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S P A R K



University Campus **Oldham**
Higher Education at Oldham College

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Editorial

This 8th issue of Spark includes research and scholarly activities undertaken at University Campus Oldham (UCO) over the last academic year. This publication includes reflections, summaries and papers which were presented at our annual UCO Research Symposium alongside other research and creative outputs from a range of subject specialist areas.

You will find elements of Oldham College's strategic plan (2019-24) - which highlights the importance of Specialism and Reputation; High Performance; Digitalisation and Technology; and Community - running through this publication.

In June 2024 we celebrated our annual UCO Research and Scholarly Activity Symposium. The keynote speaker was Dr Adekunle Oke, from Leeds Beckett University Business School. The keynote provided a critical review of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Education, focusing the application and perceptions of AI in education. of the symposium. All attendees were invited to an exhibition that showcased research undertaken by UCO staff and students. Attendees could network, visit multiple projects and engage in discussion. The research presented covered a range of subject specialisms and research methodologies.

This year's publication includes an overview of the research, (with funding from the Mixed Economy Group (MEG)) to inform UCO about the skills students need for level 4 learning. Additionally, there is a selection of work that demonstrates a range of research projects by staff and students from across several disciplines at UCO.

We hope you enjoy learning more about the wide range of research activities undertaken at University Campus Oldham and Oldham College, please join us at our next annual UCO Research Symposium. If you would like to present your own research for publication or you would like to be involved in a research project, please get in touch.

Donna Sinclair

Chair of the UCO Research and Scholarly Activity Group.

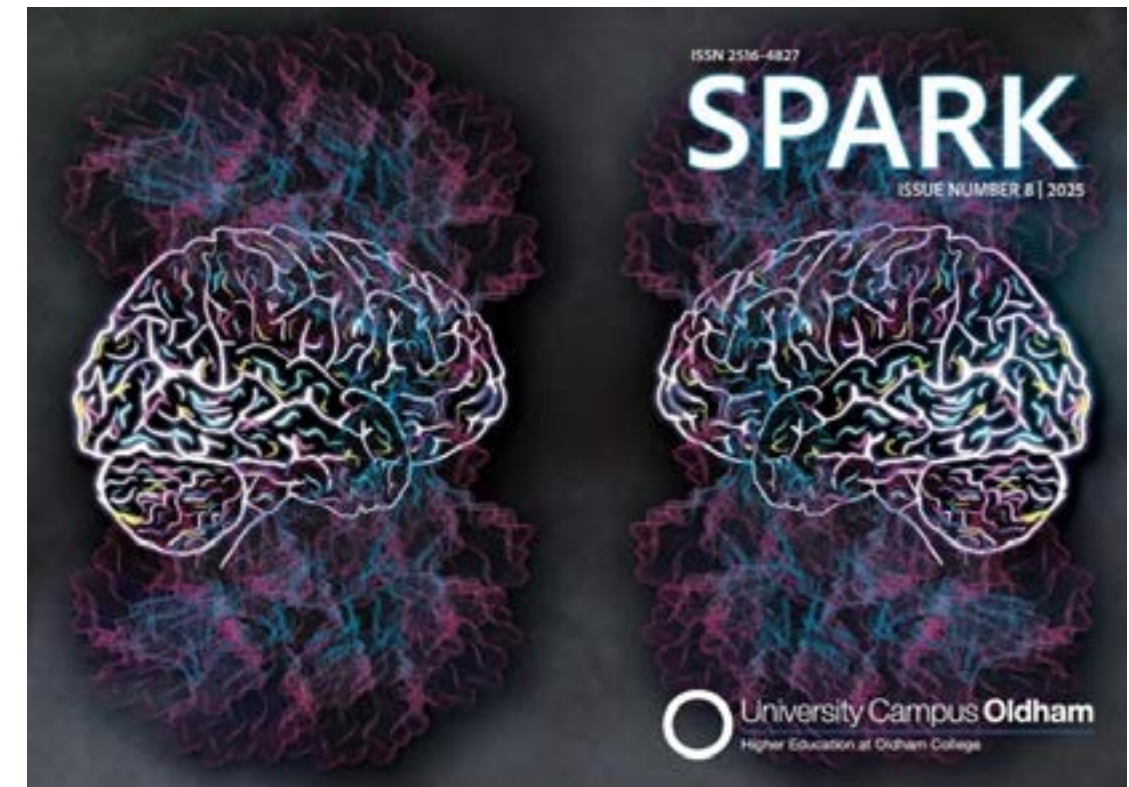
SPARK Magazine 2024 - Cover Designs

**Submissions from BA (Hons) Graphic Design
Year Two students and BA (Hons) Illustration
Year Two students.**

For the second year in succession, Year Two students from the Graphic Design and Illustration degree courses at University Campus Oldham were given the task of creating the front cover of this year's SPARK magazine as a live project within their Professional Practice module.

The students were given a brief to focus on the title, SPARK, and produce the cover image as an illustration or photograph. A final shortlist of five designs was selected, with the winning design chosen by the Research, Scholarly Activity and Ethics Committee. Than you to all the students and Laszlo Gyongyosi, Course Leader of BA (Hons) Game Art and the Professional Practice Module Lead, for all of their hard work.

Shortlisted Cover Design



Shortlisted Cover: Sheema Ali



Shortlisted Cover: Madalina Patrascu



Third Place Cover: Rain UI-Haq



Second Place Cover: James Lord



Winning Cover Design: Magdalena Zasiewska-Haza

An investigation into the acquisition of academic skills for level 4 students from Widening Participation backgrounds

“Widening participation is not simply about widening access, but also supporting the integration and success of students who gain access”
(Meharg et al., 2017, p. 86).

Background

Last year we embarked on a piece of research, with funding from the Mixed Economy Group (MEG), to inform UCO about the skills students need for level 4 learning. We did this because although UCO offers the Academic Skills Module (ASM) to level 4 students during the first five weeks of the academic year, we wanted to know whether the content, timing and duration of the programme was the most suitable approach for our student profile. Although the Academic Development team has been adapting, and developing, the ASM since 2022 to make it more student focussed and relevant, the team, support staff and lecturers continue see the same challenges facing students acquiring these skills such as academic essay structure, referencing and criticality.

Research suggests that there are a number of reasons for these challenges. Primarily, it is generally agreed the majority of students, regardless of background or previous learning experience, struggle to some degree with bridging the gap into higher education (HE), whether this is after a break in study, or when making the transition from level 3 to level 4 (Thompson et al. 2021; Robertson & Cunningham, 2024; Hastings & Noyes, 2003; Young et al, 2019; Briggs et al., 2013; Farenga, 2018; Gale & Parker, 2014). Where the gap becomes more pronounced is when students come from a widening participation (WP) background (Connel-Smith & Hubble, 2018; Face, 2024) as is the case with UCO’s cohorts, who are more

likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds, have additional needs, or have additional domestic and employment responsibilities. The gap is also arguably widened for students with vocational qualifications – which is more common in WP providers and institutions offering HE in an FE context, both of which are true of UCO. Hatt and Baxter (2002) suggests that students from academic and vocational backgrounds bring different sets of skills and expectations to HE rather than the just the recurrent view of vocational qualifications being ‘disadvantaged’. Nevertheless, the expectations of students that follow the traditional linear path into higher education – for example, through A Levels - are more aligned with university (Hastings & Noyes, 2024; Robertson & Cunningham, 2023), and the skills being developed are more grounded in the skills required in HE such as advanced writing and critical thinking (Lisauskaite et al., 2021; Face, 2024; Dong, Jong & Kong, 2020).

With research indicating that even those with relative advantage – such as those students coming through from a “traditional” background - face a skills gap, the need to develop a transition programme for level 4 students coming to UCO is compelling. Developing level 4 skills, sometimes from scratch, adds pressure to cognitive load, ability to engage, academic performance, self-esteem, and confidence in seeking support (Dong, Jong & King, 2020; Lizzio & Wilson, 2013 as cited in Potter & Bye, 2014). This can ultimately lead to early withdrawal (Potter & Bye, 2014) with vocational students twice as likely to withdraw in their first year than other students (Farenga et al., 2016 as cited in Farenga, 2018). Wingate (2007) found that the leading factor that student cite as the reason for withdrawing from their course is “the lack of preparation for and understanding of the type of learning that is required” (p. 392). Furthermore, Christie et al. (2018) found that WP students may have naivety around their own understanding of what is expected of them in HE such as the skills needed. Despite UCO delivering the ASM at the start of the course, as many other institutions do (for example, Burnley College, Salford University), Christie et al. (2018) also suggests that this may be too late and may not allow students enough time to feel confident that they are developing the right skills at the right time and at the right pace. To that end, they may struggle with making a relatively rapid shift into a style of learning that they may not have previously experienced, and therefore may feel the additional pressure of ‘learning to learn’ HE level (Wingate, 2007) and struggle with cognitive load in the process (Dong, Jong & King, 2020).

Whilst it is a risk facing all academic institutions, as they are all expected to attract and enrol a diverse student population, it is especially a risk facing WP students from vocational courses who are more likely to study HE qualifications in HE in FE environments such as UCO (Hastings & Noyes, 2024, Hatt & Baxter, 2003; Lisauskaite et al., 2021). It is also a requirement from the OfS (Office for Students) who expect all fee-charging HE institutions to outline their strategies to improving the access to and support for underrepresented groups Access and Participation Plans (OfS, 2023).

Aim Of The Study

This study focussed on how UCO as an institution can improve the transition from level 3 to level 4. In order to develop this, the nature of this gap and the impact it has on both students and staff, needed to be explored. Therefore, the aims of this research were to:

1. Identify the academic skills needed by WP students coming from vocational settings and when the skills should be introduced.
2. Explore the perceptions of students' own readiness and learning responsibilities for level 4, prior to and during the first year of study.
3. Evaluate whether the current offer for level 4 students is developing the right skills at the right time.
4. Inform the development of partnership programmes between FE and HE campuses to support students in preparation for level 4 study.

This article for SPARK is an edited version of the full MEG report due to be published in 2025. It will focus on aspects of aim 1 and 3 and discuss what might be developed for the programme and will present the following findings:

1. When the transition could begin.
2. What skills were needed at level 4.
3. What skills students find most difficult to acquire at level 4.
4. What topic could be included in a programme.

