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WHAT'S CAUSING ALL THE STRESS? A QUALITATIVE STUDY AMONG WITS UNIVERSITY SECOND YEAR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN 2019

BY

MS LERATO MAKUAPANE

WITS ANALYTICS & INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH UNIT

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OVERVIEW

- Introduction
- Research objectives
- Research and sampling methods
- Results
- Discussions and Conclusions

INTRODUCTION

- Globally, there is a general lack of research on anxiety and depression among university students, especially in low-and-middle income countries including South Africa (Ibrahim et, al., 2013).
- Literature from the high-income countries shows that the level of anxiety and depression is three times higher among university students compared to their non-student counterparts and the general population (Ibrahim et, al., 2013).
- Therefore, this study qualitatively explores the state of anxiety and depression in this cohort(which cohort).
- Understanding anxiety and depression among students will allow for the development of appropriate intervention.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to:

- Define the students' understanding of anxiety and depression
- Understanding the causes and triggers of anxiety and depression
- Understanding the coping mechanisms of anxiety and depression

RESEARCH AND SAMPLING METHODS

Online Survey

Eligibility:

- 1st time/ 1st year students in 2018
- Fulltime second year students (2019?)
- Sampled 1 250 students (targeting 250 responses)

Qualitative Work

Eligibility:

- All students must have completed the PhQ
- 25 In-Depth Interviews (5 students from each faculty)
- 2 FGDs (5-7 students across faculties)

Students will be recruited via email and telephone

Data analysis methods

- All interviews were recorded
- Transcribed
- Thematic analysis done on Nvivo 12 pro
- Two investigators assessed the transcripts separately coded and agreed upon coding framework, to avoid investigator bias





RESULTS





Understanding anxiety and depression

" anxiety it's just *that nervousness, that worry, uhmm that uneasiness, that uneasy feeling that you have*, and with depression is a severe thing where your mind is all over the place, your mind is centred on whatever is... whatever is a problem to you, your mind is just centred on that and thinking about that constantly to a point where you can't handle your thoughts anymore."

- Symptoms and feelings of anxiety and depression

"Uhhh... I th... for me I think anxiety is something that comes rather, *depression is something that stems from anxiety* . "

- Anxiety and depression intertwined

" ...people think you just, you just want to give up *because they don't understand* that its difficult, they don't understand that it's actually linked to mental health."

- Understanding anxiety and depression

" I would say *the main problem is the stigma behind depression and anxiety* when somebody comes out, and says I am depressed, first of all now, you gonna look at that person in a different light, whether its purposely or just subconsciously. "

- Stigma

Symptoms and feelings of anxiety and depression

"symptoms, erhh... *sleeping a lot*, *my change in appetite*, mhm... *losing weight*, not feeling as if I have the power to stand up, not looking forward to normal activities. "



" I suppose when *you not really sad but feel sad*, but it's also when the person feels empty inside, when the going through a dark space in their life . "



" the most common one thing could be *withdrawal*, they just... you just *wanna be on your own*, you don't wanna be in front of people, you don't wanna associate with people, you just to constantly be alone. "



" I suppose when *you not really sad but feel sad*, but it's also when the person feels empty inside, when the going through a dark space in their life . "



Causes and Triggers of anxiety and depression

"... for me personally I think that **its academics** and the sort of the world academia where you have to constantly be in the front, you have to constantly be pushing yourself to be the best otherwise you end up falling behind. "



" but then remember when you in university is not just having to manage academic time, you also need to make time for **family** and whatever and all that stuff and I have also realised that family life can put a lot of pressure on students as well, a looooot of pressure. "



" I think **high school you still quite short-sighted**, because you don't see as much, the people that you associate with, you see them every day, it's a small group of people whereas at university, many people, its-it's a lot of people and you expose yourself to different environments in the physical sense. "



Coping mechanisms

"Uhhh... I think, I think personally **talking about it with somebody** else and sharing the way you feel...

...but I definitely think speaking about it and feeling like you have **somebody to speak to**".



"grow a bit of resilience, you know what I mean, grow a bit of a **positive attitude**, be a bit more **optimistic**, see things on a brighter side stop aligning on the dark cloud typ'a vibe you know what I mean, yeah I just... "



" and **if you don't got Jesus it's even worse**, I am sorry but I really believe that, whatever **religious strong hold** you can find, whatever spiritual manner in which you can find,

...it's the idea that there's a lot going on but if you have someone with **supernatural higher power**, to ... you know to look to, to get comfort from. "



DISCUSSION

- In general, majority of students understood the concepts anxiety and depression, however in most cases they viewed them as intertwined mental condition
- They indicated that it is difficult to open up about anxiety and depression, because people do not understand these concepts
- Also the stigma around these concepts shows that there is still a huge gap on knowledge of anxiety and depression
- Students showed a great understanding of symptoms and feelings of anxiety and depression
- Academic demands, family and home life, as well as transitioning from high school to varsity are the most challenges that were regarded as causes and triggers of university students anxiety and depression
- Students mentioned talking to someone, staying positive and having a religious stronghold as their best ways to cope

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

- Continuous and deliberate engagement with students allows for the university to streamline their activities to ensure that they are still catering to student needs, which helps in improving the overall student experience.
- This work has given us insights on how students are struggling with, and navigating the issue of mental health and gives the university an opportunity to reconfigure services to ensure that they remain relevant.
- Students recognised anxiety and depression as a mental health and that it is difficult for them to cope when they are going through this mental state, which can hinder their success.
- More work is needed on this subject to better understand the knowledge of students on anxiety and depression, in order to develop appropriate and efficient intervention

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MEET *the* TEAM



Mxolisi Masango is the Head of the Analytics and Institutional Research (AIR) Unit at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). He holds a PhD degree from the University of Pretoria. Mxolisi started his career as a Researcher at the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), where he spent more than 10 years. During this time, he led multiple research projects, secured several research grants and published numerous peer-reviewed articles in local and internal journals. After leaving the ARC, he joined Wits where he is currently involved in various institutional research activities as well as student success-focused projects. Mxolisi is the Project Leader of the Wits Siyaphumelela project, a Kresge Foundation funded project. In addition, Mxolisi is the Deputy-President of the Southern African Association for Institutional Research (SAAIR).

Ryan Wagner is an NRF-rated epidemiologist who holds a PhD in Global Health from Umeå University in Sweden. Ryan has been based within the MRC/Wits Agincourt Research Unit in the School of Public Health for the past 11 years- 10 of which he lived and worked at the rural Agincourt research site. Ryan's research interests include epilepsy, cognition and mental health as well as work with traditional healers. His research has culminated in over 50 peer-reviewed publications. Ryan is involved in a number of national and international collaborations and supervises Masters and PhD students.



Fezile Mdluli is an Institutional Researcher at the Wits Analytics and Institutional Research Unit with a background in Microbiology, Development Studies and Food Security. Her previous appointments include working at the HSRC as a Junior Researcher and the Wits School of Public Health as a Research Assistant. Fezile's research interests include food security, student success, mental health & population-based studies. Fezile has presented her work at both national and international conferences and has published in peer-reviewed journals.

Lerato Patricia Makuapane is an aspiring researcher who is currently working as a Project Coordinator at Analytics and Institutional Research Unit. Her previous appointments include working as a social policy researcher at National Department of Social Development. Ms Lerato graduated with a Masters of Health Demography at University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in 2018.

