbeing needs of our Gen Z students (and, soon enough, Gen Alpha students).
- 2. Second, given these rising rates of Gen Z distress, it’s reasonable to predict that demand for mental health services amongst university students will continue to significantly exceed universities’ ability to meet this demand.**
  - Given this, universities will need to offer an array of new options to meet this demand—in other words, the new normal requires new solutions.
- 3. Third, given the ongoing scope of the problem (i.e., demand for mental health services far exceeding supply), universities will need to identify innovative solutions that**
  - incorporate many of the benefits and oversight of direct clinical care,
  - are easily scaled to the level of the need amongst each university’s population, however large,
  - are appealing to students, are easily accessible, and cater to the intersectional and complex nature of Gen Z’s needs,
  - and if possible, can help them whatever time of day or night they are distressed.



# Togetherall: A safe peer support community

**And this may be where Togetherall's online peer support platform can serve as a helpful and much needed response.**

As we already know, Gen Z students are digitally savvy and spend a lot of time online; Togetherall meets them where they already are.

Togetherall provides 24/7 access, anonymity, and the opportunity for students to both receive as well as give support to their peers. As a peer support community Togetherall provides the subtlety of insight required for supporting complex intersectional challenges, where those with lived experience can provide empathy and support.

And unlike most other online forums— which as we have seen are prey to trolling, inappropriate content, and bullying—Togetherall is moderated by licensed mental health professionals. These professionals intervene not only if a student presents in crisis, they also prevent negative

escalations, inappropriate postings, as well as bullying and other forms of abusive postings.

In short, Togetherall is an innovative solution to the higher, unable-to-be-met demand for mental health services at universities across the United Kingdom.

**It is clinically managed, scalable to meet any student population need, supports a wide range of student wellbeing and mental health issues, is available day and night, and provides a safe, easily accessible and welcoming peer-oriented community where students can find acceptance, help, and a deep sense of connectedness.**

## Conclusion

It is our hope that you will now have a deeper understanding of why so many Gen Z students at your university appear distressed, and with that, you will, of course, appreciate the injustice of the many unhelpful and inaccurate adjectives and labels often used to describe Gen Z.

Generation Z students are not “weak” and they do not “lack resilience” at all. Rather, they demonstrate a significant level of positive coping in the face of the very real stresses they have been confronting most of their lives. Indeed, these students bring both their vision for a better world and their many strengths to bear on the problems facing not just their generation but our entire society, and in some cases our planet.

In particular, as mentioned earlier, Gen Z is widely known as one of the most activist of generations regarding social justice issues. Gen Z is leading the fight to raise awareness of, and take action on, climate change, as evidenced by Greta Thunberg’s School Strike for Climate and the UK’s Student Climate Network. And more broadly, UK Gen Zers are engaging in protests, increasing their political involvement, boycotting products that don’t match their social justice and sustainability values, and making similar value-based decisions about their career paths and the organizations/ companies at which they accept positions (Abraham, 2020; Francis, 2021; Deloitte, 2021; Gayle, 2020).

Speaking of their strengths, one UK student in a 2021 Togetherall survey said, “I feel like the current generation of students [is] a lot more open minded and willing to learn about people who are different from themselves.” And as another student said when interviewed for this paper, **“We have a different perspective than other generations. The way COVID has hit my generation—the way the world shut down. [There’s a] certain kind of resilience to Gen Z—we are more flexible, able to do things a different way.”**

And we will give the last word here to another member of Gen Z, words that eloquently speak to their generation’s resilience and resourcefulness:

**“[Our main strength is] our ability to come together. We disagree about a lot of things, but when there are big things happening—bad things—our generation is good at working together and coming up with solutions...People using their voices and speaking up and making a change is kind of awesome.”**



# References

Abraham, T. (June 26, 2020). YouGov. 84% of BAME Britons think the UK is still very or somewhat racist. <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2020/06/26/nine-ten-bame-britons-think-racism-exists-same-lev>

Ackerman, C.E. 24-02-2022. Learned Helplessness: Seligman's Theory of Depression (+ Cure). <https://positivpsychology.com/learned-helplessness-seligman-theory-depression-cure/>

Adam, E., Hittner, E., Thomas, S., Villaume, S., & Nwafor, E. (2020). Racial discrimination and ethnic racial identity in adolescence as modulators of HPA axis activity. *Development and Psychopathology*, 32(5), 1669-1684. doi:10.1017/S095457942000111X

American Psychiatric Association. (2020, October 21). New APA poll reveals that Americans are increasingly anxious about climate change's impact on planet, mental health. [Press release]. <https://www.psychiatry.org/newsroom/news-releases/climate-poll-2020>

American Psychological Association (2018). Stress in America: Generation Z. Stress in America™ Survey.

