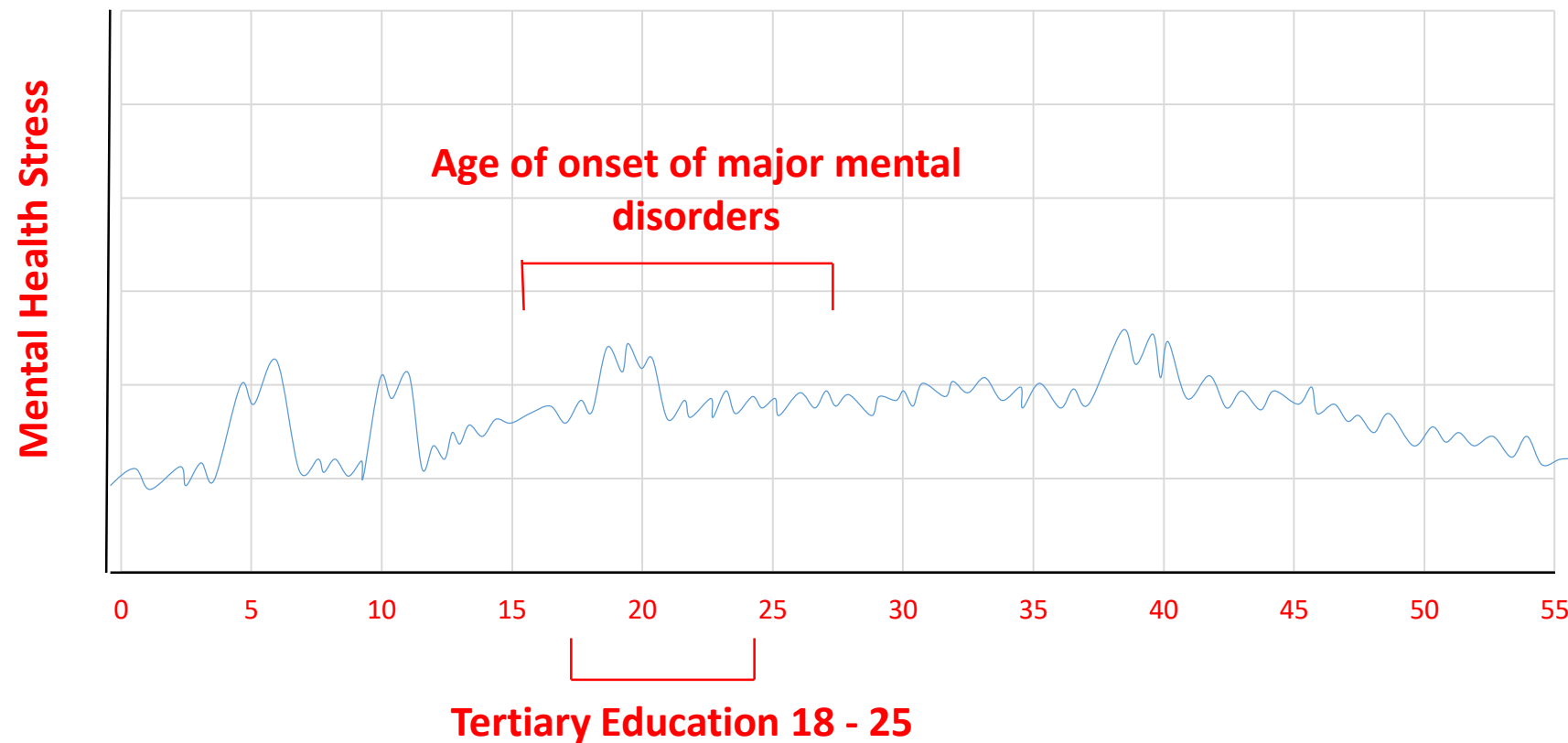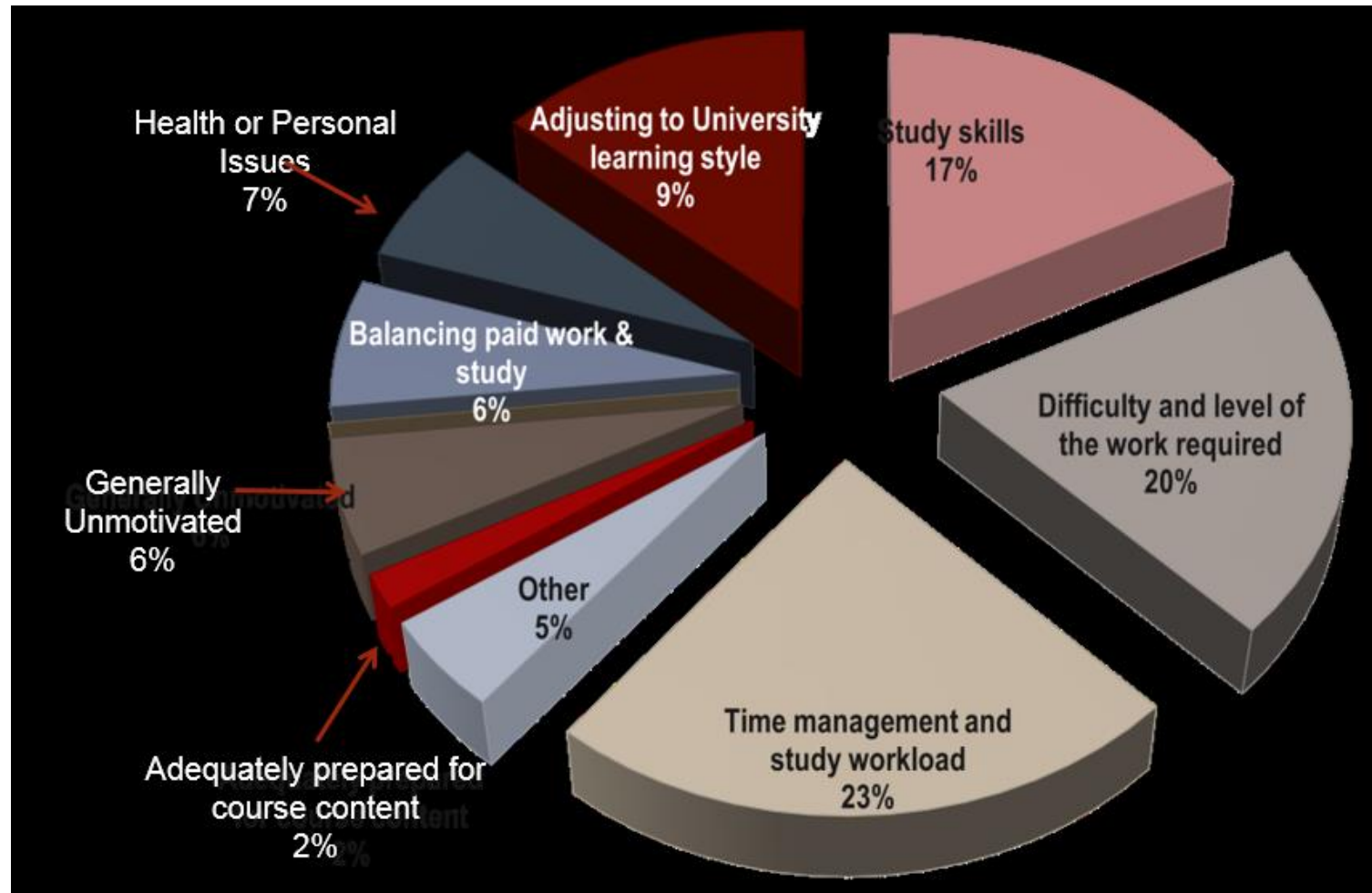# Student Wellbeing and Self-Directed Learning: The Role of Belonging and Help-seeking Behaviour

