Depression, Social Supports and Employment during the Transition from Post-Secondary Education into the Workforce

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Outline

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Canadian Context

• In Canada and globally, education is promoted as a way to secure future employment

• Canada has a high post-secondary participation rate (approx. 60%)

• Canada also has high rates of under/unemployment for community college and university graduates (approx. 25%)
Consequences of Post-degree Unemployment

• Failing to obtain employment following post-secondary education is associated with negative mental health outcomes:

  • Depression (Galambos et al. 2006; Winefield et al., 1991)

  • Lower emotional health (Hultman & Hemlin, 2008)

  • Psychological distress (Cassidy & Wright, 2008; Creed, 1999; Creed & Moore, 2006)
The Role of Romantic Relationships

• The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping suggests that social support can mitigate the negative impact of stress.

• Being in a romantic relationship in emerging adulthood has been shown to be associated with:
  • Less mood problems (Braithwaite et al, 2010)
  • Less depression (Simon & Barrett, 2010)
  • Less anxiety (Rivera et al., 2011)
  • Increased happiness (Demir, 2010)

• Little existing research on the effects of being in a romantic relationship during the transition into the workforce.
Research Question

During the transition from post-secondary education into the workforce, how do depressive symptoms in young people vary as a function of employment and relationship status?

• Hypotheses:
  • Quality of employment (satisfaction, fit with aspirations) is significantly negatively associated with depressive symptoms
  • Being in a romantic relationship is significantly negatively associated with depressive symptoms
  • Separate analyses were conducted for each sex
Method: Sample

- Data set: Cycle 7 of Canada’s National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth

  - Males:
    - N = 586
    - Average age = 21.6, SD = 1.3
    - Average Income = $27,000, SD = $19,000

  - Females:
    - N = 518
    - Average age = 21.8, SD = 1.2
    - Average Income = $19,000, SD = $13,000
Method: Variables

• Employment Quality (2 variables):
  • Job satisfaction, reported on one 4-point Likert item
  • Fit between reported career aspiration and current field of employment (dichotomously coded)

• Romantic Relationship:
  • In a dating / marital relationship (dichotomously coded)

• Depression:
  • Scores on a 7 items assessing depressive mood
Results

Please contact the author, José Domene at jfdomene@unb.ca, for information about the results.
Discussion

• First hypothesis was partially supported

• Second hypothesis was not supported

• Possible explanations for the non-significant effect of romantic relationship:
  • Is it quality of romantic relationship instead?
  • Is it overall social support system instead?
Implications

• Importance of attending to gender in understanding the links between career development and mental health

• Importance of adopting a holistic approach to counselling young people (considering career and mental health issues together)
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