American Psychological Association. (2021, March 11). Stress in America 2021: One Year Later, A New Wave of Pandemic Health Concerns Young Americans continue to struggle. [Press release]. <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2021/one-year-pandemic-stress>

APPG for UN Women. (2021). Prevalence and reporting of sexual harassment in UK public spaces. [https://www.unwomenuk.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/APPG-UN-Women-Sexual-Harassment-Report\\_Updated.pdf](https://www.unwomenuk.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/APPG-UN-Women-Sexual-Harassment-Report_Updated.pdf)

Aronin, S. & Smith, M. (August 9, 2016). YouGov UK. One in four students suffer from mental health problems. <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/lifestyle/articles-reports/2016/08/09/quarter-britains-students-are-afflicted-mental-health>

Batty, D. (October 29, 2021). The Guardian. Research reveals rapes and assaults admitted to by male UK students. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/oct/29/research-reveals-rapes-and-assaults-admitted-to-by-male-uk-students>

Benner, A. D., Wang, Y., Shen, Y., Boyle, A. E., Polk, R., & Cheng, Y.-P. (2018). Racial/ethnic discrimination and well-being during adolescence: A meta-analytic review. *American Psychologist*, 73(7), 855–883. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000204>



# References

Bond, K. (May 22, 2022). Needles, Blackouts, and self-doubt: How the UK is fighting a spiking epidemic. Metro.co.uk. <https://metro.co.uk/2022/05/22/spiking-in-the-uk-how-were-responding-to-drink-and-needle-spiking-16665010/>

Bothwell, E. (April 12, 2018). Times Higher Education. (Is this internet only?) UK student suicide rate 'rises by 56 per cent in 10 years. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/uk-student-suicide-rate-rises-56-cent-10-years>

Brogli, E., Millings, A., & Barkham, M. (2018) Challenges to addressing student mental health in embedded counselling services: a survey of UK higher and further education institutions, *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 46:4, 441-455, DOI:10.1080/03069885.2017.1370695

Brown, P. (2016) The Invisible Problem? Improving students' mental health. HEPI. <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/STRICTLY-EMBARGOED-UNTIL-22-SEPT-Hepi-Report-88-FINAL.pdf>

Center for Collegiate Mental Health. (2016). 2015 Annual Report (Publication No. STA 15-108).

Center for Collegiate Mental Health. (2021). 2020 Annual Report (Publication No. STA 21-045).

Center for Collegiate Mental Health. (2022). 2021 Annual Report. (Publication No. STA 22-132).

Chen T., & Lucock, M. (2022) The mental health of university students during the COVID-19 pandemic: An online survey in the UK. *PLoS ONE* 17(1): e0262562. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0262562>

Christensen, J. F., Di Costa, S., Beck, B., & Haggard, P. (2019). I just lost it! Fear and anger reduce the sense of agency: a study using intentional binding. *Experimental Brain Research*, 237(5), 1205-1212.

Deloitte. (June 16, 2021). Half of UK millennials and Gen Zs feel stressed most of the time. <https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/press-releases/articles/half-of-uk-millennials-and-gen-zs-feel-stressed-most-of-the-time.html>

Deloitte. (July 12, 2021). Press Release. In its 10th year, the Deloitte Global Millennial and Gen Z Survey reveals two generations pushing for social change and accountability. <https://www2.deloitte.com/cn/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/pr-millennialsurvey-2021.html>

Deloitte Insights. (2020). 2020 Deloitte Global Millennial Survey Report Resilient generations hold the key to building a "better normal" (<https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/uk/Documents/about-deloitte/deloitte-uk-2020-global-millennial-survey-infographic.pdf>)



# References

DiversityUK. (June 1, 2021). Young Brits Believe the UK Has a Serious Racism Problem. <https://diversityuk.org/young-brits-believe-the-uk-has-a-serious-racism-problem/>

Drinkaware. (September 7, 2016). Sexual harassment tops list of risks for female students on nights out. <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/news/sexual-harassment-tops-list-of-risks-for-female-students-on-nights-out>

Dyson, M. P., Hartling, L., Shulhan, J., Chisholm, A., Milne, A., Sundar, P., ... & Newton, A. S. (2016). A systematic review of social media use to discuss and view deliberate self-harm acts. *PloS one*, 11(5), e0155813.

