

Advancing Youth Health and Wellbeing at a Health-Promoting University: The QU Health Research Network Group

Members from QU Health:

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Mission

The mission of the Youth Wellbeing Research Network (RNG) is to foster a collaborative research ecosystem that produces scientific evidence, contextual data, and best practices to promote the holistic wellbeing of young people. Through a multidisciplinary approach, the network conducts comprehensive studies on the multiple factors affecting youth health and contributes to the advancement of global scientific knowledge.

The Youth Wellbeing Research Network (RNG) was established in 2021 and comprises 22 faculty members from the health sector at



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Qatar University, along with colleagues from the university's Student Counseling Center and partners from Hamad Medical Corporation. The group began its work by assessing the health

status and needs of Qatar University students, using a comprehensive and integrated definition of health based on the perspectives of students, faculty, and key stakeholders on campus.

The group aims to enrich evidence-based policies, programs, and services that seek to improve the physical and mental health of young people, particularly Qatar University students, both nationally and internationally.

Goals

Objective 1: Assess the needs of Qatar University students by gathering the views of students and key informants, including identifying health challenges and gaps in resources to guide future interventions.

Objective 2: Conduct a systematic survey of the physical environment at the university and review relevant policies to identify the supporting factors and gaps that affect student health.

Objective 3: Develop and propose evidence-based interventions that respond directly to specific needs, in line with the pillars of the "Healthy University".

To achieve these objectives, an explanatory sequential mixed-methods study design was adopted, where quantitative data were first collected and analyzed, followed by a qualitative data collection phase to provide a deeper understanding of the health priorities and needs of the population. This design enabled the triangulation of data in both phases, enhancing the credibility, reliability, and objectivity of the results.

A multidisciplinary team developed a health questionnaire to assess the health status and needs and assets of university students through six axes:

1. Demographic data.
2. Physical and mental health.
3. Lifestyle (including physical activity, diet, and smoking.)
4. Oral health and quality of life.
5. Health Literacy
6. Use of healthcare services.

Results

- The applied validated tools included the University Student Health Questionnaire (2021, University of Minnesota), the International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ-SF), the Oral Health Impact Scale on Quality of Life (OHIP-5), the European Health Awareness Questionnaire (HLS-EU-Q16,) and the YHCSUN questionnaire.
- 904 students from QU participated in the quantitative assessment through an electronic questionnaire conducted between 2021 and 2022, and the data was cleaned and processed in 2023 to ensure that it is representative of the university's students.
- This was followed by data analysis to answer specific research questions aimed at understanding the health needs and assets of university students. Ongoing analyses included descriptive analysis (e.g., prevalence of risk factors and health behaviors) and correlational or comparative analysis (e.g., the relationship between demographic factors and health behaviors).
- About six scientific papers have been prepared, of which two papers dealing with mental health and dietary patterns have been accepted for publication.
- Of the 812 participants (mean age 21.4 years, 84.6% female) 45.5% reported a history of mental illness, most notably anxiety (38.2%,) and depression (27.9%.) A dose-response relationship was also observed between the number of life events and the likelihood of mental illness diagnosis . However, only 7.6 % of students received psychological counseling, suggesting the need for strategies to promote resilience and mental well-being.

Based on these findings, the group conducted qualitative research to explore the factors influencing mental health literacy and help-seeking behavior among Qatar University students. This research used a constructive interpretive framework and relied on semi structured interviews with the students. This work formed the basis of the 2024 Graduation in Public Health project for students Maryam Al-Sulaiti,

Moudi Al-Kuwari, Rahaf Al-Kuwari, and It was supervised by Dr. Ghadir Al-Jayyousi, and was titled **"Contextualizing Mental Health Literacy and Help-Seeking Behavior of University Students in Qatar: A Conceptual Framework,"** which won first place in the poster category at the Fourth Health Literacy Conference at Sidra Medicine.

In order to achieve the second objective related to the environmental survey within the needs assessment, students Aisha Al-Ahmad and Fatima Al-Habshi, under the supervision of Dr. Ghadir Al-Jayyousi and Dr. Lily Ohara, carried out the project **"Assessing the characteristics of outdoor green spaces at the Qatar University campus," which was submitted for publication**.

Additional Achievements of the Youth Wellbeing Research Group

The group supports the Qatar University Health Project by providing data that reflects healthy campus indicators. The results of the Youth Wellbeing Initiative contribute to the review of ongoing policies and the development of pro-health strategies at the university level. The initiative was presented to the WHO team during their visit to the Qatar University campus to assess and follow up on these indicators.

The group also hosted notable speakers, including Dr. Catherine Lust (Director of Research at Boynton Health Center, University of Minnesota), developer of the University Student Health Survey, and Dr. Mohammed Siddiq Maghzoub, Acting Director of the Student Advising Center at Qatar University.

The initiative has been presented at prestigious international conferences, including:

- International Conference of Health-Promoting Universities 2025 – University of Limerick, Ireland.
- 25th International Union for Health Promotion and Health Education (IUHPE) World Congress – Abu Dhabi
- World Nutrition and Public Health Conference 2024 – London

It has also been presented at local conferences, such as the Ministry of Public Health's Healthy Cities Project and the MENARAT Regional Initiative for Adolescent Health Research and Training in the Middle East and North Africa.

Currently, machine learning models are being applied to data to predict health and well-being, in collaboration with Al-Quds University in Palestine. The group also obtained data from Qatar Biobank (QBB) to study the health and well-being of young people aged 18 to 36 years in Qatar. This resulted in a master's thesis in Public Health titled **"A Machine-Learning Model for Predicting Depression Symptoms Severity in a Sample of Young Adults: A Cross-sectional Study from Qatar Biobank (QBB),"** by Maryam Al-Yafei, supervised by Dr. Ghadir Al-Jayyousi and co-supervised by Dr. Radwan Qasrawi from Al-Quds University.

The Plan Ahead

Based on the results of the mixed assessment of Qatar University student health, the team is currently working on the project **"A Participatory Evaluation of the Design and Implementation of a University Student-Centered Mental Health and Wellbeing Program: The QU Wellbeing Advocate Program,"** led by Dr. Jennifer Allen, Lecturer in Physical Therapy, and Ms. Tayseer Al-Jili, Senior Advisor at the Student Advising Center at Qatar University, which aims to improve and support mental health and well-being of QU students.

The project aims to design and evaluate a culturally appropriate student-centered program that addresses priority health needs as expressed by students at QU. Furthermore, the participatory assessment approach will contribute to formulating policy recommendations based on direct feedback from students and stakeholders, thereby enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of future mental health policies and programs at the university.

For more information about the protocol published for this initiative, scan the QR code: