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The BGSU True Life Stress and Substance Use Campaign.

Kate Magsamen-Conrad, Bowling Green State University - Main Campus
Jeanette Dillon, Bowling Green State University - Main Campus
Krys Ingman, Bowling Green State University - Main Campus

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Kate Magsamen-Conrad, Jeanette M. Dillon Krys Ingman, Michael J. Wiedle, Lynn Nguyen, Terry Taylor, Jordyn Tillman, Jerome Anderson

Goals

A group of college students enrolled in a health communication course sought to discover how stress is related to substance abuse for students of a Midwest university. Stress is defined as any outside factor(s) that cause anxiety whether that be from academics, emotional, or general lifestyle factors. Substance includes alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs, or non-prescribed prescription drugs.

Methods

Between August and December 2014, students in a research methods class following class assignments employed a variety of methods associated with photo voice, including taking pictures of objects related to stress, interviewing other college students about photos taken, and participating in a focus group to further discuss the pictures and stress related issues. As a part of the “You-Picture-It” assignment students submitted 3-5 images of things around campus that ‘stressed’ or ‘de-stressed’ college students. Nearer to the end of the semester when it was predicted that stress levels would be elevated due to academic responsibilities, they asked fellow students (not part of the class but on the same campus) to do the same, and interviewed them to ascertain their thoughts about the images. Students remained anonymous during the project and were asked not to submit pictures that would compromise the identity of themselves or others. Students additionally took and distributed online surveys.

Findings

22.8% (8/35) of our student sample included images of a substance as defined earlier as a means of coping with stress. Specifically, 8 students stated that substance consumption relieved stress while 3 of the 8 students said that substance consumption created stress for the average student. Further, five out of 35 students (14.2%) that included substance abuse as a de-stressor, 11.6% (3/35) submitted images that determined that also said substances cause more stress. Data also indicated that it is widely accepted that substance abuse is an issue among college students.

Discussion: Future Work, The BGSU True Life Campaign

We are creating a short film for distribution in various method around the campus of BGSU. Inspired by the MTV original show, True Life, the short film is titled: The BGSU True Life: Stress and Substance. We concentrate on three substances used to cope with stress based on the data collected by students on the campus of BGSU. These substances are marijuana, alcohol, and Adderall. These fictional stories follow the lives and consequences of three students who choose to use substance to deal with the stress accompanied with the daily lives of college students. While the stories are completely fictional, they are based on the above mentioned data. We plan to run the short film in the recreation center, student union, and also add it as a part of student orientation for each incoming freshman class. Distribution will not stop with these forms of outreach; we will post the film to various forms of social media including but not limited to: Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Social media has demonstrated its utility as an excellent outlet for sharing information. The purpose of this video is to spread awareness about the consequences of turning to harmful forms of stress relief. We hope to bring to light the problem and also present alternative options for dealing with stress in college students.

Limitations

The major limitation of our data is the issue of students not wanting to submit information that could be held against them. Although students were ensured that they would remain anonymous, there is still hesitation because this assignment is attached to the university. The instance would intensify if the images were submitted by students under the legal drinking age of 21, or depicts pictures of illegal drugs.