

Trauma History, Self-Esteem and Perceived Stress: Correlates of Emotional Well-Being

Afshan Kamrudin, Mark Vosvick*, Ph.D., and Chwee-Lye Chng, Ph.D.
University of North Texas

* Corresponding author:

Mark Vosvick

UNT Department of Psychology, P.O. Box 311280, Denton, TX 76203-1280
Phone (940) 565-4715; Fax: (940) 565 – 4682; Email: Vosvick@unt.edu

The relationship of trauma, self-esteem and perceived stress to quality of life (QOL), specifically towards emotional well being, is helpful in understanding a client's trauma history and their adjustment to traumatic events (Green, 2000). Trauma has been significantly associated distress in college students (Green, 2000) however not extended to QOL.

Our study looked at the relationship of trauma, self-esteem, and perceived stress to college students' emotional well-being. Participants (n=120, 78% women) self-identified as European American (53.5%), African American (26.0%), Latino(a) (8.7%), Asian American (7.1%), and Other (4.7%)

Participants completed the Trauma History Questionnaire (Green, 1996; Cronbach's alpha = .85) the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989; Cronbach's alpha = .78), the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1993; Cronbach's alpha = .85), and the SF 36 (a measure of QOL; Ware & Sherbourne, 1992; Cronbach's alpha = .85). Significant correlations were identified among these scales. A multiple regression analysis revealed that students who reported higher levels of trauma ($\beta = .144$, $t = 2.04$, $p < .05$), higher levels self-esteem ($\beta = .38$, $t = 4.31$, $p < .001$) and lower perceived stress ($\beta = -.39$, $t = -4.44$, $p < .001$), had higher emotional well-being and explained 43% of the variance in our model (Adj. $R^2 = .43$, $F(3,111) = 31.71$, $p < .001$). Contrary to our hypotheses, instance of reported trauma was associated with better emotional well-being. Future research needs to untangle this counter-intuitive finding. However, perhaps past traumatic events that have been processed may contribute to more robust current emotional well-being for college students.

Our study suggests that clinicians who work with college students may want to focus on reducing stress and increasing self-esteem to improve overall QOL, particularly along the dimension of emotional well-being, and probe for past traumatic events.

Learning Objectives

- Past traumatic events increase emotional well-being in college-aged students.

- Higher self-esteem and lower perceived stress are positively correlated with higher emotional well-being.
- Past traumatic events have been associated with lower quality of life in other populations, yet patterns found in college students imply an externalization of these events.