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Kaleigh Landberg

Dominican University of California

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The Rise of Anxiety Among the College Age Population

Kaleigh Landberg, Dr. Brett Bayles, Dr. Andria Rusk
Dominican University of California

Introduction

Anxiety is a mental illness that comes in various magnitudes of severity. The college student population is one that is often looked for how often they experience the symptoms. We hypothesized that nearly all students experience periods of their academic program. However, those that are aware of their anxiety have learned to cope with it in a healthy manner.

The article, Replacing Stressful Challenges with Positive Coping Strategies: A Resilience Program for Clinical Placement Learning (Delany, C., 2015) explains how there is an increased stress among students and that not many of them know how to effectively manage their anxiety. The researchers also explain that with an increased anxiety level and decreased coping strategies, it can interfere with how students are able to learn and focus on the material at hand. What this particular research study suggested was that "replacing stressful challenges with positive coping strategies (which) offers a potentially powerful tool to build self-efficacy and cognitive control as well as greater self-awareness as a learner" (Delany et al., 2015).

Throughout this study, we will be researching how college-aged and young adults deal with their anxiety weather it is severe or minor. This is because there are a lot of different ways people could interpret what anxiety is. For our projects purpose, the definition of anxiety explained by the CDC and Obesaliassion.org, is your mind and body’s natural response to events that are threatening as well as having excessive and unrealistic worry about everyday tasks or events. The research we will be conducting will fill a gap in the current research on assessing anxiety levels among men and women as well as how these individuals treat their anxiety and cope with it on an everyday basis and what sort of triggers could potentially bring out their anxiety symptoms.

Methods

Participants

In this cross-sectional study students at Dominican University of California and other college-aged students, were asked to complete a survey about their demographics, thoughts on stress and anxiety, and their mental health while being a college student. Participants were informed about the survey through text as well as receiving emails, kindly asking to take part in the study. We conducted the study between January 2017 and March 2017. We also analyzed the results of the 2015 BRFSS questionnaire, which is a large national database that gets administered to people of the country every year.

Measure

For the 2015 BRFSS questionnaire, we were able to pull out all questions that participants explained about their sex, smoking, alcohol behaviors having good or bad mental health days, worry about everyday tasks or events. We hypothesize that nearly all students experience periods of their academic program. However, those that are aware of their anxiety have learned to cope with it in a healthy manner.

Within the survey, the researchers asked the students to complete very similar questions. We started off analyzing the results of both BRFSS and the survey in a program called SPSS. We first analyzed two of the questions in BRFSS to see if they were statistically significant. To see if there are descriptive statistics and put the questions in a cross tab by doing Chi-squared tests. We then did the same process for the survey. We first had to code all of the responses from our survey and insert them into SPSS.

Results

We first compared a person's smoking status with a depression index. What we found was if a person was an active smoker, they are more likely to be depressed (0.44%) as those who were not smokers were not as likely to be depressed (0.2%). These results were statistically significant with a p-value of (.<0.01). We also compared alcohol drinks consumed per day with a depression index. Our results indicated that there was no statistical difference between those that drink alcohol every day versus those that do not. Lastly, we compared women's satisfaction in life with the amount of poor mental health days a person had in the past 30 days. We found that those that are more satisfied with their life had fewer poor mental health days (2.1%) and those that are less satisfied with their life typically had more poor mental health days (3.3%), which were both statistically significant with a p-value of (<0.01).

One hundred and sixty-four students completed the survey (Table 1). Each student was only allowed to take the survey once. There were more Females (81.5%) than males (18.1%) as well as a majority of Senior’s (52.4%) and 21+ year olds (67.3%) that completed the survey. Given prior studies of gender differences in reported anxiety levels, we researched if these differences were true among college students. We first analyzed the results got from BRFSS and found that at a national level, females (22%) are more likely to be depressed than males (14%) are, which had a p-value of (0.01) which is statistically significant. Given that females are more prone to develop depression, we then looked to see if this was true at a local level, specifically among the college students. We were able to analyze four different components (Table 2) of anxiety levels and found that there was no statistical significance among any of the categories between males and females.

Discussion

• We hypothesized that nearly all student’s experience symptoms of anxiety to some degree, but that were those that are aware of their anxiety have learned to cope with it in a healthy manner that is effective for them. We found that mostly all students do experience anxiety but they all have a different take on coping with it while also not getting enough hours of sleep.

• We also found that there is a gender difference among males and females as to who is more likely to experience anxiety symptoms. In an article called Gender differences in anxiety disorders and anxiety symptoms in adolescents, it talks about how “there was a predominance of females among current and recovered anxiety disorder cases, but not among those who had never experienced an anxiety disorder. The female preponderance emerges early in life, and retrospective data indicate that at age 6, females are already twice as likely to have experienced an anxiety disorder than males.” (Levenson, P., 1998) In another article called, Brave men and timid women? A review of the gender differences in fear and anxiety, it explains how there is “substantial evidence [that] indicates that women report greater fear and are more likely to develop anxiety disorders than men. Women’s greater vulnerability for anxiety disorders can be partly understood by examining gender differences in the natural history of anxiety.” It is evident not only through our study but also through examining the results from BRFSS that there is a distinct difference in gender related to anxiety.

• In summary, we found that there is a gender difference with anxiety and depression and that women are more prone to experience these mental illnesses. We also found a multitude of variables that play either a positive or negative role in the symptoms of anxiety and depression. Those that smoke or drink alcohol regularly are statistically more likely to develop depression. Although there was a positive relation between smoking and alcohol, there is no statistical significance between them and anxiety. We also found that the amount of time a person focuses on upsetting thoughts or situations in their life will statistically affect a person not being able to get tasks done. These results can help students realize what is potentially contributing to their anxiety and offer ways as to how to better cope with their symptoms and emotions. Moreover, students will realize that having anxiety is a normal thing to experience as a college student and that they are not alone. Overall, this study highlights the high rates of anxiety among college students and the different variables that play into the mental health issue.

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References

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The authors would like to thank Dr. Andria Rusk and Dr. Brett Bayles, directors of the Health Science and Public Health Programs at Dominican University of California.

Methods Continued

Statistical Analysis

We started off analyzing the results of both BRFSS and the survey in a program called SPSS. We first analyzed two of the questions in BRFSS to see if they were statistically significant. To see if there were any differences we used descriptive statistics and put the questions in a cross tab by doing Chi-squared tests. We then did the same process for the survey. We first had to code all of the responses from our survey and insert them into SPSS.