

Research Article

# MENTAL HEALTH CARE NEEDS OF STUDENTS AT HO CHI MINH CITY OPEN UNIVERSITY, VIETNAM

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## Abstract

**Objective:** Today's life with changes in many aspects has brought people significant advantages and conveniences, but at the same time it has also caused physical and mental consequences for each person, especially mental health problems. Science has had many studies showing the impact of mental health on the quality of life, work efficiency, learning outcomes, etc. Therefore, when facing mental health problems, individuals need help to overcome the psychological problems they are facing to have healthier and more positive mental health. The scope of this study refers to the need for mental health care of students at Ho Chi Minh City Open University.

**Methodology:** This study, based on theories of mental health, models and solutions to support mental health care, we built a questionnaire with 05 groups of basic needs to help students improve their physical and mental health for healthy mental health. Specifically, the care needs for self-satisfaction; The care needs for healthy emotional expression; the need to care for satisfaction in relationships with others; the full care needs are able to maintain a stable psychological state in life and the care needs for improving the ability to cope with difficulties in learning and working. After completion, we conducted a pilot survey on a small sample to check the reliability of the questionnaire and calibrate the scale. With an alpha coefficient of 0.98-meaning that the scale has a high reliability coefficient.

**Results:** The mean score results show that all 05 groups of needs included in the study are of interest to the subjects and all have a desire to be met. Specifically: (1) The care needs for self-satisfaction has an mean score of 3.13 and a standard deviation of 0.73, a high level of need on the rating scale; care needs for expressing healthy emotions has an mean score of 3.45 and a standard deviation of 0.58, a very high level of need on the rating scale; the care needs for satisfaction in relationships with others has an mean score of 3.34 and a standard deviation of 0.65, a very high level of need on the rating scale; the full care needs are able to maintain a stable psychological state in life has an mean score of 4.42 and a standard deviation of 0.60, a very high need level in the assessment scale and the care needs for improving the ability to cope with difficulties in learning and working has an mean score of 3.19 and a standard deviation of 0.74, a high need level in the assessment scale.

**Conclusion:** The research results show that students of Ho Chi Minh City Open University have a very high level of mental health care needs. Students clearly show mental health care needs in all the contents that need to be cared for. Among the component needs of mental health care needs, the need that students pay more attention than the remaining needs is the full care needs are able to maintain a stable psychological state in life. The need that students care less about than the remaining needs is the care needs for self-satisfaction. *ASEAN Journal of Psychiatry, Vol. 25 (10) December, 2024; 1-13.*

**Keywords:** Needs; Care; Mental Health; Students; Physical and Mental Consequences

## **Introduction**

With the strong development of science and technology, especially the internet, social networks have created favorable conditions for people in general and students in particular to access, update information quickly, diversely, share, exchange, connect relationships etc. Besides, the internet supports students in researching, learning documents to serve the best learning results. However, besides positive information, students can also easily access inappropriate information, adversely affecting cognitive and personality development. Therefore, the school's task is to ensure political and ideological work for students, helping students feel secure in studying and practicing; helping students relieve anxiety and stress. From there, students will have appropriate attitudes and behaviors, especially more positive thinking in life, contributing to reducing behaviors that are not in accordance with school regulations, social ethical standards or laws, as well as increasing the effectiveness of personal activities.

Entering university, students' psychology has many changes and is easily affected. If the school does not have timely and appropriate measures and methods to support students, it can lead to consequences for mental health problems such as stress, depression, anxiety and other common mental health disorders can be mentioned. This is also easily seen through the media on newspapers and television about many cases of students who, because they do not receive timely counseling support from schools, teachers and families, have led to regrettable actions such as dropping out of school, breaking the law, depression and even suicide. Therefore, mental health support plays a very important role in the current context, not only for students themselves; for schools, for the education sector but also for society. Taking care of students' mental health so that they have the healthiest mind is the basic condition for students to perform their learning tasks or outside activities best. An environment where everyone feels comfortable, relaxed, etc., not only will the work be of high quality, but the atmosphere will also improve.

