COVID-19 and its effects on Mental Health: Reducing Anxiety in African American College Students

Aaliyah Riddle

Fisk University - Nashville, TN

ABSTRACT:

Anxiety is defined as an intense feeling of fear, worry, or nervousness that leads to a lingering feeling of uneasiness preventing individuals from achieving a relaxed state. Anxiety is a normal feeling that every human will experience for a short period of time, however, this emotion becomes a problem when it becomes overwhelming and persistent. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced conditions that amplify the probability of experiencing persistent feelings of emotion. This study focuses on COVID-19's effects as it relates to increased amplified feelings of anxiety in African American college students attending historically black colleges and universities.

BACKGROUND:

Anxiety is one of the most common mental disorders. In fact, the disease affects nearly 30% of adults at some point in their lives.
Caucasian Americans were more likely to be diagnosed with social anxiety disorder, generalized anxiety disorder; however, panic disorder is experienced more in African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans. The great gaps in diagnosis of mental health illnesses leave vulnerable populations (such as minorities) exposed to much higher risks of experiencing stronger bouts of anxiety, and unable to seek/receive help. Moreover, COVID-19 caused many college students, who were exposed to many new restrictions and different requirements (including stay-at-home orders and mask mandates) that caused negative changes, including: earning lower grades (if not failing classes), relocating back to unstable living environments, loss of funds needed to attend school, and many more prominent issues. Because of the aforementioned feelings of anxiety, extreme sadness or hopelessness, and stress skyrocketed in college-age and collegiate attending adults.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this informative virtual event was to expose collegiate-level African American students to the importance of mental health and aid in providing healthy coping mechanisms to prevent overbearing bouts of anxiety (especially during the COVID-19 pandemic).

METHODOLOGY:

The participants in this research were obtained from electronic flyers, promotion within various social media platforms, and word-of-mouth communication.
First, participants received an informed consent form via Google Forms to ensure their awareness and compliance with the research that is being conducted. Next, participants completed a pre-test given in the form of a Google Forms to determine prior knowledge of anxiety. Questions included define mental health, defining anxiety, anxiety symptoms, defining stress, and identifying stressors. Then a visual PowerPoint presentation was given from a professional therapist regarding anxiety, its signs, treatment options, and tips to combat anxiety while in the COVID-19 Pandemic. Finally,, participants received a post-test administered again through Google Forms to access the gained and retained knowledge from the presenter.

Finally, to ensure that participants' pre and post tests are properly matched, while refraining from accessing identifying information, individuals were asked to type the last five digits of their student ID within both tests.

RESULTS:

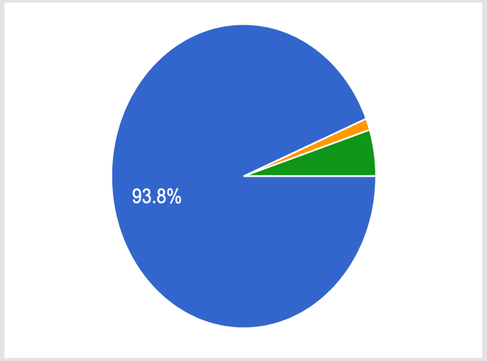

Figure 1: 93.8% knew the correct definition of Anxiety before attending the session.

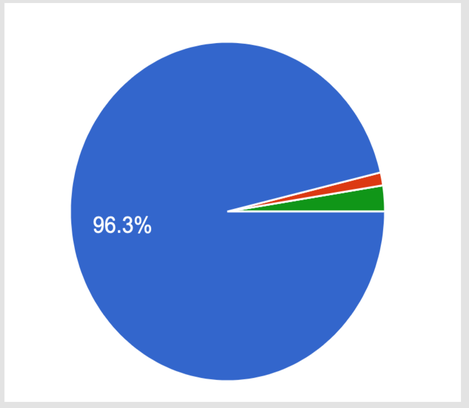

Figure 2: 96.3% of participants knew the correct definition of Anxiety after the session.

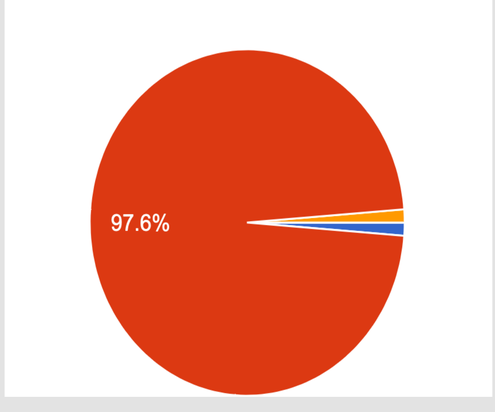

Figure 3: 97.6% of participants identified as African American

DISCUSSION:

The research performed was extremely important as African Americans are amongst the most overlooked population when it comes to Anxiety. Nevertheless, there is little to no research pertaining to the effects of COVID-19 on Mental Health as it regards to college students.

Upon reviewing the results of the study, I am pleased that the target audience was reached (as indicated by Figure 3) and that participants left with knowledge that some didn't have before (derived from comparing Figure 1 and Figure 2).

This informative session allowed African American college students to discuss and inquire information about Anxiety .

REFERENCES:

Chang, J.-J., Ji, Y., Li, Y.-H., Pan, H.-F., & Su, P.-Y. (2021, June 4). Prevalence of anxiety symptom and depressive symptom among college students during COVID-19 pandemic: A meta-analysis. Science Direct., https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0165032721005541

Asnaani, A., Richey, J. A., Dimaite, R., Hinton, D. E., & Hofmann, S. G. (2010, September). A cross-ethnic comparison of lifetime prevalence rates of anxiety disorders. The Journal of nervous and mental disease. Retrieved March 14, 2022, from https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20699719/

Kujawa, A., Green, H., Compas, B. E., Dickey, L., & Pegg, S. (2020, November 10). Exposure to COVID-19 pandemic stress: Associations with depression and anxiety in emerging adults in the United States. Wiley Online Library, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/da.23109

Liu, B., Han, B., Zheng, H., Liu, H., Zhao, T., Wan, Y., & Cui, F. (2021, July 30). Who is the most vulnerable to anxiety at the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak in China? A cross-sectional nationwide survey. NCBI., https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8394659/#:~:text=(4)%20Conclusion%3A%20Most%20people,to%20anxiety%20during%20the%20epidemic.

Muskin, P. R. (2021, June). What Are Anxiety Disorders? American Psychiatric Association., https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/anxiety-disorders/what-are-anxiety-disorders#:~:text=Anxiety%20disorders%20are%20the%20most,people%20lead%20normal%20productive%20lives.

Wang, X., Hegde, S., Son, C., Keller, B., Smith, A., & Sasangohar, F. (2020, July 23). Investigating mental health of US college students during the COVID-19 pandemic: Cross-sectional Survey Study. Journal of Medical Internet Research., https://www.jmir.org/2020/9/e22817

Nirmita Panchal, R. K., & 2021, F. (2021, July 20). The implications of COVID-19 for mental health and substance use. KFF., https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/

Anonymous, (2021, November 18). 3 most common mental health disorders in America. Access Community Health Network., https://www.achn.net/about-access/whats-new/health-resources/3-most-common-mental-health-disorders-in-america/#:~:text=The%20most%20common%20are%20anxiety%20disorders%20major%20depression%20and%20bipolar%20disorder.&text=According%20to%20the%20Anxiety%20and,with%20both%20anxiety%20and%20depression.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

I would like to give a special thank you to:
Fisk University
TN-MMC HBCU Wellness Project
Rutherford County Health Department
Jaha Martin, LCSW