

HENDERSON, S. and FORBES-MCKAY, K. 2023. Understanding how to support university student wellbeing.
Presented at the 2023 Division of Academics, Researchers and Teachers in Psychology annual conference (DART-P
2023), 20 September 2023, [virtual event].

Understanding how to support university student wellbeing.

HENDERSON, S. and FORBES-MCKAY, K.

2023

Understanding how to support university student wellbeing

Dr Sarah Henderson and Dr Katrina Forbes-McKay

Email: s.e.henderson@rgu.ac.uk k.e.forbes-mckay@rgu.ac.uk

School of Applied Social Studies

Robert Gordon University



**ROBERT GORDON
UNIVERSITY ABERDEEN**

STUDENT WELLBEING AND SUPPORT NEEDS STUDY

Background

- HESA (2022) reported 122,530 students with a recorded mental health condition in the UK in 2016/17
- This has been exacerbated by COVID-19 and the resultant lockdown (Sahu 2020; Kafka 2020)
- Many students do not access support for mental health (Rosenthal & Wilson, 2008).
- The main barriers include limited awareness of services, fear of stigma (Harris et al. 2016), lack of available counsellor appointments (Mowbray et al. 2006), and not believing they need treatment (Czyz et al. 2013).



STUDENT WELLBEING AND SUPPORT NEEDS STUDY

Aims:

- To explore student views on the current provision of wellbeing support, the barriers to accessing support, and the implementation of an opt-in emergency contact scheme

Design and materials:

- A qualitative approach was employed using thematic analysis to code free-text responses on current support and opinions on an emergency contact scheme via a Jisc online survey

Sample:

- 113 students recruited from the School of Applied Social Studies
- 14 (12.4%) male, 95 (84.1%) females, 2 (1.8%) Selected “Prefer not to say” and 1 (0.9%) identified as other.
- 77 (68.1%) undergraduates and 36 (31.9%) postgraduate students
- Aged between 17 to 60 (Mean 28.18, SD 11.14).



STUDENT WELLBEING AND SUPPORT NEEDS STUDY

Awareness of support services

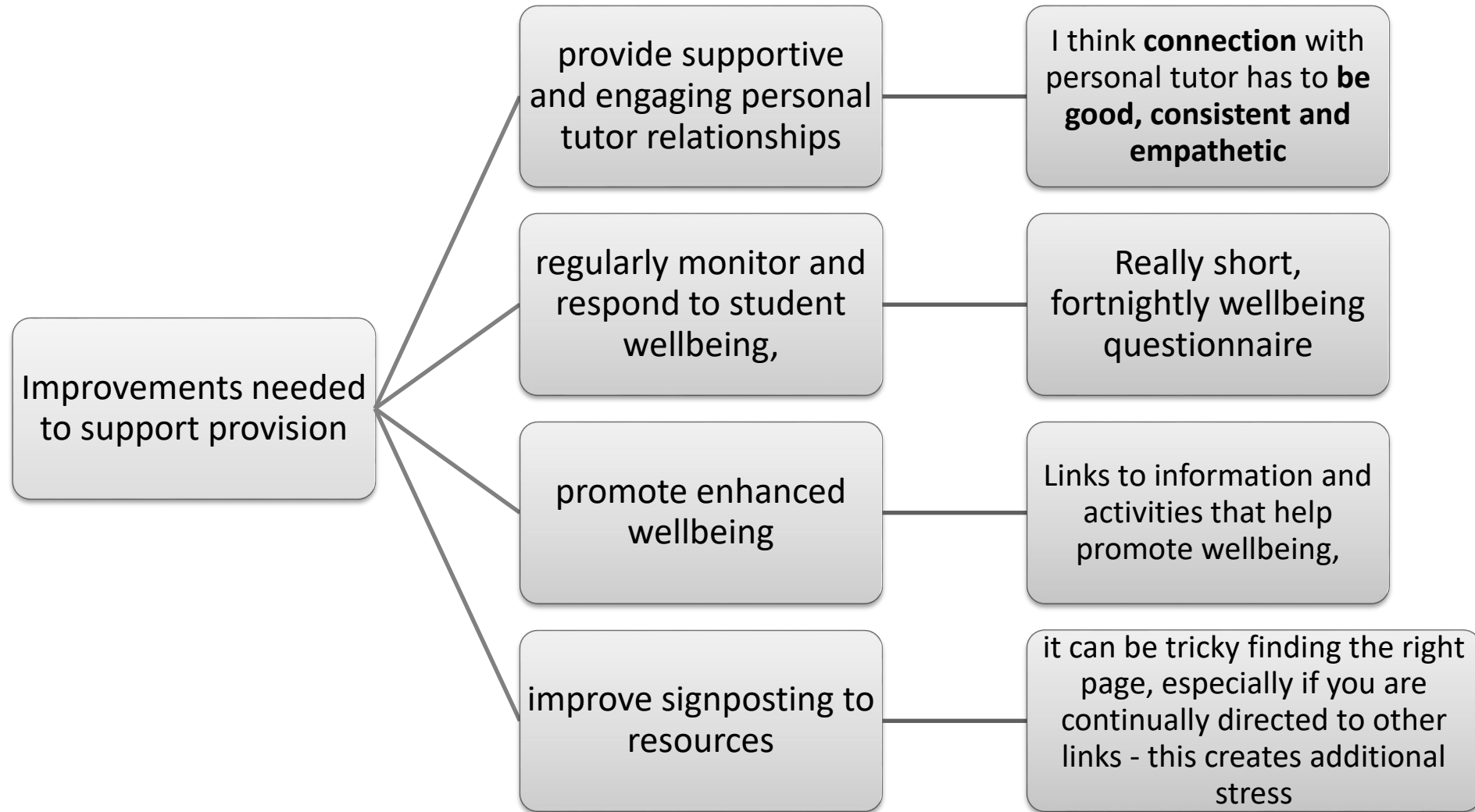
Financial support	Yes	62 (56%)
	No	49 (44%)
Study support	Yes	105 (93%)
	No	8 (7%)
Accommodation	Yes	50 (47%)
	No	57 (53%)
Mental Health Issues	Yes	93 (84%)
	No	18 (16%)