The Participants

This study adopted a mixed methods approach in the design of the questionnaires to gather participants' perspectives. The questionnaires combined closed questions resulting in data that could be examined for numerical trends, and the open questions that further qualified the closed questions. This allowed for additional qualitative data gathering to explore answers and allow thematic analysis of the raw data coding the respondents' answer for patterns and emerging themes (Braun & Clark, 2022). The perspectives gathered were from six groups: two student groups and four staff groups. The student groups comprised of level 4 students at UCO and level 3 at TOC. The four staff groups comprised of teaching staff from UCO and TOC, and support staff at both sites. All participants completed the questionnaire online via Google Forms.

The data was gathered between March and May 2024 – around 6 months before level 3 students would be starting any HE courses in September 2024, and around 6 months after level 4 students had started their courses in September 2023. 47 FE students participated and 28 HE students, 20 FE and 17 HE teaching staff, and 5 FE and 3 HE support staff participated.

Below is the selection criteria and coding for the different respondents:

Oldham college:

- Level 3 Students (TOCST)
- Staff teaching on any level 3 course (TOCTP)
- Staff teaching GCSEs or Functional skills linked to any level 3 course (TOCTG)
- Support Staff (TOCSP)

UCO

- Level 4 Students on any level 4 course (UCOST)
- Teaching staff (UCOTL)
- Support staff (UCOSP)

1: When Should Support for Transition Start

Despite the recognition of a universal skills gap, research on supporting the transition into level 4 tends to focus on students once they have started university rather than prior to it. Numerous studies citing Gale and Parker's (2014) three stages of transition – Induction, Development, and Becoming. Specifically, Gale and Parker reject point of transition for commencing students in favour of smooth transition (Gill et al., 2011 p. 65, cited in Gale & Parker, 2014) with little focus on level 3 preparation. It was crucial to ask all four sets of participants when they thought that students should begin to prepare for studying at level 4.

An overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that it should be part of the students' course, with all groups except the HE students having over half the respondents agreeing to this. The HE groups were split evenly between embedded at level 3 and in first semester of level 4. HE students, and FE staff and students all chose a summer course. Only FE staff favoured offering an additional course alongside the level 3 course (21.7%), but this was still significantly lower than the embedded course answer – this surprised the researchers, but the qualitative answers provided helped to explain this perspective.

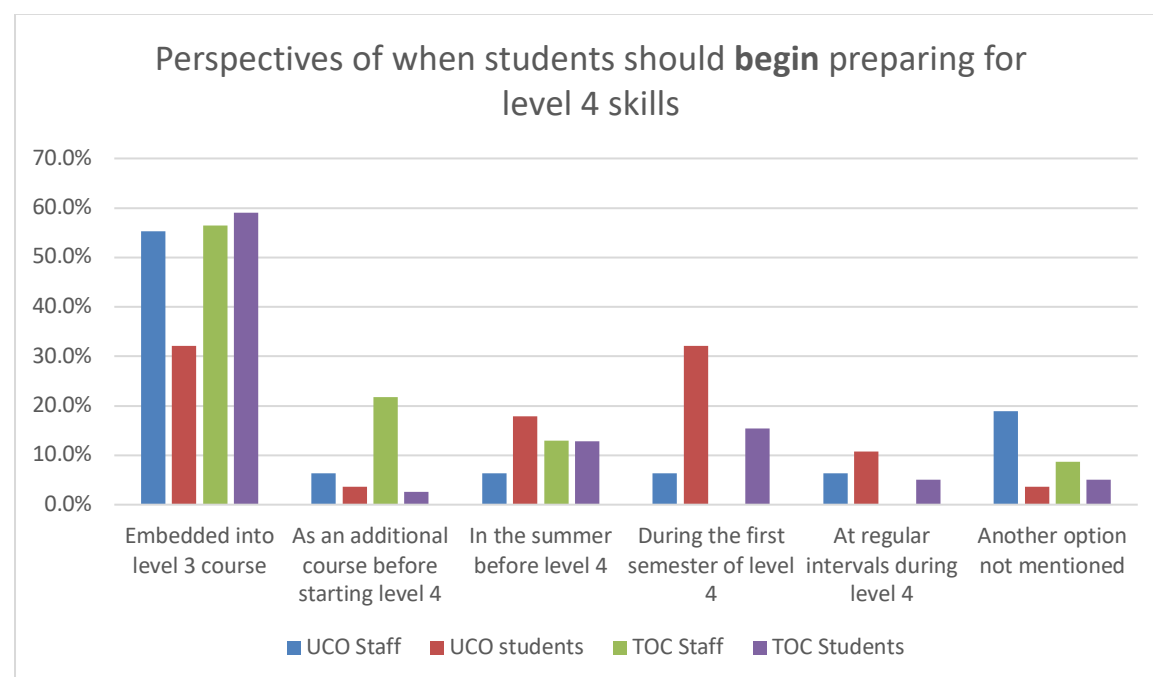


FIGURE 1: CHART SHOWING WHEN ALL RESPONDENTS FELT THAT A COURSE PREPARING LEVEL 3 STUDENTS FOR LEVEL 4 SHOULD BEGIN.

When asked to explain their answers the most significant themes were: to give students a better understanding of what to expect as a comparison to level 3; to start preparing earlier so that there is less pressure once they start the course itself; to build confidence and motivation for moving into level 4 – “the sooner they start to learn, the sooner they can become more prepared for level 4” (TOCSP17).

The idea of embedding level 4 skills in level 3 was seen as a way of helping the transition to be more seamless (TOCTP2 and UCOSP3) this seemed to be a shared view across the majority of respondents, however, the notion of a seamless transition was viewed in a few different ways. The first was so that students were “less likely to be put off from progressing” (TOCTP2), to give students “motivation to continue at level 4”(TOCTG6), and to give them the confidence and tools to progress further” (TOCSP9) – a theme that was echoed by multiple respondents. Further answers from respondents helped to give an insight into how embedding level 4 skills in level 3 study could help to develop students' confidence or motivation.

A clear theme amongst UCO students reflecting back was that it helped to prepare them and to “have more of an understanding for when I went into my first year of university” (UCOST4). It would also give them “an insight on how a level course works to see if they will be able to keep up the pace and enjoy it” (UCOST11), to give them experience (UCOST8) or “more knowledge of uni life” (UCOST27). Crucially so it can be “compared more [to] level 3 and 4 while teaching level 3 so students can see what the difference is” (UCOST29). By embedding skills into their course, students can experience elements of level 4 learning before committing to a course. It was important for one respondent who suggested that “additional courses and courses over the summer might make Level 4 seem too challenging or demanding” (TOCTP2).

The next theme was the idea that embedding the skills in level 3 is beneficial because “embedding this learning as part of their level 3 course will reinforce the skills that they need better” (UCOSP1). One respondent mentioned, “Building key skills over time will help learners to retain the skills and develop to a higher level” (TOCTP15). One HE student

echoed this “if it was integrating as a skills session during college, it would give students the experience but also allow the skillset to grow before entering university” (UCOST8). Starting during level 3 was seen to help to take off the pressure because “the step from level 3 to level 4 is quite a big step. Level 4 is a lot more in depth than level 3. More preparation is deffo [sic] needed” (UCOST26), this was echoed by two FE teachers who said that by embedding the course during level 3 would give “lots of preparation time to prepare learners for higher level thinking and working at university level” (TOCSP8) with the second extending the idea that those higher level learning skills would be “well practiced by the time they reach university” (TOCSP12). It is crucial to still provide a summer school and the ASM – particularly for students not coming from level 3 study. While nearly three quarters felt that they Academic Skills Module offer was sufficient as it was, one mentioned about starting in the summer but that the first semester needs to still be offered “so that everyone can learn these skills even if they have no free time (E.g. Work or Childcare)” (UCOST21). Another stated that “prior to starting a level 4 course an individual may not be in education or may apply to the course very late on, thus if it is expected everyone to learn on level 3 courses or ahead of time it will disadvantage those students. Having everyone cover these skills when they start the course sets out a foundation and expected level for everyone as well as bringing them all to the same point” (UCOST15).

2: Skills Needed at Level 4

This question was only asked of HE staff and students as they were reflecting on the skills they have needed to develop over the course of the year. The respondents were initially asked an open question (3.1 *What have been the most important skills you think you have need to study on your course? Why?*) and a closed question (3.12 *Of the skills listed below, which are the 3 most important to be able to do well on your course*). The open was asked to allow students to answer without the restrictions of only having the set of academic skills to choose from and consider what they have needed in their context. In answering the latter closed question, the results were calculated using a simply weighting system of the answers respondents rated first, second or third.

HE Staff

HE Students

Understanding Assignment Briefs	Referencing
Reading Academic-level Texts	Reading Academic-level Texts
Independent study Skills	Critical Thinking
Critical Thinking	Understanding Assignment Briefs
Time Management	Time Management

FIGURE 2: TABLE SHOWING RESPONSES OF: 3.21, WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT SKILLS AT LEVEL 4 (CLOSED QUESTION)

For the closed question answers, both sets of respondents had broadly the same answers: The only differing answers were that HE staff chose independent study skills and the HE students chose referencing.

The ASM includes referencing and understanding assignment briefs, however, it does not offer the other three sessions. Time management is often requested though it is not a key component of the level 4 offer. Critical thinking is not offered, nor requested, at level 4 by teaching staff – most courses request early on in level 5. There may be an argument for further sessions in semester 2 to introduce them to criticality, and a session about higher level reading skills.

In the previous question in the survey, both sets of respondents were asked an open question about what they thought the most important skills for being successful on their course. Critical thinking did not feature at all for the HE students but did when asked to rank the top 3 most important skills later in the questionnaire. Referencing remained at the top for students, but the next three skills – academic writing, research skills and IT skills were not mentioned in the earlier open question for students. Interestingly, the highest response from the HE teaching staff was on the application of theories – this was not asked by the researchers in the closed question, and is a valuable insight into the skills being developed through the academic skills team. This maybe another skillset to add to the programme.

