

Washington State University

College of Education

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Will defend the dissertation

Date: April 25, 2019

Time: 11:00 A.M.

Location: Pullman - Cleveland Hall 353

Faculty, students and the general public are encouraged to attend.

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACES) AND TOXIC STRESS AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS: PREVALENCE, RISKS, AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Chair: Sharon Kruse

Mental health has become a national health crisis, with suicide as the second leading cause of death for 10 to 34-year-olds. One in five college students experience anxiety or depression, to the extent that it is hard for them to function. Compounding the effects of college-related stress, student exposure to childhood adversity has been associated with anxiety, depression and PTSD. ACEs refer to childhood abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction. The landmark ACEs study found significant links between childhood trauma and risk for chronic disease, social, and emotional problems in adulthood. Individuals with three or more ACEs have an increased risk of negative health outcomes. ACEs are also a global public health issue, with over 275 million children worldwide experiencing some form of violence in the home. Nationally, over half of the population has experienced at least one ACE, and 25% report two or more.

ACEs, toxic stress, and poor health outcomes are particularly problematic for college students, considering stress-related (mal)adaptive coping strategies that negatively impact students before and during college. The purpose of this study was to understand and describe the characteristics and prevalence of college students most at risk for high ACEs and determine the association between college student ACEs and academic success. A quantitative correlational survey design was used to determine the relationship between ACEs scores and first-generation status among college students. ACEs scores and demographic data were used to determine prediction values for GPA. Archival data consisted of online student survey responses (N = 1,197) collected from an exploratory study investigating the relationship between ACEs and methods for which college students navigate stress. The instrument included four separate adapted surveys, including participant demographics, and was administered over three terms.

Findings demonstrated 59% of students reported at least one ACE, 38% experienced two or more ACEs, and high ACEs totaled 22%. Mann-Whitney U results indicated higher ACEs among first-generation students as compared to multigenerational students. Multiple regression significantly predicted lower GPA for students identifying as first-generation, male, African American/Black, or multiple race/ethnicity, and students with high ACEs. Evidence-based practice implications and recommendations for future research are discussed.