Examining Stress Among First-Generation College Students
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Introduction
• Stress is a complex, multidimensional and ongoing process (Lazarus et al., 1985; Schwarzer, 2001).
• Students encounter minor and major college transitions (Chao, 2012).
• First-generation college students are prompted to face academic, financial, and social challenges as they might be the first in their family to navigate college (Adams et al, 2016; Jenkins et al, 2013; Phinney & Hass, 2003).

Subjective and Objective Stress
• Psychological stress is an interaction between the person and the environment in which available resources are appraised or taxed as exceeded and jeopardize the person’s ability to cope (Lazarus et al., 1985).
• In Lazarus’ view, the interpretation of a stressful event is more important than the exposure to the event itself (Brannon et al., 2018).
• Subjective stress is the person’s interpretation of stressors.
• Objective stress is the number of stressful events experienced.
• Environmentally induced stress has an indirect effect on the person and can shape the occurrence of illness (Moore et al., 2012); resulting in a cascade of stressors or subsequent health problems (Brannon et al., 2018).
Mental Health Impact

- Stress can lead to depression and suicidal thoughts (Welle & Graf, 2011).
- A study from Harvard Medical School (2018) found that 1 in 5 college students reported having suicidal thoughts in the previous year.
- According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2018), suicide is the second leading cause of death among individuals between age 10 to 34 years old.
- First-generation students tend to report significantly low social support, stronger Post-Traumatic Stress symptoms, and less life satisfaction than non-first-generation college students (Jenkins et al., 2013).

Methods

- A sample of 150 college students will be collected through M-Turk.
- Participants will be asked to complete the Informed Consent.
- Participants will complete the Demographics Questionnaire in which they will indicate whether they self-identified as first-generation college student or not.
- Participants will complete the 10-item Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, Kemark & Mermelstein, 1983) on a 5-point scale, from 0 (Never) to 4 (Very Often).
- PSS emphasizes on the interpretation of events and measures the degree of appraised events in the past month.
- Participants will complete the 36-item Life Event Scale for Students (Clements & Turpin, 1996).
  - The scale forecast the likelihood of disease and illness after the exposure to stressful life events in the previous year.
  - This scale has allowed research to be tested with good reliability and validity (Brannon et al., 2018).
- Participants will be debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Research Questions

- How is stress experienced differently between first-generation college students and non-first-generation college students?
- What is the correlation between objective and subjective stress?

Expected Results

- First-generation college students will report significantly higher levels of perceived stress than non-first-generation college students.
- It is expected to find a positive correlation between subjective and objective stress in both groups.
References


