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MENTAL HEALTH OF COLLEGE STUDENT SUBGROUPS: EMERGING STRESSORS AND DEPRESSION

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The college student population in the US is growing increasingly diverse and the students live in a demanding changing higher education context which exposes them to multiple stressors and related mental health vulnerability. This study identifies important stressors affecting depression in college students as a whole and across the subgroups of gender and domestic/international students, and compares between-group differences. 631 college students were recruited (384 females/247 males; 450 domestic/181 international students). Depression was measured through the CES-D Scale. We asked participants to identify and rate stresses that occurred in the current year. T-tests, multiple regression and multivariate tests were used. Females showed higher depression symptoms than males, and international students' depression level was higher than that of domestic students. The stresses, such as social network changes, pressure of interacting with strangers, sleeping problems, and academic discouragement, stood out and influenced depression of the overall sample significantly. Males' depression was related to stress in interpersonal and academic challenges, while females were more likely to face stressors in social activities and interpersonal problems such as changes in diet and sleeping habits, which were associated with depression. Domestic students experienced stress in social interaction, intrapersonal issues and academic pressure relating to depression. For international students, academic challenge was the only stressor that was associated with depression. Considering the important stressors emerged in diverse subgroups, the results shed light on health campaigns for improving coping skills and resilience of various groups, to provide social support that fulfills their specific needs and ultimately promote mental health.

Keywords: mental health, stressors, depression, coping, college students, international students

Biography

Lan Jin has been graduated from the Master's program in the Department of Consumer Science at Purdue University. Currently she is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Consumer Science at Purdue University and a MPH student in the Public Health Program at Purdue University. Her research focuses on the mental health promotion, social support, and health-related behavior change, particularly on mental health of minorities and health disparities.

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