

Supporting Students Anywhere, Anytime: The Development of The Counselling Armchair Podcast for On-demand Mental Health Support

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Abstract

University counselling services frequently struggle with meeting rising demand for services with limited resources. While one-on-one support is essential, group sessions and webinars can only reach students at scheduled times. Podcasts, as on-demand content, offer an accessible, scalable way to address this challenge. Although few university counselling services have explored podcast production, podcasts have surged in popularity due to their accessibility and educational value, especially among 18–34-year-olds—a key university demographic.

The Counselling Armchair: Nurturing Well Being and Study podcast was developed at the RMIT University counselling service to enhance capacity to meet student needs. Key steps included upskilling hosts in podcast production (recording, editing, and distribution), creating a podcast design, using data from clients and counsellors to guide episode topics, and promoting episodes through RMIT University's communication channels.

Since its launch, the podcast has published 35 episodes with over 4,968 plays. Clinicians refer clients to episodes, and feedback highlights its role in reducing stigma, fostering familiarity with counselling staff, and offering interim support while students await appointments. The project illustrates how low-cost tools and collaborative design can produce meaningful, scalable mental health resources. Future directions include expanding student engagement through targeted promotion and community-building initiatives. This model offers a replicable framework for other institutions seeking to embed wellbeing into everyday university life.

Keywords

Mental health; Podcast; Student counselling; Student wellbeing.

Introduction and background

Beyond 1:1 support and services at scale

University counselling services face the perpetual challenge that demand for support far exceeds the resources allocated to meet it. In fact, university counselling services across Australia are experiencing increasing demand, growing complexity of student presentations, and limited resourcing (Brown, 2018). The 2018 Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association (ANZSSA) Heads of Counselling Services Benchmarking Survey (Andrews, 2019a) identified significant variation in counsellor-to-student ratios across institutions. Only three universities met the international benchmark of fewer than 3,000 students per counsellor and 23 met the ANZSSA benchmark of one counsellor to 6,000 students when broader support services were included (Andrews, 2019a). Subsequent analysis confirmed that no institution met international best practice standards, which indicates that counselling resources consistently fall short of what is needed (Andrews, 2019b). Earlier research by Stallman (2012) also reported that university counselling services in Australia were markedly under-resourced, with an estimated counsellor-to-student ratio of approximately 1:4,340. This is far higher than recommended international benchmarks, raising concerns about the capacity of services to meet student needs.

In 2024, RMIT University, a large dual-sector university, had more than 99,000 students globally, including approximately 70,000 students enrolled in Australia, over 15,000 students enrolled in Vietnam, and about 6,700 students in other offshore locations (RMIT University, n.d.). The RMIT University counselling team in Melbourne has 11.6 full-time equivalent (FTE) counselling staff and

3.6 FTE intake counselling staff, a total of 15.2 FTE to support the 72,200 students enrolled in Melbourne. As the portion of the team providing one-to-one therapy is only 11.6 FTE, this makes a ratio of 1:6,224, which makes it impossible to provide meaningful support to all students via traditional one-to-one therapy. As Staunton Smith and Langford (2019) demonstrated through service redesign at Swinburne University of Technology, integrating scalable models is essential to meet rising demand. As more RMIT University students present with complex mental health needs, attention is often directed to those in crisis, leaving others without timely support.

While one-to-one counselling remains central, university services face growing pressure to diversify support options. Increased mental health awareness and help-seeking among young people have coincided with rising demand and increasing complexity in student presentations (Orygen, 2020; Rickwood et al., 2005; Rickwood et al., 2016). Structural stressors—including COVID-19 impacts, academic and financial pressures, and housing or visa insecurity—have intensified demand, especially among international students (headspace, 2024; Universities Australia, 2021). Institutional factors, including student financial hardship stemming from tuition and related costs, exacerbate psychological distress and underscore the importance of accessible preventative interventions (Owen et al., 2025).

Although scalable interventions like mindfulness-based programs have been shown to improve mental health outcomes in adults in non-clinical settings, their implementation across institutions remains variable (Galante et al., 2021). National reforms, as outlined in the Australian Government’s *National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan*, emphasise proactive early intervention strategies within sustainable service models to better support population mental health (Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care, 2021).

Universities are increasingly adopting scalable, low-intensity interventions (e.g., group programs, digital content, peer support, and case management) to provide timely and accessible support to students (Madrid-Cagigal et al., 2025; Vescio et al., 2023). Despite these efforts, providing timely, on-demand support remains a challenge. While scheduled interventions like workshops, webinars, or groups can be beneficial, there are often high attrition rates between registration and attendance, which limits their overall reach. On-demand digital content can help overcome these barriers by offering more flexible access. Research indicates that podcasts can provide accessible, cost-effective, and low-barrier mental health support and may complement direct services, particularly by improving mental health literacy and reducing stigma (Carrotte et al., 2025). Nonetheless, podcast production is relatively uncommon in university counselling services as a viable mental health intervention. This paper outlines a practical model to address this shortfall—the development of an in-house counselling service mental health podcast as an effective, innovative, and scalable means of extending the reach of counselling services and supporting student wellbeing.

