

Complex Role Religiosity Plays in Relation to the Mental Health of Christian College Students

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Objectives

- Become aware of depression and anxiety rates among college students
- Identify possible contributions to this trend
- Positive and negative role religion plays in the mental health of college students
- Ways to address this issue

The problem of anxiety and depression on college campuses

- Suicidal thinking, severe depression, and rates of self-injury more than doubled over last decade.
- From 23% in 2007 to 41% in 2018 had moderate to severe depression
- The upward trend started about 2012/2013
- This is the time smart phones became common place
- 63% report overwhelming anxiety in the past year (n=610,543)
(Duffy, Twenge, & Joiner, 2019)
- More students are coming to college with already diagnosed mental illness (Post, 2011)
- Increases in students accessing mental health services on campus (ACHA, 2014)

College students and religiosity

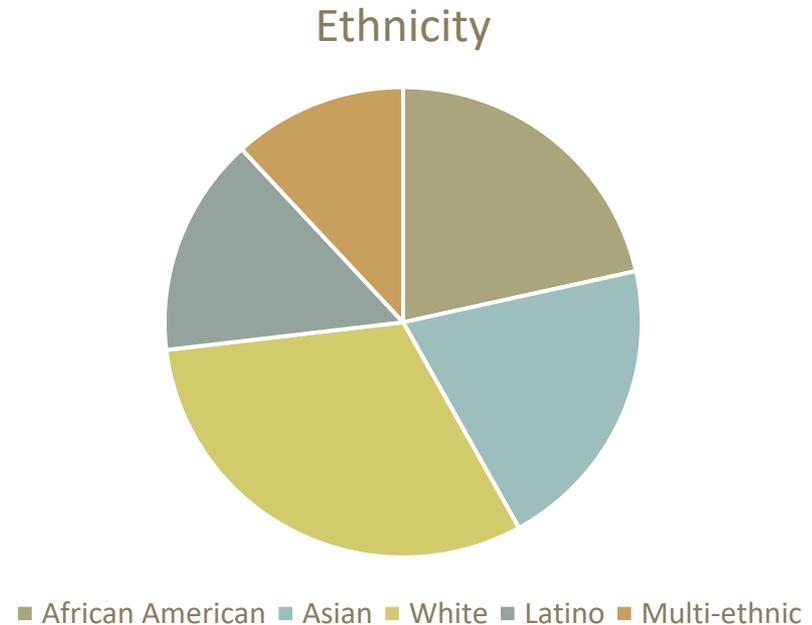
- Religiosity was linked to positive college adjustment
(Kneipp, Kelly, & Cyphers, 2009)
- College student religiosity protective effect on depression
(Berry and York, 2011)
- Emerging adults (those aged 18-25) are individualistic with their religious beliefs
- Often question religious institutions (Arnett, 2004)

Methodology

- This is a study conducted at Andrews University about every 5 years since 1990 using a purposive sample of representative classes through the university; the N each time is around 700.
- Youth health risk behaviors measured and risk and protective factors evaluated.
- Previously used paper data collection.
- In 2018 went to computer/tablet/cell phone.
- IRB approval and support of Andrews Administration

Participants of the Survey

- Age
 - 87% 18-25 years old
- Gender
 - 60% Female
 - 40% male
- Religion
 - 89% Seventh-day Adventist
 - 7% Other Christian
 - 1% Other religion (Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism)
 - 4% None



Seventh-day Adventist Church

- A Protestant Christian denomination
- Observes Saturday, the seventh day of the week, as Sabbath in keeping with the 4th Commandment
- Much of the theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church corresponds to common Protestant Christian teachings, such as the Trinity and the infallibility of Scripture.
- The church is known for its emphasis on diet and health, its "holistic" understanding of the person, and its conservative principles and lifestyle (Wikipedia, 2018)

Mental Health Frequencies

Suicide	
Suicidal ideation, past 6 months	16%
Suicide attempt, lifetime	11%

DASS	Stress	Anxiety	Depression
None	75%	67%	63%
Mild	10%	14%	12%
Moderate	6%	8%	12%
Severe	7%	4%	5%
Very severe	2%	7%	7%

