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The Struggle of Mental Health Within College Students

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Abstract

One in five college students have thoughts of committing suicide daily. We often wonder what may lead to thoughts like this. This essay uses a subjective approach to broaden the knowledge of readers regarding mental health problems within college students. In this essay, readers discover the statistical findings of factors like alcohol, nicotine, schoolwork and athletics factoring into a student's psychological distressed mental state. Without having available and anonymous resources accessible to them, students are not able to get the help they need.

The Struggle Of Mental Health Within College Students

Mental Health is an ongoing problem, a wicked problem throughout the world of college students today. Rittel and Weber once defined it as a problem with no solutions, unsolvable. Within a wicked problem there is no one solution because everyone is different in the way they think, feel and act. In a normal day, we come across many wicked problems without even realizing it. For example, our country is in the middle of solving a wicked problem today, coronavirus. However, in this essay I am here to inform you of another wicked problem, mental health within a college student. Mental Health is one's condition regarding their psychological and emotional well-being. The mind is one of the most important things in the human body, factoring into the way one thinks, feels and acts.

We all have mental health, which is a wicked problem with real implications. When we understand mental health clearly and carefully, we can see there are many factors causing the lack of mental health within a college student, like nicotine, alcohol, schooling, sports and eating. We have to wonder, is college itself the problem? Or is the problem within the student? Adding on, “Over 17 million young adults and 2.3 million adolescents suffer at least one depressive episode within a year” (University HQ). Mental Health within a college student is an ongoing problem. Often times college students use outside influences to distract them from the problems they are facing, like indulging themselves in social media and partying. It is also common that most college students do not have access or are willing to get access from sufficient support to manage their psychological health. One reason for this may be a student not wanting to jeopardize their own identity or they simply do not have accessible resources to help them. We need to consider finding ways to guide college kids away from consuming their lives around schoolwork, alcohol/nicotine and partying. By offering more support groups within schools and an online type of counseling where a student feels more comfortable to seek out for help.

Mental illness is one of the most neglected health issues. The worst part is that neglected mental health issues can lead to suicide attempts. Every year 800,000 deaths are suicides globally (Lamm 2020). In addition, the American College Health Organization states suicide is the second most common death amongst college students, more than 67,000 college students from over 100 institutions, one in five students have had thoughts of suicide, with 9% making an attempt and nearly 20% reporting self-injury. In a case study, “A Unity of Opposites”, Kevin Lamm writes about a study performed on an adult male with multiple diagnoses of mental health disorders, including a history of suicide attempts. One day,

the male decided to taper with his medications because he did not like the side effects of them. After tapering with his medications, the patient became manic, then depressed, and was provided electroconvulsive therapy (ECT). The patient received a total of 9 rounds of ECT over the course of a month. The patient was bipolar and depressed. All because he was able to taper with his medications, but we have to wonder, if his nurse kept a closer eye on him like she was supposed to, he would not have had access to his medications to be able to do so. One of the trickiest things about a mental health patient is one day they may seem completely fine and the next they are on the verge of self-destruction.

Within a college student there can be many leading factors as to why students are lacking a positive mental health. For example, academic workload, athletics, relationships, and irresponsible decision making. In a statistical study done on college kids, about 60% of students have reported having anxiety whereas 40% have reported having depression (Best Colleges 2021). A survey conducted may be one of the most reliable information as you are hearing from the students themselves, not someone else speaking for them. A disorder such as these interferes with a person's psychological state, interfering with their ability to think, feel, communicate and control their behavior. The side effects can lead to change's in a person's mood and daily stressors, often times making it hard for one to complete a task.

Joaquín Alonso, a member of the World Health Organization Surveys conducted, reported a substantial amount of college students having mental health disorders. College students from all over the country were asked a series of questions as to how they feel in a typical day. Below is statistical data conducted by a survey from Psychological Medicine: Cambridge concluding the results of a survey done on 18–22-year-old college students, I changed into a pie graph:

