Depression Among College Students: Social Support, Self-Esteem and Loneliness

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Background

❖ Between 1988 and 2001, the number of college students diagnosed with depressive symptoms who sought counseling doubled (McCarthy & Salotti, 2006).
❖ Both the onset and outcome of depression have been associated with low levels of social support (Billing & Moss, 1984).
❖ Previous research shows that many students have reported experiencing loneliness and that loneliness among students has been linked to rates of dropping out of college, suicide and suicidal ideation, and alcoholism (Catron, 1982; Medora & Woodward, 1980).
❖ Clinical literature has suggested that self-esteem plays a primary role in the etiology, maintenance, and recovery from depressive symptoms (Beck, 1967; Bibring, 1953; Blass & Shichman, 1983).
❖ Clearly there is a need for studies that attempt to identify factors associated with and test models explicating depression in college students.

Hypothesis & Procedures

❖ We hypothesized that low levels of social support, low levels of self-esteem, and high levels of loneliness are associated with high levels of Depression.
❖ Study was IRB approved
❖ Campus-wide recruitment of students at a college campus using fliers and class announcements
❖ Participants provided written consent
❖ Students received academic credit for participation
❖ Data collection using QDS software
❖ Data analyzed using SPSS 15 software
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Sample Demographics (n=316)

Age
Range: 18-56
Mean: 21.10
SD: 4.96

Ethnicity
European American - 58.5%
African American - 19.6%
Asian American - 7%
Latina/o - 9.5%
Other - 5.4%

Sexual Orientation
Heterosexual - 94%
Homosexual - 5%
Bisexual - 1%

Relationship Status
Married - 4%
Currently Seeking a Mental Health Professional - 7%

Measures

UCLA Social Support Inventory
(Dunkel-Schetter, Feinstein, Call, 1986)
Chronbach’s α = .84

UCLA Loneliness Scale
(Russell, 1996)
Chronbach’s α = .89-.94

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale
(Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, 1989)
Chronbach’s α = .78

Background Measures
Univariate Statistics

Variables
Mean
SD
Possible Range
α
Social Support:
Emotional Support
3.81
.62
0-36
.85
Aid/Assistance
3.21
.74
Information and Advice
3.01
.69
Stress in Relationships
2.14
.65

Regression Analysis
F(6, 309) = 42.09, Adjusted R² = .44

Predictor Variables
β
t
p
Social Support:
Emotional Support
-0.01
-0.03
.98
Aid/Assistance
-0.16
-2.95
.00
Information and Advice
0.16
1.88
.06
Stress in Relationships
-0.11
2.4
.02
Self-Esteem
-0.27
-5.68
.00
Loneliness
0.45
9.19
.00

Results & Clinical Implications

❖ Our findings show that social support is differentially associated with depression, suggesting that social support is not always beneficial and future research identify how and why different dimensions of social support contribute to depression.
❖ Based on our research, college campuses nationwide can adequately develop treatment programs focusing on decreasing feelings of loneliness and increasing self-esteem among students.

Limitations

❖ The use of self-report data may contribute to response bias.
❖ The cross-sectional correlational design of our study limits causal inferences from being made.
❖ Generalizability is limited by our sample’s composition of self-selected respondents.

References

❖ Please refer to handout.