Students in general and students of Ho Chi Minh City Open University in particular have been facing a lot of pressure from issues related to friends, family, sexual orientation, future career orientation, etc. On the other hand, carrying out learning tasks in the current context also has many

things to pay attention to such as: Changed content, learning methods, higher requirements, more forms of testing and evaluation, etc. Therefore, if students do not have the skills to organize their lives, do not control or manage themselves, they will encounter many difficulties with mental health problems. Taking care of students' mental health, on the one hand, helps them study, have a better life and on the other hand, helps the school demonstrate its role and image in the eyes of students and in the eyes of society. This not only helps teaching and learning results to be effective, but also helps the school build the image of a model school, thereby raising the reputation of the school in the education system in particular and in society in general.

Based on the content of mental health care, we identify specific expression or manifestations of mental health care needs for students, including: (1) The need for self-satisfaction: Students perceive themselves as meeting their own expectations as well as self-assessing and recognizing their own value. From being satisfied with themselves, students will have a happy, comfortable life and easily cope with events and happenings around them; (2) Care needs for expressing healthy emotions: Students have been and are making outstanding progress compared to other ages. Entering student age and life along with physical changes, students will have a great need to express emotions. Once students are able to express their emotions correctly and appropriately, it will help them have the skills to organize their lives effectively. On the other hand, when expressing healthy emotions, students will also easily connect with people around them, communicate peacefully and easily feel the attention of everyone for them; (3) The need to be satisfied with relationships with others: When students are fully aware of their own values, it will be a condition for students to easily connect and build relationships around them. Students being satisfied with others also means that students will feel comfortable in relationships, know how to respect and understand each other to develop together; (4) The need to be able to maintain a stable psychological state in life: When students self-assess that their personal life has become stable, it is important that they have the desire to maintain this psychological state in a long-term, sustainable way to avoid changes that disrupt their lives. This means that students feel capable enough to meet their own demands on surrounding issues. Once students have the ability to maintain themselves, it also means that students

can also solve problems, overcome the pressures and difficulties of life and (5) The care needs for improving the ability to cope with difficulties in learning and working: No matter how stable life is, a person who wants to manage his life must anticipate difficulties and know how to come up with the most effective solutions. Once they know and anticipate, students will be more proactive with what will come, etc., from here students can help students increase their motivation to study and work because they feel confident and have faith in themselves.

**Materials and Methods**

*Characteristics of research subjects*

University is one of the important stages of every individual. University students at this time must go through a stage with many changes in life called emerging adulthood. Students are a group of people who mainly focus on learning and developing knowledge and skills at colleges and universities and often have typical psychological characteristics. One of the most important characteristics at this age is the development of self-awareness. This helps them understand themselves, self-evaluate their abilities and qualities, thereby set appropriate learning and training goals. Students often like to explore, search for new things and like to demonstrate their strengths through learning and cultivating knowledge. According to Perry, students in general and students at Ho Chi Minh City Open University experience the development of thinking processes through the stages of learning at university as follows [1].

- Freshmen often have a rigid and somewhat extreme view of the world and the knowledge they acquire. They often try to find absolute truth and knowledge.

- In next year, students are faced with different perspectives and theories, so they may feel that the knowledge they receive from lecturers is very messy and unclear.
- Junior (third-year) students begin to accept and appreciate the diversity of views, even conflicting ones, on the same issue. They begin to realize that people are entitled to different opinions and can look at an issue in many different ways depending on the circumstances.
- Gradually, students come to understand that they must choose and be responsible for specific values, options and perspectives, although initially they do this only in theory, in research or in multiple-choice exams.

Thus, from the first year (freshman) to the last year (senior), students move from an absolute perspective to a relative perspective and then to self-select the perspectives, ideas and beliefs that are appropriate for them. Perry says that intellectual development is an important feature of students’ cognitive processes [2,3].

Although students are often energetic and ambitious, their psychological development is uneven. Many factors such as family, learning environment and educational methods can affect their development. Despite having a certain level of education, students may still encounter limitations such as immaturity in thinking and acting, affecting their learning activities and efforts [4]. On the other hand, pursuing different fields and learning orientations between majors and majors, students also have certain differences.

Distribution of research samples: Total participants were 425 (after elimination of ineligible participants), specifically (Table 1).

