

University Counseling Services at CSUN.

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Prepared for

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Abstract

This report investigates the prevalence of mental illness with college students. It is meant to inform students that they are not alone when dealing with mental health issues and it explains that it is normal to get help. It shows what can happen to a student when they need help but don't seek it. Finally it explains the ways to go about seeking help when the decision is made to do so. California State University Northridge helps students with mental health by providing counselors that give emotional support. Students don't know this because of the lack of marketing provided by University Counseling Services. The stigma associated with seeking help can be lessened within time as long as UCS increases the exposure of the programs they have in place for students.

Introduction

Background

College can be a difficult environment. It is the first-time students are away from home and the first time they're exposed to influences that have been hidden by parents like drugs and alcohol. Dealing with these new experiences can be stressful for students and when stress is left untreated it can expose underlying mental problems. Michael Kerr points out in his article for healthline that 1 out of every 4 college students suffers from some sort of mental illness, including depression and 75% of people don't seek help for mental health problems.

Problem

The problem is that the majority of college students that need help with mental health don't seek it because they fear being stigmatized by their peers and/or family and they aren't aware of the services available. After fear comes hopelessness and without hope students are likely to drop out of school. The solution CSUN has for helping students is University Counseling Services. Unfortunately, it isn't easy to find because it is located on the 5th floor of Bayramian Hall 520. Our campus needs to fix these problems by making the counseling service easier to access so students are aware of the help provided and therefore likely to seek it.

Purpose

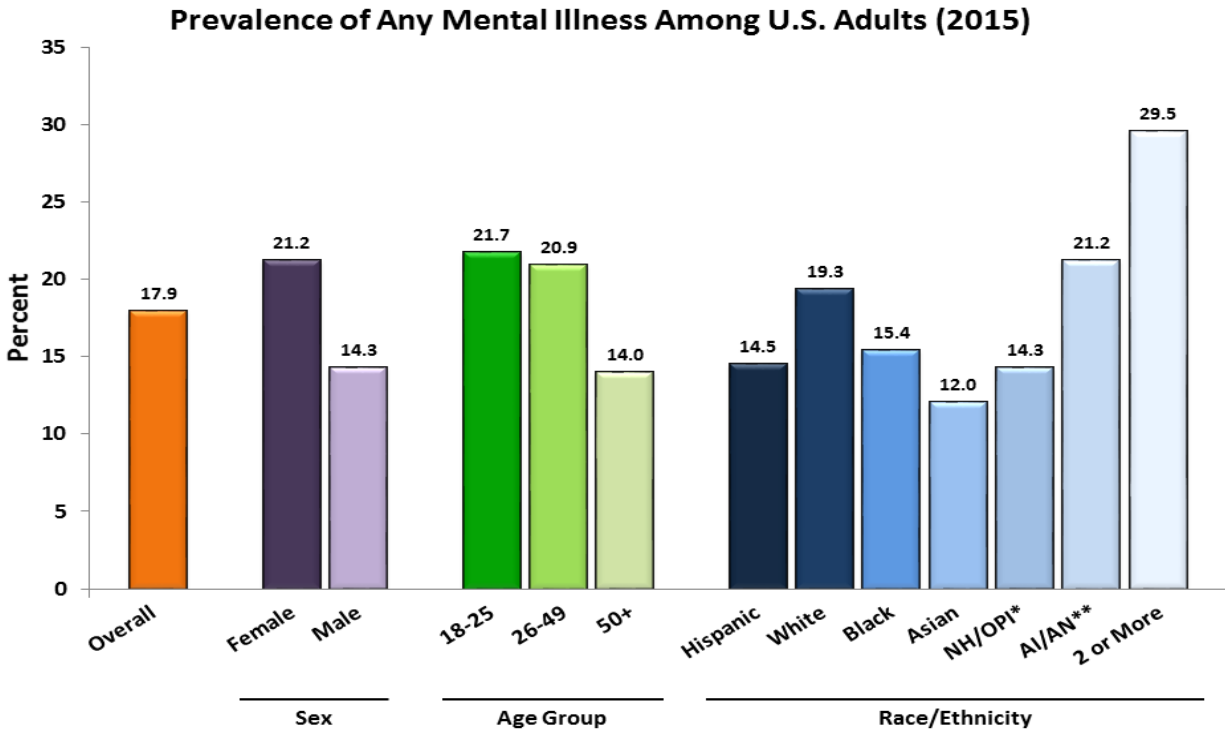
The purpose of this report is to highlight the relevance of mental health among college students. It gives students insight in how to determine if they need counseling services and it gives an example of what can happen when a student with mental illness doesn't seek help. Then solutions are offered on how to increase the effectiveness of CSUN's University Counseling Services.

Discussion

Providing Awareness

Adults 18-25 have the highest prevalence of any mental illness among American adults compared to a 2015 study, shown in Figure 1, according to a National Institute of Mental Health survey.

Figure 1



Data courtesy of SAMHSA

*NH/OPI = Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
**AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native

This means college students have a high chance of having a mental illness and if left untreated can get worse. College can be a stressful environment because not only are the students learning from the courses, they take they are also learning new lessons about life like how to manage time efficiently, how to deal with peer pressure, and how to build new relationships.