English, D., Lambert, S. F., Tynes, B. M., Bowleg, L., Zea, M. C., & Howard, L. C. (2020). Daily multidimensional racial discrimination among Black US American adolescents. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 66, 101068.

Elks, S. (July 21, 2020). Reuters. Students at leading UK university denounce sexual violence in online posts. <https://www.reuters.com/article/britain-women-rape-idUKL5N2ER4P8>

Evans, G. W., Li, D., & Sepanski Whipple, S. (2013). Cumulative Risk and Child Development. *Psychological Bulletin*. 139(6),1342-96. doi: 10.1037/a0031808

Faelens, L., Hoorelbeke, K., Cambier, R., van Put, J., Van de Putte, E., De Raedt, R., & Koster, E. H. (2021). The relationship between Instagram use and indicators of mental health: A systematic review. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*, 4, 100121.

Francis, P. (June 7, 2021). The Conversation. Black Lives Matter: how the UK movement struggled to be heard in the 2010s. <https://theconversation.com/black-lives-matter-how-the-uk-movement-struggled-to-be-heard-in-the-2010s-161763>

Gayle, D. (October 23, 2020). The Guardian. BLM UK gains legal status and renames as Black Liberation Movement UK. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/23/blm-uk-gains-legal-status-with-renaming-as-black-liberation-movement-uk>

Gluckman, N., Read, B., Mangan, K., & Quilantan, B. (2017). Sexual harassment and assault in higher ed: What's happened since Weinstein. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.



# References

Haggard, P. (2017). Sense of agency in the human brain. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 18, 196-207. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nrn.2017.14>

Henderson, M., Shure, N., & Adamecz-Völgyi, A. (2020): Moving on up: 'first in family' university graduates in England. *Oxford Review of Education*. DOI:10.1080/03054985.2020.1784714

Hickman, C., Marks, E., Pihkala, P., Clayton, S., Lewandowski, R. E., Mayall, E. E., ... & van Susteren, L. (2021). Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey. *The Lancet Planetary Health*, 5(12), e863-e873.

Hill, M., Farrelly, N., Clarke, C., & Cannon, M. (2020). Student mental health and well-being: Overview and Future Directions. *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 1-8. doi:10.1017/ipm.2020.110

House of Commons. (April 26, 2022). Spiking: Ninth Report of Session 2021-22. HC 967. <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/21969/documents/165662/default/>

Hughes, D. L., Watford, J. A., & Del Toro, J. (2016). A transactional/ecological perspective on ethnic-racial identity, socialization, and discrimination. *Advances in child development and behavior*, 51, 1-41

Ipsos. (September 25, 2017). Opinions of Generation Z's ambitions and priorities differ greatly between the generations. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/opinions-generation-zs-ambitions-and-priorities-differ-greatly-between-generations>

Jones, I. (March 31, 2021). PA Media. Latest figures on ethnic diversity in the UK. <https://ca.movies.yahoo.com/latest-figures-ethnic-diversity-uk-120914432.html>

Kwong, A. S., Pearson, R. M., Adams, M. J., Northstone, K., Tilling, K., Smith, D., ... & Timpson, N. J. (2021). Mental health before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in two longitudinal UK population cohorts. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 218(6), 334-343. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.2020.242>

Levy, D. J., Heissel, J. A., Richeson, J. A., & Adam, E. K. (2016). Psychological and biological responses to race-based social stress as pathways to disparities in educational outcomes. *American Psychologist*, 71(6), 455.

Livingston, J., Holland, E., & Fardouly, J. (2020). Exposing digital posing: The effect of social media self-disclaimer captions on women's body dissatisfaction, mood, and impressions of the user. *Body Image*, 32, 150-154.



