

Title: COVID-19-Anxiety and Using Substances to Cope: Differences Across Race and Gender in a New York State College Student Sample

Corresponding Author: *Laura Longo, Alcohol and Other Drug Preventionist; Staff Psychologist, University at Albany*

"Overall, this abstract has good conceptualization, methodology, sample size, and important, relevant findings. Some suggestions are recommended to improve the abstract. In the introduction, the authors mentioned "no known studies have examined racial differences in college student mental health", which is not true, as there are some studies that looked into this (e.g., Fruehwirth, Biswas, and Perreira, 2021; Trammell, Joseph, and Harriger 2020). First paragraph of results may be more appropriate to be listed under methods. The MANCOVAs were performed controlling for psychological distress, the authors should consider also controlling for socioeconomic status/ income."

"The abstract has several strengths, particularly related to the methods (the use of validated measures of coping motives, psychological distress and anxiety) and analysis. It is unclear what the response rate was, or if the analytic sample of 1,487 is roughly similar to the student population at the college, and this information should be included in the abstract. The sample size is more than sufficient for the analysis, and the analysis is appropriate. The introduction/background section provides a solid rationale for the study, but in several instances, existing knowledge about substance use among college students should be presented with a bit more finesse. For example, the abstract's first sentence states college students are a high risk group for initiation of substance use. However, it is well established that initiation of alcohol use, marijuana use, and many other substances occurs much earlier. The first sentence in the second paragraph states, "Substance use and mental health tend to co-occur." The authors probably mean "substance abuse and mental health problems," but the phenomenon of co-occurrence is so well-established that such a statement is irrelevant. Additionally, there are many different mechanisms and theories about co-occurrence (with some more applicable for different age groups than others). Given this study's focus on stress & coping, the sentence could be deleted entirely, and instead introduce the stress & coping theories that are central to this study. The chapter will allow more space to summarize the theory and relevant prior research that speaks to race and gender differences in coping-related substance use among college students (there is a lot of it). Consider extending the purpose of the study to examine rates of use, and differences in coping motives, as well as whether there are associations between coping motives and frequency of use (and if there are differences by race in those patterns). The abstract presents main findings and the chapter will allow more space to include other key findings. For example, what were the scores on the distress scale overall and by race and gender? And what cut-off score is considered severe? Also, according to the results section, past month marijuana use was reported by 20% of women and 25% of biracial and hispanic/latinx students. The question in the survey asked how many days someone used marijuana. The methods should further specify how "past month use" was operationalized for the analysis (a report of at least 1 day?). In a couple of places in the abstract the data are interpreted in a way that suggest substance use increased during the pandemic (for example, in the results section, "increased substance use due to COVID-related stress". If the authors have information about pre-covid substance use, that would be important to add. Otherwise, caution is warranted about assuming use increased during the

pandemic. The findings will lend themselves to a series of important recommendations for ways to differentially support college students struggling with stress, anxiety and/or substance use. If the survey asked if students are living on or off campus, some of the recommendations can be refined even more meaningfully (ie in terms of how to reach students with information and supports)."