College Students Mental Health during ZOOM-U

Tracing the News Media Analysis

Mental health is something many people in the United States struggle with on an everyday basis. According to NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, "20.6% of U.S. adults experienced mental illness in 2019 (51.5 million people). This represents 1 in 5 adults." Mental illnesses are something that can affect a person's mood, behavior, and even thinking. Mental illnesses can be caused by stressful situations, death, chronic medical conditions, abuse, trauma, financial situations, social isolation, and much more. The year 2020, has been the most isolating and stressful of them all for many which have led many to begin struggling with mental health. For the past four weeks, I have been following different news articles to see how colleges and college students are adjusting to this "new way of life".

College students all over the United States have been reporting an increase in mental health since being sent home from college in March. College students naturally struggle from anxiety with course load but since isolation, that number has dramatically increased. A research study conducted at Texas A&M University interviewed 195 students to "understand the effects of the pandemic on [college students'] mental health and wellbeing". 138 of the 195 students interviewed stated that their mental health has increased since the COVID-19 outbreak. The psychologist, Son, noticed that "multiple stressors were identified that contributed to the increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depressive thoughts among students. These included fear and worry about their health and of their loved ones (177/195, 91% reported negative impacts of the pandemic), difficulty in concentrating (173/195, 89%), disruptions to sleeping patterns (168/195, 86%), decreased social interactions due to physical distancing (167/195, 86%), and increased concerns on academic performance (159/195, 82%)." Students who are unable to see

family or even connect with family are considered about their families well being and also financially how their families may be able to pay for their college students to attend college. Dr. Micky Sharma works for counseling and consultation services at OSU and states that "[He] would say to the student, instead of focusing on things being normal again, what I want you to focus on is creating your new normal. We can proactively be a part of what we want the future to be." The issue with this though is that usually when people are depressed they get into a negative mindset and can't see the positive of creating this new normal for themselves.   Since campuses opened up in the Fall of 2020, college counseling centers have seen an increase in demand for therapy and are struggling to meet with all who want to participate. Although some colleges were able to meet this new demand, others financially could not support it. One way to help ease the increase of stress would be that " colleges should look at the factors that are contributing to stress – such as substance use, discrimination, assaults and the pressure around figuring out one's major and career – and then work to reduce their influence. Promoting resources for early intervention in these areas can help students cope with stress and build time management skills." (Marty Swanbrow Becker Associate Professor). Easing up on stressful things colleges can control, such as declaring majors or assignments, can help students feel a bit at ease with adjusting to the "new normal". Having opportunities for students to "gather" together and connect remotely is one way to help ease back into socializing and feel less alone during these stressful times. St. Lawrence University created many different virtual events for students to attend throughout the week of quarantine. These events included a virtual escape room, live streaming of the Saints hockey game, Esports quarantine game night, Trivia, Quarantine Stress Buster Chats, and many more.

A common pattern I have noticed is that college students' mental health increased due to the lack of socialization on campus and feeling more alone than ever. College students rely on others to feel involved on campus but due to everything being remote, these students feel that it is impossible to feel "normal" during these times. Sujata Gupta, a researcher at Science News, discovered that "Certain factors put some students at greater risk of feeling highly distressed. Women were twice as likely to fall into that group, versus the moderate or low groups, while Asians were 30 percent more likely. Spending eight or more hours in front of a computer, smartphone, or television screens also increased risk". The themes of these articles all revolve around talking about the increased mental health in college students and some ways colleges could adjust their curriculum to make students feel more at ease. The sources I used all have around 50% reliability with negative bias ratings. I found it was hard to find sources that had a low liability rating and a high bias rating. I think this is because mental health is something a majority of people struggle with, even if it is not on an everyday basis. Some people believe that mental health is an "ideology" and that people are becoming "too soft" and just need to "suck it up". Mental illness is a chemical brain imbalance that makes those who struggle to think differently. Those who struggle with depression have trouble focusing, memory, decision-making, and fatigue. These symptoms make it hard for those struggling with depression to feel connected with reality.

We should intercept media coverage with facts, but in today's media world that is hard to do with fake news floating around. Having different reliability and biased articles helps readers hear both sides and create their own opinions. Having reliable sources, such as researchers, experiments, and students talking about the increase in mental health on campuses' really helped back up the information that was being stated.

In conclusion, mental health on college campuses has skyrocketed due to the lack of socialization and increase in stress levels. Researchers like Son noticed that many families became financially unstable due to losing jobs, and other stressful situations have been factors for this increase. Many students are requesting free therapy that many campuses currently are offering, but financially these colleges can not afford to pay these therapists. Especially with colleges losing money with students remotely doing college. Therapy is a great way for students to talk out their issues and help them cope with the "new normal" we are all experiencing. The articles I have found these past four weeks have been very reliable and have been promoting and giving ideas to students and colleges on how to create a positive new environment for these students. These reliable sources have helped me learn accurate information in a non-biased way. Mental health on college campuses is a very serious rising issue and we need to find a positive way to change the culture.

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