

Examining the Gender Differences in Depression amongst Male and Female College Students

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Introduction

Based on an article by Liu and colleagues (2022), depression is rising at alarming rates amongst college students. According to the American Psychological Association (2018), depression is described as experiences of unhappiness that are characterized by instances of sadness and hopelessness that negatively affects one's daily life and function. About **20% to 40%** of undergraduates often suffer from depression (Liu et al., 2022).

Changes in college students' lives such as increased academic workload (Yang et al., 2021), financial struggles (Richardson et al., 2017), and instances of being home sick (Thurber & Walton, 2012) are common college students experiences that are associated with depression.

In regards to gender differences in depression, it was found that females tended to report higher levels of depression and were two times more likely to report depression across their lifespan than males (Gao et al., 2020). Also, when reporting depression, it was found that males describe symptoms by physiological factors (e.g., loss of appetite, fatigue, etc.), while females describe symptoms by construct (e.g., hopelessness, feeling sad, etc.) (Cavanagh et al., 2016). Considering these gender differences, it is important to note that Brownhill and colleagues (2005) did not come to this same conclusion. In fact, they found no gender differences in depression amongst college students.

Present Study

Purpose of the Study: To address potential gender differences in depression.
Research Question: Are there differences of depression across gender?
Predictions

- Hypothesis 1:* females college students will have a higher average depression score compared to males.

Methodology

A sample of college students (n=441, males=175, females=226) was drawn from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette via SONA participants recruitment system, Prolific, or class announcement.

Demographics:

- Participants average age was 23.18 (SD=6.83). Self reported ethnicities were 56% White, 16.3% African American/Black, 6.8% Hispanic/Latinx, 6.2% Asian, and lastly 14.7% other.

Measures include:

Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21). The Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale 21 (DASS-21; Lovibond and Lovibond, 1995) is a 21-item self-report measure that is a shorter form of the longer DASS-42 item scale.

- An exemplar item for the depression subscale is “I couldn’t seem to experience any positive feelings at all.”

Gender was coded into two levels: male and female.

Results

An independent means t-test, with equal variances assumed revealed that male college students’ depression (M= 6.86, SD= 5.95) was significantly different than female college students’ depression

Conclusion

Based on our results, females reported a higher average score of depression compared to males. This aligns with past literature showing that females had a higher average of depression (Asher 2023). The current findings help to distinguish the differences in mood disorders across genders (male and female) especially since Brownhill and colleagues (2005) found no gender differences. The differences in depression in male and females may be due to the role of gender expectations such as men being more independent and closed-off and women tending to be more emotionally vulnerable and help seeking (Gao et al. 2020). The gender roles men are place in can lead to limited reporting of depression, whereas females may be more likely to report symptoms openly and more accurately. Because females and males show these differences, further research is needed in order to learn how to properly treat and prevent depression amongst male and female college students. Consideration and treatment of depression across gender (male and female) is especially important in college students due to the prevalence of suicide amongst this group and the difference amongst suicidal attempts and methods in males (use more lethal methods) and females (drug overdoses).

Limitations and Future Directions

Some of the limitations are self-report, only considering male and female gender, and the lack of consideration for varying sexual orientations. Future research may need to assess how societal pressure of gender roles affects self reports of depression and other psychiatric disorders.

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