Stress	15%
Anxiety	19%
Depression	24%

Mental Health Risk Factors

Gender

	Male	Female
Anxious	11%	24%

- Females are 2 x's more likely to be anxious
- Statistically significant at the .01 level

Mental Health Risk Factors

Sexual Orientation

	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual
Anxious	17%	17%	60%
Depressed	22%	14%	65%

- Those who identified as bisexual were about 3 x's more likely to be anxious and depressed
- Also have much higher rates of suicidal ideation and attempts
- Statistically significant at the .001 level

Mental Health Risk Factor

Suicide

Suicide ideation	Stress	Anxiety	Depression
Yes	38%	49%	66%
No	11%	14%	17%

- Stress, Anxiety, & Depression 3 x more likely to have suicidal ideation

Suicide attempt	Stress	Anxiety	Depression
Yes	35%	44%	47%
No	13%	16%	22%

- Stress, Anxiety, and Depression 2 x more likely to attempt suicide

Mental Health Risk Factor

DASS

	Stress	Anxiety	Depression
Stress	1		
Anxiety	.75*	1	
Depression	.77*	.71*	1

- * indicates statistical significance at the .01 level
- ** indicates statistical significance at the .05 level

Mental Health Risk

Trauma

- While you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life, did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way or try to or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal sex

ACE	Yes	No
Anxious	27%	18%

- If was sexually molested, 1.5 x more likely to be anxious
- Statistically significant at .05 level

Mental Health Risk

Trauma

- While you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life, did you often feel that no one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special or your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other or support you.

ACE	Yes	No
Anxious	30%	17%

- If emotionally neglected 1.8 x more likely to be anxious
- Significant at the .01 level

Mental Health Risk

Religiosity

	Stress	Anxiety	Depression
Share faith for approval of others	.12**	.13*	.16*
Pray to avoid God's disapproval	.12*	.20*	.16*
Attend church to avoid disapproval of others	.14*	.13*	.10**

Mental Health Protective Well Being

	Stress	Anxiety	Depression
Ladder of life	-.39*	-.37*	-.51*
Happiness	-.35*	-.32*	-.49*
Vitality	-.21*	-.18*	-.30*
Sleep	-.12*	-.11*	-.15*

- Ladder – On what step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time (average is 6.5 out of 10)
- Happiness – Taking all things together, would you say you are happy? (average is “rather happy”)
- Vitality - I feel I’m living life to the fullest, making healthy choices, staying physically fit and I feel I have reached my optimum levels of vitality that I work to maintain. (average is “sometimes”)

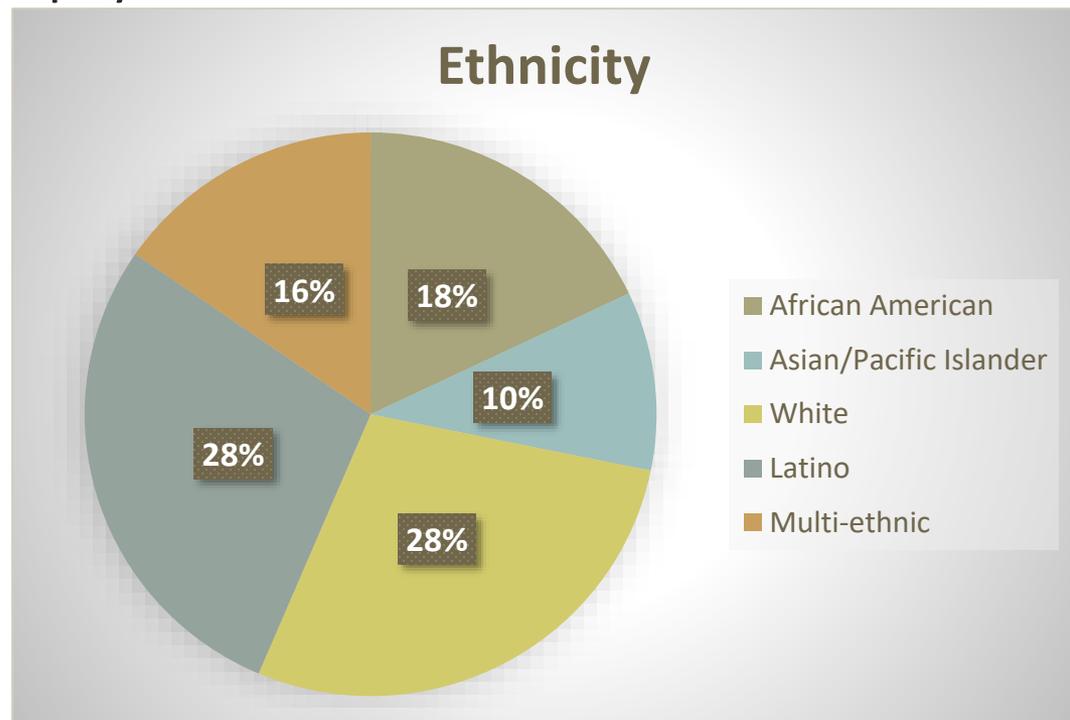
Mental Health Protective Commitment to Christ