Skills	HE Staff	HE Students
Essay writing	1	1
Research skills	3	3
IT skills	2	2
Reading	2	1
Academic writing	1	4
Criticality	2	
Application of theory	3	
Note taking		1
Revision Skills		1
Referencing		7
Presentations skills		1
Reflective writing		1
Paraphrasing		1

FIGURE 3: WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT SKILL(S) THAT STUDENTS NEED ON YOUR COURSE? (OPEN QUESTION)

3. Most Difficult Skills to Acquire

The question following this asked the HE staff and students to think about the hardest skill to learn or improve to explain what was so difficult about it. Below are the top five categories.

UCO Staff	UCO Students
Time Management	Referencing
Research Skills	Time Management
Critical Thinking	Critical Thinking
Referencing	Speaking in Public
Reading Academic-level Texts	Reading Academic-level Texts

FIGURE 4: TABLE SHOWING THE TOP 5 MOST DIFFICULT SKILLS TO ACQUIRE.

Of the top 5 categories, four were the same for each group – time management, critical thinking, referencing, and reading academic texts.

For time management, the struggles around balancing work life alongside study were acknowledged “Some students have jobs, families etc. outside of university life so can only work onsite effectively during the timetabled hours. As we know, independent learning is an important aspect of time management, as it gives students time out of class to support their learning and development of skills” (UCOTL8). One respondent highlighted where students have not yet learned to “prioritise and manage their own workload” (UCOTL5). Another observed that in HE “greater focus on larger components with longer durations leads to a drift” (UCOTL15). Some students may not be able to “self-regulate to bring themselves back on track” (UCOTL5). From the students’ perspectives, three didn’t give a relevant answer to the question; of the other three respondents, two highlighted juggling family life alongside studying. One of those mentioned the pressures of having a placement and another simply that they have “never been good at time management”.

Regarding answers in relation to the acquisition of critical thinking skills, the overwhelming consensus from students was that they have “never done it before” (UCOST18) and moreover did not seem to understand “how to be critical” (UCOST29), or how to “write academically about it” (UCOST7). These issues are also reflected in the difficulties with referencing. According to a UCO tutor, students “lacked experience or the understanding of why these skills are important” (UCOTL12). Another likened it to “learning a new language for them” (UCOTL16). Other issues mentioned included where they may already be familiar with referencing learning a “new way of referencing and structure of the reference” (UCOST6 and UCOTL13), or finding that they may be understanding it but “still find it

difficult to use APA7” (UCOST28). The final issue is around the formatting of referencing – “getting everything in the right order, brackets and italics” (UCOST17) or struggling “to adapt the referencing to different academic sources” because “APA7 isn’t a “one-size fits all” method” (UCOST20).

For the theme of reading, from the students’ perspective reading journals came up for both the students who chose this as the hardest skill to acquire. With one disclosing their dyslexia and struggling with “concentrating on what’s relevant and what’s not” (UCOST26). From a staff point of view, they linked research and reading together, with one respondent highlighting the time required to research and read materials, not only for the searching process but that the materials “high levels of reading and ability to process the academic language provided” (UCOTL7). For the other respondents who linked research and reading – the first highlighted not only the lack of experience in research but not “understanding the assessment to help with research and reading” (UCOTL6) nor “fully appreciating the impact it can have on grading” (UCOTL11).

Public speaking features often in HE and is a skill students struggle with, this was due to: “lack of experience” (UCOST9), being “shy, introverted and lack self-confidence” (UCOST21), and another mentioned “being anxious and nervous in front of everyone” (UCOST9).

4. Content Of The Course

The HE and FE tutors were asked what should be on the course, the FE students were asked a slightly different question “What would you like to know before starting your level 4 course?” HE students were not asked a version of this question, however, were asked what skills they had needed. The themes of the answers are set out in table below. It is very clear that from the student point of view the emphasis was on knowing more about the course – support they need etc - whereas HE tutors were exclusively considering academic skills.

Furthermore, HE students were asked what additional skills students would have liked to have learned in the first semester to find out what other areas that may have struggled with. These help to give a more rounded picture of the soft and hard skills that students need to be successful at level 4.

Skills	FE Students	FE Staff	HE Staff	HE Students
Don't know	4	2	0	
Soft skills / non-academic skills				
Finance	3	1		
Uni v college / what to expect	9	2	2	
Placements during	2	2		
employment opportunities after the course	2			
Content of the course	9	2		
Support available to the students	3	2		
About meeting the tutors	2			
Assignments	5			
Uni visits / applications		3		
Independent living skills / finance		2		
Progression to level 5		1		
Getting to know each other			1	
Preparation for workload			1	
Embracing failure in classroom			1	
Resilience			1	
Mental health resilience			1	
Time management			8	2
Organisational skills			2	
Academic skills				
Academic Language		2	3	
How to answer questions / assignment briefs		1	1	
Essays		2	4	1

Independent study skills		4	1	
Critical thinking			4	1
Information regarding academic misconduct			3	
Referencing			6	
Reading			6	
Library skills / finding sources			2	
research orientation			5	2
creative thinking skills			1	1
Digital literacy			2	
Note taking			3	
Planning an assignment			2	
Other support and self-learning opportunities.			1	
Reading Journal articles				3
Embedding references				1
Presentation skills				1
Pod casts				1
Voice overs				1

FIGURE 5: TABLE OF RESPONSES ABOUT WHAT SKILLS LEVEL 3 STUDENTS SHOULD BE TAUGHT DURING THE COURSE FOR LEVEL 3 STUDENTS

It also shows a clear gap between the needs of level 3 students anticipating university compared with level 4, with the former focusing on soft skills or knowledge about what to expect, and the latter on academic skills. This is true of the difference between FE and HE staff – though there is more of an overlap on some skills. This research would have been more rounded if it had asked the same question to the HE students for their perspective – however, it was very helpful for a perspective on other skills that may be very specific to a course or assignment. For example, there has been a rise in assessments using voiceovers since the coronavirus pandemic.

Conclusions and Recommendations

When this project set out to investigate the skills students need to be able to work successfully at level 4 after transitioning from level 3, the researcher’s focus was on the identification of academic skills. The key findings were:

- There is a gap between perceptions of skills needed – with level 3 students and staff focussing on softer skills such as confidence building, and information sharing about what university life like or how it will impact them financially and level 4 students and staff focussed on academic skills.
- There is a strong argument that a transition programme should ideally be embedded in students’ study programmes so that it has clearer links to the course and is more relevant to the students. Although this is the preference, there may be a logistical issue with this may add pressure on the delivery of courses in their current state.
- Summer schools and the ASM would still be needed.
- To potentially expand the ASM offer into the second semester to develop skills not offered at level 4 but have been identified as needed: critical writing, high-level reading skills (including journals), linking theory to practice and time management.

The full article expands on these themes and others with more in-depth findings and discussion.

The researcher wishes to thank MEG for the financial support for this project, thank senior management who promoted the project, especially Head of Student Support, Laura Macmillan and Vice Principal and Assistant Principal HE and Higher Skills, Susan Holden for championing it. Finally, many thanks to the staff and students at UCO and Oldham College for sharing their experiences in the questionnaires.

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Putting Oldham on the Map: Poetry and Placemaking

“Deawn in eawr village, folk seem very queer,
But you’ll ha’t get use’t, if yer come t’live here.”
(Oakley, 1991: 53)

These lines are from ‘Village Folk’, a dialect poem by John Oakley which details several escapades of imagined characters from “eawr village” of Oldham. For those of us who work or live near University Campus Oldham (UCO) we have an idea of “eawr village” or *our place* and the characters we live, work, or study with. Arguably, we all have an idea of the campus in relation to the town in which it is situated. We have an idea of how we perceive UCO through our senses - the smell of the canteen and the taste of the produce purchased from there, the feel of the metal bannisters beneath our hands as we ascend and descend the stairs, the tinny voice of the lift and the vocal hubbub of staff and students on a busy Tuesday morning. Or we have stared at the facade of the main building and cursed the slow opening glass doors. We locate ourselves within the main and studio buildings, and have preferred routes in how we arrive to, and leave from, campus. The traffic jams, the tram delays: “You’ll ha’t use’t, if yer come [t’sstudy or t’work] here” (ibid. author’s insertion). As we make sense of place through our quotidian existence, poetry can also help us to make sense of place/s.

The word poetry evolved from the Greek *poiesis* (ποίησις) - “to make, create, produce” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2025). In turn, poetry, it can be argued, can help us to create or to make sense of the world (Vincent, 2018). Other scholars have turned to poetry to reflect and creatively express themselves, seeing poetry “as a resonant method for multi-sensory geographies” (Paiva, 2020, p.1). Moreover, it has been suggested that poetry brings in the “living knowledge” of the writer (Chapman Hoult et al, 2020, p.90). Following this argument, and having experienced the positive effects of writing poetry and writing about poetry, the author posits that this aesthetic form is a mode of knowledge production. Poetry can help us understand, among many other things, feelings, thoughts, and places and spaces through the written, or spoken, word.

This article focuses on the notion of poetry as a tool for imaginative place-making, assisting us in perceiving Oldham through time. While examples of poetry about Oldham were discovered during the initial research scoping stages – for example the above poem by John Oakley, poetry by Ron Williams (1991) and Rochdale radical Samuel Bamford (1865) - for brevity, and space, this paper concentrates on Samuel Bottomley’s *Greenfield: A Poem*, an understudied poem from the late eighteenth century. *Greenfield: A Poem* brings some of the rural and uncanny geographies of Oldham to life. In order to explore how the poem does this, the article is structured in a tripartite form: first with an overview of the concept of placemaking; secondly with a close reading and analysis of *Greenfield: A Poem*; and finally, suggestions for how poetry could be used as a tool for sparking curiosity for staff and students at UCO and how further research on Oldham’s literary heritage is recommended.

