



BETTER MINDS BY DESIGN:WHAT STUDENTS WANT FROM MENTAL HEALTH APPS & THE POSSIBLE ROLE OF AI IN IT

GROUP 3

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INTRODUCTION & MOTIVATION

Motivation:

- Mental health issues are common among university students
- RWTH mental health survey denotes a significant number of students report bad mental health
- Access to professional help is often limited due to service shortages, cost , or stigma



INTRODUCTION & MOTIVATION

Relevance:

- Mental Health Apps (MHAs) provide on-demand tools
- Increasing interest in integrating AI into MH apps.

Research Questions:

1. Which user needs and features for lasting interactions with mental health apps do university students need for their mental health and well-being?
2. Would AI features make mental health apps more attractive for students?

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

Semi-structured interviews

Qualitative content analysis based
on Mayring's method
(Mayring, 2015)

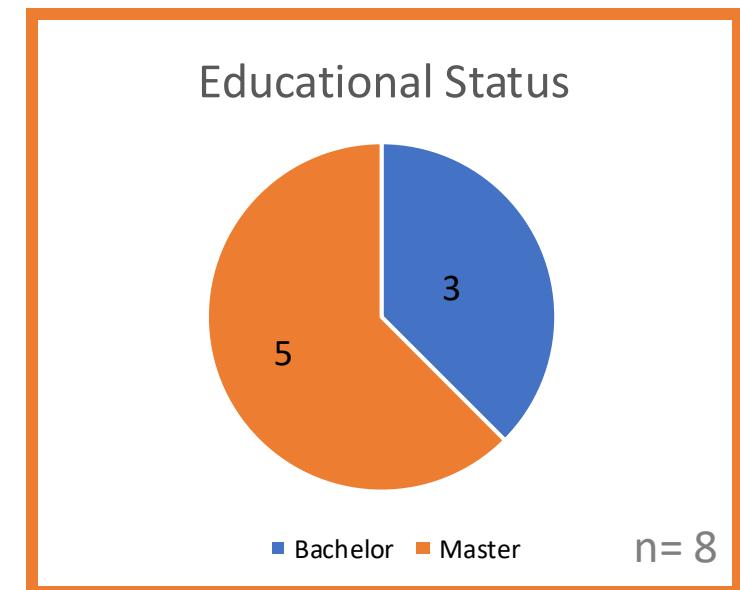
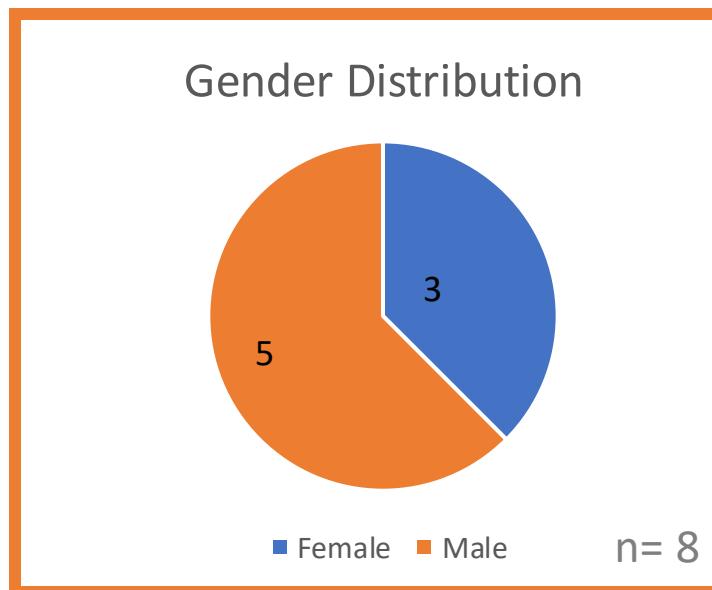
SAMPLE DESCRIPTION