**Table 1. Distribution of research subjects.**

		<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Gender	Male	170	40
	Female	255	60
Years of study	Freshman	127	30
	Sophomore	96	22
	Junior	109	26
	Senior	93	22

Majors	Sociology	89	21
	Linguistic	81	20
	Engineering	60	14
	Technology	67	16
	Economy	72	17
	Service	52	12
	Other	4	1
Programs	General	356	84
	High-quality	69	16
Personality types	Introversion	253	60
	Extraversion	172	40
Total		425	100

### *Research methods*

- Quantitative research using questionnaires as the main research method.
- Purpose is to measure the level of mental health care needs of students.
- Principles and methods of conducting the survey: Conducted through google form.

### *Scale*

Research on the mental health care needs of students at Ho Chi Minh City Open University. The survey consists of 35 items, each item is rated on a 4 point Likert scale: Level: 1=no need; 2=partially need; 3=need and 4=very high need [5].

The research content includes 5 groups of needs, specifically,

- The need for self-satisfaction, including items: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7.
- The need for healthy emotional expression, including items: 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14.
- The need for satisfaction in relationships with others, including items: 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21.
- The need to improve the ability to maintain a stable psychological state in life, including items: 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28.
- The need to improve the ability to cope with

difficulties in studying and working, including items: 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34 and 35.

Accordingly, the points are calculated by the total points of the component items (number of items, %, mean score and the higher the score on the items, the higher the level of needs [6].

**Scoring method:** The mean score is calculated by taking the highest score of the scale (4) minus the lowest score of the scale (1) and dividing by 4 levels. The difference in points for each level is 0.75 (Table 2).

### **Results**

#### *Care needs for self-satisfaction*

The results in Table 3 show that, care needs for self-satisfaction is rated by students at the level of “very necessary” with the mean (M) score of 3.13 and the Standard Deviation (SD) score of 0.73. This score shows that students of Ho Chi Minh City Open University have the need to be satisfied by others and to be self-satisfied to maintain a state of personal psychological balance [7-9].

#### *Care needs for expressing healthy emotions*

The results in Table 4 show that care needs for expressing healthy emotions is rated by students as a very high need with a mean (M) score of 3.45 and a Standard Deviation (SD) score of 0.58 (a score close to the absolute score of 4.00) [10-13]. This score shows that students at Ho Chi Minh Open University have a very high need for expressing emotions in a healthy way.

**Table 2. Level of assessment of mental health care needs.**

No.	Mean score	Level
1	1.00-1.75	Low
2	1.76-2.50	Medium
3	2.51-3.25	High
4	3.26-4.00	Very high

**Table 3. Care needs for self-satisfaction.**

Expression	Result										
	Score level								Mean	SD	Ranking
	1		2		3		4				
	No. of items	%	No. of items	%	No. of items	%	No. of items	%			
Be fully self-aware	6	1.4	58	13.6	202	47.5	159	37.4	3.21	0.72	3
Know how to accept and respect oneself	9	2.1	57	13.4	216	50.8	143	33.6	3.16	0.73	4
Be ready to accept the problems that arise in life (success or failure)	27	6.4	100	23.5	200	47.1	98	23.1	2.87	0.84	5
Recognize one's own shortcomings and accept them	13	3.1	53	12.5	182	42.8	177	41.6	3.23	0.78	2
Do everything in the best possible way	40	9.4	104	24.5	159	37.4	122	28.7	2.85	0.94	6
Feel joy in studying, work and life	18	4.2	50	11.8	174	40.9	183	43.1	3.23	0.82	2
Be able to be independent, live independently or be oneself	6	1.4	39	9.2	183	43.1	197	46.4	3.34	0.7	1
Total	6	1.4	53	12.5	189	44.5	177	41.6	3.13	0.73	-

