Number of College Students Seeking Help for Mental Health Troubles Increases

During the past six years, diagnoses of anxiety, depression and panic attacks rose among undergrads in the United States.

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Nearly 26 percent of people 18 years and older are living with a mental health condition in the United States. Now, recent study findings published in the Journal of American College Health suggest that mental health problems are on the rise among university students, Medical News Today reports.

For the study, researchers examined data provided by the American College Health Association on almost half a million U.S. undergraduates between 2009 and 2015. Next, scientists reviewed the trends in diagnosis and treatment for 12 mental health conditions: anorexia, anxiety, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), bipolar disorder, bulimia, depression insomnia, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), panic attacks, phobia, schizophrenia and substance abuse/addiction.

Results showed that during the six-year period, diagnoses and treatments for anxiety, depression and panic attacks surged. In addition, researchers noted that students were more willing to seek mental health help on campus, with nearly one fifth reporting that they used their university's mental health facilities. Additionally, three quarters of participants stated they would use such services in the future. (This represents an increase of more than 4 and 6 percent increase, respectively.)

Scientists commented that universities should examine the overall culture surrounding mental health on their campuses and take necessary steps to develop, implement and support strategies that specifically work for their institution.

"If the overall culture is not one that promotes health, that will need to be considered before step two, which is providing support for prevention in a variety of areas," said Sara Oswalt, PhD, of the University of Texas at San Antonio, the lead author. "This may include sleep instruction, stress reduction and exercise. Step three needs to be adequately staffing counseling and health centers so those in need of services can be seen."

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