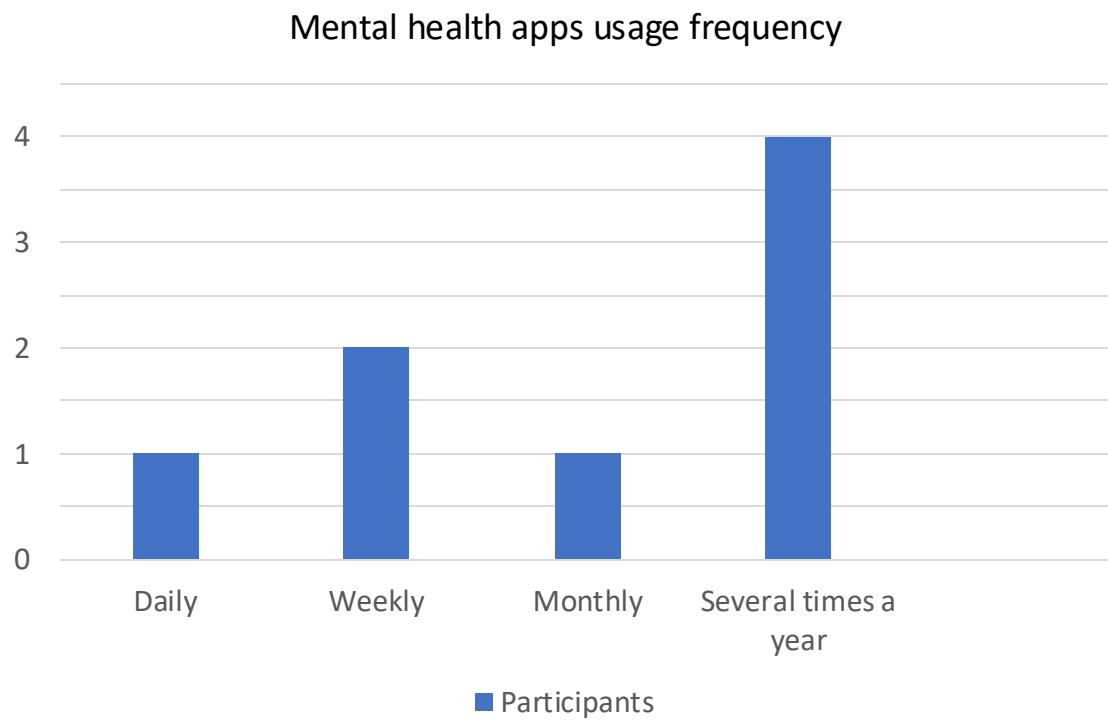
- 8 Participants, Students, all mental health app users



- Age: 22 - 27
 - (M: 23, 6)

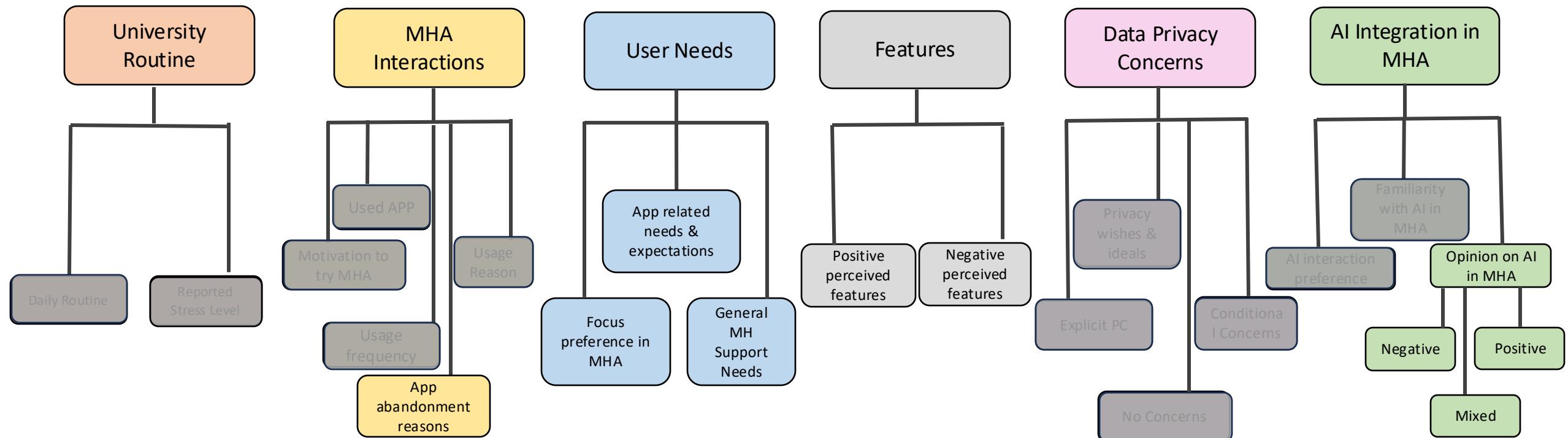


n=8



SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

CATEGORY SYSTEM



DISCUSSION

RQ1: Which features and user needs are essential for sustained interaction with mental health apps among university students?