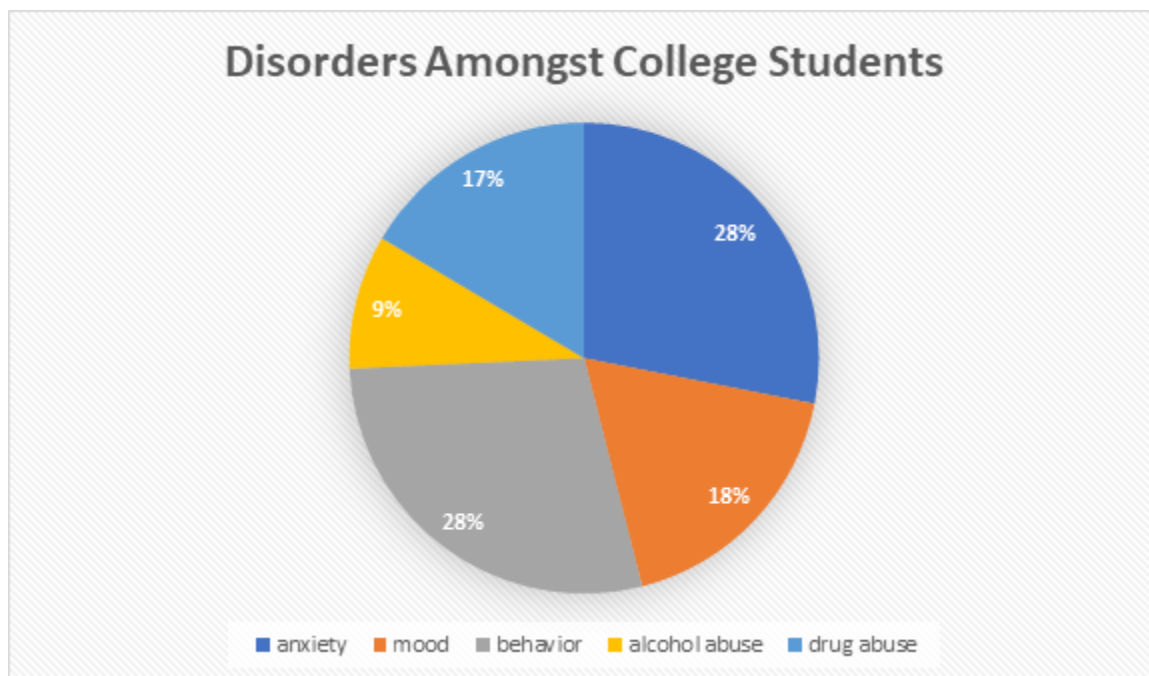


Figure 1: Disorders Amongst College Students

These findings are significant in researching mental health within college students. Analyzing this graph, the data was transformed into a whole of 100%. 78% of this graph reported having a mental health disorder. Whereas, the other 22% reported alcohol abuse and drug abuse, two leading factors effecting a college students mental state.

One reason a college kid may be affected by a mental health diagnosis is athletics. In a study performed on college coaches who have experience with their athletes having mental health problems, Florence Lebrun states “Given demands placed on athletes, they are subject to tremendous number of stressors. As they progress on the pathway to elite status, athletes are subject to mental health issues” (Lebrun 2020). Speaking as a student athlete myself, athletes have a lot of stressor put on them such as, practicing 24/7, workouts, games, giving up free time to be committed to the sport. Sport participation has the possibility to take a toll on athletes well-being and personal growth. Athletics tend to dictate what an athlete can and cannot do with their lives based on schedules and workouts. It is very easy for an athlete to

become stressed and struggle with school due to simply not putting enough time and attention into academics, being sidetracked by their athletic sport.

Another leading factor to a college kids mental health is substance abuse. Substances like, alcohol, e-cigarettes, drugs and even cellphones play a big role in one's life. For example, "Problematic cell-phone use is common amongst mental health disorders and substance abuse worsens scholastic performance" (Grant). Academic Journal Author, Jon Grant conducted a survey of 31,325 college students, gaining the results of 20.1% reported cellphone use associating with alcohol causing lower grade point averages, leading to alcohol use disorders. We may ask why this may be the case, but cellphones and alcohol are both distractions throughout the day. Often times, we find kids partying or playing on their cellphones instead of doing homework. Alcohol is a depressant and taking advantage of it can lead to substantial symptoms that the student did not have before, like depression and mood disorders.

Another substance taken advantage of by college students is e-cigarettes. For instance, "E-cigarettes are popular amongst college students who display risky alcohol use patterns, those with mental illness disorders have heightened risk for e-cig use" (Hefner). Author and psychologist Kathryn Hefner also conducted a survey on college students. Her results concluded that students who use e-cigarettes reported being more addicted to alcohol with it, and e-cigarette use was most common amongst students with psychiatric and substance use disorders.

Mental health is a wicked problem in itself, but it needs to have some solutions. Michael, Levin studying a sample of 79 college students that were randomized to go to a ACT(Levin 2017). An ACT is an acceptance and commitment therapy program. The students had no idea what they were in for, but the results showed an improvement in overall distress, general anxiety,

social anxiety, depression and positive mental health. Schools need to go about a different approach for counseling a student. Significant psychological and behavioral problems is a growing concern throughout universities. In particular, anxiety is one of the biggest concerns for college students, with 41.6% of the student population reported having anxiety (Alonso 2016).

Counseling and therapy seems to be helping mental health patients. However, colleges need to go about it in a different way. Most kids are ashamed or embarrassed to share their feelings or experiences with people, counselor at University Health Center in NYC, Sadaf Siddiqi reported students have made statements of feeling weak by getting therapy and they often times cannot make the connection to get therapy when symptoms start affecting their mood (Siddiqi 2018). I believe that is why kids are not seeking the help they need. Instead of having in person therapy sessions, which some schools do not even have, they need to offer a virtual environment. A way for college students to log onto an app or website and express their feelings and seek help while remaining anonymous but still having contact with a therapist for advice and feedback.

Another way to stop substance abuse is to inform students of the causes and effects of it. Advertise what the substances are doing to people and how it is affecting their mental health. Lastly, kids need to join more extracurriculars/clubs throughout their universities. Clubs that allow a student to be involved but not take away time they need for schoolwork. Clubs/extracurriculars will help a student branch out, find friends and distract their mind from drowning in schoolwork, sports and the other negative encounters they may be facing in their lives.

In conclusion, mental health is an important factor into one's life. Poor mental health is common amongst college students and is growing rapidly every year. Factors like substance

abuse, athletics, relationships, and academics influence the mind. In order to get the help they need, students need to acknowledge if they are struggling. Finding ways to guide college kids away from consuming their lives around schoolwork, alcohol/nicotine and partying by advertising the effects caused from these substances like posters and advertisements as well as support groups within schools and offering a different type of counseling, where the student feels comfortable enough to seek the help they desperately need.

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