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Psychological Stress Over The Life Span

Self-directed Learning and Problems in Adjustment to University

The Importance of Belonging in Adjustment to University

- For almost 30 years, many have emphasised the importance of a student's sense of belonging in adjusting to the stress of University (e.g. Tinto, 1987: Wilson et al. 2015)

- Research shows that a sense of belonging predicts attrition among undergraduate and postgraduate students (e.g., Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Krause, 2005, Thomas, 2015)

- Belonging is also closely connected with completing students' ratings of satisfaction with their courses and of psychological well-being
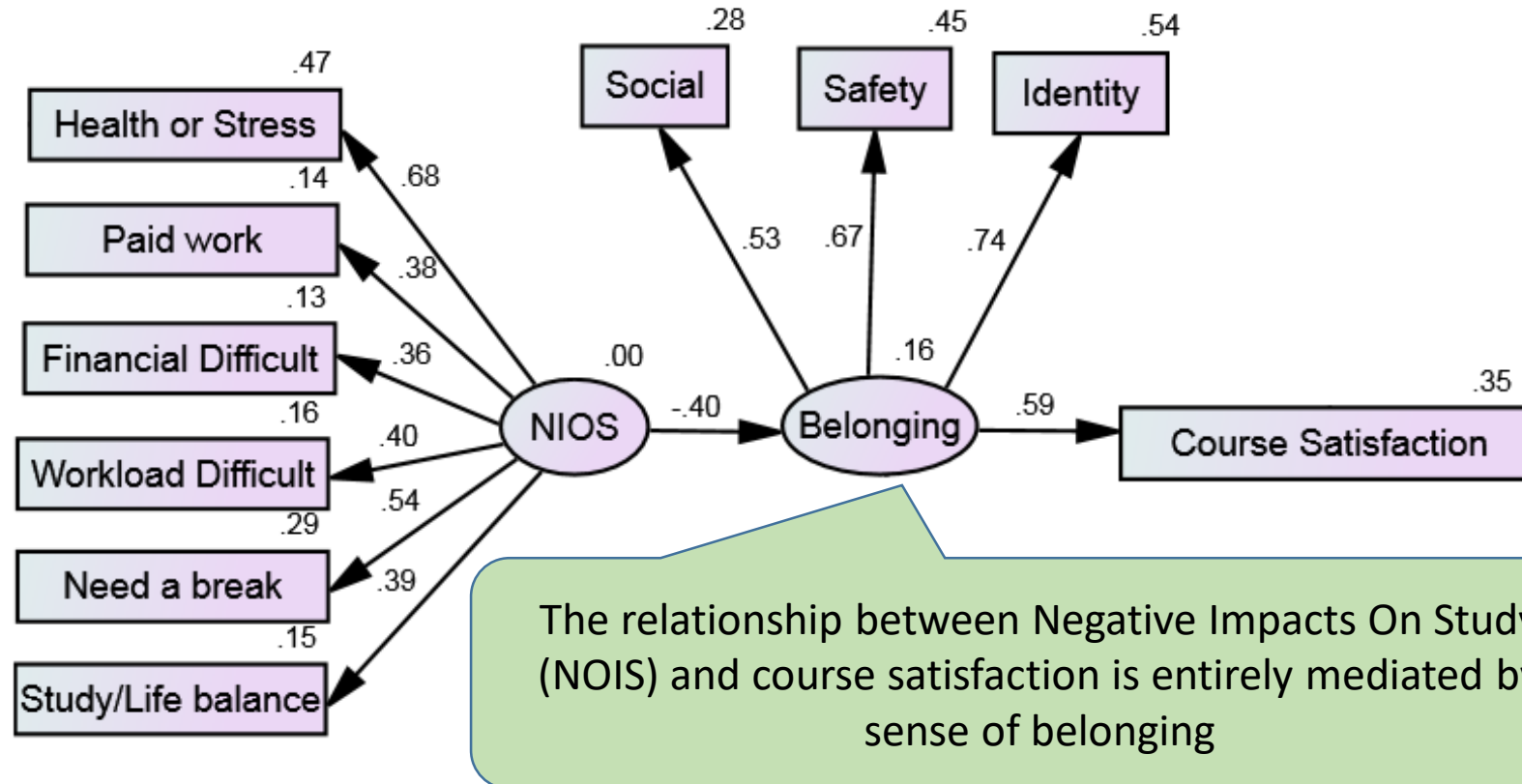
The Nature of Belonging

- Baumeister and Leary (1995) built on Maslow's earlier hierarchy of needs ideas and defined belongingness as a personality construct

- 'a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting positive and significant personal relationships' (p 497)

- They saw belonging as the experience of consistent interactions with others and persistent caring from others and this is a prerequisite of the desire to learn

- At university the construct is broader relating to **social relationships**, the **campus environment (feeling safe)** and **identification with the university** (Slaten et al., 2017)

Belonging Determines the Influence of Negative Impacts on Study

The relationship between Negative Impacts On Study (NOIS) and course satisfaction is entirely mediated by sense of belonging

Belonging and Well-being

Belonging contains a fourth component of well-being that reflects personal satisfaction and an understanding of who one is (Ahn & Davis, 2020)

- Subjective well being is hedonistic it involves general life satisfaction, frequent experience of positive affect and infrequent negative affect.

