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Understanding college student mental health: Stress, depression, stigma and religiosity

Complete abstract:

Mental Health issues, such as depression, stress and anxiety are plaguing college students in the United States, according to NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (www.nami.org). Unfortunately, more than half of the students suffering from these issues do not seek help, citing stigma as the main impediment. While the church's health message has often brought attention to physical health issues, mental health has not received as much attention. This presentation aims to raise awareness of the importance of mental health as part of the health message, in addition to presenting data on a mental health crisis that is occurring among our young people. Lastly, we aim to discuss ways in which academics and colleges can use this information, as well as churches and the larger communities to which we belong, to raise awareness and impact reform.

Research from three studies conducted on a Midwestern Christian university campus will be used to understand rates of depression and stress among religiously affiliated students, as well as efforts by the university counseling center to raise awareness of their services and decrease stigma associated with seeking help. One survey, of over 400 students, will discuss rates of depressive symptomatology on campus. A second study will present a multifactorial model, which accounts for 62% of depressive symptomatology among students, and includes religiosity, stress, and sense of belonging as significant variables. The third study will present themes from qualitative interviews with students, expanding on their beliefs about mental health on campus. Implications for prevention and early intervention strategies by universities and counseling centers will be highlighted. In addition, implications for work with other age groups and non-college samples will be discussed.

Short Abstract:

With ever increasing rates of mental illness on college campuses and among young adults, we will present findings from three studies on rates of depressive symptomatology among Christian college students. We will also discuss stigma as a risk factor and religiosity and sense of belonging as protective factors for depression.

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