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The problems faced by first year university students and their psychological well-being

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Introduction. First year university students differently experience transition to university. Many young people have to leave their parental home and go to another city. Some youngsters are brave when it comes to new challenges. But others are not prepared for the demands they are going to face. They find it difficult to adjust to campus environment, to new friends and new life style. Regardless of the difficulties young person must cope with learning tasks.

This study examines the problems that students encounter at university during their first year. These problems should be taken into account as it has impact on professional training, national economy, human resources and one's psychological well-being. Understanding the most frequent problems faced by university students is necessary to evaluate their needs in order to provide directions for the required assistance and for developing the most effective graduate programs.

Objective. The main objective of this study was to examine the most frequent problems faced by first year university students in Lithuania and to reveal relationships between these problems and students' psychological well-being.

Method and procedure. The participants were first year students attending Vilnius University and Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences. The students represented various fields of study, such as social sciences, technology, humanities, arts, etc. The data were drawn from a sample of 121. The mean age was 19. There were 50 females and 71 males.

The Student Problems Inventory for this study was developed on the basis of Reynolds (2013) research findings. A list of 28 student problems was

distinguished: Stress management difficulties, Time management difficulties, Anxiety for something, Difficulties related to the transition to university, Difficulties related to student entitlement, Academic difficulties, Financial difficulties, Concern over the growth of one's own personality, Lack of learning motivation, Longing for close people, Health problems, Conflicts with students, Excessive parental involvement, Depressive mood, Lack of self-confidence, Difficulties associated with a roommate, Sexual harassment, Insufficient parental involvement, Sexual abuse, Substance abuse / addiction, Grief / loss, Lack of connection with faculty community, Anger management difficulties, Discrimination experience, Suicidal thoughts, Eating disorders, Difficulties in career planning, Longing for the old friends.

Because of heterogeneity of the challenging areas of student concerns, high internal consistency was not expected, however, computed Cronbach's Alpha showed good internal consistency – 0.85. Depending on how often respondents experience one or another problem, they rated each of them on 5-point scale (from 1 – ever to 5 – constantly).

The Lithuanian Psychological Well-Being Scale (LPGS) developed by Bagdonas, Liniauskaitė, Urbanavičiūtė, Girdzijauskienė, Kairys (2012) was applied for measuring students' psychological well-being. The questionnaire consists of 8 subscales: Global satisfaction with life and oneself as a person, Negative emotionality, Purposefulness in life, Satisfaction with interpersonal relationships, Satisfaction with family relationships, Satisfaction with living standards, Satisfaction with physical health, Perceived control. The instrument demonstrates good psychometric properties. All subscales showed good reliability, Cronbach alphas ranging from 0.67 to 0.95. The psychological well-being was assessed with a 5-point response scale (1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree).

The students were given The Student Problems Inventory and The Lithuanian Psychological Well-Being Scale in their classrooms. The respondents were asked to read the questionnaires and fill in it. Anonymity was guaranteed.

Results. The research results show that university students of the first year were more frequently concerned about anxiety for something (98.3 % of students experience this problem), time management difficulties (95.9 %), lack of self-confidence (93.4 %), lack of learning motivation (91.7 %), difficulties related to the transition to university (85.1 %), stress management difficulties (82.6 %), longing for the old friends (76.9 %), growth of one's own personality (76 %), depressive mood (76 %), difficulties in career planning (75.2 %), academic difficulties (73.6 %), longing for close people (62.8 %), health problems (62.8 %), lack of connection with the faculty community (62 %), financial difficulties (57.9 %).

Other problems were experienced by less than 50 percent of students. Reynolds (2013) explored how student affairs professionals perceive student concerns. The results obtained were close to current study results. The most frequent identified students' concerns were similar in both studies. But in examining the most challenging concerns at the top of the list we found concerns identified in many cases as less frequent. There are suicidal ideation and behavior, immaturity, interpersonal conflicts, student entitlement, diversity, family problems, substance abuse and addiction, sexual assault, parental involvement, self-harm, eating disorders.

The results revealed statistically significant differences (Mann-Whitney test) in problems' frequency between males and females. The frequency of such problems as stress management difficulties, anxiety for something, difficulties related to the transition to university, lack of learning motivation, longing for close people, health problems, anger management difficulties, discrimination experience, longing for the old friends was higher in females than in males and excessive parental involvement was higher in males.

Seeking to investigate the relationships of students' problems with psychological well-being, the Spearman's correlation was calculated. Statistically significant negative relationships were found between psychological well-being and problems such as stress management difficulties ($r = - 0,394$, $p < 0.001$), anxiety for something ($r = - 0,505$, $p < 0.001$), difficulties related to transition to university ($r = - 0,278$, $p < 0.05$), difficulties relate to student entitlement ($r = - 0,179$, $p < 0.05$), academic difficulties ($r = - 0,195$, $p < 0.05$), financial difficulties ($r = - 0,290$, $p < 0.001$), concern over the growth of one's own personality ($r = - 0,331$, $p < 0.001$), lack of learning motivation ($r = - 0,449$, $p < 0.001$), conflicts with students ($r = - 0,233$, $p < 0.05$), depressive mood ($r = - 0,637$, $p < 0.001$), lack of self-confidence ($r = - 0,548$, $p < 0.001$), insufficient parental involvement ($- 0,191$, $p < 0.05$), substance abuse / addiction ($r = - 0,230$, $p < 0.05$), grief / loss ($r = - 0,235$, $p < 0.05$), lack of connection with the faculty community ($r = - 0,244$, $p < 0.01$), anger management difficulties ($r = - 0,328$, $p < 0.001$), suicidal thoughts ($r = - 0,410$, $p < 0.001$), eating disorders ($r = - 0,282$, $p < 0.01$), difficulties in career planning ($r = - 0,331$, $p < 0.001$).

Conclusions. The focus of current study was on the most frequent problems faced by first year university students in Lithuania. 15 problems of 28 were identified as most frequent: anxiety for something, time management difficulties, lack of self-confidence, lack of learning motivation, difficulties related to transition to university, stress management difficulties, longing for the old friends, growth of one's own personality, depressive mood, difficulties in career planning, academic difficulties, longing for close people, health problems, lack of connection with the faculty community, financial difficulties.

The study examined relationships between students' problems and psychological well-being as well. We found no links between students' psychological well-being and time management difficulties, longing for close people, health problems, excessive parental involvement, difficulties associated with a roommate, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, discrimination experience,

longing for the old friends. Students' psychological well-being most strongly and negatively associated with such problems, as depressive mood, lack of self-confidence and anxiety for something. Other problems have weaker but statistically significant negative correlations with psychological well-being.