# References

Makoni, A. (March 31, 2021). Evening Standard. 'MeToo movement' in British schools as more than 10,000 students share experiences of sexual harassment. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/metoo-movement-everyones-invited-school-students-sexual-abuse-b927084.html>

Marsh, S. (May 23, 2017). The Guardian. Number of university dropouts due to mental health problems trebles. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/may/23/number-university-dropouts-due-to-mental-health-problems-trebles>

McManus, S. & Gunnell, D. (2020). Trends in mental health, non-suicidal self-harm and suicide attempts in 16-24 year old students and non-students in England, 2000-2014. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 55, 125-128.

Mental Health Foundation. (July 15, 2019). Our history and future: 70 years of the Mental Health Foundation. <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/blog/our-history-and-future-70-years-mental-health-foundation>

Milotay, N., (2020). Next generation or lost generation? Children, young people and the pandemic, EPRS: European Parliamentary Research Service. <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/1426820/next-generation-or-lost-generation-children-young-people-and-the-pandemic/2041358/>

Mir, E., Novas, C., & Seymour, M. (2022). Social Media and Adolescents' and Young Adults' Mental Health. National Center for Health Research. <https://www.center4research.org/social-media-affects-mental-health/>

Neves, J. & Brown, A. (2022). Student Academic Experience Survey. HEPI. <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2022-Student-Academic-Experience-Survey.pdf>

O'Dea, S. (May 21, 2021). Statista. Smartphone ownership by age in the UK 2012-2021. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/271851/smartphone-owners-in-the-united-kingdom-uk-by-age/>

Office for National Statistics. (April 28, 2022). Crime in England and Wales: year ending December 2021. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingdecember2021>

Office for Students. (2019). Insight Brief 5. Mental health: Are all students being properly supported? <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/b3e6669e-5337-4caa-9553-049b3e8e7803/insight-brief-mental-health-are-all-students-being-properly-supported.pdf>





# References

Orben, A., Przybylski, A. K., Blakemore, S. J., & Kievit, R. A. (2022). Windows of developmental sensitivity to social media. *Nature Communications*, 13(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-022-29296-3>

Ott, H. (September 29, 2020). CBS News. Hundreds of stories of sexual assault at colleges around the world shared on anonymous Instagram accounts. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/st-andrews-survivors-instagram-scottish-university-sexual-assault/>

Pinkney, E. (April 16, 2018). UK Student Suicide Figures: What Actually Are They, and Should They Be Published? <https://medium.com/@mwproject/uk-student-suicide-figures-what-actually-are-they-and-should-they-be-published-cc6b28431fd8>

Pirkis, J., Rossetto, A., Nicholas, A., Ftanou, M., Robinson, J., & Reavley, N. (2019). Suicide Prevention Media Campaigns: A Systematic Literature Review. *Health communication*, 34(4), 402-414. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2017.1405484>

Racine, N., McArthur, B. A., Cooke, J. E., Eirich, R., Zhu, J., & Madigan, S. (2021). Global prevalence of depressive and anxiety symptoms in children and adolescents during COVID-19: a meta-analysis. *JAMA pediatrics*, 175(11), 1142-1150. DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2021.2482

Rao, A., & Napper, P. (2019). *The Power of agency: The 7 principles to conquer obstacles, make effective decisions, and create a life on your own terms*. St. Martins Press.

Rao, D., Elshafei, A., Nguyen, M., Hatzenbuehler, M. L., Frey, S., & Go, V. F. (2019). A systematic review of multi-level stigma interventions: state of the science and future directions. *BMC medicine*, 17(1), 41. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-018-1244-y>

Royal College of Psychiatrists. (May, 2021). *Mental health of Higher Education Students*. <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/improving-care/campaigning-for-better-mental-health-policy/college-reports/2021-college-reports/mental-health-of-higher-education-students> (CR231)

Seligman, Martin E. P. (2020, December 9-13). *Agency and Positive Psychology*. [Keynote address]. Evolution of Psychotherapy Conference, Anaheim, CA, United States. [http://staging.nxtbook.com/hmpglobal/brochures/eop\\_2020/stage.php?startid=8#/p/6](http://staging.nxtbook.com/hmpglobal/brochures/eop_2020/stage.php?startid=8#/p/6)

Selkie, E. M., Fales, J. L., & Moreno, M. A. (2016). Cyberbullying prevalence among US middle and high school-aged adolescents: A systematic review and quality assessment. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 58(2), 125-133.



