

The client organisation and context: UK University

Student wellbeing is becoming an increasing cause for concern in the UK, and recent research suggests over a third of UK-based students meet the clinical criteria for a mental health disorder (Macaskill, 2013). Furthermore, five times more students disclose a mental health condition than 10 years ago, and triple the number of students drop out of university as a result of psychological problems (Thorley, 2017). Ongoing untreated mental health and wellbeing issues amongst students are likely to interfere with their study progression and retention (Blanco et al. 2008), however student support services have not kept pace with the increased demand (e.g. Macaskill (2013) estimates only 5% of students receive the help they need). Somewhat ironically, there is a dearth of academic research into the mental health of students studying Psychology, however, there is reason to believe that a higher proportion of mental health issues may exist in this population, as many choose to study the topic as a result of personal experience.

Why and how Sophrology was used

The Sophrology sessions were offered to student members of the University Psychological Society.

Goals of the programme:

Given the stresses associated with undergraduate and postgraduate study, and in light of the research around student mental health, the primary aim of the internship was to promote wellbeing by teaching participants the three main principles of Sophrology, and exploring ways to integrate these into everyday life:

- Body consciousness –reconnecting with the body; increase awareness of physical sensations and feelings; releasing tension. Promoting a calm mind through a relaxed body.
- Objective reality – seeing things as they really are, without judgment or expectations.
- Positive action – focusing on the positive, rather than the negative (or the ‘problem’). Strengthening and enhancing the positive aspects of ourselves (including our abilities, capacities and experiences) to help us reach our potential.

High-level overview of the programme:

A series of 8 sessions, of 1 ½ hours each took place in the evenings. Each session was designed so that it had a specific aim relevant to the students, including: letting go, fostering positivity, improving self-confidence and resilience, enhancing focus and concentration, managing stress and worry.

Impact

All participants found the overall experience of Sophrology enjoyable, helpful and beneficial, and hoped to continue with it in the future. They all said they would recommend it to their friends.

Participants were asked to indicate how they rated their overall experience of Sophrology on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly disagree, and 5 being strongly agree. Results can be seen in the table below.

	Average Score
I enjoyed it	5
I found it helpful	4.5
It met my expectations	4.5
I found the sessions easy to follow	5
It has been beneficial to me	5
I would recommend it to my friends	4.75
I will try to practice Sophrology in the future	5

Positive changes highlighted by participants included:

- Energy Level,
- Quality of sleep
- Increased objectivity
- Levels of stress/anxiety
- General wellbeing
- Concentration/focus
- Motivation
- Self-confidence

Learning and recommendations for the future

It was surprisingly difficult to get people to sign up to the sessions, despite being an audience who are (1) in need of welling support and (2) intrinsically interested in strategies to promote wellbeing (due to the nature of the course they are studying). This indicates a need for increased education and awareness of Sophrology and its benefits.

It was very interesting to observe how the same Sophrology session affected or appealed to participants in different ways (but was largely positive overall). This shows how potentially useful transdiagnostic wellbeing techniques can be, as they can benefit people suffering from a variety of different complaints.

A formal strategy for encouraging inter-session homework practice, perhaps using some kind of prompt would help participants further.

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