Mental Health Services on College Campuses: Why Do Students Access Care?

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**Why do we care about college students and mental health?**

- Mental health (MH) problems among higher education students are a significant public health issue in US.

- Colleges and universities play an important role in addressing student MH needs and reducing stigma associated with seeking treatment.

- Understanding why students do or do not access care is essential for addressing unmet MH needs.
Study description

• Part of statewide evaluation of CalMHSA Student Mental Health Initiative

• Goals of presentation:
  – Enhance understanding of factors associated with college students’ use of MH services
  – Inform better design of prevention and early intervention programs to reduce stigma and improve use of MH services
Who did we learn about?

- 32 public higher education institutions in California

- 33,238 students and 1,4018 faculty and staff across University of California (UC), California State University (CSU), and California Community College (CCC) systems

- Students, faculty and staff responded to an invitation sent by institution in Spring and Fall 2013 to complete an anonymous, online survey
What did we ask about?

- Student use of mental health services with specific questions about on-campus mental health services

- Student mental health
  - Current psychological distress
  - Any mental health related academic impairment while in college

- Student coping style

- Demographics

- Campus climate and student MH supports
  - Supportive campus climate for student MH needs
  - Services/resources for students with MH needs
  - Supports for faculty/staff to help students with MH needs

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What did we learn?
Students have high rates of mental health needs

- High rate of current psychological distress (e.g., anxiety, depression, hopelessness)
- High rate of academic impairment due to MH issues (e.g., dropped course, received incomplete, dropped out)

![Bar chart showing percentage of students with psychological distress and academic impairment]

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Disparities in MH service use both on and off campus

- Asian and Latino students *less likely* to use any and on-campus MH services while in college
- African American students *less likely* to use on-campus MH services while in college

Use of MH Services

- No 80%
- Yes 20%

Off campus 50%
On campus 50%
Adaptive coping is a significant driver of MH service use

- Students with adaptive coping skills are more likely to use any and on-campus MH services.

- For students who had both psychological distress and academic impairment, adaptive coping increased odds of service utilization:
  - By 27% for on-campus services
  - By 97% for any MH services
Students on supportive campuses are more likely to use MH services

- Students *more likely* to receive any MH service and on-campus MH services if campus has:
  - Supportive climate for student MH issues
  - Adequate campus resources for student MH problems
  - Adequate staff/faculty resources to support students with MH problems
Now I would like to highlight some of our key findings from this study. [Add brief description of analytic approach here]

We adjusted for potential differences between survey responders and non-responders at the campus level using administrative data for all students on gender, race/ethnicity and student status (full-time vs. part-time) to construct response propensity weights using a logistic regression of participation, equal to one divided by the estimated probability of survey response for each campus. Using the weighted data, we then conducted univariate and bivariate analyses, describing the use of mental health services among higher education students. Subsequently, we performed logistic regressions examining the association between student use of mental health services, student characteristics, and campus environment, controlling for the city characteristics in which the campus was located. We examined use of any mental health services and on-campus mental health services separately, as the CCC system does not have a formal system-wide network of on-campus mental health providers comparable to the UC and CSU systems. We modeled the interactions of probable current serious psychological distress, academic impairment, and active coping, allowing us to better understand how the combined presence of two or three of these overlapping factors influenced service utilization among students.
Addressing student MH issues is critical

- More than 10% of students reported MH problems substantially affected academic success.

- College students self-report higher rates of current serious psychological distress than general population.

- Addressing student MH issues is critical for essential outcomes (e.g., on-time graduation, employment).
There are still disparities in MH care utilization

- Lower rates of MH service use are documented among racial/ethnic minorities (Asian, Latino and African American).

- Disparities exist even among population of students who have relatively easy access to MH services on campus.

- Increasing active coping may help mitigate some of disparities we see.
Supportive campus climate important to MH service use

- Students are more likely to use MH services when they attend campuses with:
  - Supportive climates
  - Staff and faculty equipped to support students with MH problems
  - Adequate resources
PEI activities help reduce stigma and foster support

- Methods to increase supportive campus climates and foster support:
  - Engage in social media campaigns to reduce stigma.
  - Reach out to underserved racial/ethnic minority students in culturally appropriate ways.
  - Train staff, faculty, and students on how to respond and refer students in distress.
  - Collaborate across campuses and systems to promote effective practices and share resources and lessons learned.
PEI activities help reduce stigma and foster support

- Examples of CalMHSA-sponsored PEI activities to reduce stigma on college campuses:
  - **LATINAS JUNTAS**: promotes self-esteem, mental health awareness, and stigma reduction among female students of Latin descent
  - **Ability Ally Training**: increases awareness and sensitivity about people with disabilities
  - **ReachOut**: helps teens and young adults manage distress, reduce stigma around getting help, and become educated about mental health
THANK YOU!

To request a copy of the presentation
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