



The Impact of Educational Perfectionism on the Mental Health of Generation Z Students

Maria Resendes



“Our students are not automatically tuned in to the pleasure of learning when the end game is a passing score on a test” (Nielsen, 2013, p. 49).

Introduction

- **Generation Z:** those born between 2001 and 2015.
- **Generation Y:** those born between 1980 and 2000.
- **Educational Perfectionism:** High performance expectations in the academic setting.
- Historical Context:
 - Standardized testing
 - Government established educational policies:
 - No Child Left Behind (NCLB)
 - Race to the Top (RttT)
 - Common Core State Standards (CCSS).
 - Government funding for schools is dependent upon standardized test scores. This pressures the nation’s teachers and students to strive for above average scores.
- Today:
 - Children of Generation Z are the ones directly affected.
 - School days have become centered around test preparation creating an environment that promotes memorization rather than critical thinking and mastery of skills.
 - **“Students are reporting mental distress, physical illness, and exhaustion due to tests and their preparation” (Nielsen, 2013).**

Objective

This review aims to raise awareness and identify potential areas of further research pertaining to the effect of educational perfectionism on the mental health of current Generation Z students. The knowledge gained from this review could be useful for those current and future researchers in the mental health and education fields that strive to understand the ways to maximize student knowledge and success, while at the same time maintaining optimal mental health for this particular group of students.

Review of Literature

The effects of an educational system that promotes perfectionism are clearly seen in the research surrounding Generation Y, the students who now comprise most of the countries’ undergraduate programs.

Researchers	Study Description	M _{age}	Findings
Eum and Rice; 2010	Observational study; Discerning the impact of test anxiety on academic performance.	19	Test anxious students performed poorer on specific tasks and in terms of overall academic achievement.
Mahmoud, Staten, Lennie, and Hall; 2015	Observational study; Studying causes and effects of student anxiety.	22	There has been an increase in student anxiety in the past twenty years. Student’s anxiety was primarily related to their negative thinking and maladaptive coping.
Greeson, Juberg, Maytan, James, and Rogers; 2014	Experimental Study; Evaluating the effects of a stress reducing training program for undergraduate students.	25.4	For the intervention group, perceived stress and sleep problems significantly decreased for those who had experienced the intervention.
Conley, Travers, and Bryant; 2013	Experimental Study; Examining the impact of a wellness seminar on stress management for first year college students.	18.4	Intervention participants experienced improvements in psychosocial adjustment and stress management by the end of the academic year when compared with controls.

An Educator’s Perspective

Kris Nielson: a middle school science teacher...

- “I couldn’t continue what I was doing knowing that the current policies [Common Core State Standards] in place for education are actually harming our kids.”
- “I refuse to watch my students slouch under the weight of a system that expects them to perform well on EOG [End of Grade] tests, which do not measure their abilities other than memorization and application.”
- “Teachers have reported extreme **anxiety, acting out, crying, fighting, and depression** in their students.”

Potential Research & Recommendations

Research recommendations:

- Observational and experimental studies in the K-12 school system.
- Randomized Controlled Trials for possible stress reducing and coping interventions.

Possible effective coping mechanisms:

- The establishment of a type of Mental Health First Aid that is available for students at their schools.
- A mentorship type program that allows for more individualized guidance in learning.
- Education regarding stress reducing techniques.

Conley, C. S., Travers, L.V., & Bryant, F. B. (2013). Promoting psychosocial adjustment and stress management in first-year college students: The benefits of engagement in a psychosocial wellness seminar.
 Eum, K., & Rice, K. (2010). Test anxiety, perfectionism, goal orientation, and academic performance.
 Greeson, J. M., Juberg, M. K., Maytan, M., James, K., & Rogers, H. (2014). A randomized control trial of koru: A mindfulness program for college students and other emerging adults.
 Mahmoud, J., Staten, R., Lennie, T., & Hall, L. (2015). The relationships of coping, negative thinking, life satisfaction, social support, and selected demographics with anxiety of young adult college students.
 Nielsen, K. (2013). *Children of the core: What we can do to fight back*. Kris L. Nielsen.
 Twenge, J. (2009). Generational changes and their impact in the classroom: Teaching generation me.