An overview of placemaking

The term “place” itself has several intertwining connotations (Cresswell, 2015). The author posits that “place” is an intertwining of the phenomenological (experiential, sensory) and the socio-cultural (cultural, political). This article argues that “placemaking” is a complex notion. Placemaking - and its related “place-making” and “place making” - as a term has come to prominence over the last decade and a half, predominantly in arenas such as town planning, place management and branding, and “urban design” (Lawton, Męczyński & Barber, 2013, p.108). Placemaking is also a communal endeavour where improvements, or subversive activities, are undertaken by those who live and/or work in their local area (see for example: Entrikin, 2002; Hou & Rios, 2003; Bezemies, 2019; Dolley, 2020; Sara, Matthew & Lewis, 2021; and Webster et al. 2021). Both these top-down and bottom-up practices imply that placemaking is the physical act of changing, developing, or re-sculpting an area.

Placemaking in Oldham

The town centre of Oldham has been reshaped over time. In 2025, there are developments where, once again, Oldham is being remodified. Pinning where UCO is now located, the following maps help us visualise the (hi)stories of Oldham's past and present.



In the mid to late 19th century, Manchester was known as a “cottonopolis” (some of the earliest uses of this term can be found in: Anon., 1830, p.322; Anon. 1848, p.8; and Lowe, 1854, p.269). Oldham was one of the towns that fed Cottonopolis and was described as “the great Lancashire spinning centre” (Hutton, 1904, p.743). Until 1974, Oldham was situated in the historic county of Lancashire (Farrer, 1911). Maps can help us to visualise how Oldham looked over time and assist us in developing a deeper understanding of Oldham's stories as well as histories. Maps, however, are also “slippery customers” and ripe for critique (Harley, 1989, p.8). While it is beyond the scope of this article to critically consider the role of cartography in the (re)development of Oldham, it is worth pausing to see how maps can visually depict how the town has changed over two hundred years. In the map pictured above it can be seen that the site where UCO now was in a colliery with, cotton mills are also visible.

As the cotton industry diminished in England, Oldham, like other towns and boroughs outside Manchester, experienced post-industrial decline (Lancashire and Merseyside Industrial Development Association, 1967). The 1950 map below demonstrates how Oldham developed in post-war England, while there are a handful of cotton mills, the industry has changed. The way in

which we understand Oldham here has changed. UCO is now situated in the middle of Ironmonger Land (see below).



Finally, a contemporary map of Oldham locates UCO where we know it now!



As for Oldham's future stories; the town is currently a site of place-shaping, as a business improvement development (BID) area promising regeneration and a “transformed” Spindles (the shopping centre), new town centre park green space, and the development of a new “Cultural Quarter” (Oldham Council, 2025).

Writing Greenfield and Saddleworth, Oldham.

If places are sites of experience and social/cultural/political praxis, then writing about them can help us to understand and/or empathise with them. Places are, as writer and academic Paul Evans suggests, “dynamic, changeable, moody beings that shape their inhabitants and are shaped by them at the same time” (Evans, 2015, p.ix). Evans’ broader literary corpus can be argued as a good example of a writer concerned with place. The term “place writing” itself, however, is, as academic David Cooper posits, currently an understudied area of scholarly endeavour that deserves a “pluralistic approach” when approaching a range of diverse texts (Cooper, 2020). To demonstrate one such approach, it is here that the article turns to a piece of loco-specific poetry.

Greenfield: A Place / *Greenfield: A Poem*



The loco-specific focus on Greenfield in this article is possibly a controversial inclusion. Greenfield, and by extension the whole of the Saddleworth district area, was originally in the West Riding of Yorkshire until 1974 when the United Kingdom Government’s Local Government Act (1972) came into force. The precipitous Pennine hills that both surround and make up the Saddleworth moors, have over time, acted as a physical border between Yorkshire and Lancashire. *Greenfield: A Poem*, was written nearly two hundred years before Saddleworth and Greenfield were sliced off the county of Yorkshire and has been selected for *Spark’s*

contemporary reader as it has rich geo- and topographical, toponymic, and folkloric detail. Furthermore, *Greenfield: A Poem* presents a way of imaginatively pathfinding our way around the area, where toponymic places are mixed with the folkloric, fictive elements. In terms of the methodological approach to analysing this piece, reading the poem takes an interdisciplinary stance, borrowing critical tools from the fields of literary geographies and geohumanities. The scholarly field of literary geographies is lively and is arguably concerned with geographically attuning one’s self to explore literary texts of place (see, for example: Hones, 2008; Alexander and Cooper, 2013; Saunders, 2016; and Cooper, Donaldson and Murrieta-Flores, 2016).

First published in 1792, Samuel Bottomley’s *Greenfield, a Poem* is a book-length poem, roughly organised in twenty-eight stanzas using a rhyme scheme featuring rhyming, and half-rhyming, couplets. The poem offers the reader an imaginative “tour” of Greenfield before recounting a local folk tale / tragic love story which is retold over the span of nearly half the poem. This poem opens as a meditation on Greenfield, where the speaker compares his¹ own creative contribution to other poets’ writings. Here, the speaker rather than triumphing Ancient Greek mythology featuring “Cyprian groves or Tempe’s flowery plains” (line 2) it is “Romantic Greenfield’s beauty [the poet will] rehearse” (line 4, author’s insertion). Ironically, throughout the poem the speaker superimposes ancient Greek analogies melding an English location with pastoral, Grecian “Arcadian scenes” (line 46). It could be suggested that, while rehearsing “Greenfield’s beauty”, the speaker as a “Rustic swain” (line 5) situates himself within a pantheon of other poets preoccupied with the environment and imagination. The pleasant representation of place engenders a sense of topophilia (Tuan, 1977). This pride of place allows the speaker to set out his stall and “enrol his country” by placing Greenfield on the map for the reader (line 6). The third stanza of the poem sets out an imaginative vista for the reader as

¹ The author assumes the masculine pronoun here in line with the poet’s gender presentation.

“Greenfield opens to the wondering eye,
With a grand picture of antiquity!
Hills upon hills, and rocks on rocks are piled,
In hoary grandeur, thro’ this rural wild (lines 15 - 18)

Here, with the playful “wondering eye”, the reader can wander the area imaginatively, exploring the topography of the area with “hills upon hills” and perceive the craggy rocks in this “rural wild”. As well as a prosaic hike through this “rural wild”, this backdrop also offers perhaps the perfect arena for more mystical happenings.

The fifth stanza introduces “sweet illusions” (line 24), again invoking mythological figures from antiquity such as “fawns”, “satyrs” (line 26), “Apollo” (line 27), and “mighty Pan” (line 29).

Greenfield’s “illusions” consist of:

“[...]Fairies in circles, dancing on the green,
At dusk of eve; or when with silver shades
The full orb'd moon these rural scenes invades
(lines 32 - 34)

With the introduction of the uncanny to an otherwise bucolic scene, the surrounding topography of Greenfield changes and prehistoric lithic formations become “rocks and mountains of enchanted ground” (lines 45 - 46). Greenfield is mutated into a landscape that juxtaposes with industrial Oldham and Manchester, here there is the “healing power, the mineral waters” of Dovestone dean where “nymphs and swains” - both mystical and human - “breathe the purer air” (lines 54 - 56). As the speaker locates and moves the reader from Dovestone dean to the steeper climes of “lofty ALPHIN” (line 58, original capitalisation), the poem swiftly moves through the seasons using cardinal points of north as cold and south. This can be mapped as below. In stanza nine, alluding to Phoebus - Phoebus Apollo, the sun god of antiquity - from the vantage point of the crest of the hills the reader can experience the sun moving “through the wintry solstice rolls [...] / O’er ALPHIN’s top each morning from the main” (lines 59 and 61) where the “...sun twice rises on the adjacent plain” (line 62).



The lofty topography of the area described allows the reader to locate themselves on these beautiful but treacherous hills, where on “RAVENSTONE ... / boisterous Boreas makes the cavern roar” (line 70). This terrifying image engenders a sense of topophobia - being fearful of place (González, 2005). Boreas, the fierce Greek god of the north wind, adds drama, however, the speaker quickly draws the reader’s “wondering eye” to:

“See ALDERMON’s still more majestic rise,
His craggy summit cleaves the opening skies; [...]

Within this mountain lies a latent cell.
(As story says) where groups of fairies dwell”
(lines 79 - 80, and 85 - 86) original capitalisation)

Within Aldermon this “latent cell” of fairies is activated if a traveller enters one of Aldermon’s caverns where “not a shout / From those within is heard by those without” (lines 87 - 88). Here, the sonic - or lack thereof - geographies of the area are alluded to, and any “bold invader” (line 91) must bear “a flaming torch” (line 92) and “cautiously explore the steep descent” (line 93) to descend into the “dreary chasms to the realms below” (line 95). Cautionary tales are a common trope in folklore and fairy tales, offering a warning to those who are about to transgress from expected norms (see, for example, Miller, 2022; and Hobart, 2013).

As well as the bucolic and fearsome topographies, storytelling is intertwined in *Greenfield: A Poem*. The second half of the poem moves from geographical to fantastical imagery. In stanza 16, the speaker summons:

“...fountain nymphs with locks of glossy green
instruct my muse while faintly I relate
A story of some thousand ages date”
(lines 110 - 112)

Channelling these supernatural beings, the poem retells the story of giants Aldermon and Alphin, who, prior to becoming rock formations, were “high as their fame, [so] their mutual friendship rose” (line 127, author’s insertion). The story follows a trope of friends to enemies whose friendship demises in a tragic battle over “the conquering beauty” (line 128) of Rimmon, a shepherdess. This mortal, however, is bestowed with elements of local nature as she is compared to “roses newly blown; / Or blooming May, when crimson blushes beam / Along the flowery banks of silver Tame” (lines 130 - 132). The reader can trace Rimmon’s geolocation with the depicted attractive young woman along the river’s riparian edges. Through no fault of her own, it is Rimmon’s beauty, her choice of giving “her partial smile to Alphin’s love” (line 144) that enrages Aldermon. This sexist machismo instigates an epic battle where Aldermon “tears a rock, and hurled through the skies, / At ALPHIN aim’d the winged fragment flies” (lines 165 - 166, original capitalisation). The battle caused “GREENFIELD to its firm foundations shook” (line 212) and offers a pugilistic legend of how the erratic boulders that litter the area were placed. Further, this fictional geoengineering provides an alternative explanation in the formation of the geological makeup and flora as when Alphin is slain by Aldermon:

“...from his mangled veins
What foaming blood the craggy mountain stains;
Which straight its purple and its name assumes,
And each returning season fresher blooms.”
(lines 218 - 221)

This is an imaginative interpretation of the physical geography of the area, however, the colour of the rocks can be attributed to the sandstone of Alphin Pike “formed between 322 and 321.5 million years ago” (British Geological Survey, 2025). In grief, Rimmon too becomes part of the landscape as her blood also adds colour to the rocks: “Far up in the vale near GREENFIELD’s

utmost bounds, / a circling rock a crystal fount surrounds” (lines 261 - 262).

