

Suicides at record level among U.K. students

May 10 2018, by Michael Richards, John Marsden And Sean Creaney



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According to a recent study, the rates of suicide among students in the UK has [reached record levels](#). The international study, by Raymond Kwok and colleagues at Hong Kong University's Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention, provides further evidence that large numbers of students attending UK universities are struggling to maintain their

mental health.

The study contributes to growing evidence of a problem with [student mental health](#) – and confirms the findings of [previous studies](#) which suggest a fivefold increase in the number of students disclosing [mental health problems](#) over the last ten years. This comes on top of an increase in the number of students leaving courses because of mental health difficulties.

And while this issue isn't just limited to the UK, the scale of the crisis at UK universities has seen many counselling and [mental health services](#) overwhelmed by rising demand.

Why is this happening?

Students attend university at a developing stage of their young adulthood – and making this transition from home life to university life can be emotionally challenging. Leaving behind existing [support](#) networks can also be highly difficult for students.

Many students come from complex backgrounds where [mental health issues](#) have already manifested. And while there is a stereotype that students just "drink and take drugs", this obviously isn't the case for all students – which makes a student's [circumstances potentially complex](#).

The demands of academic life and the pressures of financially making ends meet can also be a real problem for students. And it's not just [undergraduate students](#) who feel the strain of student life either. In one survey of 2,279 Ph.D. candidates, many reported [high rates of anxiety and depression](#).

For these students, there is not just the demand to complete a Ph.D. thesis over three years, but also the teaching, admin, research – and that's

without mentioning the full-time and part-time jobs many students [have to take on to survive](#).

All of which no doubt contributes to university drop out rates and failure to produce academic work. For students, this adds to the tensions and feelings of low worth – which impact things well beyond [the confines of the university campus](#).

How to help students

To help students in need, more personalised forms of support are required – that acknowledge past traumas and distressed states – to address key sources of stress. In this way, there should be a concerted effort to tackle the root causes of the problem.

But this isn't just down to counselling services or university [mental health](#) teams, everyone on campus has a role to play – from the lecturers to support staff. This is important, because students might be more likely to turn to a regular friendly face for help, rather than reach out to an official support service.

Ultimately, universities have a responsibility to create safe spaces and to provide support beyond the campus. And with latest figures showing that the suicide rates among UK students have increased by [56% in the last ten years](#) – to overtake the suicide rate of young people in the general population for the first time – it is clear that a huge effort is needed to provide more support and reassurance to students, throughout their studies.

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