The growing popularity and impact of podcasts and mental health content

Podcast listenership in Australia has surged, with 33% of those aged 12 and older tuning in weekly in 2023—a 7% increase from the previous year (Commercial Radio & Audio [CRA] & Triton Digital, 2024; Edison Research, 2023). The 18–34 age group, which overlaps significantly with university students (82% of RMIT University enrolments are aged 20–44; RMIT University, 2023), makes up a large portion of this audience. Podcasts’ convenience, accessibility, and long-form conversational style foster “parasocial intimacy”, strengthening listener–host connections and engagement, often extended via social media (Vilceanu, 2025). Alongside evidence that smartphone-based and digital mental health interventions show promise for young people (Firth et al., 2017), this suggests audio-based and mobile platforms may play a useful role as their audio-only format allows for private consumption—especially with headphones—which can increase engagement (Adler Berg, 2025). Podcasts are also compatible with multitasking, enabling students

to listen while commuting, exercising, or completing routine tasks, which enhances accessibility and integration into daily life (Cheng et al., 2025).

Mental health podcasts have grown alongside this broader trend, driven by rising mental health awareness and post-pandemic needs. A University of Melbourne study found that one third of 629 Australian adults had listened to mental health podcasts in the past year, particularly those aged 18–35, women, and individuals with lived or familial mental health experience (Carrotte et al., 2023). Preferred formats included lived-experience interviews, mindfulness exercises, and practical strategies, with listeners reporting improved understanding and reduced stigma (Carrotte et al., 2025). These features make podcasts a valuable resource for students who may avoid formal counselling due to stigma or scheduling challenges, or who may prefer anonymous, flexible support (Tomasi, 2020).

Podcasts as a scalable mental health resource for university counselling services

Unavoidable delays in accessing one-to-one mental health support further illustrate the need for scalable mental health interventions. In Australia, headspace reports average waits of 10–25 days for intake and therapy sessions (2019). This aligns with data from RMIT Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS), which show an average wait time of 16.8 days for an initial appointment in 2024. Furthermore, Australians may delay seeking help for up to 12 years (Beyond Blue, 2025), and adolescents often wait over 99 days for treatment (Subotic-Kerry et al., 2025). Globally, mental health services face a US\$200 billion annual funding gap, with only 2% of health budgets allocated to mental health (World Health Organization, 2022). Beyond one-to-one therapy, individuals are increasingly turning to mental health apps; peer support groups; online forums; and complementary therapies such as mindfulness, journaling, and creative arts (World Health Organization, 2021). Podcasts fit within this broader mental health support system, providing a support option that can complement traditional services.

While several universities have produced podcasts to support student mental health and wellbeing, these are typically created outside of counselling services. Examples in Australia include the University of Melbourne’s *On the Same Wavelength* (Carrotte, 2023) and the University of Sydney’s *Minding Your Mind* (Hickie & O’Loughlin, 2021–present), both publicly accessible and featuring expert advice. Less common are podcasts developed by university counselling services themselves, such as the University of Oxford’s *Introducing CBT for Low Mood and Depression* (Totman, 2020–2022), the University of Galway’s *Well Zone* (MacNally & Harrison, 2022–present), and the University of Florida’s *CWC Talks: The College Mental Health Podcast* (Olivia & Chelsea, 2020–2022). Whilst these podcasts offer a promising start in using podcasting for student mental health support, there remains scope for further development. Moving beyond a brief psychoeducational format to a more conversational, interview-style approach may make the content more engaging and better align with what listeners enjoy most about podcasts—long-form conversation, storytelling, humour, and authentic connection between hosts and guests. Moreover, because the existing options are not produced in Australia, an RMIT University-specific in-house podcast would allow for content tailored to the RMIT University student experience, making the support more relevant and meaningful.

The constraints of podcasts for mental health support

Although the growth of mental health-themed podcasts is exponential, their clinical effectiveness as a mental health intervention is less understood. While they appear effective in increasing understanding of mental health concerns, the impact on listener behaviour and long-term health outcomes remains under-researched (Zou et al., 2025). Carrotte et al. (2025) highlight that while brief digital interventions—including podcasts—can improve self-reported symptoms of anxiety and depression, listeners often disengage before consuming enough content to experience

meaningful benefits (Feng et al., 2025). Carrotte et al. (2025) also note that the likelihood of listeners engaging with a podcast is influenced by the production quality and accessibility. Podcasts are not substitutes for crisis support or personalised therapy; their role is primarily complementary, and their effectiveness relies on listeners remaining engaged. They are limited by design because listeners cannot ask questions, receive tailored feedback, or engage in dialogue in the way they can with a counsellor. Moreover, the multitasking benefit might mean that users only listen without actively applying the content or reflecting deeply (Oslawski-Lopez & Kordsmeier, 2025). Therefore, although a counselling service podcast would be a valued innovation in mental health that is supported by university policy, it could not replace clinical services. Rather, a podcast would need to be designed to complement clinical services with a curated selection of topics relevant to the counselling population. Provided that the content is engaging, practical, and informative and can be flexibly accessed, a podcast could be a welcome addition to support options offered to students, both those currently engaged in counselling and those considering seeking support.

