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SELF-ESTEEM, ANXIETY AND SUICIDAL THOUGHTS AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to consider self-esteem, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts among college students. The research questions that were set out to answer were: R1-Is there a difference in stress and anxiety based on gender? R2 -Is there a correlation between mental health and the stress among college students? After a long semester of gathering research and bringing everything together it is finally the day to show the hard and strenuous work that students put into these projects. Our class, being the first research methods class at Highlands College of Montana Tech, have gotten to learn how to complete a research study based on obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, and the chance to open the door to further studies on our results. As we get to present our posters and presentations to the faculty, students, and administrators it will be encouraging to students that the information is used and readily available to our community as well as others. Not only are we the first class in Butte to do this, but we are also preparing to present our projects at the Montana Tech Techxpo and also at the 3rd Annual Student Research Day for Montana's Two-year colleges in Great Falls, MT. The results of this study were to consider self-esteem, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts among college students, and significant results were found.

BACKGROUND

The following are some different literature reviews that talk about studies on self-esteem, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts among college students. College students and suicidal thoughts can sometimes happen based on all the different variables of responsibilities that come with it. The different variables can be family, finances, academic achievements, and mental health. Sometimes drugs and alcohol can also affect how a student is feeling and how well they are doing in school. "Suicide is a significant public health problem for individuals during late adolescence and early adulthood and a major contributor to years of potential life lost before 65" (Hirsch, 2011, p. 393). "Elements of the college "experience" itself also have the potential to become risk factors, including changes in role responsibilities, academic demands, career indecisions, financial pressures, and loneliness and separation from traditional support negatives" (Hirsch, 2011, p. 393). Being a college student definitely has its problems or effects on the students and is in fact a different environment. "Over the past 20 years, a wide body of research has developed investigating college students who appear to be at the greatest risk for mental health concerns and suicidal tendencies" (Schwartz, 2009, p. 81). All of these statements fit with what college students are faced with, and are used as variables in this study.

METHODS

The purpose of this quantitative study was to consider the correlation between self-esteem, anxiety and suicidal thoughts among college students. This study involves a survey comprised of both yes and no answers and Likert scale questions to assess a series of questions. This survey was handed out to Intro to psychology students who were given extra credit for their time to voluntarily participate according to the University of Montana Institutional Review Board Requirements. No one under the age of 18 was a participant. The survey consisted of 17 questions and was distributed to the classes by other classmates in the Research Methods Class. A script was read to the classes prior to the distribution so that anyone under 18 or students who chose not to participate in the voluntary study.

RESULTS

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Dependent and Independent Variables

Variables	Entire Sample (n=31)		Male (n=10)		Female (n=21)	
	(M)	(S)	(M)	(S)	(M)	(S)
Dependent Variables						
Unpleasant Life-meaning	3.29	1.10	3.1	1.1	3.38	1.12
My Life Meaningful	3.70	1.13	3.6	1.17	3.76	1.13
Clear Purpose	3.48	1.06	3.3	1.25	3.57	.98
Search for Meaning	3.25	1.43	3.7	1.49	3.04	1.39
Manage Anxiety	3.32	1.24	3.7	1.1	3.14	1.27
Suicidal Thoughts	2.00	1.31	1.9	1.28	2.04	1.35
Independent Variables	(Freq)	(Percent)	Frequency		Frequency	
Gender						
Male	(10)	32%				
Female	(21)	68%				
Age						
Traditional	(20)	65%	7		13	
Non-traditional	(11)	35%	3		8	
Things not better						
No	(14)	45%	6		8	
Yes	(17)	55%	4		13	
Talked to someone						
No	(12)	39%	6		6	
Yes	(19)	61%	4		15	
Loneliness/Low self-esteem						
No	(21)	68%	9		12	
Yes	(10)	32%	1		9	
Stressful attending college						
No	(7)	23%	3		4	
Yes	(24)	77%	7		17	
Suffer any form of anxiety						
No	(9)	29%	6		3	
Yes	(22)	71%	4		18	
Prescription Meds						
No	(23)	74%	8		15	
Yes	(8)	26%	2		6	
Physical Activity						
No	(7)	23%	1		6	
Yes	(24)	77%	9		15	
Good Comm.						
No	(4)	13%	0		4	
Yes	(27)	87%	10		17	
Medical Anxiety						
No	(17)	55%	9		8	
Yes	(14)	45%	1		13	

Table 2: Correlations between anxiety: life meaning, purpose, and suicide.

Pearson Correlation Chart	Managing my anxiety	Pearson Correlation	P
Understand my life's meaning		.536**	.002
Having a good sense of what Makes my life meaningful		.517**	.003
My life has a clear purpose		.407*	.023
Searching for meaning in my Life		.045	.810
Suicidal thoughts		.053	.778

*p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01 ***p < 0.001 (two-tailed)

Table 3: Correlations between suicidal thoughts: anxiety, life meaning and purpose.

Pearson Correlation Chart	Suicidal Thoughts	Pearson Correlation	p
Understand my life's meaning		-.368*	.042
Having a good sense of what Makes my life meaningful		-.291	.112
My life has a clear purpose		-.382*	.034
Searching for meaning in my life		.053	.778
Found a way to manage anxiety		-.264	.152

*p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01 ***p < 0.001 (two-tailed)

CONCLUSION

In conclusion with all the data collected within this small group, it is believed that this research project had good correlations. When looking at the Pearson Correlation chart we can see that there are correlations between understanding their life meaning and having a sense of what makes their life meaningful. To answer research question one there is a difference in stress and anxiety between genders. More females said attending college was more stressful than males. Also statistics show that females also suffered more from anxiety than males did. Research question two had a correlation between mental health and the stress of college students. This was shown in the statistics that females were more likely to talk to someone about their situations than males. More females claimed to have higher numbers in loneliness and/or self-esteem. There are more people who face these different feelings an ideations than originally thought starting out. This study has brought attention that there may be many more students that suffer the same issues but would rather keep them inside. Some of the recommendations that may be useful to others could be to have a support group on the campus for the students who need that feeling of comfort, safety, and support; in which they may feel they do not have anywhere else. It is a belief that there is more research that can and should be done in the near future. The possibility of school counselors and administration working together to come up with different activities and ideas to deter anxiety and causes of negative outcomes with suicide ideation would be a great step in the right direction.

FUTURE STUDIES

The data shown in the project only shows a small group in Butte, MT. The sample size is a limitation to this study conducted. If these tests were run on a larger scale, I feel that it could and would be very beneficial from high school students to older college students going back. They could get the data that would show what the dependent and independent variables are and may even find some answers to what trigger the negative outcomes before they actually happen. More studies need to be done across the country and in larger quantities.

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