**Table 4. Care needs for expressing healthy emotions.**

Expression	Result										
	Score level								Mean	SD	Ranking
	1		2		3		4				
	No. of items	%	No. of items	%	No. of items	%	No. of items	%			
Share one own feelings with people around	6	1.4	27	6.4	204	48	188	44.2	3.35	0.66	4
Acknowledge the emotions that come to one comfortably	3	0.7	27	6.4	178	41.9	217	51.1	3.43	0.64	2
Recognize the emotions that exist so one can control them better	3	0.7	30	7.1	186	43.8	206	48.5	3.4	0.65	3
Know many ways to release one onw emotions: Cry, write a diary	0	0	30	7.1	177	41.6	218	51.3	3.44	0.62	1
Able to seek professional counseling and therapy if emotions are beyond one’s tolerance	11	2.6	67	15.8	158	37.2	189	44.5	3.24	0.81	5
Know how to maintain positive emotions	7	1.6	35	8.2	184	43.3	199	46.8	3.35	0.7	4
Know how to create positive emotions, do things one likes to maintain a good mental state for oneself	5	1.2	59	13.9	203	47.8	158	37.2	3.21	0.72	6
Total	0	0	20	4.7	145	34.1	260	61.2	3.45	0.58	-

*The care needs for satisfaction in relationships with others*

The results in Table 5 show that the care needs for satisfaction in relationships with others is rated by students at a very high level of need with a Mean score of 3.34 and a SD score of 0.65. This score shows that students at Ho Chi Minh City Open University have a very high need to be satisfied with their surrounding relationships, from family to school and outside society [14,15].

*The full care needs are able to maintain a stable psychological state in life*

The results in Table 6 show that the full care needs are able to maintain a stable psychological state in life is rated by students at a very high level of need. This is also the highest need among the 05 groups of needs presented in the study. This need has a Mean score of 3.42 (approaching the

maximum score of 4.00) and a SD score of 0.60 [16]. This score shows that students at Ho Chi Minh City Open University have a very high need for care in order to be able to maintain their own stable psychological state in a sustainable way.

*The care needs for improving the ability to cope with difficulties in learning and working*

The results in Table 7 show that the care needs for improving the ability to cope with difficulties in learning and working are rated by students at a high level of need with a Mean score of 3.19 a high level in the assessment scale and a SD score of 0.74. This is a need group with a low score among the 5 proposed need groups [17]. This score shows that students of Ho Chi Minh City Open University have a need for care to have enough ability to improve their ability to cope with and overcome obstacles and difficulties in work and life.

**Table 5. The care needs for satisfaction in relationships with others.**

Expression	Result										
	Score level								Mean	SD	Ranking
	1		2		3		4				
	No. of items	%	No. of items	%	No. of items	%	No. of items	%			
Listen and empathize with those around one	0	0	50	11.8	172	40.5	203	47.8	3.39	0.67	3
Accept other people's differences	5	1.2	22	5.2	146	34.4	252	59.3	3.38	0.7	4
Open and friendly in communication with people around	3	0.7	36	8.5	174	40.9	212	49.9	3.4	0.67	2
Be open to receiving help from others and be willing to help others when they need it	5	1.2	6	1.4	170	40	244	57.4	3.47	0.65	1

Be willing to let go of relationships when they are not meaningful in one's life	3	0.7	35	8.2	167	39.3	220	51.8	3.33	0.77	5
Respect and try to maintain existing relationships	8	1.9	56	13.2	153	36	208	48.9	3.08	0.84	7
Willing to make friends with new people (friends, partners, guests, etc.)	5	1.2	47	11.1	158	37.2	215	50.6	3.32	0.66	6
Total	3	0.7	28	6.6	161	37.9	233	54.8	3.34	0.65	

**Table 6. The full care needs are able to maintain a stable psychological state in life.**

Expression	Result										
	Score level								Mean	SD	Ranking
	1		2		3		4				
	No. of items	%	No. of items	%	No. of items	%	No. of items	%			
Take time for fun and entertainment activities to balance one's mind	0	0	50	11.8	172	40.5	203	47.8	3.36	0.68	6
Always be ready to accept whatever happens	5	1.2	22	5.2	146	34.4	252	59.3	3.52	0.65	2
Participate in social activities	3	0.7	36	8.5	174	40.9	212	49.9	3.4	0.67	4
Avoid factors that can cause stress	5	1.2	6	1.4	170	40	244	57.4	3.54	0.59	1
Go to church/pagoda or places that can balance one's own mind	3	0.7	35	8.2	167	39.3	220	51.8	3.42	0.67	3



