

Depression in college students: Perceived stress, loneliness, and self-esteem

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College students experience many stressors (Thorofare, 2007), which if left untreated, can lead to depressive symptoms (APA, 2004). In 2004, a national study by the American Psychiatric Association reported that 49% of college students met the criteria for clinical depression. Students have also reported experiencing loneliness (Wiseman, Guttfeund & Lurie, 1995), which has been associated with school drop-out rates, suicides and alcoholism (Cutrona, 1982; Medora & Woodward, 1986; Cacioppo, Hughes, Waite, Hawkley, & Thisted, 2006). Lonely and depressed students are more likely to have low self-esteem (Friedlander et al., 2007), and experience more stress (Thorofare, 2007). Using the Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), this cross-sectional correlational study examines the relationships between selected psychological factors (perceived stress, loneliness, self-esteem,) and depressive symptoms in college students. We hypothesize that higher levels of depressive symptoms are associated with higher perceived stress, higher levels of loneliness, and lower self-esteem. State college students (n=316, 76% female, 37% ethnic minorities) provided data by completing the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale ($\alpha=.84$); Perceived Stress Scale ($\alpha=.82$), UCLA Loneliness Scale ($\alpha=.94$), and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale ($\alpha=.89$). As predicted, a hierarchical linear regression analysis using stress, loneliness and self-esteem explained 58% of variance in depressive symptoms in students ($\text{Adj.}R^2=.58$, $F(3, 312)=315$, $p<.001$). Multicollinearity diagnostics produced acceptable tolerance (.70 to .75), and VIF (1.34 to 1.46) scores suggesting constructs in our model are distinct and separate. A reduction in depression among young adults could influence the outcome of many co-morbid medical illnesses in society.

249 words

Learning Objectives:

- 1) At the end of the session, conference participants should be able to discuss the scope and extent of the problem of depression in college students.
- 2) At the end of the session, conference participants should be able to describe the contribution of factors such as perceived stress, loneliness, and self-esteem to depression in college students.
- 3) At the end of the session, conference participants should be able to discuss the public health implications of depression in college students.