STUDENT WELLBEING AND SUPPORT NEEDS STUDY

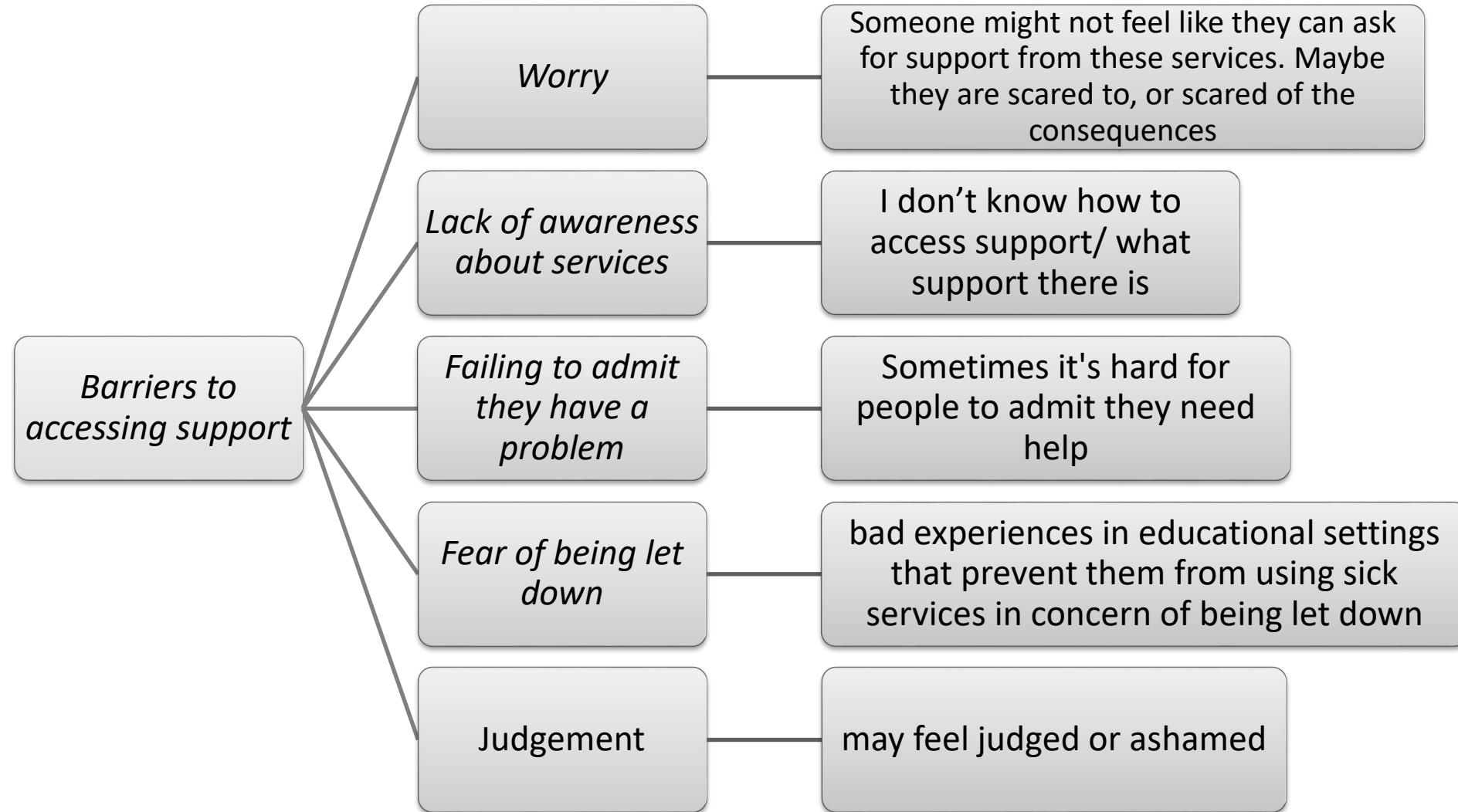
Awareness of support services

Physical Health Issues	Yes	59 (53%)
	No	52 (47%)
Crime Related Issues	Yes	49 (44%)
	No	62 (56%)
Barriers to accessing support	Yes	32 (29%)
	No	80 (71%)

FINDINGS: THEMATIC ANALYSIS IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED



FINDINGS: THEMATIC ANALYSIS BARRIERS TO ACCESS



FINDINGS: STUDENT VIEWS OF THE EMERGENCY CONTACT SCHEME

DO YOU THINK THE SCHEME IS A GOOD IDEA?

- 108 (95.6%) students were in favour of the scheme
- Of those opposed; 3 (2.7%) were undergraduate students, 2 (1.8%) were postgraduate

REASONS FOR OPPOSITION

May cause more problems

Removes agency/infantilising

Named person is not helpful

Wants to be contacted first

Lack of named person



NEXT STEPS

- Students with mental health difficulties are more likely to drop out of university (Richardson, 2015), and less likely to attain higher grades (Eisenberg et al., 2009)
- Informed the development of:
 - Wellbeing Monitoring Tool to identify concerns and signpost to relevant areas of support (developed by Katrina Forbes-McKay and Shonagh Douglas)
 - Trusted Contact Scheme
 - Improved Personal Tutor (Pastoral Support) Policy
- Trusted Contact Scheme research will continue to be extended across the University



REFERENCES

- Czyz, E. K., Horwitz, A. G., Eisenberg, D., Kramer, A., & King, C. A. (2013). Self-reported barriers to professional help seeking among college students at elevated risk for suicide. *Journal of American college health*, 61(7), 398-406.
- Eisenberg, D., Golberstein, E. & Hunt, J. (2009). Mental Health and Academic Success in College, *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy*, Vol. 9, 40-40.
