Emotional wellbeing of first year university students: Critical for determining future academic success

Libbie Douglass          Rabiul Islam

Charles Sturt University
Background

• Student Self Reporting

• 2007 FYHE Conference Roundtable Discussion

• The Next Step ………
The next step .......

• How will we investigate students experiences and emotional wellbeing?

• Do negative emotional issues impact on academic performance?
Aim of Study

To identify whether first year university students were experiencing emotional & mental health issues, and if they were, did those emotional and mental health issues impact negatively on their academic performance?
Methodology

Participants

• 189 first year internal students
• 66% female / 34% male
• 67% - 17 – 19 yrs / 28% - 20 – 29yrs
  5% - 30+ yrs
• Rural - 48% / Urban - 52%
• across courses & faculties
Questionnaire

- Based on *a priori* assumptions gathered by information from existing evidence based research

- Based on information from combined sources

- Self report format

- 100 descriptive statements
Questionnaire Item Examples

• I experienced difficulty in doing assignments for my subjects
• My first year was a very positive experience
• I suffered from very low self-esteem
• I had a problem controlling my alcohol intake
• I had family problems outside university
• I felt I had a lack of academic skills
• I felt comfortable approaching the lecturers
• I experienced sexual harassment
Procedure

• Personal request for voluntary participation

• Exploratory Principal Components Factor Analysis

• Correlations & Multiple Regression
Results
Self Report Findings of Item examples

50% - being really stressed
26% - suffering from anxiety
24% - suffering from depression
18% - experienced violence
10% - self harming behaviour
10% - extremely negative sexual experience

65% - I am not coping with my responsibilities
55% - my friends were involved in drug use
30% - I experienced drugs on campus
27% - I took illicit drugs
24% - had a problem controlling alcohol intake **

58% - needed friends for emotional support
39% - felt as though I needed help but didn’t seek it
10% - visited counsellor outside university
8.5% - visited university counsellor
Results

Principal Components Exploratory Factor Analysis

4 Factors Extracted

1. Positive Social Interaction
2. Mental Health Problems
3. Negative Experiences
4. Academic Difficulties
## Results

Mean Scores for the four identified factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTOR</th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Social Interaction</td>
<td>3.80 (.65)</td>
<td>3.65 (.62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Problems</td>
<td>2.14 (.75)</td>
<td>2.40 (.70)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Experiences</td>
<td>2.37 (.63)</td>
<td>2.22 (.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Difficulties</td>
<td>2.94 (.77)</td>
<td>2.77 (.71)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Results

Multiple Regression Analysis for experience of **ACADEMIC DIFFICULTIES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Social Interaction</td>
<td>-.327</td>
<td>-2.23</td>
<td>.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Problems</td>
<td>.275</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Experiences</td>
<td>.234</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>.076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Social Interaction</td>
<td>-.157</td>
<td>-1.89</td>
<td>.060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Problems</td>
<td>.343</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Experiences</td>
<td>.304</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Model for Males

- Positive Social Interaction
- Mental Health Problems
- Negative Experiences

Academic Difficulties
Model for Females

Positive Social Interaction

Mental Health Problems

Negative Experiences

Academic Difficulties
Meanings

• Large numbers of FY students in this study have indicated wide range of emotional and mental health problems

• Females mental health & emotional wellbeing can predict Academic Difficulties

• Males and females show different predictive models for academic difficulties
Where to from here?

• Further Research

• Implications

• University Services

• Retention & Attrition of students