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Trend Analysis of Depression and Anxiety in College Students

By Katarina Smith

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to determine what factors are contributing to the growing trend of depression and anxiety on college campus.

Personal Connection

- Lifelong learner and passion for education
- Personal accounts with depression and anxiety
- Interest in understanding and improving Western Oregon University's mental health resources

AWARENESS OF DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

Are universities exposing students to information and resources related to their mental health?

- Over half of college students felt that their college or university provides information regarding depression and anxiety
 - 52% are interested in getting information from their university
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Awareness Findings

1. 95% of college counseling center directors surveyed said the number of students with significant psychological problems is a growing concern in their center or on campus
2. More than 60% responded that their college or university doesn't provide information about suicide prevention and about the same number of people said that they weren't interested in learning more about it

Assumption:

The increase in depression and anxiety related incidents in the college population should suggest lack of awareness as not being the immediate issue with this growing trend

Conclusion:

The issue isn't about bringing awareness to university officials; rather, it is important that the students become more aware

UNDERSTANDING DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

Is misunderstanding of these disorders and how they relate to college life causing the increase in the development depression and anxiety?

- Depression and anxiety are the most common types of mental illness experienced by college students
 - According to a Depression and Anxiety Monitor survey, of all the stigmas mentioned in this research, more than a quarter of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that people with depression are unpredictable
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Understanding Overview and Findings

Overview

Reviewed disorders and sub-disorders most commonly experienced by college students:

- Depression
 - Clinical Depression
 - Bipolar Disorder
 - Psychotic Depression
 - Seasonal Affective Disorder
 - Persistent Depressive Disorder
- Anxiety
 - Generalized Anxiety Disorder
 - Panic Disorder
 - Social Anxiety Disorder
 - Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
 - Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Understanding Overview and Findings

Findings

- Mental Health and Suicide Survey by Harris Poll identified 60% college-aged adults view seeking professional mental health services as a sign of strength
- About 10% or less of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that people with depression exhibit stigmas including weakness, dangerousness, and whether or not depression is a real illness

Micky M. Sharma, Psy.D., the director of counseling at Ohio State University states in an interview with PBS:

“I think the stigma regarding mental health has decreased locally here at Ohio State and nationally across the country. Students are more apt to reach out and meet with a counselor when they’re struggling with things”

Conclusion:

Stigmas do still exist, but the impact they have on the mental health community has decreased in recent years

ACCESSIBILITY TO COLLEGE STUDENTS

Are students aware of the resources that are available at their university and how they can get access to these resources?

- The second largest barrier for seeking help is busy student schedules accounting for 34% of students
 - Inflexible hours of operation for health services were the next largest at 25%
 - Challenges with resource allocation are often due to inadequate funding and inconsistent supply:demand leading to large demographics uneducated and minimally supported
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Access to Resources Findings

Jennifer Ruark, deputy managing editor of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, comments on how vastly different college campuses are in their ability to respond to mental health concerns. She says:

“You have some college campuses that are able to have an on-site psychiatrist, but there are many that don’t.

There are many campuses which don’t have as many hours available at their counseling center, who are staffing the center with interns or trying to rely more on peer education and faculty intervention, simply because they don’t have the resources that they need”

Nicole Stearman, a student of Eastern Washington University, who suffers from panic attacks, discussed in an article her problem with attempting to seek help:

“I can't really time my panic attacks to hit only on weekdays during the center's 11 a.m.- 4 p.m. counselor walk-in hours,”

Access to Resources Findings

Funding:

- Many organizations and government agencies are working on providing grants that go directly to improving college health centers
- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA), has a variety of grants available for schools including the Garrett Lee Smith Campus Suicide Prevention Program with over 2 million dollars available for 20 schools to receive

Conclusion:

With funding like the Garrett Lee Program, colleges will be able to better accommodate students needs such as flexible clinic hours, availability of on call psychological professionals, and more campus outreach

Conclusion

- Thesis investigated three factors that could contribute to the rising trend of depression and anxiety among college students
 - Lack of awareness
 - Misunderstandings of mental illnesses
 - Inadequate resource access
- No single factor is the driving force, rather a compilation of these factors

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