Mental Health and Substance Use Issues in Families: Associations with College Performance

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Abstract

This study examined how growing up in a household affected by mental illness or substance abuse is related to perceived stress, college performance, and attitudes toward the academic environment. College students (n = 211) affected by mental illness in the family scored higher on measures of college gratitude, satisfaction, and perceived stress, while family substance abuse was only associated with lower GPA. Understanding the effects of different ACEs can help support students adjust to college.

Introduction

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): traumatic life experiences such as living with a parent with mental illness or substance abuse problems (Hughes et al., 2016)
- ACEs affect children's wellbeing into adulthood
- More research needed on impact of different ACEs like familial mental illness and substance abuse on adjustment and wellbeing in early adulthood
- Present study examines gap by exploring relationship between childhood coping abilities and perceived stress among college students
- Expected that parental mental illness or substance abuse will be associated with increased perceived stress and poorer academic performance

Methodology

- Larger study aimed to examine stress, technology use, and wellbeing in college students
- Present study focused on subscales of College Gratitude (CGS) and Satisfaction with Academics (SAS)
- Subscales looked at subject's appreciation for college and contentedness with their academic performance
- Took the Perceived Stress Scale which rated frequency of specific thoughts and feelings with the past month
- Correlation analysis conducted to explore possible relationships

Participants

- 77% females, 21% males, 2% transgender or nonbinary
- 19-34 years of age (M= 21, SD= 1.66)
- From 4-year local universities in Connecticut
- 70.4% identified as white/Caucasian, 10% as African American or black, 2% as Asian or Asian American, 8% as Latino/a, and 10% as multiracial
- SES was measured using parent education; 57% of our sample had parents with college degrees

Results

Positive Correlations
Familial mental illness and SAS
- r (198) = .141, p = .048
Familial mental illness and CGS
- r (197) = .203, p = .004
Familial mental illness and perceived stress scale
- r (194) = .159, p = .027
Trend
Predicting familial mental illness via presence of substance abuse in the family
- r (199) = .13, p = .068
Negative Correlation
Substance abuse in the family and college GPA
- r (161) = -.204, p = .009

Conclusion

- Those with mental health issues in the house scored higher on SAS and CGS
- Students may be more grateful to attend college
- Type of childhood adversity matters (Hughes et al., 2016)
- Early intervention could mitigate the effects of ACEs
- Could come by implementing counseling services in schools in high risk areas
- Could supply students with effective coping skills to deal with their problems

References available upon request.