Learn how to organize everything (study, work and play) reasonably	8	1.9	56	13.2	153	36	208	48.9	3.32	0.77	7
Understand the importance of maintaining a balanced psychological state	5	1.2	47	11.1	158	37.2	215	50.6	3.37	0.73	5
Total	3	0.7	17	4	132	31.1	273	64.2	3.42	0.6	-

**Table 7. The care needs for improving the ability to cope with difficulties in learning and working.**

Expression	Result										
	Score level								Mean	SD	Ranking
	1		2		3		4				
	No. of items	%	No. of items	%	No. of items	%	No. of items	%			
Learn how to solve problems in life ,study or work	38	8.9	82	19.3	189	44.5	116	27.3	2.9	0.9	5
Have the skills to solve difficulties in life or study	13	3.1	75	17.6	205	48.2	132	31.1	3.07	0.78	4
Be ready to accept difficulties in life, see them as challenges/learning opportunities to grow up	6	1.4	68	16	173	40.7	178	41.9	3.23	0.76	3
Study and improve one’s own skills for a better life	19	4.5	47	11.1	177	41.6	182	42.8	3.23	0.82	3
Plan to organize one’s own life effectively	35	8.2	102	24	167	39.3	121	28.5	2.88	0.92	6
Take courses to improve one’s own life skills	11	2.6	38	8.9	163	38.4	213	50.1	3.36	0.75	2

Have the opportunity to interact with people in society to improve the skills necessary for life and future work	7	1.6	34	8	179	42.1	205	48.2	3.37	0.7	1
Total	8	1.9	50	11.8	184	43.3	183	43.1	3.19	0.74	-

**Discussion**

Entering the university environment, students have many psychological changes and is easily affected by many different factors. If the school does not have timely and appropriate measures and methods to support students, it can lead to consequences for mental health, etc. These include problems such as stress, depression, anxiety and other common mental health disorders [18,19]. This is also easily seen through the media on newspapers and television about many cases of students, because they do not receive timely counseling support from the school, teachers and family, have led to regrettable actions such as dropping out of school, breaking the law, depression and even suicide. Students’ mental health plays an important role in cognitive and social development and creates a balance of psychology, emotions and moral values. The students’ mental health issue is an increasing concern to universities, particularly in the context of students suffering many adverse impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic [20]. University counselling services in the United Kingdom and the United States are reporting an increase in help-seeking, with more students reporting more severe problems. Distress among young people has increased, particularly among women [21]. With more students entering university and with over 200 classes per year in some courses, students are receiving less individual support. Social media and financial hardship due to rising tuition fees have both been proposed as possible reasons to explain the increase and severity of mental health difficulties among college students [22].

The results in Table 3 also show that, in the expressions of care needs for self-satisfaction, the care needs to be able to be independent, live independently or be oneself are the top priority of the target groups with the Mean score of 3.34 and the SD score of 0.73, a very high level on the assessment scale [23]. The second priority that students are interested in are two groups of

needs: Care needs to feel joy in studying, work and life and care needs to recognize one’s own shortcomings and accept them with the same Mean score of 3.23 and the SD score of 0.82 and 0.78 respectively, a very high and high levels on the assessment scale [24]. With this result, we can understand that: Once students are supported to be able to understand themselves, know how to take care of themselves, they will realize their own value in relationships, in their own lives to happily and comfortably accept. Besides, creating a learning and playing environment without pressure of achievement and creating a healthy spirit will help students balance their emotional state, have a healthy spirit and maintain healthy mental health.

The results in Table 4 also show that, in the expressions of care needs for expressing healthy emotions, the needs to know many ways to release one’s emotions: Cry, write a diary is the top priority of the target groups with a Mean score of 3.44 and a SD score of 0.62, a very high level on the evaluation scale. The second priority that students are interested in is the group of needs to acknowledge the emotions that come to one comfortably with a mean of 3.43 and a mean of 0.62, a very high and high level on the evaluation scale. With this result, we can understand that: Once students are able to express their emotions in one way or another, they will feel comfortable and happy to balance their positive mental state in general and maintain a healthy mental state in particular. The group of care needs to know how to create positive emotions, do things one likes to maintain a good mental state for oneself, although students rated it as having little impact on maintaining a healthy mental state, it had a mean score of 3.24 approaching 3.25 (a very high level on the scale). From a psychological science perspective, we see that: Deep inside a person is the emotional world because it is something that is difficult to express on the outside and is also difficult to measure and evaluate. Once people

have to suppress their emotions, it will lead to many consequences every time they explode. Therefore, this score both shows the need of students to take care of their mental health and at the same time shows part of the emotional factor that is being suppressed in each individual.

