Omega Graduate School

Dissertation Research Prospectus (Pre-Proposal)

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Problem Statement

The problem is that it is unknown whether there is a relationship between Depression, Anxiety, and Stress of college and university students 18 to 24 years in Trinidad and Tobago and the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown because research shows that there is a correlation between these disorders and college students’ mental wellbeing during Covid-19 lockdown across the world’s continents (Tadesse et al. 2020, p.1).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore whether there is a relationship between Depression, Anxiety, and Stress in college and university students 18 to 24 years in Trinidad and Tobago and the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown.

Background of the Problem

The Coronavirus first appeared in Wuhan, China, in late 2019. However, by the first six weeks of 2020, the virus had spread rapidly from China to several other countries in East Asia and the United States of America (Hadi et al., 2020, p. 1).

This continuous spread led the Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO) on January 30, 2020, to declare the COVID-19 virus a "Public Health Emergency of International Concern” under the International Health Regulations (HR) (2005) (WHO, 2020 para.1). As the situation grew worse, the Director General declared COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (Hadi et al., 2020, p.1).

This COVID-19 virus was described as the most infectious disease in the last century after the Spanish Flu epidemic (Chowdory et al., 2020, p. 163). This dreaded disease was widespread, affected citizens’ health, and caused the death of approximately two (2) million persons worldwide (Klinglhofer et al., 2021, p.1).

Various Governments put containment measures in place to prevent the spread among their citizenry. One of these measures was establishing lockdowns. However, this measure forced residents to remain home from attending school and work, preventing them from socializing as they usually did (Sampogna et al., 2021, p.2).

Several researchers across the continents commented on the new measures and their relationship to students' mental health. "School closer and stay-at-home declarations by the federal and lower government administrative exposed students to psychological problems" (Tadesse et al. 2020, p. 1). These researchers showed that the disorders of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress were high in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia, regarding college students. Najjuka et al. 2021 highlighted that several studies among university students in China, Bangladesh, and other countries have also reported high levels of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress among their students (p. 1533).

Felfe et al. 2022 described school closures used as part of the containment measure as a critical issue. They posited, "The youth mental health crisis has become so acute during the COVID-19 pandemic that a coalition of pediatric health experts has declared it a national emergency" (p. 1). These researches highlighted that the measures interrupted schools' educational and social curriculum. They identified a lack of social interaction and support from friends and family problems as issues that adversely affected youths' mental health. Lipson et al., 2022, referred to the importance of paying attention to mental health challenges in young adults. They cited Duffy et al., 2019 who stated that within the last ten years, there had been twice as many college students who faced mental health problems (p. 1). Other researchers have also shown a relationship between lockdowns and mental health and that the 15-to-24-year age group is most vulnerable (Mc Gorry et al., 2022, p.61).

This awareness led this student to study the relationship between Depression, Anxiety, and Stress of 18 to 24 years old college and university students in Trinidad and Tobago and the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

Significance

This study will contribute to a gap in the research of 18 to 24-year-old college and university students of Trinidad and Tobago by identifying a relationship between Depression, Anxiety, and stress and the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown based on the research questions.

Research Questions

What are the perceptions of the 18 to 24-year-old college and university students regarding the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown.

Research Methodology

This study will utilize a qualitative methodology because research questions will be answered through inductive coding and exploratory thematic analysis.

Theoretical /Conceptual Framework

This study is framed by the Biopsychosocial theories of mental illness because the Bio Psychosocial theory guides us in understanding that a person’s genetic makeup, that is, how they manage their thoughts, feelings and behaviors, as well as their social environment can have an impact on their mental health (Cooper, Tatlow-Golden, 2023, pp. 214-218). According to Armstrong and Summers (2020), "biological, psychological, and social factors are all central to every mental illness" (p. 82).

Mental illness has been the main obstacle to the health, wellness, and productivity of young persons worldwide (McGorry et al., 2022, para.1). This includes the age group 18 to 25 year-olds on which we are focusing our study. McGorry et al. posited that their data showed that 50% of mental disorders occur before age 15 and 75% by age 25. They also asserted that 50% of this age group is affected by age 25.

Depression, Anxiety, and Behavioral disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents (WHO, 2021, para.1). Some emotional conditions prevalent among young persons are Anxiety and Depression. The most pervasive is Anxiety. The World Health Organization (WHO) posited that 3.6% of 10 to 14-year-olds and 4.6% of 15 to 19-year-olds experience an anxiety disorder (WHO, 2021, para. 7). These disorders can hinder a student's performance at school. Depression can even lead to suicide if not dealt with early.

According to the World Health Organization Report (2022), "Adversity is one of the most influential and detrimental risk to mental health” (p. 22). Adversity can come in different forms, such as poverty, sexual abuse, physical abuse, and even the COVID-19 pandemic. The World Health Organization Report (2022) stated, “At any one time, a diverse set of individual, social, and structural factors may combine to protect or undermine our mental health and shift our position on the mental health continuum” (p.14). This pandemic did just that. Research on the Covid-19 Pandemic lockdown has shown that it has undermined young persons’ mental health. Mc Gorry et al. (2022) stated that young people have had worse mental health experiences since the Covid-19 pandemic; 75% reported that their mental health was worse than before. Research also shows that there is a relationship between the mental ill health of first-year college students and low academic achievement and that depression is synonymous with quitting school before graduating according to Eisenberg et al., 2009, (as cited in Lipson et al., 2022). This data has heightened my interest in pursuing this study.

Instrumentation

This qualitative study will utilize a field-tested researcher-developed questionnaire validated by feedback from 5-7 subject matter experts.

Research Design

This qualitative study will utilize a basic qualitative design because it will explore perceptions of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress and the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown among young college persons 18 to 24 years old in Trinidad and Tobago.

Population and Sampling

The target population for this study will be 18 to 24-year-old young persons from colleges and universities in Trinidad and Tobago.

Data Analysis

This study will utilize manual coding and Creswell and Poth’s Data Analysis Spiral for data analysis: Step One: Managing and organizing the data (data preparation). Step Two: Reading anmemoing emergent ideas. Step Three: Describing and classifying codes into themes. Step Four:

Developing and assessing interpretations. Step Five: Representing and visualizing the data.

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