Development of an RMIT Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS) podcast

Rationale

The *Australian University Mental Health Framework* (Orygen, 2020) encourages diverse, student-informed approaches, including digital media, to enhance wellbeing. Murphy and Baines (2015) similarly emphasise the importance of an integrated university-wide mental health strategy, supporting initiatives that embed wellbeing into everyday student life. However, guidance on podcasting remains limited, indicating that universities have yet to fully incorporate this medium into their mental health strategies. At RMIT University, this created a clear opportunity. With no existing mental health podcast tailored to student wellbeing, a podcast produced by CAPS could address this gap. Aligning content with common concerns raised by CAPS clients would provide timely, relevant support on prevalent mental health and academic challenges, delivered in an accessible, on-demand format that could also act as interim support for students awaiting appointments.

An in-house podcast would complement clinical services, enabling clinicians to refer students to specific episodes to reinforce therapeutic work. Hearing counsellors' voices may also demystify the counselling process, reduce stigma, and encourage help-seeking. Such an initiative would extend the reach of RMIT University's support services and align with Sillifant's (2024) call for a whole-of-university approach to student mental health and wellbeing that emphasises structural change and opportunities for enhanced support.

Design: The Counselling Armchair: Nurturing Well Being and Study

Launched by RMIT CAPS in 2022, *The Counselling Armchair: Nurturing Well Being and Study* podcast has published 35 episodes as at March 2026 (Matjacic & Ty, 2022–present). The concept of the podcast was to record conversations between counsellors on common mental health and academic issues in an interview format with two hosts. This format enables the inclusion of psychoeducational content, explaining psychological concepts, common symptoms, and the challenges students typically encounter, while also offering evidence-based strategies for improving wellbeing. The decision to adopt a conversational interview style was based on the desire to present the information in a warm and engaging manner, reducing the potential dryness often associated with psychoeducational content. This approach also allows multiple members of the CAPS team to contribute, each sharing their “go-to” strategies typically offered in one-on-one counselling sessions in a way that draws the listener into the conversation.

To enhance accessibility and ensure the podcast reaches a wide audience, it was made available on public streaming platforms, allowing students to conveniently access episodes and subscribe.

Subscription also enables notifications of new content, fostering continued engagement and connection with the community of podcast listeners. Inevitably, a publicly available podcast can be accessed by anyone, and there is a portion of the podcast audience that are not RMIT University students. However, as this does not create any additional burden on podcast production, it was deemed to be of no concern if other interested parties also consume episodes. The benefits of a podcast that is easily accessed by RMIT University students outweighed any need to keep the podcast in house.

The podcast releases episodes roughly once per month, although this is influenced by the work demands on the hosts, whose primary responsibility is providing counselling support to clients. During peak periods of demand for counselling appointments, there are longer delays between episodes. Additionally, a change of host due to the departure of a founding host created some delays. In 2024 and 2025, however, episodes have been more consistently regular and episode plays have increased.

Episode topics

Most episode topics were based on common issues reported by CAPS clients and aligned with existing webinars and workshops, offering similar content in an accessible, on-demand format. Some topics were selected for their relevance to the RMIT University student experience. Interviewees were primarily internal staff and interns, allowing listeners to hear from various counsellors with different areas of expertise. Two episodes featured external experts, while others included RMIT University staff from student services, such as student welfare advisors, to highlight available support. Early episodes also addressed administrative matters like census dates and special consideration. Table 1 shows all released episode titles, release dates, and number of plays as at March 2026.

