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Prevalence and Predictors of Stress and Anxiety Among College Students

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McLaren et al., Prevalence and Predictors of Stress and Anxiety Among College Stu
Prevalence and Predictors of Stress and Anxiety among College Students
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INTRODUCTION

College students report elevated rates of stress and anxiety, and thus are at risk for a range of negative consequences to their psychological and physical health. Results from a national survey indicate that approximately 57% of college students reported more than average or tremendous stress and 61% of college students reported feeling overwhelming anxiety within the last 12 months (ACHA, 2017). Despite the elevated prevalence rates and potential impact on the well-being of college students, very few studies have examined factors associated with stress and anxiety. For example, some existing research has found that stress was associated with increased alcohol use (Dusselier et al., 2005; Magrys & Olmstead, 2015). Additionally, students who are employed report more anxiety symptoms than students who are not employed (Mounsey, Vandehey, & Diekhoff, 2013). However, additional research is needed to identify aspects of the college experience and characteristics of the students themselves that may be associated with stress and anxiety. The current exploratory study examined the rates of stress and anxiety among college students, as well as the possible predictors of stress and anxiety based on demographic characteristics, involvement on campus, alcohol use, and mental health. A better understanding of the factors associated with stress and anxiety among college students can inform the development and implementation of customized prevention initiatives.

OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the rates of stress and anxiety among college students.
2. Examine stress and anxiety based on college students' demographic characteristics.
3. Examine stress and anxiety based on college students' involvement on campus.
4. Examine stress and anxiety based on college students' alcohol use and mental health.

METHODS

Participants

This research study included 365 college students from a mid-size liberal arts university in the northeast region of the United States. The sample included:
 78% Female, 89% White
 20% Freshmen, 30% Sophomore, 25% Junior, 19% Senior, 1%, 5th Year Undergraduate
 100% Enrolled Full-time
 52% Residing on Campus
 20 Average Age

Procedures

An online survey was sent out to students in the Spring of 2016. A raffle for twenty \$25 Amazon gift cards was offered as an incentive to participate. The appropriate Institutional Review Board process was completed.

METHODS

Measures

Data was obtained from an ACHA-NCHA II survey which assesses the physical and psychological health of college students (ACHA, 2017). The variables utilized in the current study were college students' demographic characteristics, stress, anxiety, involvement on campus, alcohol use, and mental health. Items assessing students' demographic characteristics included age, gender, class status, housing, and employment. Items assessing involvement on campus included participation in a sorority or fraternity and involvement in sports. Items assessing alcohol use included whether consumed alcohol in the past 30 days and having consumed five or more drinks at a sitting within the past two weeks. Items assessing mental health included being diagnosed with a mental health disorder in the past 12 months and ever received university counseling.

RESULTS

Forty-nine percent of participants reported having more than average stress or tremendous stress within the last 12 months. Fifty-four percent of participants reported having felt overwhelming anxiety over the last 12 months.

Table 1. Average Rates of Stress based on Demographics, Involvement on Campus, Alcohol Use, and Mental Health

		Mean Stress Score	t	p
Demographics	Female	3.55	3.056	.002
	Male	3.24		
	On campus	3.50	.209	.835
	Off campus	3.48		
	Employed	3.48	.266	.791
	Not employed	3.46		
Involvement	Fraternity/Sorority	3.57	-1.308	.192
	No Fraternity/Sorority	3.45		
	Sports	3.45	-.756	.450
	No sports	3.51		
Alcohol Use	Past 30 days	3.53	-1.433	.153
	No past 30 days	3.39		
	Binge past 2 weeks	3.48	.006	.995
	No binge past 2 weeks	3.48		
Mental Health	Received counseling	3.80	-3.894	.000
	No counseling	3.40		
	Treated/diagnosed	3.89	-5.93	.000
	Not treated/diagnosed	3.33		

RESULTS

Table 2. Percentages of Anxiety based on Demographics, Involvement on Campus, Alcohol Use, and Mental Health

		Percentages	Chi-square	p
Demographics	Female	57.2%	3.030	.082
	Male	46.1%		
	On campus	56.2%	.232	.630
	Off campus	53.6%		
	Employed	56.0%	.209	.648
	Not employed	53.5%		
Involvement	Fraternity/Sorority	60.6%	1.824	.177
	No Fraternity/Sorority	52.8%		
	Sports	50.0%	2.647	.104
	No sports	58.6%		
Alcohol Use	Past 30 days	57.1%	1.098	.295
	No past 30 days	51.0%		
	Binge past 2 weeks	54.4%	.046	.831
	No binge past 2 weeks	55.5%		
Mental Health	Received counseling	74.3%	13.213	.000
	No counseling	50.2%		
	Treated/diagnosed	83.5%	37.639	.000
	Not treated/diagnosed	45.2%		

DISCUSSION

The findings of the current study indicate that students that reported seeking help for mental health issues are more likely to report stress and anxiety. Thus, counseling services professionals should address stress management with their patients. Limitations of the study include the use of a sample that was primarily White and female. Additionally, constructs were assessed with one-item questions. Surprisingly, this exploratory study did not help identify other aspects of the college experience that may be associated with stress and anxiety. More research is needed, particularly in light of the elevated rates of stress and anxiety among college students.

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