Health-Related Quality of Life in Chronically-Ill College Students: Examining Influential Constructs

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Recommended Citation
"Health-Related Quality of Life in Chronically-Ill College Students: Examining Influential Constructs" (2017). Stander Symposium Posters. 1017.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/stander_posters/1017

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Background

- Chronic illnesses are health conditions that persist at least six months and require maintenance or treatment
- Up to one-third of college students suffer from chronic symptoms (Ward, Schiller, & Goodman, 2014)
- Research on college students typically focuses on academics (Houman & Stapley, 2013); little is known about how chronic symptoms impact their health-related quality of life (HRQoL)
- Research shows that college freshman with chronic illness report significant impairment in HRQoL (Herts, Wallis, & Maslow, 2014)
- The Illness Intrusiveness Model (Devins, 2010) is used in the current study to conceptualize HRQoL, as it includes psychological well-being, treatment adherence, and factors that impact both positive and negative outcomes
- Symptoms of major chronic illnesses are significantly associated with poor psychological well-being, depression and anxiety (Katon, Lin, & Kroenke, 2007), indicating a reciprocal relationship between mental health and chronic illness
- Stigmatization of chronic illness has also been linked to negative psychological and social outcomes (Gupta, Gupta, & Watteel, 1998)
- Perceptions of health stigma are the single best predictor of depression in chronically-ill individuals (Gupta, Gupta, & Watteel, 1998)

Background

- Adherence drops significantly during college as students become responsible for their health (Pai & Ostendorf, 2011)
- Avoidant coping contributes to negative health outcomes, psychosocial impairment, and diminished coping ability (Bombardier, D’Amico, & Jordan, 1990)
- The proposed research seeks to examine how college students with chronic illness cope with their illness, function psychosocially, and experience stigmatization, constructs which have not yet been examined in combination
- Determining how these constructs, independently and in combination, affect health-related quality of life (HRQoL) is the ultimate goal of this research

Methods, Analyses, and Anticipated Results

- Participants will be students at the University of Dayton with chronic illness
- Participants will complete an online battery of measures, composed of demographic information, the AAQ-II, IIRS, SSCI-8, CES-D-10, and GAD-7
- Following collection, data will be analyzed using t-tests and correlations to test for simple associations between demographic variables and main study variables. Multiple regression will be used to analyze relationships among the assessed variables while controlling for covariates
- The interconnected associations between stigma and avoidant coping with overall mental health and health-related quality of life are of primary interest
- It is hypothesized that relationships will be found between the predictor variables, stigma and avoidance, and the outcome variables, health-related quality of life, depression, and anxiety. For example, the relationship between stigma and quality of life will be stronger for individuals with higher levels of avoidant coping
- There may also be a significant interaction between avoidance and stigma such that levels of the outcome variables are even higher for those who experience stigma and cope via avoidant strategies