

Exploring the Relationship between Mental Health Literacy, Wellbeing and Substance Use in UK University Students

Introduction

- Over the past decade, there has been a significant increase in UK students disclosing mental health conditions when applying to universities (UCAS, 2021).
- The prevalence of low wellbeing, low mental health literacy (MHL), and high substance use among students underscores the need for comprehensive research to explore the interrelationships between substance use, wellbeing, and MHL, aiming to fill a critical gap in understanding these variables within the student population (McAlaney et al., 2021; Wynaden et al., 2013; Furnham et al., 2011).
- The study sought to investigate the individual and combined relationships between substance use, wellbeing and MHL.

Materials and Methods

- Cross-sectional surveys were administered to 169 participants online, assessing MHL, frequency of substance use and wellbeing.
- MHL was measured using the Mental Health Literacy Scale (MHLS), which captures a comprehensive overview of attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge about mental health disorders.
- *Wellbeing* was measured using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS).
- *Substance Use* was measured by asking participants how frequently they a) drink beer, wine and stronger drinks, i.e. spirits, and b) how frequently they use hashish/marijuana, cocaine, ketamine, and MDMA.



Results

Examining the effect of gender on MHL

- Women displayed significantly higher scores of MHL than men, and being a woman was the strongest predictor of MHL, as revealed in the hierarchical regression model.

Investigating the relationship between substance use and MHL

- The more frequently people use substances, the lower their MHL was likely to be, though this effect was reasonably small.
- The more frequently people use ketamine, the lower their levels of MHL are likely to be.
- Alcohol use was associated with lower MHL levels.

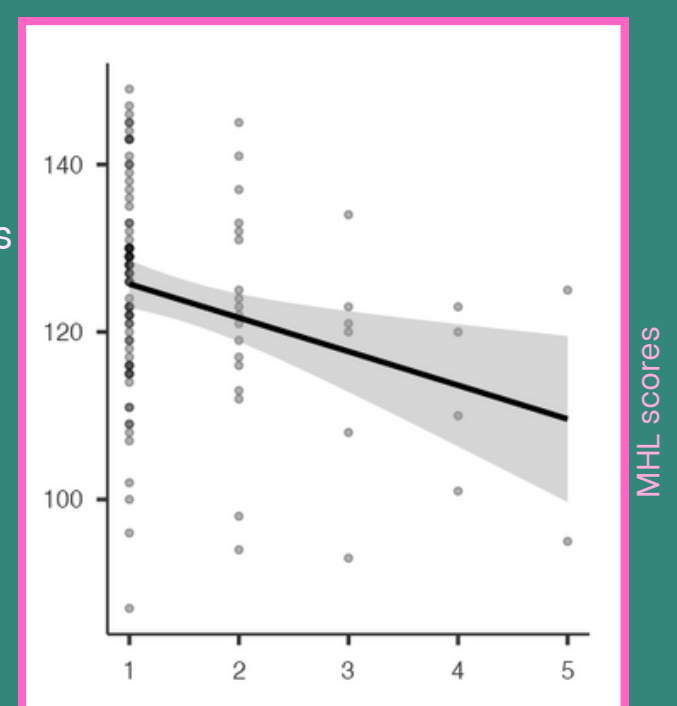
Exploring the relationships between wellbeing with MHL and substance use.

- There was no evidence to support that wellbeing is linked to lower levels of MHL.
- Ketamine was the only variable corresponding with substance use that significantly correlated with wellbeing. The finding suggests that the more frequently a person may use ketamine, the more likely they are to present lower levels of wellbeing.

Determining the combined effect of substance use and wellbeing on MHL

- A hierarchical regression model revealed that gender was the greatest predictor of MHL levels.

Ketamine scores



Correlation matrix showing the association between MHL scores and Ketamine

Conclusion

- The study revealed that cocaine, ketamine, and alcohol use were linked to decreased MHL, highlighting a negative association between substance use and MHL.
- The study reaffirmed higher levels of MHL in women than men; future research must explore the cause of this difference.
- The most notable finding was the negative correlation between ketamine and wellbeing, despite no other substance correlating with wellbeing. This may be because people see media coverage of the medical use of ketamine for depression, influencing them to take ketamine for undiagnosed mental health disorders. Further research is necessary to explore this (Palamar & Le, 2022; Khantzian, 1997).

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