	Not committed to Christ	Not sure if I'm committed to Christ	Committed life to Christ at a specific time	Commitment to Christ has developed
Depressed	16%	47%	33%	19%

- Having a developed commitment to Christ, but also not being committed to Christ, you are 2.5x's less likely to be depressed than if you aren't sure if you are committed.
- Significant at .001 level

Follow-up Focus Groups

- Conducted October-November 2018
- Follow up to Health Risk Behavior Survey
- Open-ended questions related to Wellness Behaviors in regards to mental and physical health and substance use
- 5 groups
- 4-10 per group
- Total: 39
- Gender:
 - Male: 38%
 - Female: 62%



Analysis

- Transcripts typed
- Code book developed
- Themes identified using QDA Miner
- Constant comparative method and frequency of codes
- Analysis conducted by principal investigator and graduate assistant to protect from bias
- Report developed

Mental Health Themes

- Resources are available
- There is awareness
- Stigma

Participant Quote

“This is my sophomore year so, its something that I guess students kinda take for granted, they just expect you to go to class and be ok with everything that happens and there is a lot of drama that happens in college, a lot more than what I would have liked to happen in college but you have to be able to nonetheless, and from personal experience that I should have gone and talked to a counselor, just for my own mental health and because of like the student persona of like, oh you don’t need to do that, you’ll be ok, you’ll work through it. I didn’t and I should have.”
FG1

Reasons students aren't thriving

- Stress from school
- Difficulty with time management and balance
- Dissatisfaction with life

Participant Quote

“It’s hard to balance all the aspects, mentally or academic and spiritual ... it’s too difficult. It feels like maybe academics is a lot then you wanna throw in social so then you will just have to forget about rest.”

FG2

Role of Religion

- Religion increases mental health stigma
- Can cause guilt if a person has not internalized religious values

Participant Quote

“Sometimes I have heard like, religious people say to somebody that has like depression, oh you believe in God, why are you sad? You know like they don’t see mental health as something that you actually need to and see somebody to get help for and like they can just cure it with prayer.” FG2

Coping Tools Used

- Exercise, walking, sports
- Hang out with friends
- Watching shows (Netflix), gaming, social media
- Listening to music or doing art
- Prayer

Recommendations by Focus Groups

- Improve dorms to increase mental health
 - Decrease noise/more privacy
- Help with balance
- More transportation options
 - Helps to relieve boredom and isolation

Participant Quote

“There is a class that is focusing on learning and behavior and trying to find ways to teach other professors better ways to teach their students everything. So I think that would be super helpful. Because once they teach it in such a way that students can manage it, then maybe they can manage their schedule. Then if they can manage their schedule, they can sleep, then they can eat better. It all stems from learning how to learn.” FG4

Implications

- Increasing burden on campus counseling programs
- Depression and anxiety highly correlated with suicidal ideation and suicide attempts
- Risky for the student with the issue and others
- Detracts from student success

Programs to address the problem

- Check Your Mood for suicide or substance use/abuse alert
- Therapeutic case management
 - Weekly committee meetings

Summary

- Depression and anxiety increasing nationally
- Gender, and sexual orientation effect mental health
- Religion is a risk and protective factor
- Stress, anxiety, and depression highly correlated
- Sexual abuse and emotional neglect increases anxiety
- College students overwhelmed and miserable
- More awareness, but still a stigma
- They need more support and understanding

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