# References

Shah, Z. (February 17, 2022). Kidscreen. Study notes: YouTube dominates online time, but Discord makes gains. <https://kidscreen.com/2022/02/17/study-notes-youtube-dominates-online-time-but-discord-makes-gains/>

Statista. (2022). <https://www.statista.com/statistics/528577/uk-population-by-generation/>

Stoll, N., Yalipende, Y., Byrom, N. C., Hatch, S.L., & Lempp, H. (2022). Mental health and mental well-being of Black students at UK universities: a review and thematic synthesis. *British Medical Journal Open access*. 12:e050720. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2021-050720

Student Minds. (2022). Student Mental Health: Life in a Pandemic, Wave III.

[https://www.studentminds.org.uk/uploads/3/7/8/4/3784584/student\\_minds\\_research\\_wave\\_iii\\_\\_2\\_.pdf](https://www.studentminds.org.uk/uploads/3/7/8/4/3784584/student_minds_research_wave_iii__2_.pdf)

Students Organising for Sustainability-United Kingdom (SOS-UK). (November 2021). Student Opinion: Spiking Amongst Students and Safety in Night Time Venues. [https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/6008334066c47be740656954/6241b4d7b2f4562eda9925b1\\_20211209\\_SOS-UK\\_Student%20Opinion\\_Experiences%20of%20spiking\\_inc\\_NUS.pdf](https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/6008334066c47be740656954/6241b4d7b2f4562eda9925b1_20211209_SOS-UK_Student%20Opinion_Experiences%20of%20spiking_inc_NUS.pdf)

Thorley, C. (2017). Institute of Public Policy Research. Not by Degrees: Improving student mental health in UK's universities. [https://www.ippr.org/files/2017-09/1504645674\\_not-by-degrees-170905.pdf](https://www.ippr.org/files/2017-09/1504645674_not-by-degrees-170905.pdf)

Topping, V. (March 27, 2021). The Guardian. 'Moment of reckoning' for UK schools as 5,800 accounts of abuse published. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/27/moment-of-reckoning-for-uk-schools-as-5800-accounts-of-abuse-published>

Twenge, J. (2017, September). Have smartphones destroyed a generation? *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/has-the-smartphone-destroyed-a-generation/534198/>

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). (March 9, 2022). Entry rates into higher education. <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/higher-education/entry-rates-into-higher-education/latest#title>

UK Student Climate Network. (2022). <https://ukscn.org/>



# References

Universities UK. (October 2019). Changing the Culture: Tackling gender-based violence, harassment and hate Crime: two years on. <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-07/uuk-changing-the-culture-two-years-on.pdf>

Universities, U.K. (2016). Changing the culture: Report of the Universities UK Taskforce examining violence against women, harassment and hate crime affecting university students. London

WARC. (January 31, 2020). Most children in the UK own a mobile by age seven. <https://www.warc.com/newsandopinion/news/most-children-in-the-uk-own-a-mobile-by-age-seven/43179>

Wright, B. (April 13, 2018). Happiful. UK Student Suicide Rate At All-Time High. <https://happiful.com/uk-student-suicide-rate-at-all-time-high/>

Xiao, H., Carney, D. M., Youn, S. J., Janis, R. A., Castonguay, L. G., Hayes, J. A., & Locke, B. D. (2017). Are we in crisis? National mental health and treatment trends in college counseling centers. *Psychological Services*, 14(4), 407.



# About the author

Katharine (Kate) C. Staley, Ph.D. is a licensed clinical psychologist and the Founder/Principal of River Rocks Consulting, based in the United States. River Rocks offers numerous consulting services in the mental health and wellness arena to educational institutions (K-12 and Higher Ed), nonprofit organizations, federally-funded programs, and the business community. Dr. Staley also offers coaching services through RRC. River Rocks is dedicated to helping individuals, parents, and organizations learn how to proactively support children, teens, and young adults so they can better manage adversities and reach their full potential. Dr. Staley most recently served as the Assistant Director of Community Education and Outreach at Penn State University's large student counselling centre (CAPS). Dr. Staley received her Masters and Ph.D. in Child Clinical Psychology from Penn State University, and her A.B. in Psychology from Brown University in Providence, RI.



## Author

**Katharine C. Staley, PhD**

Licensed Psychologist

Founder/Principal, River Rocks Consulting





**CONTACT US**

[info@togetherall.com](mailto:info@togetherall.com)

[togetherall.com](https://togetherall.com)

