



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

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Literature

- Trauma is significantly associated with distress in college students (Green, 2000)
- Trauma may be a risk factor for earlier diagnoses of illnesses (Green, 2000)
- Students in higher education are reported to have increased symptoms of mental ill health (Ian et al., 2008)
- Low self-esteem is generally associated with low quality of life (Van Dongen, 1996)
- Self-esteem plays a role in the adjustment of life stress (Cohen and Hoberman, 1983)

Model

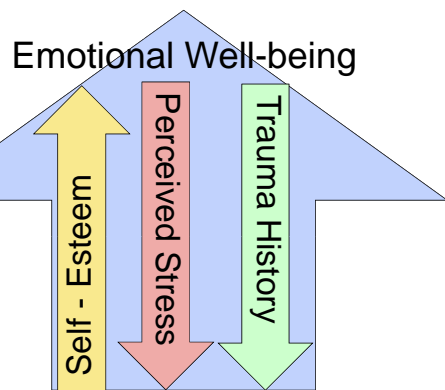


Figure 1. Quality of life in terms of life conditions and perception of emotional well-being (Adapted from Felce and Perry, Model for QOL, 1995)

Hypotheses

- A history of trauma will be negatively associated with emotional well-being
- Perceived stress will be negatively associated with emotional well-being
- Self-esteem will be positively correlated with emotional well-being
- A history of trauma, perceived stress, and self-esteem will explain a significant portion of the variance in emotional well-being in college students

Measures

Trauma History Questionnaire (Green, 1996)
Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$, reported
General Disaster Trauma Subscale
13 Items
"Have you ever seen someone seriously injured or killed?"
Inventory Scale
Yes, No; # of Times, Approximate Age

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989)
Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$, reported
11 items
"All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure"
4-point likert-type scale anchored at 1 – strongly agree and at 4 – strongly disagree

Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1993)
Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$, reported
14 items
"In the last month, how often have you, been able to control irritations in your life?"
5-point likert-type scale anchored at 1 – never and at 4 – very often

SF 36 QOL (Ware & Sherbourne, 1992)
Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$, reported
Emotional well-being subscale: 5 items
"During the past 4 weeks, have you felt so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer you up?"
6-point likert-type scale anchored at 1 – all of the time and at 6 – none of the time

Demographics (n=325)

| | n | % |
|--------------------|-----|------|
| Frequencies | | |
| Gender | | |
| Female | 247 | 76.0 |
| Ethnicity | | |
| European American | 193 | 59.4 |
| African American | 62 | 19.1 |
| Latino(a) | 30 | 9.2 |
| Other | 40 | 12.3 |

| | Mean (SD) | Range |
|---------------------|------------|---------|
| Descriptives | | |
| Age | 21.1 (4.9) | 18 – 56 |
| Years of Education | 13.7 (2.1) | 1 – 22 |
| GPA | 3.1 (.57) | 0 – 4 |

Results

Descriptive Statistics

| | Mean (SD) | Possible Range | Actual Range | Cronbach's α |
|------------------|-------------|----------------|--------------|---------------------|
| Perceived Stress | 27.0 (7.1) | 0 – 56 | 4 – 56 | .84 |
| Self-Esteem | 31.9 (4.2) | 11 – 44 | 20 – 38 | .87 |
| Trauma History | 1.9 (1.8) | 0 – 13 | 0 – 9 | .60 |
| Well-being | 59.2 (18.6) | 0 – 100 | 0 – 92 | .78 |

Bivariate Statistics

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---------------------|------------------|-------|------|-------|------|--------|-------|-----|----|
| 1. Age | -- | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Gender | -.07 | -- | | | | | | | |
| 3. Ethnicity | -.03 | -.03 | -- | | | | | | |
| 4. Education | .28** | -.00 | .02 | -- | | | | | |
| 5. GPA | .11 [†] | .07 | .14* | .02 | -- | | | | |
| 6. Perceived Stress | -.03 | .17** | .05 | -.12* | .02 | -- | | | |
| 7. Self-Esteem | -.07 | .03 | -.06 | .05 | -.09 | -.46** | -- | | |
| 8. Trauma History | .18* | -.03 | .09 | .08 | .07 | .07 | -.07 | -- | |
| 9. Well-being | -.09 | -.07 | -.06 | .08 | -.09 | -.63** | .46** | .01 | -- |

**p<.001 *p<.05 [†] = trending < .060

t - Tests

| Variable 1 | Variable 2 | Effect | t | df | p |
|------------|-----------------|----------|-------|-----|-------|
| Gender | Crime | Male | 2.81 | 314 | <.001 |
| Gender | Physical Sexual | Female | -1.52 | 315 | .003 |
| Education | Stress | Freshman | 1.74 | 134 | .014 |

Regression Analysis

| | β | t | p | Tolerance | VIF |
|------------------|---------|--------|-------|-----------|------|
| Age | -.11 | -2.37 | .018 | .90 | 1.12 |
| Trauma History | .08 | 1.75 | .081 | .97 | 1.04 |
| Self-Esteem | .21 | 4.32 | <.001 | .79 | 1.31 |
| Perceived Stress | -.52 | -10.60 | <.001 | .79 | 1.35 |

Criterion variable = Emotional Well-being

Adj. R² = .42, F (8,316) = 30.18, p<.001

Discussion

Though a history of trauma was only found to be trending in this study, additional research should examine the role of trauma in overall emotional well-being. Additionally, findings were counterintuitive, in that trauma was positively associated with emotional well-being, which may suggest a trend among college students. Perhaps future research that categorizes trauma based on level of severity may clarify the role of trauma in emotional well-being. Issues of self-esteem have been found in the literature to be related to level of education. Higher self-esteem was found to be a significant predictor of higher emotional well-being in our study, which may suggest that the level of education plays a role in emotional well-being. Perceived stress and self-esteem have been found to be related to internal locus of control (Houston, 1972; Judge & Bono, 2001) therefore control should be explored as a predictor of emotional well-being. Self-esteem is cited as a moderator in stress-illness relationship (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988); perhaps studying physical symptoms associated with emotional well-being will yield significant findings.

Clinicians working with a college-aged population should consider assessing for past traumatic events when working with students experiencing high perceived stress and low self-esteem.

Limitations

- Cross-sectional, correlation design
- Data was taken from one university
- Gender imbalance, more females than males

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- Please see handout for references

