The Rise of Anxiety Among the College Age Population

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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 year where they experience anxiety, but those that are aware of their anxiety are the ones that are willing to cope with it in a healthy manner.

The article, Replacing Stressful Challenges with Positive Coping Strategies: A Resilience Program for Clinical Placement Learning (Delaney, 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 built self-efficacy and cognitive control as well as greater self-awareness as a learner” (Delaney 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. The objective of this research study is to examine how often college students are experiencing symptoms of anxiety and what sort of triggers could potentially bring out their anxiety symptoms. The goal of this research study is to examine how often college students are experiencing symptoms of anxiety as explained by the CDC and DBSalliance.org, is your mind and body’s natural way of warning you 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 built self-efficacy and cognitive control as well as greater self-awareness as a learner” (Delaney et al., 2015).

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 a link 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 from 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, weather or not they have had ever a depressive disorder, how often they get physical exercise, sleeping patterns, and the amount of anxiety they experience. All of these different questions gave us a large range of different variables that could potentially be hindering college student’s mental health, therefore making them experience anxiety on a regular basis.

Within our survey, the researchers asked the students to complete two very similar questions that were in the BRFSS questionnaire. Some of the questions included general demographics such as sex, age, grade level, county of residence as well as health behaviors they engage in regularly, such as smoking, drinking, exercising, and overall feelings of stress and anxiety. We administered the survey using a link through Survey Monkey and the responses were kept confidential and anonymous.

Study Design

The survey was sent out via the email to the students of Dominican University of California as well as through our Facebook profiles. We decided on what questions to ask by researching previous studies that were done on mental health in college students as well as get ideas of what to ask after analyzing the BRFSS dataset. We wanted to know if college students were constantly thinking about assignments that they needed to get done as well as other stressors they had in their life.

Discussion

We hypothesized that nearly all student’s experience symptoms of anxiety to some degree, but there are those that are more aware of their anxiety have learned to cope. It is also that many ways that are effective for them. We found that mostly all students do experience anxiety but they all differ in how they handle the anxiety. Some are able to cope with it in a healthy manner as well as 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 8, 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 emotionality and biologically that indicates that women are more likely to experience anxiety and depression than men tend to be.” 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, depression, 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 this mental health issue.

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 compared to those that were not smokers were not as likely to be depressed (0.37%). These results were statistically significant with a p-value of (.001). We also compared alcohol drinks consumed per day with a depression index. We found that those that drink alcohol every day versus those that do not. Lastly, we compared the narcissistic behavior in the past 30 days. We found that those that are more satisfied with their life typically had poor mental health days (.83%), which was statistically significant with a p-value of (.001).

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 (81.3%) 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 given 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 (.001) which is statistically significant. Given that females are more prone to development 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 makes and females.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Dr. Brett Bayles, directors of the Health Science and Public Health Programs at Dominican University of California. Without their help and guidance the work would not have been possible. I also want to thank Lawrence Yu and Margaret DeMayo for being partners for our survey.

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Clinical Psychology Review, 29(6), 496-505.


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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 they were 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.