

Psychological Distress, Perceived Social Support and Coping Strategies among College Students

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Background: This study sought to examine psychological distress, perceived social support and effective coping strategies among undergraduate students enrolled in social work program, and to identify factors that predict psychological distress. The sample consists of 234 junior and senior-year undergraduate social work students from a large public university in central California. Data on demographics, psychological distress (depression, anxiety and stress), coping and perceived social support were collected voluntarily through survey questionnaires. The findings reported moderate levels of depression and anxiety, and a high level of perceived social support. More specifically, students in junior year reported lower perceived social support and higher mean scores on psychological distress compared to students in senior year. Perceived social support was negatively correlated with depression, anxiety and stress. Female students reported more emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies compared with male students. Avoidant coping emerged as a significant predictor for psychological distress ($\beta=.72, t=12.83, p<.001$). Avoidant coping strategy was positively correlated with depression ($r=.68, p<.001$). The current findings demonstrate the importance of enhancing social support and encouraging positive strategies of coping among social work students. Implications for social work educators and administrators are discussed.