- ✓ Preferred: mood tracking, journaling, statistics
- ✓ Students value tools that don't add additional cognitive burden and fit into their daily routines
- ✓ Low-effort, easy-to-integrate features are crucial

"So like having visual support, setting goals and being able to achieve them, seeing own milestones..." (P8_transcript, p. 15)

"Journaling is definitely the most beneficial [...] so that way I can process [my thoughts] a lot easier" (P1_transcript, p. 3)

"Emotional and mood logging, especially through journaling. Seeing memories and how I felt was really valuable." (P4_transcript, p. 5)

"Yes, it was too much effort. So for me, it also got stressful to write down my thoughts and memories every day [...] I just didn't want to continue it because of the effort." (P6_transcript, p. 4)

DISCUSSION

RQ1: Which features and user needs are essential for sustained interaction with mental health apps among university students?

- x Gamification is controversial: Some students found streaks and rewards stressful or counterproductive

“Missing a streak can make you feel bad, so I think it becomes stressful.” (P4_transcript, p. 4)

“I don’t see [gamification] as something necessary for mental health apps.”
(P1_transcript, p. 8)

- x Barriers to continued use:

- Motivation drops when effort feels too high or integration into routines is difficult
- Paywalls were a strong demotivating factor

“It requires motivation to do it. [...] I forgot or just was too lazy to do it.” (P2_transcript, p. 2)

“A lot of the features were behind the paywall.” (P2_transcript, p. 4)

DISCUSSION

RQ2: To what extent do AI-based features enhance the attractiveness and usefulness of mental health apps for students?

- ✓ AI seen as helpful, especially for immediate feedback and emotional reflection

“Because I get solutions for my problems right away.”
(P3_transcript, p. 9)

“It has this conversation kind of structure which I feel can be very beneficial.”
(P5_transcript, p. 9)

DISCUSSION

RQ2: To what extent do AI-based features enhance the attractiveness and usefulness of mental health apps for students?

X Skepticism remains around emotional authenticity & trust

- Several students were unsure about AI's ability to handle emotional depth or personal struggles
- Mixed reactions depending on how human-like and helpful the responses were

"For me that doesn't sound right [...] to pair [mental health] with anything AI-related."
(P1_transcript, p. 4)

"If 90% is helpful and 10% is really negative, that's a different issue. I wouldn't want that." (P2_transcript, p. 9)

X Data privacy is a major concern

"Deep data, like feelings and stuff... it's weird." (P8_transcript, p. 10)

"I feel I would be a little bit more concerned about the privacy [...] you're talking to a person but also you know it's not a person." (P1_transcript, p. 9)

FUTURE WORK

What could be done/researched in the future?

- Design a prototype for the app
- More in-depth probing on specific features (e.g. focus group)
- Cross-cultural comparisons

SUMMARY

- **Students value low-effort, flexible features**
→ Journaling, mood tracking, statistics
- **AI features show promise but with conditions**
→ Appreciated for quick support and personalization, but trust, emotional authenticity, and privacy remain concerns
- **User needs are emotional as well as practical**
→ Apps must be simple, non-intrusive, and easily integrated into everyday student life
- **Successful design = user-centered + ethically aware**

LIMITATIONS

What could have been done better?

- Larger & more diverse sample
- Inclusion of real AI interaction trials
- Triangulation of methods

What could be done/researched in the future?

- Differentiate between active MHA users (daily/weekly) and passive MHA users (several times a year or less)
- Design a prototype for the app
- More in-depth probing on specific features (e.g. focus group)
- Cross-cultural comparisons

Limitations

- Convenience sampling: sample extracted only from RWTH students
- Mental health as a hard topic to open up about/ discuss
- Lack of actual app or AI tool use

CATEGORY SYSTEM