In other retellings of this folktale, Rimmon is depicted as a water nymph from Chew brook (see, for example, Peak District Online, n.d.; Bradbury, 1871). The folklore of *Greenfield: A Poem* transmutes back into the physical geography “the rocks by ALDER and ALPHIN thrown” (line 295, original capitalisation). Folklore, and local legends like that of Alphin, Alderman, and Rimmon, are placemaking tools. While they arguably contain fantastical content and some notion of a tale that has existed for generations and communally orally recounted (Propp, 2005; Westwood and Simpson, 2006). Folklore is mutable and it is often difficult to place a date on when they originated. Historically too, borders are mutable through political or environmental changes. The area around Greenfield has been transformed by a growing population and the addition of Dove Stones reservoir surrounded by other imaginative toponyms for rock faces such as: Pots and Pans and Indians Head (so named because of the resemblance to the facial features of a native American). Saddleworth itself is a liminal space which “has long been a borderland region between Lancashire and the West Riding [...] Greenfield...was more rural and set in one of the most scenic valleys in the south Pennines” (Young, 2020, p.404). It is perhaps this now semi-rural setting that lends itself well to folklore and fairy tales as well as offering adventurous hikes.

Applying Poetry to UCO’s Curricula: A Proposal!



While a close reading of one poem sheds some light on how areas that are now in the Oldham borough are portrayed, this is arguably one way of analysing and interpreting the poem. Broader study needs to be undertaken to discern themes and tropes in the literary geographies of Oldham. The topographical writing and the folk tale offered by Bottomley's *Greenfield: A Poem* can offer a historical understanding in how place is made for a contemporary reader. Moreover, a contemporary audience will be aware of Greenfield's changed geographies with the addition of Dove Stone reservoir. A deeper understanding of place could be made through a larger literary survey and further collections of historic and contemporary maps of the borough. Emerging themes and tropes from *Greenfield: A Poem* include: topographies; environment; nature; and the uncanny. The courses at University Campus Oldham are industry-focussed, and humanities subjects such as literary studies, history, or geography are not offered. Many of the courses currently offered, however, have the scope for interdisciplinarity and could be enhanced by incorporating humanities approaches. In anecdotal conversations with staff and students, we hear of myriad creative, and creative-critical, approaches such as poetry; letter-writing; children's book illustration; and film studies. Below is a humble suggestion for how texts that offer a historical, geographical, and cultural grounding could be embedded into the curricula.

To inspire students by stories of place, creative industries students can use poetry and localised stories to bring to life imaged geographies and folkloric characters. The study of maps can also offer ways in for creative cartographies of imagined and real places. Computing students may be interested in tools such as geospatial technologies including geographic information systems. They may also be keen to learn the code and programs that power digital mapping devices and software such as: JavaScript, SQL, Python, C++, C#, and (.NET). Education students can use local stories to engender positive feelings of identity, or for learning literacy and geographical skills, for children, young people, and trainee teachers which could help in combatting the ongoing reading crisis (National Literacy Trust, 2024; The Reading Agency, 2024). Saddleworth itself has been filmically and historically linked with horrendous crime in the past with the Moors Murders (Thomson, 2007; Lockwood and Masters, 2021), here, criminologists can add another dimension in how we understand a place. Health and social care and counselling students may benefit from using poetry for therapy, self-reflection and journalling (see, for example: Bolton *et al*, 2004; Dorman, 2017; and Simpson, 2019). Psychology students could investigate what imagination is, how the brain sparks images, and what the impact of aphantasia on perceiving art such as poetry could be (see, for example Zhang, 2022; Krempel and Monzel, 2024). Finally, business and accounting and construction students may be interested in heritage and place management, place-shaping, and municipal placemaking.

Towards a Literary Oldham?

The poem presented here scratches the surface of what could be a rich literary heritage for Oldham. Oldham, it can be argued, like many other towns and boroughs in the Greater Manchester region, tends to be overshadowed by the city of Manchester. Reading what has been written - in both fictional and non-fictional literary texts and maps - can assist us in developing an empathy for a place that has changed geographically, historically, politically, socially, culturally, and textually. As *Greenfield: A Poem* demonstrates, our understanding/s of Oldham can be complicated by the complexity of the place. Other stories of Oldham deserve to be acknowledged and investigated; Oldham has folklore, poetry, and stories from its contemporary diasporas that deserve to be heard; the town and borough is ripe for further scholarly research. It is time to put Oldham on the map.

Acknowledgements & References

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How do trauma and working conditions impact the mental health and wellbeing of UK Police and do they seek psychological support?

By Joanne Green L5 FdSc Counselling and Psychotherapeutic Skills

Introduction

Policing in the United Kingdom (UK) is widely regarded as a dangerous and challenging profession, both physically and emotionally. Many researchers agree that the trauma and stress experienced by Police Officers can adversely impact their health and wellbeing (Brown et al 1999; Burnett et al, 2019; Hurrell et al, 2018; Graham et al., 2023). In 2023 there were 50,205 assaults on UK police officers while on duty (Police Federation, 2023), and over 14,000 officers were signed off from work due to mental health illness (Police Federation (PFEW), 2024a).

Alarmingly, from 2001 to 2020, 344 Police Officers died because of suicide (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2024). According to the Police Foundation (2019), resilience in policing has been in decline since 2010 and almost 40 percent of officers consider their role as exceptionally stressful in contrast to other professions which reveal a median rate of just over 16 percent.

The most detailed and largest study to date involving over 42 thousand police personnel, demonstrates that, although there has been a recent decline in symptoms of depression in police personnel, wellbeing is on the decline revealing that emotional fatigue, which can lead to burnout, is at an all-time high, and, overall, police personnel feel increasingly less valued compared to a similar study in 2021 (Graham et al., 2023; Graham, 2021). Moreover, another study involving over 12,000 police personnel identifies that elevated levels of trauma-related mental health disorders in UK police forces are partly due to poor working conditions and handling challenging situations without adequate support (Lewsey, 2022). Steel et al. (2021) agree, noting that these occupational hazards increase the risk of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Complex -PTSD (C-PTSD). Correspondingly, a recent survey by the Police Federation (PFEW), (2024b) reveals that over 60 percent of officers who left the service in the seven years leading to 2024, did so due to adverse impacts on their wellbeing. These findings demonstrate a necessity for psychological support to help police officers maintain their health and perform their duties effectively.

This literature review adheres to BACP's Ethical Guidelines for Research (2019) and the Ethical Framework (2018) with a focus on GDPR, Data Protection, and confidentiality. It also enables the author to remain informed about the latest research in accordance with BACP Ethical

Guidelines, which in turn supports their portfolio and current practice (Tribe & Morrissey, 2020). The review explores mental health issues in UK policing, including trauma and workplace stress, and the accessibility and uptake of counselling support. It covers factors affecting police wellbeing, such as PTSD, C-PTSD, adverse working conditions, fatigue/burnout, and police culture, while considering the impact on public perceptions of policing. Though a myriad of international studies is acknowledged, given the scope of the review, it focuses on UK research to address gaps in understanding the mental health wellbeing impact on UK police and the need for effective support. Reference to Police personnel within this review, unless specified, refers to both police officers and staff.

Prevalence of PTSD/C-PTSD

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) (2019) defines PTSD as a psychological illness that can develop in patients who have been exposed to or witnessed traumatic events or situations. These events, which may be experienced as psychologically or physically harmful or a threat to life, can impact a person's mental and physical health. Examples of such events include natural disasters, severe accidents, acts of terrorism, sexual assault, or other historical trauma. Complex-PTSD (C-PTSD) is a newer diagnosis resulting from similar traumatic events usually after being subjected to inhuman treatment by another as opposed to a natural disaster or a road traffic collision, the symptoms of which are described as more relentless and long-term requiring prolonged psychological interventions (Bisson et al., 2019). Police officers frequently encounter potentially traumatic incidents and as part of their role are tasked to support individuals who have suffered trauma (Brewin et al., 2020) which can significantly impact their wellbeing (Steel et al., 2021) however, the complex impacts of this exposure to trauma is an understudied area (Davies et al., 2022) and if police personnel are to be protected, further research would be beneficial.

Brewin et al. (2020) report that PTSD rates among UK police officers are almost 20 percent higher than the general UK populace, although PTSD is less common in higher ranking personnel. Additionally, Burchell et al. (2022) suggest that up to 20% of police officers experience PTSD or C-PTSD, with higher rates linked to factors such as increased work intensity, limited autonomy, fewer career opportunities, and a lack of meaningful work. Respectively, a 2018 survey of almost 17,000 UK police officers (Police Care UK, 2018) revealed that despite 20 percent exhibiting symptoms of PTSD or C-PTSD, almost 70 percent of them failed to recognise these symptoms (Lewis et al., 2019). Police Care UK (2018) reports that only 12 thousand of the respondents who had confirmed trauma exposure were invited to complete the International Trauma Questionnaire (ITQ) (Cloitre et al., 2018), while the remaining four thousand were not offered the opportunity. Given that 70 percent of officers failed to recognise their own trauma

symptoms, this suggests that their awareness of traumatic experiences may also be limited, potentially distorting the results, and indicating that the true prevalence of trauma may be much higher. However, some researchers challenge these findings, arguing that the rates of PTSD among police officers are likely much lower. For example, Stevelink et al. (2022) estimate that only 4% of police officers will develop PTSD during their career, and Brewin et al. (2022) supports this view, suggesting that studies reporting higher rates are often based on biased samples or flawed study designs, which may lead to misinterpretation by respondents and consequently inflated prevalence estimates.