Table 1*Released Episodes, Release Dates, and Number of Plays as at March 2026*

Episode number and title	Publish date	Plays (as at March 2026)
1. Welcome to The Counselling Armchair	Aug 2022	100
2. I feel like a phony: Managing Imposter Syndrome	Sept 2022	198
3. I'll get to it later	Sept 2022	118
4. Recipe for Assessment Success	Oct 2022	108
5. Let's get sleepy	Dec 2022	181
6. Jingle Bells or Jingle Hell?	Dec 2022	175
7. Meet our Student Welfare Advisors	Jan 2023	65
8. Soundbite: Crikey! It's Census Date!	Feb 2023	33
9. A whole new world?	Feb 2023	75
10. Soundbite: Extension of Time and Special Consideration	March 2023	46
11. Transitioning to Uni	April 2023	76
12. Get ahead of your time	June 2023	83
13. Do you feel socially anxious too?	June 2023	102
14. Sailing through Groupwork Storms: Dodge the pitfalls and maximise success	Sept 2023	58
15. Thriving with ADHD: Navigating your study journey	Sept 2023	192
16. Building Boundaries and the Art of Assertive Communication	March 2024	213
17. Unwind and Stress Less: Stress Management 101	April 2024	256
18. Anxiety Antidotes: Tackling avoidance with confidence	June 2024	142
19. Perfectly Imperfect: Embracing Flaws and Finding Balance	July 2024	194
20. Embracing Neurodivergence: From Burnout to Wellbeing and Emotional Balance	July 2024	220
21. Redefining Masculinity: Navigating Modern Manhood	Aug 2024	173
22. Finding your tribe: Overcoming Loneliness and Building Meaningful Social Bonds	Oct 2024	145
23. Taming the inner critic: A guide to self-compassion	Nov 2024	190
24. When Rejection Feels Unbearable: Understanding Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria	Dec 2024	231
25. The Happiness Hack: Using Positive Psychology to improve your Well Being	March 2025	207
26. Staying on Track: Building Motivation and Focus	April 2025	215
27. Building Healthy Relationships in a Complicated World	June 2025	155
28. You're Not Alone – Talking About Suicidal Thoughts and Self-Harm	June 2025	181
29. It's Not Just Conflict: Naming Coercive Control	Sept 2025	149
30. How to Look After Yourself When the World Feels Heavy	Sept 2025	133
31. Bonus Episode: A Guided ACT Exercise	Sept 2025	100
32. Understanding Intimate Partner Violence	Oct 2025	130
33. Between Two Worlds: Balancing Culture, Family Expectations and Your Wellbeing	Dec 2025	102
34. What helps when money stress affects study?	Dec 2025	147
35. Low Battery Mode: Burnout, Stress, Exhaustion & the Path Back	March 2026	52

The process of podcast production

As first-time creators, the podcast hosts required initial upskilling to establish a cost-effective production process that fit into staff workflows. During pre-launch, the team selected a title (*The Counselling Armchair*), artwork, and royalty-free music, with input from CAPS staff. The logo was later revised by RMIT University communications to meet branding guidelines. Early episodes were recorded via Microsoft Teams, but inconsistent sound quality led to a new method: participants continued meeting on Teams but recorded individual audio tracks using phone apps, which were later mixed for clarity. This setup required only basic equipment—a laptop, headset, and smartphone. Sound editing was done using Audacity, a free audio editing tool. Episodes were

distributed via Anchor (now Spotify for Podcasters), which enabled free hosting and automatic distribution to major platforms like Spotify and Apple Podcasts.

Episode planning is structured and collaborative. Hosts meet monthly to select topics and develop cohesive interview questions. Guests—usually CAPS staff—participate voluntarily, with occasional external experts invited for additional insight. A pre-interview is conducted to refine questions and align content with the episode’s goals. Interviews typically run for 45 to 60 minutes, allowing for thoughtful discussion while maintaining listener engagement. This process supports professional delivery and ensures relevance to student wellbeing.

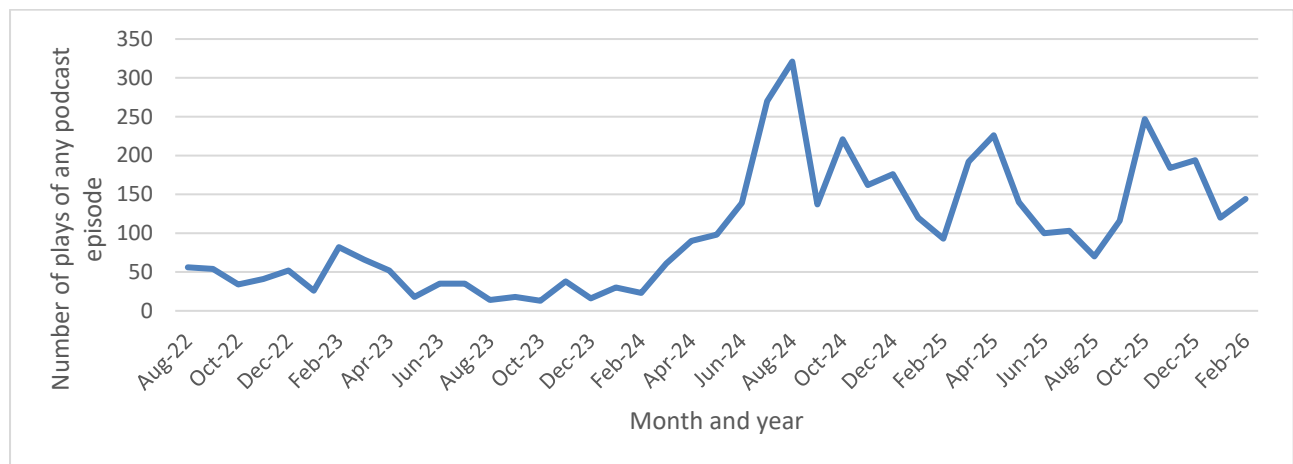
The results so far

Podcast analytics

Listenership has been gradually building since the podcast’s launch, and there have been 4,968 total plays to date. Accelerated growth in 2024—including a 481% rise in listeners, a 653% increase in plays, and a 169% growth in followers—coincided with enhanced promotion through RMIT University’s internal communication channels. Prior to this, promotion was minimal and largely reliant on word of mouth. On average, episodes receive 128 plays, with some performing significantly better—an encouraging result for a specialised, independently produced podcast. Spotify data show it ranks as a “top 5” podcast for 73 listeners and the “number 1” show for 26, indicating strong engagement and potential for continued growth. Figure 1 shows the number of plays across all episodes since the podcast’s launch in 2022.

