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Depression, Anxiety and Stress in First Year Psychology Students:

Principles of Psychology Lab Report

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Abstract

A laboratory study was conducted to compare first-year university students' scores on the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS, Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995, cited in Crawford & Henry, 2003) with

h norms based on a general population (Crawford and Henry, 2003). Results replicated findings in Wong, et al. (2006) that the students had higher levels of depression and anxiety than the norms for a general population, but there were no significant gender differences in depression and anxiety levels. While there were significant relationships between the three DASS subscales, there were no significant differences in the relationship of age with the DASS subscales.

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Did you know that eight years after being diagnosed with Stage 1 breast cancer, there remains about a 3% chance you will die of a recurrence within the next two years – compared with about a .001% chance that you will die had you been diagnosed with Stage 4 breast cancer, i.e., metastasis has occurred (Taylor, Davis, & Boyages, 2002)? In another words, after eight years, the 10-year survival rate is *higher* (almost certain) for those who had been diagnosed with Stage 4 cancer than for those diagnosed with Stage 1 cancer. Why? because almost all of those diagnosed with Stage 4 cancer have already died. What does this have to do with the finding that first-year university students suffer from greater psychological distress than other students (Adlaf, Gliksmann, Demers, Newton-Taylor, 1998, cited and *interpreted* in Wong et al., 2006)? The first-year students who become second-year students may not be any more or less distressed than they were during their first year.

Of course, it's sad when *anyone* is distressed, but Wong et al.'s interpretation of the above finding also should sadden anyone with respect for the scientific method. In addition, Wong et al. (2006) interpreted findings of depression, anxiety, and stress in first-year university students (though only small percentages of the 7915 participants were seriously disturbed) higher, than in studies using norms that were representative of general populations [using the subscales of the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS), Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995, cited in Crawford & Henry, 2003], as evidence that had “major implications” (p. 781) *related to being a first-year student*. The researchers know nothing about the participants' depression, anxiety, or stress levels prior to entering university or about how, for example, the levels compare with those who had graduated from high school a year ago and have been slinging hamburgers ever since graduation. They also misleadingly mixed previous studies of university students in general with those with information a

bout first-year students *in particular* (pp. 777-778) and were not surprised to find higher levels of depression in males than in females (despite not noticing reverse findings using the DASS in research they cite, Crawford & Henry, 2003, p. 117), although “women are 2 or 3 times” more likely than men to report being depressed “in study after study” (Emery & Oltmanns, 2000). (As discussed below, gender differences are not necessarily based on genetic differences.)

Wong et al. (2006) used participants ranging in age from under 18 to 24, although most were 19 to 24 years old. Relationships between age and the DASS subscales were not assessed (and with large samples, small and meaningless differences may be statistically significant, Salkind, 2006). In fact, Crawford and Henry (2006) did find weak (Salkind, 2006) negative age relationships (Pearson $r_s < /.19/$, $p_s < .01$, two-tailed tests) with the depression and stress subscales and with total score. Further research, an intention of the laboratory report described below, is needed on relationships between age and the DASS.

The laboratory study reported below was designed to assess whether Wong et al.’s results (2006) would be replicated using Crawford and Henry’s norms (2003) and to explore the relationship between age and the DASS. Replication of Wong et al. (2006) required hypothesizing there would be higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress in first-year university students than in the general population norms in Crawford and Henry (2003), and that female students would report higher levels of anxiety and stress than males would report, but lower levels of depression...

...References

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