Despite these conflicting statistics, UK police forces fail to consistently track or record instances of C-PTSD or PTSD among their personnel (Foley et al., 2021; Burchell et al., 2022; Miller et al., 2021). Beyond these studies there is limited research examining how working conditions or vicarious trauma contribute to trauma-related issues in policing, raising concerns about the true extent of the problem. Recent research identifies within policing, a rise in mental health challenges, such as emotional fatigue and feeling less valued, (Police Federation (PFEW), 2024a; Lewsey, 2022; Graham, 2023), however the largest ever study across UK policing, of over 42 thousand personnel, failed to address trauma within the survey. This reinforces the need for improved methods for tracking and addressing the trauma and wellbeing of officers, which could better inform targeted interventions and decision-making by police forces to support their personnel.

Adverse Working Conditions

Since 2010, significant cuts in police funding have increased pressure on officers, forcing them to accomplish more with fewer resources, which has negatively impacted their mental well-being (Lewis et al., 2019; Burchell et al. (2022) Kassem & Erken (2024). Unsurprisingly, therefore, various researchers found that officers mentioned high workloads and insufficient staff as key stressors of their role (Houdmont & Elliot-Davies 2017; Elliott-Davies, 2020; Davies et al., 2022). A recent study by Graham et al. (2023), the largest of its kind, concurred with these findings and revealed incivility and a lack of appreciation from their employers and the community as major contributory factors. Other research such as Purba and Demou (2019) and Papazoglou et al. (2018) echo this view. Davies et al. (2022) and Burnett et al. (2019) also highlight that high workload and the emotional toll of constantly helping others can lead to compassion fatigue and burnout, which in turn can result in depression and anxiety for police personnel, further increasing work pressures.

Mental health challenges in the workplace are a significant financial strain, with an estimated 16 million workdays lost annually due to stress, anxiety, and depression (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2022) and in policing, in the 10 years since these austerity measures, police sickness levels due to mental ill health have almost doubled (Cartwright & Roach, 2020). Moreover, high-stress jobs like policing can harm both physical and mental health (Phythian et

al., 2022) and these findings suggest that funding cuts in policing may be counterproductive, as the cost of mental health and wellbeing issues could exceed any savings. Consequently, the Police Federation (PFEW) (2024b) reports there has been a recent increase in police officers leaving the force and almost 60 per cent of those cited an adverse impact on their mental health as their primary reason for resigning, further impacting Government spending to replace and train new officers and the inevitable loss of skilled personnel; which further exacerbates the issue.

One of the most recent studies, though limited in scope, argues that the perspectives and lived experiences of police officers have largely been overlooked in research on modern day contemporary policing issues (Kassem & Erken, 2024). However, many of the challenges identified in this study, such as poor public confidence, insufficient funding, high workloads, and lack of training, echo those highlighted in this review as contributing to mental health struggles, which casts doubt on their argument. A 2016 demand survey of 43 police forces (Houdmont & Elliott-Davies, 2017) demonstrated that officers experienced stress levels twice as high as the general workforce, driven by heavy workloads and staffing shortages, which led to recommendations being presented to the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) for consideration. However, a more recent study by Graham et al. (2023), found similar stressors suggesting that, despite slight statistical variations, little has changed over the past seven years. While a career in policing can be rewarding if proper support is available (Police Federation, 2024a), research shows that officers continue to face significant challenges, including public distrust and lack of recognition, indicating a need for ongoing psychological support.

Police Culture - Accessing mental health support

Mental health stigma remains widespread within UK policing, often resulting in officers and staff feeling both personally and professionally isolated (Bell & Palmer-Conn, 2019). Research by Turner and Jenkins (2018) demonstrates that many police personnel avoid seeking help for mental health issues due to a prevailing "bulletproof" culture and concerns about negatively impacting their career progression. This pervasive culture creates significant barriers to seeking support, with officers fearing damage to their reputation, a lack of confidentiality, and potential career setbacks (Bell & Palmer-Conn, 2019; Edwards & Kotera, 2020; Turner & Jenkins, 2018). Furthermore, officers often face distrust from colleagues and supervisors, with mental health-related absences frequently dismissed as unsubstantiated (Bell and Palmer-Conn, 2019; Stuart, 2017; Turner and Jenkins, 2018). A small study by Bell et al. (2021) also demonstrates that police personnel struggle to acknowledge their mental health issues and are reluctant to disclose them to medical professionals, further perpetuating the stigma.

Grumley-Traynor and Rydon-Grange (2024) echo this view, and, while not exclusively focused on UK police forces, their study highlights that police are regularly hesitant to seek psychological support noting that only those with an official medical diagnosis are likely to pursue counselling

services. Conversely, Lewis et al. (2019) identifies that almost 90% of police who recognised that they had experienced trauma within the workplace, the majority had sought help, however, 76% of them turned to counselling or other support networks rather than their force, indicating a lack of trust in their employer's capability to support them. In contrast, Davies et al. (2022) and Pythian et al. (2022) point to progressive change within policing toward a more forward-thinking approach to enhancing police personnel wellbeing. Since 2017, a national pledge has resulted in various police initiatives such as the Blue Light Wellbeing Framework (BLWF) (Mind, 2019), Oscar Kilo (2019), The National Police Wellbeing Service (NPWS) being implemented in the UK (College of Policing, 2018), preventative trauma measure like TRiM (Miller et al., 2021), and more recently the Working Together to Prevent Suicide initiative (College of Policing, 2022; Police Federation (PFEW), 2022). However, despite these efforts, Pythian et al. (2022) note that consistency of practice is varied, and evaluation of the initiatives is limited, casting doubt on the efficacy and lack of factual evidence of any improvements.

Correspondingly, Demou et al. (2020) report that some police personnel acknowledge progress in addressing mental health issues within the service, but stress the need for additional interventions, such as counselling and workplace training, to tackle deeper cultural issues within policing. However, the study has limitations, primarily reflecting the perspectives of a small group of senior police leaders and does not capture the broader experiences of frontline officers. As mentioned previously, many of these officers are leaving the force in significant numbers due to low morale (PFEW, 2024b) and have an increasing sense of being undervalued by their employers, and the general public, compared to the results of a similar survey in 2021 (Graham et al., 2023). As such, this evidence raises further questions about the effectiveness and value of these costly initiatives.

GDPR/Data Protection & Research Limitations

The BACP (2019) outlines that the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) establishes key principles for data protection, defining the responsibilities of counsellors in handling personal data. It ensures the protection of individuals' personal information and gives them greater control over its collection, storage, sharing, and use. Tribe & Morrissey (2020) demonstrate that the Data Protection Act (DPA) 1998, though convoluted, must be fully understood by therapists, as it is the primary legislation governing client records. Any breach of the DPA must be reported to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), which oversees the regulations, since such breaches could expose sensitive client information and negatively affect the client-therapist relationship. Therefore, it is crucial for counselling research to comply with these GDPR/DPA standards (Jenkins, 2017). Moreover, obtaining explicit consent from clients is essential before using their data in research (BACP, 2024).

Throughout this literature review, the author adhered to DPA and GDPR legislation, acknowledging that, although several smaller studies - such as those by Turgoose et al., (2017);

Hurrell et al. (2018); and Gray and Rydon-Grange (2019) which focused on specific roles within policing such as child or sexual violence investigations, or one by Sheard et al. (2019) which examined particular force areas - detailed information about individual police forces or personnel was generally excluded. This was done to ensure the confidentiality and safety of police respondents, particularly those in sensitive roles, who are more vulnerable to risk. However, this compliance restricts the ability to compare forces or demographic groups, limiting the collection of specific data. As a result, while an abundance of research points to police reluctance to seek psychological support, it lacks detailed statistics on counselling access, thus hindering a comprehensive response to the research question.

Impact on public confidence in policing

According to Lowerson (2022), public trust and confidence in policing has significantly declined, partly due to high-profile incidents such as the murder of Sarah Everard and further worsened during the pandemic, exacerbated by hasty legislation and unclear rules (Charman et al., 2023; Hohl, 2023). Key factors influencing public trust include personal encounters with law enforcement, perceptions of fairness, and the role of social media (Wells et al., 2024). Additionally, a recent study by Bradford (2024) and echoed by Caveney et al., 2019, indicates that austerity measures have negatively impacted public confidence, highlighting that the decline in figures since 2010 coincides with government cuts to policing. Given that austerity measures have similarly affected the mental health of police, this poses the question of whether there is a connection between police mental health and the public's distrust in the police service.

Burchell et al. (2022) also demonstrate that trauma-related disorders not only contribute to significant emotional distress for police officers but also pose a risk to the execution of their duties and their effectiveness. Unresolved trauma can impair both behaviour and critical cognitive functions (Miller et al., 2021), hindering officers' ability to meet objectives related to crime prevention, investigation, and community engagement, negatively affecting their professional performance thereby impacting public confidence. However, a literature review by Hanway and Hambly (2023) regarding public confidence in policing, which had the capability of addressing an association, fails to consider the mental health and wellbeing of police personnel and the potential effects this may have on public perceptions. Similarly, the latest Police National Wellbeing Survey (Graham et al., 2023) indicates a notable increase in police personnel feeling undervalued by the public, yet it does not establish a direct link between public attitudes and the mental health of the police workforce; both of which could be seen as missed opportunities, offering the potential for further research.

Conclusion

Research highlights a significant gap between the mental health needs of UK police personnel and their ability to access appropriate support. While precise statistics are unavailable due to GDPR restrictions, evidence suggests that those officers who seek help prefer external services over internal ones. The literature identifies that stigma, cultural barriers, long hours, shift patterns, mistrust of the mental health system, and career concerns contribute to low engagement with psychological support within the force. Trauma is just one factor affecting officers' mental health, with poor working conditions, high workload, and insufficient resources also playing a role. These factors have led to higher sickness rates and a notable decline in the number of experienced officers, as evidenced by high resignation rates.

While not directly aligned with the primary focus of this review, the author also identifies research related to factors influencing public confidence in policing. It can be demonstrated that some of these factors overlap with those affecting the mental health of police personnel. However, no existing studies appear to examine the correlation between these two areas, highlighting an opportunity for future research to explore whether mental health is connected to a decline in public trust. Such research could offer valuable insights into how police forces can enhance officer wellbeing while simultaneously improving public confidence in policing.