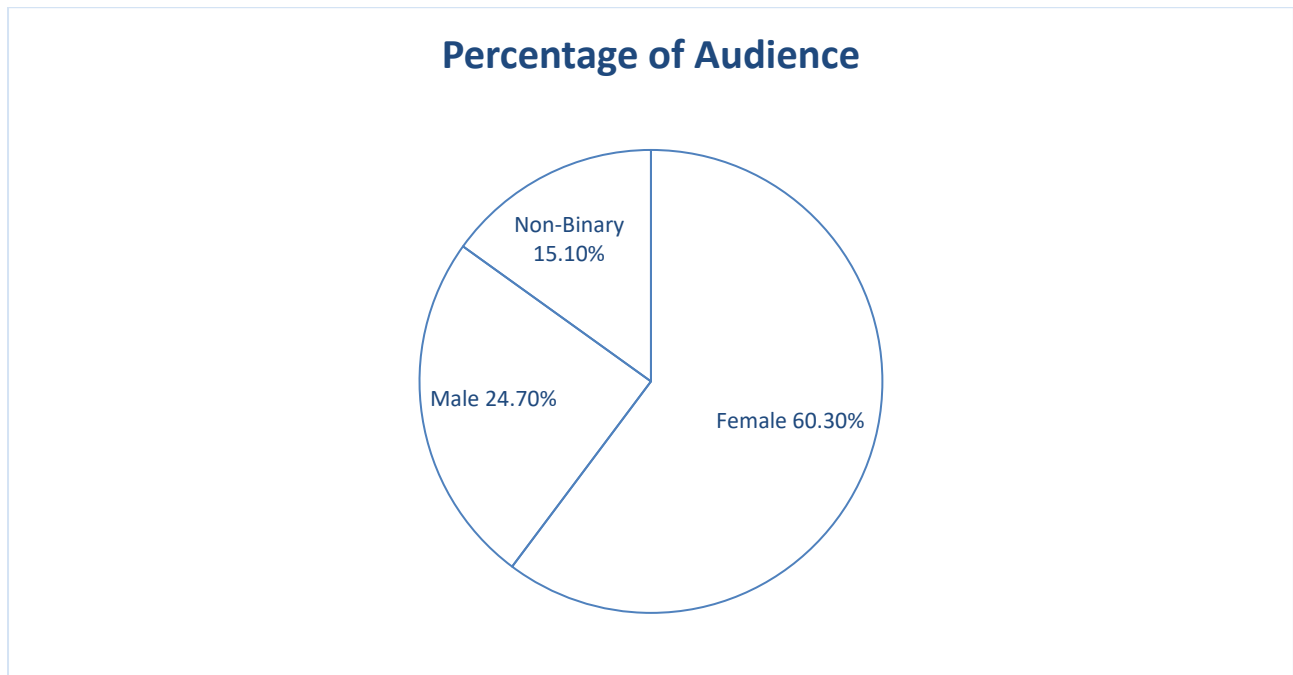
Figure 1

Number of Plays Across All Episodes 2022–2025



Gender, age, and location breakdown of listenership

Audience data for *The Counselling Armchair* show that 60.3% of listeners are female, 24.7% male, and 15.1% non-binary. This aligns with broader trends, as mental health podcasts typically attract more women and among women who listen to podcasts each month, 64% report using them for mental health support (Edison Research & SXM Media, 2022). It also reflects wider patterns in help-seeking, with women historically more likely to access support, although this is gradually shifting as stigma decreases and cultural barriers become better recognised (Ford & Keane, 2024; Harris et al., 2015). Although data on non-binary and gender-diverse podcast audiences are limited, their strong representation here is notable given their significantly higher rates of mental health challenges (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024). Figure 2 shows the gender breakdown of the podcast audience.

Figure 2*Listenership Breakdown by Gender*

Data show that 28.9% of listeners are aged 27 or younger, 50.6% are 28–44, and 20.5% are 45 or older. This indicates an older audience compared to RMIT University’s student population, where 67% are 24 or younger, 30% are 25–44, and only 4% are over 45. The podcast thus appears to have broader appeal beyond the typical university student demographic (CRA & Triton Digital, 2024; RMIT University, 2024). Figure 3 shows the ages of the podcast listenership.

