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STRESS IN ACADEMIA

Stress is a normal part of life. Yaribeygi et al. (2017) define stress as any intrinsic or extrinsic stimulus that evokes a biological response, and responses to these stressors are called stress responses. Depending upon the type, timing, and severity of stressors, the body can respond in different ways. Today's students deal with more stressors than ever before, whether it is the K-12 system or higher education programs. Graduate and doctoral students often struggle with stressors as they meet the demands of completing their education. Many times, students find themselves more vulnerable because of the highly competitive nature of higher education programs. Graduate students who seek advanced degrees often experience anxiety and challenges as they transition from undergraduate programs or professional positions (Hullinger & Hogan, 2014). Other issues facing graduate students include feelings of not belonging among underrepresented racial or ethnic groups (Miller & Orsillo, 2020; Stone et al., 2018), and even international students struggling to adjust to new protocols and practices within American institutions (Bang & Montgomery, 2013). Earning a doctoral degree is a high point in one's education, with approximately 100,000 students beginning their degree in the United States (Carnegie Classification, n.d.). With this being the highest level of education one can attain, we often find some of the brightest and most ambitious students within this level of higher education. With these positive attributes also comes much pressure. Astonishingly, it is estimated that 50% of all doctoral students complete their degrees, with many leaving their programs during the first year (Walker, Golde, Jones, Bueschel, & Hutchings, 2008; Esping, 2010; Lovitts, 2001). Therefore, it is necessary to better understand students' psychosocial well-being and academic life and positive coping strategies.

COMPONENTS OF STUDENT PSYCHOSOCIAL HEALTH

The term psychosocial well-being includes a broad spectrum of emotional, social, and physical components of health. Gustafsson et al. (2010) revealed that the psychosocial environment can be divided into two areas: (1) factors related to school failure and academic stress and (2) factors related to teacher-student and student-student relationships and the social climate of the school setting. Specific psychosocial factors related to the first area may include stressors such as maintaining grades, attitudes, motivation, persistence, learning abilities, and emotions (Tindle et al., 2022). The second set of

factors relate to the pressures of meeting the expectations of parents' and instructors' expectations and even competitiveness among other students. These also include the factor of social isolation that stemmed from the recent pandemic. The absence of social connections due to isolation practices during the pandemic left students confused about program expectations and miscommunication or lack of communication with their peers and instructors (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Lovitts, 2001). In addition to the financial burdens of paying for their education, these factors often complicate the educational process for graduate and doctoral students.

IMPORTANCE OF PSYCHOSOCIAL HEALTH AND COPING SKILLS

So, one may ask why the psychosocial aspects of academic life is an important topic to discuss. For starters, there is a growing interest among colleges and universities as federal monies are now tied to student retention rates as well as services provided to students. The interest universities and colleges have in developing support services for healthy lifestyles and assistance programs has increased in recent years. Student needs have become a concern as higher education identifies the importance of providing specific care in the academic context. By addressing the psychosocial aspects of academic life, student academic performance and health can be improved.

Another important consideration is helping students with positive coping strategies while earning advanced degrees. In our daily lives, we must learn coping skills to positively process stimulus factors each and every day. The way we cope depends

upon the individual personality and situation. Folkman (2010) states that coping skills are cognitive and behavioral strategies used to deal with stressors. Social needs have been identified as one of the most important coping tools. Having a close social circle can provide students with emotional support from family and friends, professional support through mentoring and guidance of instructors and professionals, and practical support as it relates to finances and completing tasks (Heller & Rook, 1997; House, 1981; Nelson & Brice, 2008; Rosenholtz, 1989; Schaefer, Coyne, & Lazarus, 1981; Singh & Billingsley, 1998). As challenges arise, support services and coping strategies are placed on students. Knowing how to cope with the psychosocial aspects of academia not only equips students with the necessary tools and strategies to succeed but also enables colleges and universities to better understand student needs while completing their degree programs.

CONCLUSION

Given the nature of earning advanced degrees, institutions of higher education can be a positive part of a student's academic achievements. Positive psychosocial skills can provide students with richer educational experiences long after graduation. Understanding the stressors of academic life can positively impact student GPA, persistence in obtaining their degrees, and overall well-being. This issue looks at the psychosocial aspects of the academic life of graduate and doctoral students. The articles consider the different ways students encounter and deal with the stressors of academia. We have completed a group of interesting studies of well-being and coping.

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