In conclusion, while initiatives such as Trauma Risk Management (TRiM) and the National Police Wellbeing Service show potential, significant gaps remain in addressing trauma-related mental health within the police service. Improving support systems and accurately tracking trauma-related data could help forces better understand the scope of the issue, enabling more targeted interventions. This, in turn, could reduce police turnover, enhance police personnel wellbeing, and lower overall policing costs in the UK.

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A phenomenological study on why patients fear discontinuation of Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor (SSRI)

by Amy Reddy BSc (Hons) Health & Social Care 24-25

P= Patients use of SSRI E= Fear of withdrawal and Lack of support O= Experiences

Introduction:

This presentation will examine the limitations encountered by individuals when seeking to discontinue SSRI medication underpinned with wider reading. The reason behind the research is to highlight the individual's perspective as opposed to statistical data, the gap in research and the need for further research and development this will educate professionals further on the support and facilities required to allow discontinuation to be successful and the relapse rates to a minimal.

- The literature reviews were carried out using databases, to collate information which uses a phenomenological approach.
- The appraisal tool used was Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2024).
- Limited research is available to support patients and General Practitioners (GPs) with the process of discontinuation of SSRI.
- The change is important as it will look to reduce the overuse of SSRI, reduce overprescribing of SSRI, remove social stigma and fear and provide withdrawal and relapse support.

Background:

- Limited withdrawal support.
- Gaps in the research (Royal College of Psychiatrist, 2019).
- Limited patient autonomy.
- GPs' fear of encouraging SSRI discontinuation.
- Increase in SSRI prescriptions (NHS Business Service Authority, 2024).
- Suicide and suicidal thoughts through using SSRI.
- The support required to discontinue the use of SSRI remains in its infancy (Medicines & Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, 2014).

The aims of the research is to :

- Explore patients fear of withdrawal when discontinuing the use of SSRI medication .
- Identify support needs of the patients and GP's providing the support.
- Consider the need for further research and a change in policy to ensure patients receive the correct support from GP's who possess the knowledge and skills required to provide the support through the use of Holistic, person centred support and policy guidelines.

Key themes/findings

- Fear of withdrawal side effects and uncertainty on support available.
 - Lack of knowledge and support from GPs.
- Lack of funding, training and additional support services leading to failure to sustain discontinuation.
 - Limitations included the research being in short supply with quality pieces using the patient's voice within the UK few and far between.
- GPs found it easier for patients to continue the use of SSRI as opposed to discontinuation.

Conclusion

- The current issue surrounding the research is that the research is limited from a patient's perspective, it offers little insight into the future development of GPs' knowledge and support and requires a substantial amount of additional research.
- Withdrawals from the use of SSRI medication is problematic due to limited knowledge to enable sustainability of discontinuation and research that evidences successful discontinuation and methods used is scarce.
- The research question has addressed patience experiences with discontinuation along with barriers faced and how the involvement of GPs is limited.
- The impact of these limitations is that discontinuation is unsuccessful and from the little research provided the success rate is small in comparison to the number of patients using SSRI medication, the research also highlights the impact lack of up skilling has on GPs.
- This research is important within the Health and Social Care sector as it highlights the importance of the principles required for success when a patient's needs are being heard and acted upon ensuring autonomy, unconditional positive regards and person-centred care using a holistic approach.

Recommendations:

- Up skilling GPs to enable support for patients holistically. (The Royal College of General Practitioners, 2012).
- Collaborative working between GP's and patients (Wentink et al., 2019).
- (RCGP, 2024), Budgeting allocation for up skilling and training for GP's periodically (M McCabe et al, 2020).
- Appointments for patients using person centred (NHS England 2024) and humanistic approaches (Singh, 2024) as opposed to DSM5 criteria.
- Tolentino and Schmidt (2018), Biopsychosocial approach to tapering or discontinuation of SSRI (Syed et al., 2020).

Methodology:

- The research was carried out through a systematic review of 5 main research papers supported by wider research.
- Positionality when carrying out the research had the potential for unconscious bias due to the interest in the subject and how this interest had the scope for shaping the research methods (Bryman et al., 2021, p. 131).
- P.E.O was used to ensure the research was relevant to the research question (Doody & Bailey, 2016).
- The choice of methodology was from a qualitative research perspective, with the use of snowballing to gather credible sources in respect of wider reading material (Choong et al., 2014).
- To address the research question, a number of databases were used: PUBMed EBSCOhost, Sage Journals, Cinahl, NHS, Google Scholar, and Government, with the use of Boolean filters alongside truncation to allow for refined and credible sources (Bramer et al., 2018).
- The use of a CASP allowed for a thorough appraisal of the papers to ensure validity, credibility and reliability (CASP 2024) and to ensure that the methodological approach was appropriate.
- Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes throughout, (Elliott, 2018), coding using a bottom-up approach (Jensen et al., 2022). However, a focus on phenomenology was necessary to allow engagement from the participants to address the research question (Neubauer et al., 2019).
- Ethical approval from the participants to address the research question (Neubauer et al., 2019).
- Ethical approval when acquiring the research papers ensured the protection of the patient and interviewers (World Health Organisation, 2021).



Research papers:

- Study 1 –General practitioners' attitudes towards antidepressant withdrawal. (McCabe et al., 2020).
- Study 2 - The lived experience of withdrawal from Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor (SSRI) antidepressants: A qualitative interview study (Mahmood et al., 2024).
- Study 3 - A qualitative study of patient views on discontinuing long-term selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (Leydon et al., 2007).
- Study 4 - Maintenance or Discontinuation of Antidepressants in Primary Care (Lewis et al., 2021).
- Study 5 - Better safe than sorry — why patients prefer to stop using selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) antidepressants but are afraid to do so: results of a qualitative study (Verbeek-Heida & Mathot, 2006).

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Beyond Likes and Shares: A Generational Study of Social Media-Induced Depression Tendency in the UK's Digital Landscape

By Joshua Bellot BSc (Hons) Psychology

Introduction

Social media has become a pervasive aspect of modern life, transforming communication, information access, and relationship formation (Defede et al., 2021; Hatamleh et al., 2023; Macit et al., 2018; Schwaiger et al., 2022; Steinsbekk et al., 2024; Yu, 2023). While offering benefits such as enhanced connectivity and self-expression, its impact on mental health is a growing concern (Beyari, 2023; Khalaf et al., 2023; Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2020; Sulaiman et al., 2024). Negative effects like addiction, anxiety, and depression are increasingly recognised (Bowen et al., 2020; Simsek et al., 2019). These effects are not uniform across age groups, highlighting the importance of examining generational differences in social media usage and its psychological impact. Previous research has often focused on younger generations, with fewer studies comparing the impact on older adults (Kross et al., 2021; Twenge et al., 2018). While the impact of social media on mental health is increasingly recognised, fewer studies have directly compared the social media-induced depression tendency (SMIDT) across distinct adult generations in the UK. This study addresses this gap by examining social media induced depression tendency (SMIDT) scores across Generation Z, Millennials, and Generation X. This study's findings reveal that Generation Z reported significantly higher SMIDT scores compared to Millennials, suggesting a differential psychological impact of social media across these generations.

Literature Review

Understanding the distinct social media usage patterns across generations is crucial for comprehending its varying impacts on mental health. Younger generations tend to be more active with trends and viral content, while older generations often prefer established platforms for connecting with family and peers (Elkatmış, 2024; Euajarusphan, 2021).

Generation Z

Generation Z (born mid-1990s to early 2010s) are defined as digital natives with high social media engagement and dependency (Sharma & Singh, 2023; Vugec et al., 2021). A significant majority in the UK use social media regularly for educational, communicational and entertainment purposes, often favouring short-form videos and photo-based platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube (Dixon, 2024; Elkatmış, 2024). They are heavily targeted by social media algorithms prioritising stimulating and trending content, potentially making them more vulnerable to negative effects (Chen, 2024; Guess et al., 2023). Furthermore, increased mental health issues like depression and anxiety have been linked to social media influence in this group (Boursier et al., 2020).

Millennials

Millennials (born 1981 to 1994) are also highly active social media users, utilising platforms for communication, entertainment, and self-expression (Vugec et al., 2021). They also tend to express the most concerns about social media's impact on their mental health (Xuan & Amat, 2020). These concerns may stem from experiences of feeling inadequate and the fear of missing out (FoMO), factors that the SMIDT scale may reflect.

Generation X

Generation X (born 1965 to 1980) represent a transitional generation in social media adoption, often preferring traditional media (Euajarusphan, 2021). While a large percentage in the UK use social media regularly, they tend to favour long-form content platforms like Facebook for maintaining connections and may use platforms like X (formerly Twitter) for sharing business, political, and research news (Fietkiewicz et al., 2016). While their usage might be less frequent than younger generations, if online interactions are not fulfilling, it could still contribute to feelings of loneliness, a component potentially captured by SMIDT. Their views on social media can also influence their children's usage of such platforms which could be a contributing factor to increased social media usage and mental ill health (Vossen et al., 2024).

While some literature acknowledges potential benefits of social media for social connection, particularly for geographically isolated older adults, this study focuses on the social media-induced depression tendency across three generations in the UK. Research indicates that adolescents and young adults (Generation Z) are particularly susceptible to the negative impacts of social media on mental health, with links to increased anxiety, depression, and psychological distress (Keles et al., 2020; Szczygieł & Podwalski, 2020). Factors like time spent on social media, frequent checking, personal investment, and problematic use are risk factors for depression and anxiety (Keles et al., 2020). Social media use in this group has also been associated with loneliness, poor sleep, cyberbullying, body image issues, fear of missing out (FoMO), and

decreased life satisfaction (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2020). Social media addiction, fuelled by addictive platform designs and the promotion of trends, is a significant concern for this generation due to their susceptibility to peer influence (Bhargava & Velasquez, 2021; Ciranka & van den Bos, 2019). This tendency to engage with trends and popular content aligns with social influence and social media engagement theory which suggest that popular content can become amplified, potentially exposing young people to harmful content (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016; Glasper, 2013). In addition, there is also a link between social media and suicide-related online experiences (Rodway et al., 2023). Furthermore, social media has been found to negatively impact young people's self-esteem, with a focus on seeking online validation (Ugwu et al., 2023; Valkenburg et al., 2021).