- Psychological well-being is 'Eudaimonic' focused on the path

    toward self-fulfilment and the pursuit of long term goals:
    - Purpose in life
    - Autonomy
    - Self-acceptance
    - Personal Growth
    - Environmental Mastery
    - Positive Relations with Others
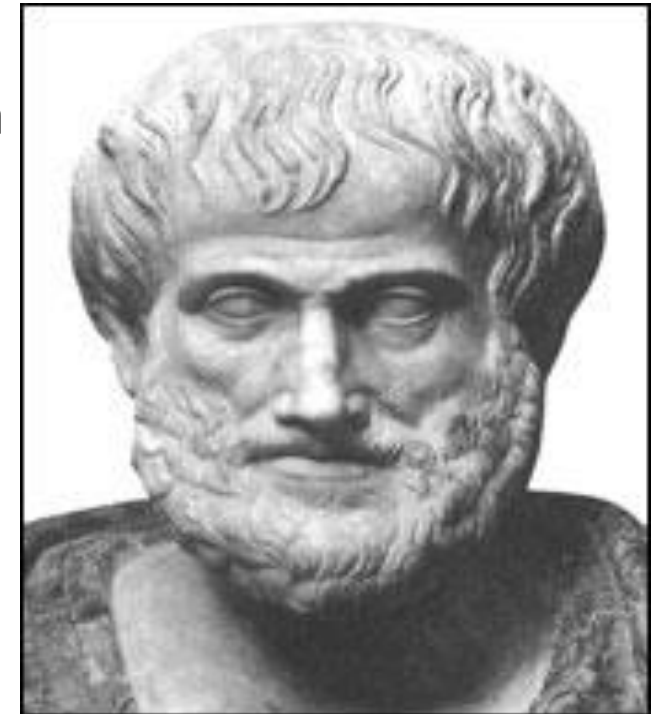
Belonging encourages Help-seeking Behaviour

- Help-seeking is an important adaptive strategy adopted by self-regulated learners. It is linked to belonging and directly associated with higher academic grades and coursed satisfaction

- Help-seeking is a complex process that requires cognitive, social and motivational processes. Forethought is required to recognise the need for help and social competencies are involved in actually asking for help

- The process of help-seeking therefore involves a series of decisions
  Deciding to seek help; deciding from whom to seek help; and deciding the form of help to seek.
  Belonging most strongly influences the initial decision to seek help

'The students with the greatest need for help are the ones least likely to seek help'

Why Don't Students Seek Help?

Mental health (Wynaden, Wichmann, & Murray, 2015)

- Unsure they had a problem or felt symptoms not serious enough
- Afraid, anxious, embarrassed or ashamed
- Perceived lack of time to attend a session
- Felt they should be able to handle their own problems
- Issues of service availability/concerns professionals cannot help

Academic problems (Finney, Barry, Horst & Johnson, 2018)

- Unsure of their need for help
- Negative attitude to help-seeking (feel it reflects personal failure)
- Unsure of what type of help they may need
- Unsure where to go for help

Belonging, Well-being & Intrinsic Motivation Predict Comfort in Help-seeking

Wellbeing and Intrinsic motivation Correlations with Comfort in Help-seeking		Mental Health Concerns Correlations with Comfort in Help-Seeking	
Belonging	.39**	Loneliness	-.34
Psychological Well-being	.38 **	Social Anxiety	-.34*
Subjective Well-being	.33 *	Worry	-.28**
Intrinsic Motivation	.30**	Depression	-.25

Belonging in the Classroom (Rixon et al., 2020)

Interpersonal Dimension

How can interpersonal relationships be better developed in the learning process?

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- Through teacher behaviour & attitudes
- Valuing social interactions
- Focusing on class participation mechanics
- Ensuring inclusive learning environments

Environmental Dimension

How can place and space be used to better build connection amongst learners?

- Using small classes and/or small group work
- Through the creation of communities
- Allowing proximity to teachers
- With careful design of virtual spaces

Temporal Dimension

When can sense of belonging strategies and practices be employed?

- In the transition period, first weeks, & continuously
- In cohorts & pods of students

Curricular Dimension

How can curriculum and assessment design, enhance and value sense of belonging?

- Using assessment strategies
- Implementing proven interventions
- Adopting active learning
- Utilising specific tools & resources

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Some Discussion Questions

- How do we foster belonging in our work in supporting students?

- What role do we play in helping academics to do this?

- How do we encourage help-seeking when working with students?

- How do we promote help-seeking related to self-directed learning?