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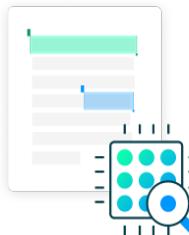
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Mental Health Today and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: Understanding Challenges Among College Students

Introduction

Mental health among college students has become a critical public health concern in recent years as there has been a prevalence of anxiety, depression, and emotional distress reported throughout college campuses all across the United States (American College Health Association, 2023). As higher education settings get ever more demanding, an understanding of the underlying causes of the prevalence of mental health difficulties is paramount. Among the most influential frameworks to interpret the human motivation is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which can be a valuable analytic lens considering the focus it gives to inadequating one's most basic needs, as well as psychological needs, in order to compromise the overall well - being.

Applied to college experiences today, Maslow's model suggests that a large percentage of mental health issues experienced by students can be attributed to needs that have gone unfulfilled and at many different hierarchical levels of operation. This paper discusses the current state of mental health of college students' population, outlines Maslow's theoretical construct, and explains how the functioning of the unmet needs gives rise to the emotional distress that is being observed today.

Section 1: Mental Health Today

Mental health should include the affective, cognitive and sociocultural well-being of the individual, which in turn influences cognition, affect, and behavior. For undergraduate populations, the highest level of mental health is essential for academic achievement, for making sound decisions, and for living through the transition years of life. Nevertheless, the most recent surveys indicate that undergraduates are experiencing psychological distress unlike any previous generation. More than 60% report experiencing acute anxiety symptoms and nearly half have depressive manifestations in the academic calendar (American College Health Association, 2023). Principal stressors identified are the pressure of schoolwork, financial instability, social isolation and the need of balancing academic demands with occupational commitment.

Physical health behaviours have an influential impact on the psychological wellbeing. Empirical investigations show consistently that physical activity engagement reduces the stress burden, improves the affective and increases the level of cognitive functioning. Despite such evidence, a sizable population of students do not engage in adequate physical activity leading to deteriorated mental health outcomes. Baïli et al. (2022) revealed that only a minority of US institutions require the involvement of students in physical activity based curricula, despite known information that exercise promotes mental health and reduces stress, as supported by extant data. The scarcity of planned activity alternatives may leave students especially prone to experience the symptoms of anxiety and depression when confronted with periods of increased academic challenge.

Access to mental - health services is another important issue. Counseling Centres in many Universities are faced with massive waiting lists and understaffing and this has meant that timely support is then denied. Concrete examples such as students skipping meals in an attempt to save money, having multiple jobs or facing housing security precariously illustrate the ways in which systemic obstacles make psychological detriment worse. Collectively these findings bear witness to the fact that the problem of mental health issues among college students is not only pervasive but is intricately connected with unmet needs Majors on multiple levels.

Section 2: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs outlines five different levels of human needs, viz., physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization, and thus, posits the all-fulfillment of basic needs comes before the motive to obtain higher order psychological development.

Physiological needs include getting sufficient sleep, nutrition, and being physically healthy - all those areas where a large percentage of college students show needs, compromising their emotional stability and performance in school. Safety needs fill the need by financial security, a house and a reasoning, to give notice as normal well-being, and on the off chance that students are stressed by their financial burden, school related stress, or live with relatives, then these

students are now out on a whole. Finally, the needs for love and belonging are met through having friends and getting involved in their community, but many students struggle with this deficit because of homesickness or difficulty in forming social ties.

Esteem needs are related to self-confidence and accomplishment. The pressures inherent in academic circumstances, peer comparison and fear of failure routinely destroy the self-worth of students. At the top of Maslow's ladder, selfpondekchung is the process of seeking self-actualization and personal potential, creative self-expression, and/or long-term goals-nota whose process is difficult when we do not satisfy our basic needs.

Section 3: Connecting Mental Health to Maslow's Hierarchy

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs isolates five different levels that comprise physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). The theory states that lower level needs have to be satisfied before higher-order psychological development can be sought.

In the context of higher education, physiological needs like adequate sleeping hours, balanced nutrition, physical well-being to promote better affective states and scholastic outcomes are often neglected, thus compromising affective states and scholastic outcomes. Safety needs-this need includes financial security, stable housing and health are jeopardized by increasing tuition, empire building debt and rocking lives with precarious living arrangements.

Affiliation needs may not be satisfied when one is challenged by isolation or difficulties in building social bonds. Esteem demands are affected by academic stresses, peer comparison and fear of failure. When these basic needs remain in an unsatisfied state, the achievement of self-actualization and individual growth is made much more challenging.

Conclusion

In conclusion, college students face significant mental health challenges due to academic pressure, financial stress, feelings of belonging, and lack of resources to address the issues. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs offers a relevant theoretical framework of understanding the roots of these difficulties and explains how unfulfilled needs at successive levels of the hierarchy have

a detrimental effect on affective well-being. Empirical support to the imperative to integrate aspects related to physical health in comprehensive mental health support initiatives, for example, Bailey et al. (2022). Accordingly, higher education institutions need to employ a comprehensive strategy that targets students' physiological needs, safety, social and esteem needs, which can support the realization of both personal growth and academic success.

References (APA 7th Edition)

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