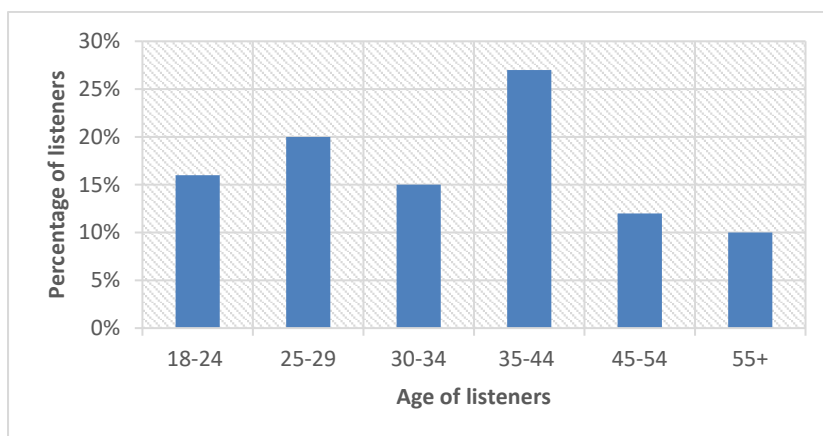
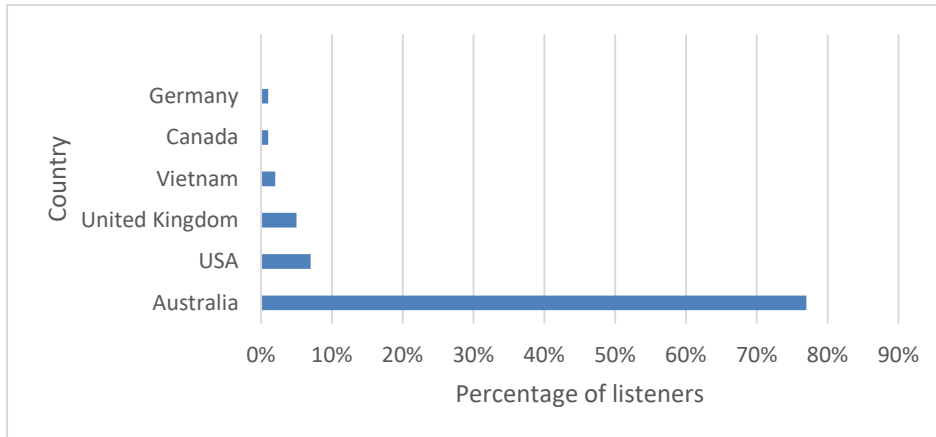
Figure 3*Listenership Breakdown by Age*

Figure 4 shows the percentage of listeners by country. The podcast has been streamed in 23 countries, with the majority of listeners located in Australia and the other top five countries being the United States, the United Kingdom, Vietnam, Canada, and Germany. The prominence of English-speaking countries is expected, as it is likely that listeners seeking mental health-related content in English would encounter the podcast. The presence of listeners in Vietnam is also understandable given the existence of an RMIT University campus in that region. In contrast, the engagement from predominantly non-English-speaking countries such as Germany is less readily

explained, although it may reflect English-speaking residents seeking mental health resources delivered in English.