Looking Within

One of the most difficult skills but most crucial in life is to be able to be self-aware. Aware of one's thoughts, and aware of ones actions. When dealing with our own problems how do we know if it is only stress or something more serious like depression? We need to be able to evaluate ourselves in a daily basis in order to evolve and grow as introspective humans. With this awareness we can access the full potential to complete tasks like homework or studying for finals or time management.

“In their daily lives people continuously make decisions about what courses of action to pursue and how long to continue those they have undertaken. Because acting on misjudgments of personal efficacy can produce adverse consequences, accurate appraisal of one’s own capabilities has considerable functional value” (Bandura 3).

Deciding to Seek Help.

Stigma

There is a perceived public stigma attached to people who seek help for mental health because they are seen as unstable, dangerous, and responsible for their condition. This can be especially difficult for students who are of color, athletes, or expected to achieve high academic success. Although not all of the public holds these negative stereotypes it still hinders student's ability when seeking help because of their pride and fear of judgment. Students fear that their family and peers will look down on them for exposing weakness. This perception needs to change for progress to be made. On the University Counseling Services website page, www.csun.edu/counseling, it explains that all information provided will be confidential, "Neither the fact that the student seeks counseling nor any information about the sessions will appear on their student academic record". So students can be left assured that the information disclosed in the counseling sessions will remain private.

University Counseling Services

There are two different types of counseling offered at UCS. The first is individual counseling where the sessions are meant for assessing short term goals. Individual counseling is helpful for students because it gives them emotional support by a trained professional. If a student needs more time the counselors will find the right outside provider based on financial needs and healthcare options. All counseling within CSUN is offered free of charge. The second type of counseling is RIO. RIO (Recognition, Insight, and Openness) is a group counseling course that lasts 3 weeks and is curriculum driven. Each week builds on the material provided the week prior but a student can show up any time. UCS needs to extend their reach around campus so that students that are hesitant to seek help will eventually warm up to the idea.

When Left Untreated

Seung-Hui Cho, a student of Virginia Tech was admitted to a mental hospital after his roommate became concerned because he threatened to take his own life. When Cho was released, he was referred by a professor to Cook Counseling Center, Virginia Techs on campus counseling. According to Sherry Lynch Conrad, the triage counselor, she met with him for 30 minutes and did not schedule a follow up because Cho didn't know his school schedule. After two more calls from the counseling center Cho stated he suffered from depression, anxiety, and trouble concentrating but he refused to make an appointment. On April 16, 2007 Cho killed 32 people and himself at Virginia Tech campus in Blacksburg, Va. Reporter Dan Evon of Inquisitr news wrote an article saying "It is considered the deadliest shooting incident by a single gunman in Unites States history." A mistake Cho made was isolating himself from those that could help him and in time this led to loneliness. This failure to be socially connected to his peers led him to resentment and finally hatred. The hatred turned violent and the rest is history.

Conclusion

Therefore, students are among the highest risk of developing mental illness because of their age group and because college in itself is stressful. Stress impacts the mind and body and when stress is left untreated can lead to other conditions like depression and suicidal ideation. The first step in deciding whether or not to seek help is by looking within. The negative stigma associated with mental illness prevents students from seeking help and can hinder their ability to perform well in school. Mental illness is one of the main reasons students drop out of college. Every life is important and by saving just one person will make a difference because that one person may be the next Cho. If Cho just took the time to make that appointment to see a counselor so many lives would have been saved. University Counseling Services is the solution and by increasing its exposure it can increase its effectiveness in treating students.

Recommendations

By implementing the following recommendations UCS will increase their reach around campus and thereby increase the number of students they help. This will ensure success among students and in turn improve our economy through the achievements the students will make for the future.

1. Have a stand with pencils, pens, and stress balls with the UCS logo that helps students identify with the program. This stand can be set up when the clubs around campus recruit students. Since the items that are handed out will likely be used for school assignments then the students will associate school work with counseling.
2. Have a sign with easy to read and brightly colored artwork on the 1st floor of Bayramian Hall highlighting that walk-ins are always welcome.
3. Have a brightly colored sign displaying the services provided by University Counseling Services on the 5th floor of Bayramian hall next to the elevator and stairway. These signs will also have arrows pointing toward the direction of the correct room which is 520.
4. Have teachers get an incentive to refer students to UCS when they see the student having trouble with school work. An example of an incentive could be a certificate or award given to the professor for saving a life. The student will have the power to decide if the teacher will receive an award at the end of every semester. The award can be added to their portfolio so when they are under review for a raise it can be a tool in pushing the promotion in the right direction.
5. Have one poster in every building advertising University Counseling Services. These posters will have a picture of a student with a quote that specifies a program and how it helped them excel.
6. Have an online course required for students to register for classes. It will be due once a year and contain real stories of student's who struggled with mental illness. It will educate students on how to resolve it on their own with quizzes after each lesson reinforcing what is taught to memory. In the end it will mention that if a student is beyond self-help to reach out through University Counseling Services.
7. Have the best students from the program start a fundraiser that supports mental health through perseverance. This perseverance will be shown by the students as they run a marathon through campus. The funds from this fundraiser can be used to pay for the posters and other promotional items.

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