Millennials also experience negative mental health effects from social media, including higher technostress and lower happiness (Brooks, 2015). Studies have shown a correlation between prolonged use and depressive symptoms, along with concerns about its health impact and feelings of inadequacy and FoMO (Shahid et al., 2024; Xuan & Amat, 2020). Furthermore, social media addiction in young adults has some links to depression and aggression (Shahid et al., 2024). Research on Generation X and social media's mental health impact is less extensive. While they may use it less frequently than younger generations, they are still susceptible to its effects, such as increased loneliness and social isolation. Conversely, it can also provide important social connections for geographically isolated older adults (Lad et al., 2020; Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2020).

This study aimed to examine to what extent social media impacted individuals from each generation. Considering previous research, it is hypothesised that Generation Z and Millennials are the most impacted when compared to Generation X.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative design to investigate the relationship between social media and mental wellbeing across generations. The survey link was distributed across platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter), targeting relevant groups to reach a diverse sample of UK social media users. The collected data on the impact of social media on mental wellbeing was from a purposive volunteer sample of UK social media users aged 18 to 59. This age range covered Generation Z, Millennials, and Generation X. Participants provided informed consent following ethical guidelines from the British Psychological Society (BPS).

The study utilised a modified version of the Social Media-Induced Depression Tendency (SMIDT) scale to measure depression tendencies associated with social media usage across three factors: Sensitivity/ Attention Seeking, Worthlessness, and Escapism/ Reality Avoidance (Ugwu et al., 2023). The scale was adapted into a Likert-scale format, ranging from 1 = Never to 5 = Very Often, to allow for ANOVA analysis. The resulting potential total score range of 75. An independent groups design was used, with the independent variable being the three generational age groups and the dependent variable being the modified SMIDT score. The data

was then analysed using Jamovi. While Levene's test supported the assumption of equal variances, Welch's correction was applied to the one-way ANOVA due to the unequal sample size across the generation groups, particularly the smaller sample size for Generation X, providing a more robust analysis.

Results

After data cleaning, the final sample comprised of (N = 88) participants. Descriptive statistics, see table 1, revealed that Generation Z reported the highest mean SMIDT score (M = 41.3, SD = 9.25), followed by Generation X (M = 36.7, SD = 7.33), and Millennials (M = 34.5, SD = 8.86). Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated that SMIDT scores were normally distributed within each group.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics comparing SMIDT scale scores across three generation groups.

							Shapiro-Wilk	
SMIDT Score	Generation	N	Missing	Mean	Median	SD	W	p
	Generation Z (Born 1995 - 2012)	36	1	41.3	39.0	9.25	0.940	0.053
	Millennials (Born 1981 - 1994)	35	0	34.5	34	8.86	0.980	0.769
	Generation X (Born 1965 - 1980)	17	1	36.7	34	7.33	0.961	0.652

A one-way ANOVA with Welch's correction, see table 2, showed a statistically significant effect of generation on SMIDT scores ($F(2, 46.9) = 5.05, p = 0.010$), indicating differences in the perceived impact of social media across generations. Levene's test supported the assumption of equal variances.

Table 2

One-Way ANOVA (Welch's)

	F	df1	df2	p
SMIDT Score	5.05	2	46.9	0.010

Post-hoc comparisons using Tukey's test, see table 3, revealed that Generation Z reported significantly higher SMIDT scores than Millennials ($\Delta M = 6.79, p = 0.004$). The differences between

Generation Z and Generation X, and between Millennials and Generation X, were not statistically significant.

Table 3

Tukey Post-Hoc Test – SMIDT Score				
		Generation Z (Born 1995 - 2012)	Millennials (Born 1980 - 1994)	Generation X (Born 1965 - 1979)
Generation Z (Born 1995 - 2012)	Mean difference	—	6.79**	4.57
	p-value	—	0.004	0.185
Millennials (Born 1981 - 1994)	Mean difference		—	-2.22
	p-value		—	0.669
Generation X (Born 1965 - 1980)	Mean difference			—
	p-value			—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Discussion

This study found that Generation Z reported the highest SMIDT scores, significantly higher than Millennials, while Generation X's scores were intermediate. This supports the hypothesis that younger generations, particularly Generation Z, are more susceptible to negative psychological impacts associated with social media use. The lack of statistically significant differences between Generation Z and Generation X, and between Millennials and Generation X, is likely attributed to the smaller sample size for Generation X (N = 17), which could have significantly limited the statistical power to detect any potential significant differences that may exist. It is also possible that Generation X's intermediate SMIDT scores reflect a more nuanced engagement with social media, balancing its use for connection with potential moderating factors such as work and family responsibilities.

The higher SMIDT scores in Generation Z align with literature describing them as digital natives with high social media dependency (Sharma & Singh, 2023; Vugec et al., 2021), exposed to curated content on platforms like TikTok and Instagram driven by targeted algorithms (Chen, 2024; Elkatmış, 2024). This constant exposure to idealised online portrayals may exacerbate feelings of Sensitivity/ Attention Seeking and Worthlessness, as suggested by the components of the SMIDT scale and the findings of Ugwu et al., (2023) regarding the negative impact on self-esteem.

Millennials' significantly lower SMIDT scores compared to Generation Z may reflect more established coping mechanisms and a more balanced relationship with digital content, potentially leveraging its positive aspects for self-expression and community engagement while being more aware of its potential health impacts and feelings of inadequacy and FoMO (Dixon, 2024; O'Reilly et al., 2023; Shahid et al., 2024; Xuan & Amat, 2020).

Generation X's intermediate SMIDT scores, while not statistically significant from the other groups, suggest a complex interaction with social media. While they may not be as immersed as younger generations, they are still susceptible to feelings of loneliness when online interactions are not fulfilling (Bucci et al., 2019; Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2020). Their differing usage patterns, often favouring platforms for maintaining connections, might lead to a different experience of social comparison and escapism compared to the more visually oriented younger generations.

Implications for Theory and Practice

The findings reinforce the need for age-specific strategies to address social media's impact on mental health. Such strategies could look like educational programs for Generation Z within school curricula that focus on digital literacy, critical evaluation of online content, stress management techniques, and the importance of reducing screen time could be beneficial. For Millennials, interventions could focus on promoting mindful social media use, encouraging awareness of FoMO triggers and strategies to manage them, and highlighting resources for maintaining a healthy balance between online and offline activities (Abel et al., 2016; Shahid et al., 2024). Generation X could benefit from initiatives promoting meaningful offline interactions and community engagement could help combat potential feelings of loneliness and social isolation that may arise from social media use.

The study also supports the Social Media Engagement framework, highlighting the risks of algorithm driven content and urging further research into these mechanisms using longitudinal designs (Keles et al., 2020; Plackett et al., 2023).

Limitations and Further Directions

The current study possesses several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. Firstly, the cross-sectional design employed limits the ability to establish causal inferences regarding the differential impact of social media across generations. As a result, while it was observed that Generation Z had higher SMIDT scores, there cannot be a definitive conclusion that social media use directly causes this increased tendency. Future research should therefore employ longitudinal or experimental designs to investigate the temporal relationships and potential causal pathways between social media engagement and mental wellbeing across different age groups.

Secondly, this study relied on self-report measures for assessing both social media-induced depression tendency and potentially social media usage. This introduces the possibility of reporting biases and inaccuracies from participants due to social desirability or recall issues. To mitigate this in future investigations, it is recommended to integrate objective measures of social media use, such as screen time tracking or platform activity data, alongside self-report questionnaires.

Thirdly, the small sample size from Generation X (N = 17) warrants caution when interpreting the non-significant findings for this group. The lack of statistical significance in comparisons involving Generation X might be attributable to insufficient statistical power. Consequently, future research should aim to recruit larger, more representative, samples across all generations to enhance the generalisability of the findings and provide a more robust understanding of the trends.

Building on these limitations, there are several avenues for future research emerge. It is crucial to further investigate the impact of targeted algorithms on mental health, particularly within younger generations like Generation Z who are heavily exposed to curated content on platforms like TikTok and Instagram. Longitudinal studies could track how exposure to these algorithms over time influences their psychological wellbeing. Furthermore, future research should explore the specific conditions under which social media use transitions from being a beneficial tool for connection and information to a harmful influence on mental health. Employing mixed methods approaches, combining quantitative data with qualitative insights from interviews or focus groups, could provide a richer understanding of these nuanced processes.

Finally, while not a limitation that can be altered post-hoc, it is important to acknowledge that the cross-sectional nature and reliance on self-report might influence the interpretation of the observed generational differences in SMIDT scores. The higher SMIDT in Gen Z could be partly explained by their potentially greater awareness and willingness to report mental health concerns compared to older generations, although the measure aimed to specifically capture tendencies related to social media use. It is also important to continue to connect these findings with existing literature. For example, the higher SMIDT scores in Generation Z align with studies highlighting their high digital engagement and exposure to algorithm-driven content. Future research should further explore these theoretical links with more robust methodologies.

Conclusion

This cross-sectional study provides evidence of generational differences in SMIDT, with Generation Z reporting the highest scores, significantly higher than Millennials, and Generation X in an intermediate position. However, it is important to interpret these findings within the context of the study's limitations. Specifically, the cross-sectional design means we can only observe associations and cannot infer causation. These findings align with existing literature highlighting Gen Z's vulnerability due to high digital engagement and platform design. Millennials may possess more adaptive coping strategies, while Generation X's experience reflects a complex interplay of digital engagement and relational needs. Methodologically, further research should address limitations by employing longitudinal designs, objective measures, and more inclusive sampling strategies to better understand and mitigate the mental health consequences of social media across the lifespan. Understanding these generational differences in SMIDT underscores the necessity for tailored approaches in research, education, and intervention strategies aimed at mitigating the potential negative mental health consequences of social media across the lifespan. Further research must build upon these findings by addressing the identified methodological limitations to establish more definitive conclusions.

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