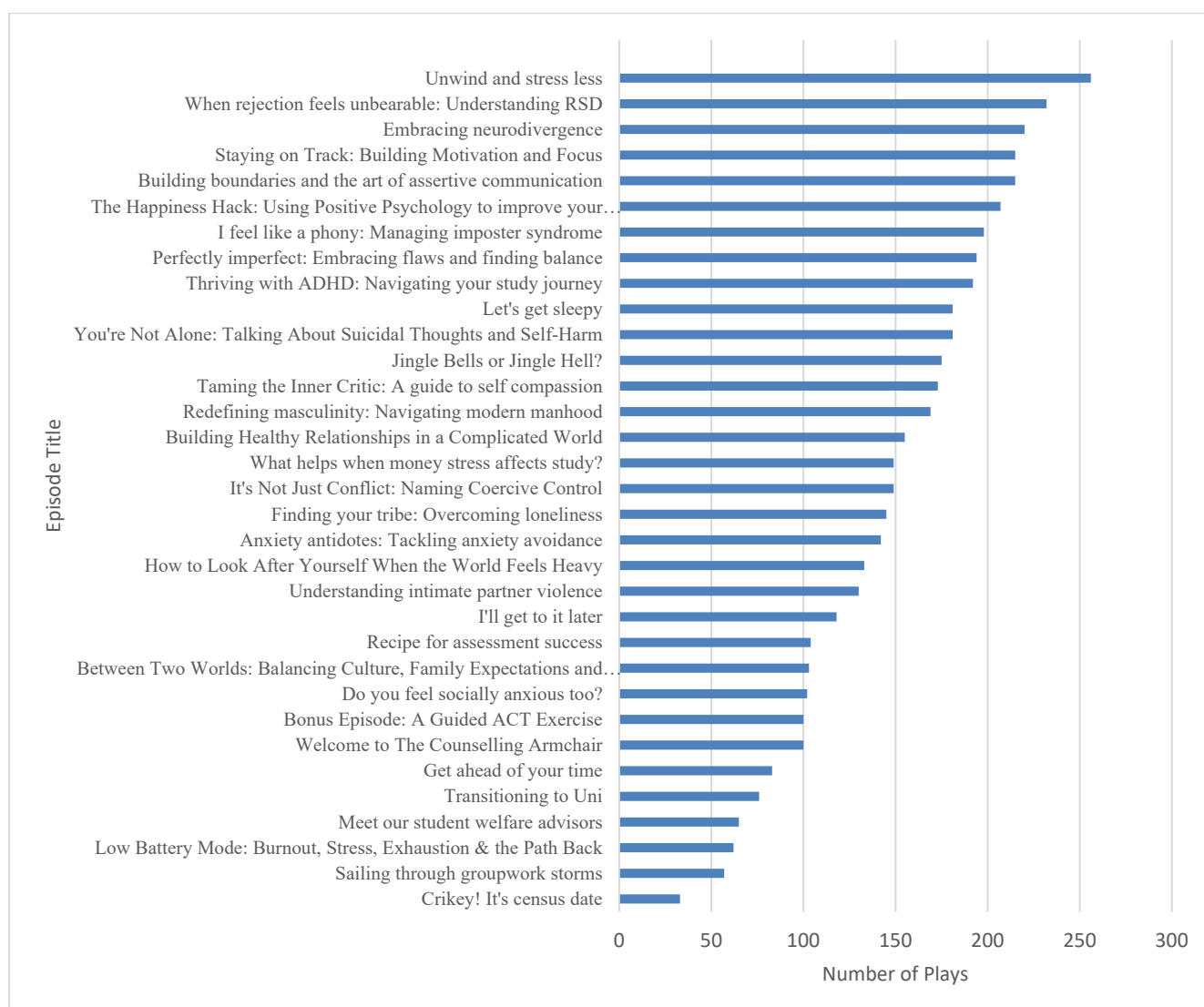
Figure 4

Listenership Breakdown by Country



Episode play count

Figure 5 shows the episode rankings by number of plays. These indicate an audience preference for episodes on more specific mental health topics rather than university-specific topics and for longer episodes. For example, the most played episode is “Unwind and Stress Less”, a long-form interview episode containing advice on stress management and a meditation exercise, and the least played episode is “Soundbite: Crikey! It’s Census Date!”, a short informational episode on what to do by Census date.

Figure 5*Most to Least Played Episodes*

Outcomes

Purpose and evaluation metrics

The Counselling Armchair podcast was developed to support student mental health through accessible, on-demand content. Engagement analytics, such as episode play counts, provide an indicative measure of reach and demonstrate consistent utilisation, including by international listeners. Furthermore, spikes in downloads following targeted promotion of episodes within RMIT University indicate the potential of podcasts to extend the reach of mental health support.

Accessibility and complementing clinical services

The podcast provides a freely accessible resource for all students, including those awaiting individual appointments. Although listener data do not specifically identify RMIT University students, CAPS clinicians and student support staff report routinely recommending episodes. This approach aligns with evidence on key determinants of student psychological distress, including financial stress, social inclusion, and academic pressures (Owen et al., 2025). Future enhancements will include integrating episodes within a dedicated mental health resources page on the CAPS website, which will enable tracking of student engagement through click-through data.

RMIT University clinicians often integrate podcast content into therapeutic practice, using episodes as homework to reinforce psychoeducation and reflection. For example, one clinician regularly directs clients to the episode on rejection sensitive dysphoria, a concept often unfamiliar but relevant to their experiences. Clinicians report that the podcast is a valuable tool to shortcut psychoeducation, particularly helpful in a six-session brief therapy model. Because the content is created in house by colleagues, clinicians report feeling able to trust its quality and confident recommending episodes to clients. Furthermore, the upskilling of staff involved in the podcast's development has strengthened their capacity to produce effective digital content for student support, enhanced their psychoeducational communication competencies, and contributed to increased professional satisfaction. This approach aligns with Bratby and Duncan (2023), who highlight that accessible mental health resources enhance staff confidence and capacity to support students beyond formal counselling sessions.

Engagement, familiarity, and client experience

A core strength of the podcast lies in addressing concerns specific to RMIT University students, identified through CAPS clinicians and service data, and reflecting factors associated with psychological distress in Australian university students (Owen et al., 2025). Podcast episodes on study-related topics and mental health issues are promoted via on-campus digital screens, newsletters, and social media, extending its reach beyond counselling clients. While the exact RMIT University student listenership is unclear, attendance at related mental health webinars offered by RMIT University CAPS indicates strong demand for this type of support.

Key aims of *The Counselling Armchair* podcast were to reduce stigma and normalise help-seeking by familiarising students with the counselling experience, and to explore whether hearing counsellors' voices could ease anxiety and foster a sense of connection. While the impact is challenging to quantify, future iterations of the CAPS intake form or post-therapy evaluations could include items assessing the podcast's influence on students' willingness to seek support.

