The Effects of Imagined Stressful Trauma on Optimism and Self-Esteem in Adolescents

Wang, Karissa

This study was designed to determine whether traumatic experiences, defined as those which cause physical, emotional, or psychological distress or harm, affected the outlook of students outwardly (optimism) and inwardly (self-esteem). Trauma was induced in participants by reading about stressful situations. Participants (N=59) were all 15 or 16 year old sophomores at NUAMES High School. Permission from the administration was given to address these male (N=26) and female (N=33) students during their classes. Written consent from both participants and their guardians was collected before experimentation. Each participant was randomly given one of three stories to read. The stories differed in one sentence only. One depicted a high-stress situation (N=21), one a low-stressful situation (N=19), and the other did not mention the stressful topic at all (N=19). Participants then completed the Revised Life Orientation Test and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Statistical tests, including a one-tailed ANOVA, were performed on the data. F-ratios and P-values were analyzed. The tests showed that the randomization procedure worked. No significant correlation was found between the stress level and scores in the three different categories. This may have been because the stress level was only slightly adjusted. However, other correlations did exist. Higher grade point averages correlated with both higher optimism and self-esteem levels. In alignment with past studies by others, females were generally less optimistic and had lower self-esteem than males. In future studies, the degree of stress will be increased to see if there are statistically significant effects on optimism and self-esteem.

Awards Won: