

**Title:** The impact of nutritional know-how on the well-being of socio-economic deprived students: The role of Higher Education Institutions – An exploratory journey

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** This research was undertaken in a West Midlands HEI with a significant number of students from socio-economically deprived backgrounds. Increasing interest has been shown into the susceptibility of students to mental health problems (Newbigging & Parsonage, 2017). The number of young people (O'Hara, 2018) and University students experiencing mental health issues is high, ranging from depression (62%), anxiety (69%) and stress (50%) (University College Birmingham, 2018). This paper reports on an initiative to organise a workshop around nutrition and how it affects mood and cognitive power hence equipping this group with non-medical interventions to assist them through their personal and student life.

**Approach:** As an institution we are committed to a holistic student experience and how this can be enhanced. Since Hippocrates we see reference to the connections between mental well-being and overall health. During pastoral care several mental health issues were identified. The workshop was designed to provide students with nutritional advice, practical non-expensive tips on creating habits for a healthier mind and body. The workshop focused on nutrition and neuropsychology.

**Practical implications:** With “aggregate economic and social cost of mental health problems in the West Midlands around £12.6 billion in 2014-15” (Newbigging & Parsonage, 2017, p. 5), school based mental health promotion representing 10% out of 349 participating countries as mentioned in a World Health Organisation report (2017), mental health problems affecting 1 in 10 children with insufficient interventions in place (Mental Health Foundation, 2018), antidepressant drug prescriptions up by 108.5% in ten years (Brown & Triggles, 2018) a re-evaluation on the issue including a different approach can potentially have multiple benefits.

**Originality / value:** Limited research exists, especially in the UK, in relation to nutrition and well-being in tertiary education. Interventions of that nature can have a stronger impact compared to physical education interventions as shown in a metanalytic study conducted by Plotnikoff, et al (2015) based on 41 studies, although the focus was on weight loss. This proposed approach can open-up possibilities with positive impact on the vital region of West Midlands in terms of sustainable healthy outputs impacting society and health services overall.

**Keywords:** Nutrition, well-being, students, mental health, sustainability, West Midlands region

**Paper category:** Research paper / Case study

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