Whilst *The Counselling Armchair* podcast cannot replace one-to-one therapeutic support, it does provide a viable and effective addition to the support system for students, especially because it can be accessed on demand at any time. Clients have reported listening to episodes featuring their counsellor when feeling anxious or having trouble sleeping, describing this as soothing and reassuring. Recognition of their counsellor's voice elicited feelings of comfort and familiarity, and engaging with episode content reinforced the knowledge and support gained from counselling sessions.

Feedback from clients who accessed the podcast, as reported to their referring clinician, highlights the compassionate tone of hosts, the practical value of content, and the emotional relief of relatable discussions. This reflects findings from previous research on mental health podcasts and listener experiences (Ó Caoilte et al., 2023). Many students report engaging with additional episodes beyond those recommended, some becoming regular listeners, and several report recommending episodes to friends. Additionally, students reported that the podcast helped to normalise their difficulties. As a result, they felt less ashamed and guilty and, importantly, less alone. Clients have reported experiencing "light bulb" moments when listening to episodes which enhanced their therapy journey. Although more evaluation is needed, such feedback suggests the podcast may enhance trust and therapeutic rapport.

Challenges, lessons, and future directions

The development of the podcast faced several early challenges. As first-time creators, the hosts required upskilling in key areas such as recording, editing, and distribution to establish a functional production workflow. Balancing podcast production with core counselling responsibilities also proved difficult, often leading to delays during peak service periods. Additionally, initial growth

was limited due to minimal promotion, with most referrals occurring through word of mouth until communications support was engaged to enhance visibility.

The project also highlighted several important learnings. First, scalable mental health support can be delivered using accessible, low-cost tools, demonstrating that meaningful resources can be created even by first-time creators with modest technical expertise and with limited budget. Second, podcast content can be integrated with clinical services to enhance impact and can easily be utilised as a “while you wait” resource when there are booking delays for appointments. Third, audience preferences indicate that listeners value longer episodes with in-depth discussion of mental health themes rather than short, soundbite-style informational episodes, highlighting the importance of thoughtful content design to maximise engagement. Collectively, these lessons underscore the potential for podcasts to complement traditional mental health services within higher education settings.

Qualitative feedback from students and counsellor referrals provides meaningful insight into engagement with the podcast and its perceived outcomes. Future objectives include increasing student listenership through targeted promotion, engagement at student events, and the strategic use of university social media. Plans to cultivate a listener community—such as hosting events; incorporating interactive elements, including vox pops; and inviting students to propose episode topics—are intended to enhance relevance, foster collaboration, and further integrate the podcast within RMIT University’s broader mental health support system.

Recommendations for other institutions

To apply this podcast model, counselling services can begin by launching a pilot series using basic equipment and free software like Audacity or Spotify, while gradually upskilling interested staff to build internal confidence. Content should be aligned with student needs by using counselling service data and staff insights to guide episode topics, focusing on common concerns and psychoeducational strategies. Promotion should be integrated across multiple channels to maximise reach and normalise help-seeking behaviours. Podcasts can also extend therapeutic work, with clinicians referring clients to relevant episodes to reinforce key concepts and provide interim support. Institutions should evaluate and iterate by collecting feedback, monitoring engagement analytics, and refining content and delivery based on what resonates most with students and staff.

Conclusion

The Counselling Armchair: Nurturing Well Being and Study podcast has become a valuable resource in promoting student mental health at RMIT University. While the exact proportion of student listeners remains unknown, anecdotal evidence suggests the podcast effectively complements counselling sessions. Student feedback highlights its role in normalising personal challenges and reducing feelings of shame and guilt, thereby fostering a more supportive and inclusive environment.

Both RMIT University counsellors and listeners have praised the podcast’s relevance, particularly in episodes focused on mental health and stress management—echoing Rueckert’s (2025) call to shift from reactive, crisis-driven approaches to proactive, culturally embedded wellbeing strategies. The podcast also aligns with student wellbeing research, illustrating how university initiatives can embed wellbeing into the everyday student experience through accessible, student-informed interventions (Riva et al., 2020).

Hearing familiar counsellor voices enhances connection and trust, positioning the podcast as both an educational tool and a means of destigmatising mental health challenges. Looking ahead, plans include expanding the podcast’s reach through targeted promotion and building a listener community via events and collaborative topic suggestions. This project also provides an

opportunity for further research through large-scale, formal qualitative and quantitative data collection to more comprehensively examine the trends suggested by informal feedback collected. Ultimately, *The Counselling Armchair* exemplifies how university counselling services can innovate to meet growing mental health needs, offering scalable, student-informed support that complements traditional services while embedding wellbeing across the institution.

Declaration

Assistance with identifying and formatting references was supported by AI (ChatGPT). All content, interpretation, and conclusions were reviewed and verified by the author. This disclosure is provided in accordance with the *Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association* (JANZSSA) AI Policy.

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