Development of an Instrument to Identify Depression in College Freshmen

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Background info

Statistics:

• The World Mental Health Surveys International College Student Project reported that major depressive disorder was the most common disorder among the cross-national sample of first-year college students (Auerbach et al., 2018).

The American College Health Association [ACHA] (2021) reported an increase in mental health symptoms among undergraduate college students:

• 81.8% reporting moderate to high levels of stress

• 56.1% reporting challenges with academics

• 78.6% reporting problems with procrastination

• 55.3% of students scored positive for experiencing loneliness on the UCLA Loneliness Scale Version 3 (Russel, 1996).
Background info

Statistics Con’t:

• 28.5% had a positive screening/risk for suicide on the Suicide Behavior Questionnaire-Revised (Osman et al., 2021).

• 2.3% reported a suicide attempt within the last 12 months. (Osman et al., 2021).

In a national study conducted in 2019:

45.1% students reported feeling so depressed it was difficult to function.

(American College Health Association, 2019).
History

- In 2011, the original study that started it all revealed that 188 showed serious signs of depression.
  - An effective tool was deemed necessary
- A shift from quantitative to qualitative research
- The original pilot study revealed four themes from 12 college sophomores.
  - stress, changes in eating habits, sleeping issues, and procrastination or putting things off
- The next study introduced a larger population of 33 students that then modified our themes to what we are currently using.
Current Themes

- Framing One’s Emotions, Behaviors, and History of Depression
- Coping Responses to Manage Depression
- Making and Maintaining Meaningful Connections
- Navigating the Day to Day Context
Making and Maintaining Meaningful Connections

“I found myself wanting to be home more than here most of the time because, like the times where I actually to go home. I had this, like dread in my stomach coming back to school” (#24)

“I had a good group of friends, but I still just didn't feel like I kind of fit in I guess” (#2).

“I was lonely like I said. I was very, very lonely” (#6)

“I kind of pushed away a bunch of my friends and my family and nobody really knew what was wrong, they just thought that I was busy with school so, I just didn’t have time, that wasn’t really the case” (#12).
“So, it wasn’t really a lot of reason for me to be struggling. Like, I was getting good grades you know, I was meeting people, making friends and you know, doing social activities. Didn’t really feel like there was any reason for me to be you know, depressed at all” (#28).

“I just like finally realized that like I really was like depressed second semester because I really like never accepted it. I would always just tell myself like, oh, I’m just tired . . . like I didn’t even like want to get out of bed like most of the days. I skipped class like all the time” (#32).

“I was like why am I experiencing this? And then I was like maybe I’m a little bit depressed” (#33).
Coping Responses to Depression

“I did think about reaching out, but I didn’t because I didn’t want to bother anybody” (#30).

“I tried to like mask a lot of those feelings . . . I was drinking, I was smoking, just trying to like kind of cover whatever, just like, like I said like put a band-aid on it and just move on” (#9).

“I think it’s just like culturally there’s this stigma of like you know you need to be strong just get over it, like push through you know”(#9).
Navigating the Day to Day Context

“Coming in from fresh or from high school you’re just kind of thrown into this like college setting” (#4)

“I felt almost stupid compared to the other students. So I think that was also just kind of, like, a constant struggle where it was hard getting in there and being involved when I felt like I didn't have anything smart to say” (#15).

“Like it was a lot of, it doesn’t matter what you’re feeling, you’re in college, you got to get through it, everyone feels like this. You, it, as you, you’re sad whatever, keep moving forward” (#13).

“’’Just push yourself out of bed and go through the motions and just smile and wave, keep your head down, try your best to get your homework done and get your, get your exams at a decent grade so that you can move on to next year and hope the next year’s better” (#7).
Process

- Instrument development
- Data reviews
- Drafting
- IRB Approval
- Focus sessions
- Review and redraft
Future plans

- We are currently recruiting upperclassmen to review the current instrument draft
- We are currently working with Dr. Julie Brandy to hold one-on-one meetings with those participating
- We are going to use the feedback from the meetings to help finalize a draft of the instrument.
- We plan to recruit CORE students in the fall to administer the instrument along with a standard depression screening tool
Overall conclusions

- This instrument is important for early identification and management of freshmen who believe they are at risk of developing depression.
- This instrument is essential to screen the mental health effects of incoming freshmen students.


Questions?