

# Beyond the Student Mental Health Crisis: a Transatlantic Collaborative Symposium

25 March 2025

Session abstracts

**Keynote, 13:10 – 14:00 GMT**

**Concept creep and the mental health crisis**

**Nick Haslam, University of Melbourne**

In this talk I will outline a program of research on historical shifts in the expansiveness of concepts of mental illness. I will explain these historical trends as examples of the wider phenomenon of 'concept creep' - the semantic inflation of harm-related concepts - and discuss their cultural drivers. I will then discuss research on the implications of holding broad concepts of mental illness, which include a propensity to self-diagnose that may have troubling effects. Concept creep has its greatest influence on young people, so understanding how expansive concepts of mental illness can undermine their mental health should be a priority for researchers and mental health workers.

**Keynote, 14:45 – 15:25 GMT**

**The problem with mental health awareness**

**Lucy Foulkes, Prudence Trust Research Fellow, University of Oxford**

In recent years, there have been extensive efforts to raise public awareness of mental health problems, with the goal of reducing stigma, improving mental health literacy and encouraging help-seeking. For some, these efforts are essential and will mean access to treatment and a reduction in symptoms. However, it is also vital to assess whether, for others, the current approach to mental health awareness might be causing unintended harm. In this talk I will discuss the growing body of quantitative and qualitative research that highlights the potential negative effects of mental health awareness efforts in young people, particularly regarding how young people interpret and respond to their psychological difficulties.

**Keynote, 15:25 – 15:55 GMT**

**Crisis or continuity? Using history to think about student mental health**

**Sarah Crook, Swansea University**

Concern about student mental health is not new. Indeed, general practitioners and psychiatrists affiliated with universities have been sounding the alarm about student wellbeing since the Second World War, while students themselves vocally agitated for increased mental health provision during and after the 1960s. This paper looks to this history to re-examine the concept of crisis and argues that understanding the

development of services shines a new light on what is sometimes seen as a distinctively contemporary problem.