- Harris, P. J., Campbell Casey, S. A., Westbury, T. & Florida-James, G. (2016). Assessing The link between stress and retention and the existence of barriers to support service use within HE. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 40(6), 824- 845.
- HESA. (2022). Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2020/21. <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/25-01-2022/sb262-higherEducation-student-statistics/numbers>
- Kafka, A. C. (2020). *Shock, fear, and fatalism: as coronavirus prompts colleges to close, students grapple with uncertainty*. [Online]. Washington, DC: The Chronical of Higher Education. Available from: <https://www.chronicle.com/article/shock-fear-and-fatalism-as-coronavirus-prompts-colleges-to-close-students-grapple-with-uncertainty/> [Accessed 18 March 2022].

REFERENCES

- Mowbray, C. T., Megivern, D., Mandiberg, J. M., Strauss, S., Stein, C. H., Collins, K., Kopels, S., Curlin, C., & Lett, R. (2006). Campus mental health services: Recommendations for change. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 76(2), 226-237.
- Richardson, J.T. (2015). Academic attainment in students with mental health difficulties in distance education. *International Journal of Mental Health*, 44(3), 231-240.
- Rosenthal, B. & Wilson, W. C. (2008). Mental health services: Use and disparity among diverse college students. *Journal of American College Health*, 57(1), 61-68.
- Sahu, P. (2020). Closure of Universities Due to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Impact on Education and Mental Health of Students and Academic Staff. *Cureus*, 12(4), e7541.