The results in Table 5 also show that, in the expression of the care needs for satisfaction in relationships with others, the care needs to be open to receiving help from others and be willing to help others when they need it, is the top priority of the target groups with the Mean score of 3.47 and the SD score of 0.65, a very high level on the assessment scale. The second priority that students are interested in is the care needs to be open and friendly in communication with people around with the mean score of 3.40 and the SD score of 0.67, a very high and high level on the assessment scale. With this result, we can understand that: once students have the opportunity or are encouraged to open up and be willing to communicate with people around them, they will maintain a healthy mental state, nurturing a more positive psychology in life. This is a very basic need in the psychological life of each person. Once the need to communicate and establish social relationships is met, our psychological life will be better. This need is very normal and shows that students tend to approach the outside society to develop themselves. On the other hand, if the need to be satisfied with relationships is met, it will be a favorable condition to maintain a healthy mental health state. The results of this study are consistent with the proposed theoretical problem. Therefore, meeting the care need for students to feel satisfied with themselves and with the relationships around them will be a condition to improve their lives as well as maintain their healthy mental health state. Maintaining a stable state of psychology and life will help each individual realize their own value and know how to express emotions in a healthy way without hurting themselves or others. At the same time, they have fun in their daily work, are not too strict with themselves when they make mistakes and importantly, individuals do not try to do everything according to expectations that are too high compared to reality. From here, a state of mental health will be maintained and stabilized.

The results in Table 6 also show that, in the group of the full care needs are able to maintain a stable psychological state in life, the care needs to avoid factors that can cause stress is considered by students to be the most necessary with the

first rank, the Mean score is 3.54 and the SD is 0.59, a very high level, the highest among all 35 items included in the survey on the need to take care of mental health of students at Ho Chi Minh City Open University. This expression shows that students really want the care to minimize the factors that cause pressure, even stress in life as well as in work. From the perspective of psychological science, this result is completely consistent with the proposed theoretical research issues when discussing mental health. Besides, the care need to always be ready to accept whatever happens is also the second priority choice of students. One of the typical requirements of student life is the ability to be autonomous, to organize one's personal life and other issues such as work, love, etc. Therefore, student life is considered rich and diverse but also equally complex.

The results in Table 7 also show that, although the mean score of the entire group of needs is 3.19, with Mean score of 3.37 and a SD score of 0.70, the care needs to have the opportunity to interact with people in society to improve the skills necessary for life and future work, is the top priority for students. This expression also shows the sense of students' responsibilities with their own duties towards their future and career or the need to take courses to improve one's own life skills is also a priority for students with a mean score of 3.36, a very high level on the assessment scale and a SD score of 0.75. Particularly with the care need to plan to organize one's own life effectively, students are less interested. This issue is also easy to understand and suitable for students' psychology and age characteristics because at this age they can do this by themselves without needing attention or guidance.

## **Conclusion**

Taking care of students' mental health is very important to help students solve mental instability problems as well as maintain a healthy mental state. In order to take care of and support to improve students' mental health, it is necessary to understand students' needs. The study selected 5 groups of needs that play an important role in taking care of students' mental health. The research results showed that students have needs in all 5 groups of mental health care needs included in the study. In which, the need with the highest expression is the full care needs are able to maintain a stable psychological state in life and the need with the lowest expression is the care

need for self-satisfaction.

To meet the mental health care needs of students as well as maintain and enhance their mental health, we need to implement synchronous measures. Continue to implement mental health care activities for students that have been and are being implemented at the school, at the same time, it is necessary to improve and invest in mental health care activities for students to maintain their healthy mental health state.

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