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Factors Predicting Intention to Initiate Mental Health Services among College Students Returning to Campus during COVID-19

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Background/Purpose

While the impact of transitioning to a virtual learning environment during the COVID-19 pandemic is well-documented, few studies have explored the mental health impact of reopening campus.^{1,2,3,4} As a measurement of mental health impact within the context of reopening campus, this study aims to identify factors associated with intention to initiate mental health services (MHS), with a particular focus on race, among college students.

Methods

- **Study Population:** Students at Old Dominion University (ODU) aged 18 years or older who are enrolled during Spring 2022
- **Study Design & Sampling:** A cross-sectional survey was administered through Qualtrics to a sample of students selected using a stratified random sampling method.
- **Variables:** The survey assessed demographics, online class experiences, past and future use of MHS, and feelings towards campus reopening. Intention to initiate MHS was assessed by asking participants if they are considering initiating MHS in the future, and responses were dichotomized into intention (considering initiating MHS use within 30 days, 3 months or 6 months) and no intention (not considering initiating MHS).
- **Statistical Analysis:**
 - Descriptive analysis included calculating frequencies and percentages.
 - Bivariate analyses were conducted using Chi-square and Fisher Exact tests.
 - Multivariable logistic regression was used to identify factors associated with intention to initiate use of MHS. Odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI) were calculated.
 - All analyses were conducted in Stata 14 and level of significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results

Descriptive Analysis:

- 236 students completed the survey (response rate = 23%)
- Of these, 39.3% ($n = 92$) reported they intended to initiate MHS within the next one to six months.
- Sample characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Bivariate Analysis:

- Intention to initiate MHS within the next one to six months was significantly associated with age ($p = 0.028$), gender ($p = 0.001$), student status ($p = 0.040$) and employment status ($p = 0.010$).

Table 1. Sample Characteristics and Intention to Initiate MHS

	N (%)	Intention to Initiate MHS		p-value
		Yes n (%)	No n (%)	
Total	236 (100.0)	92 (39.3)	142 (60.7)	
Age Group				0.028
18-24	129 (54.7)	54 (41.9)	75 (58.1)	
25-34	71 (30.1)	32 (45.7)	38 (54.3)	
35-44	21 (8.9)	4 (20.0)	16 (80.0)	
45 and older	15 (6.4)	2 (13.3)	13 (86.7)	
Gender				0.001
Male	68 (28.8)	15 (22.4)	52 (77.6)	
Female	163 (69.1)	74 (45.7)	88 (54.3)	
Non-Binary/Prefer Not to Say	5 (2.1)	3 (60.0)	2 (40.00)	
Race				0.780
Asian	17 (7.2)	6 (35.3)	11 (64.7)	
Black or African American	53 (22.5)	22 (41.5)	31 (58.5)	
Caucasian	133 (56.4)	51 (38.9)	80 (61.1)	
Two or More Races	11 (4.7)	6 (54.6)	5 (45.5)	
Other or Prefer Not to Say	22 (9.3)	7 (31.8)	15 (68.2)	
Ethnicity				0.367
Hispanic	25 (10.7)	12 (48.0)	13 (52.0)	
Non-Hispanic	209 (89.3)	80 (38.7)	127 (61.4)	
Student Status				0.040
Full-Time	189 (80.1)	80 (42.6)	108 (57.5)	
Part-Time	47 (19.9)	12 (26.1)	34 (73.9)	
ODU College				0.482
Batten College of Engineering and Technology	34 (15.2)	11 (32.4)	23 (67.7)	
College of Arts & Letters	42 (18.8)	13 (31.0)	29 (69.1)	
College of Health Sciences	27 (12.1)	10 (37.0)	17 (63.0)	
College of Sciences	38 (17.0)	19 (51.4)	18 (48.7)	
Darden College of Education & Professional Studies	45 (20.1)	21 (47.7)	23 (52.3)	
Graduate School	1 (0.5)	0 (0.00)	1 (100.0)	
School of Cybersecurity	7 (3.1)	2 (28.6)	5 (71.4)	
Strome College of Business	30 (13.4)	13 (43.3)	17 (56.7)	
Discipline Area				0.983
Hard	85 (38.0)	34 (40.0)	51 (60.0)	
Soft	139 (62.1)	55 (40.2)	82 (59.9)	
Class Standing				0.528
Undergraduate	184 (78.0)	70 (38.3)	113 (61.8)	
Graduate	52 (22.0)	22 (43.1)	29 (56.9)	
Employment Status				0.010
Employed	167 (70.8)	74 (44.6)	92 (55.4)	
Unemployed	69 (29.2)	18 (26.5)	50 (73.5)	
Living Arrangement				0.743
Alone	21 (8.9)	8 (38.1)	13 (61.9)	
With Roommates	67 (28.4)	30 (45.5)	36 (54.6)	
With Partner	90 (38.1)	34 (38.2)	55 (61.8)	
With Family as Dependent	53 (22.5)	19 (35.9)	34 (64.2)	
Other	6 (2.1)	1 (20.0)	4 (80.0)	

Note: Due to missing values, cell counts may not total 236.

Results (continued)

Multivariable Analysis:

- Controlling for other demographics, intention to initiate MHS did not vary significantly by race.
- However, trends suggested that African Americans and those of two or more races were more likely to report intention to initiate MHS than Asians.
- Analyses indicated that gender and employment status were significantly associated with intention to initiate MHS ($p < 0.05$).

Table 2. Adjusted Logistic Regression Model Predicting Intention to Initiate MHS

	OR (95% CI)
Race	
Asian	1.00
Black or African American	1.09 (0.29, 4.22)
Caucasian	0.91 (0.26, 3.16)
Two or More Races	1.28 (0.21, 7.71)
Other or Prefer Not to Say	0.67 (0.12, 3.84)
Age Group	0.69 (0.45, 1.04)
Gender	2.69 (1.36, 5.30)
Ethnicity	0.39 (0.13, 1.18)
Student Status	0.61 (0.26, 1.44)
ODU College	1.09 (0.95, 1.24)
Discipline Area	0.77 (0.40, 1.49)
Class Standing	1.37 (0.64, 2.95)
Employment Status	0.40 (0.20, 0.81)
Living Arrangement	0.81 (0.64, 1.02)

Discussion

- Campus reopening has presented unique challenges to students as they adjust to a “new normal.”
- These adjustments may be difficult or stressful for many students, requiring the use of MHS or other support services.
- Given the small sample size in the current study, future research is needed to further understand how utilization of MHS differs by race and other demographic characteristics.

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