Self-Care and Wellness during Grad School: How to Stay Healthy Under Pressure

Georden Jones, Alisia Palermo, Baénie La Fleur, Alexandra Richard
Learning Objectives

1) Inform and equip students to recognize the signs of burnout in themselves and others

2) Provide practical strategies to improve and develop a self-care plan

3) Facilitate an open conversation about self-care
Outline

– Introduction
– Signs and Sources of Burnout
– Self-Care Strategies
– Integration of Self-Care Strategies into Daily Routine
– Self-Care Action Plan
Introduction

What is all the hoopla about self-care?
Evidence for a men graduate education

Teresa M Evans, Lindsay Bira, Jazmin Beltran Gas

With mental illness a growing concern within graduate academia and policy makers to consider intervention

There is a growing cry for help from graduate students across the globe who struggle with significant mental health concerns. Despite increased discussion of the topic, there remains a dire need to resolve our understanding of the mental health issues in the trainee population.

Recent research on mental health in the trainee population has focused on within-institution cohorts, such as the 2014 UC Berkeley report, which found that 43-46% of graduate students in the biosciences were depressed, and the 2015 University of Arizona report, which found that a majority of doctoral students reported "more than average" current stress of "tremendous" stress and endorsed school and education-related issues as the most significant contributors to their stress. Although this is an emerging topic, the social and policy implications are significant for graduate students and educators.

Original article

Challenging the Stig Students

Kristin A. Kosyuk, Ph.D.; Sarah Elieffson, M.S.; Kon Patrick Michaels, Ph.D.

Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Article history: Received November 2016

Keywords: Mental illness; Stigma;

Abstract

Purpose: This study investigated interventions on mental illness stigma among college students.

Methods: Data were collected from participants who were randomly assigned to presentation, education-based preventative, and treatment seeking interventions.

Results: A 3 x 2 analysis of variance indicated significant differences in the effects of the interventions on mental health stigma.

Conclusions: These findings suggest that these two approaches should be considered for challenging mental illness stigma among college students.

An Exploratory Study of Psychology Graduate Student Workload, Health, and Program Satisfaction

Christina M. Rummell
The University of Akron

Graduate students in clinical and counseling psychology programs must balance multiple professional and personal roles, navigate complex educational systems, and respond well to constructive feedback. How do students experience and cope with the stress related to this workload? Responses from a national survey of clinical and counseling psychology graduate students reveal that rates of physical and mental health symptomology are higher than those of the general population and of medical students. Of students surveyed, greater than 40% reported clinically significant anxiety symptoms, greater than 30% reported clinically significant depressive symptoms, and more than one third of participants (34.2%) reported clinically significant symptoms of both anxiety and depression. More than half of students also reported chronic physical health symptoms, with these symptoms increasing with greater workload. Despite these symptoms, many students reported lacking adequate support from supervisors and faculty, as well as limited use of mental health counseling. Recommendations to aid professional psychologists with increasing trainee self-care and coping are discussed.

Keywords: psychology students, training, health, workload, stress

For psychologists specifically, there are numerous negative consequences of unmanageable personal distress, including loss of enthusiasm and meaning in one's work, impairment in ethical decision making, loss of compassion for clients, burnout, and neglecting one's physical health (Brilzegian & Gelp, 2010; Pope & Vasquez, 2007). In addition, work-family conflict has been found to be associated with depression, anxiety, emotional strain, towards treatment seeking, and intentions to seek treatment for mental health among young adults. Results have implications for addressing barriers to mental health care for
What is Self-Care?

– Taking care of yourself to maintain your physical and mental health
– Means different things to different people
  – Could be as elaborate as having monthly (or weekly) spa days or as simple as ensuring you are maintaining your hygiene
What is Self-Care?

– Strive to incorporate self-care into your day-to-day routine...
– Rather than burning yourself out for 12 months and having a vacation at the end of the year to “rejuvenate”
– (Not that there is anything wrong with rewarding yourself with a vacation!)
Mindfulness Exercise
Why is Self-Care Important?

- Self-care helps you to...
  - Avoid burnout and compassion fatigue
  - *Can lead to feelings of exhaustion, ineffectiveness, frustration, and hopelessness*
  - Maintain effectiveness
  - Increase physical and emotional energy
Sources of Burnout

Sources of burnout
- Work overload
- Lack of control
- Insufficient reward
- Breakdown of community
- Unfairness
- Significant value conflict
- Lack of fit between the person and the job

Feelings of burnout
- Exhaustion, including emotional exhaustion
- Cynicism
- Ineffectiveness
- Frustration
- Disengagement
- Stress
- Helplessness/hopelessness
Particular issues for graduate students

- Procrastination
- Isolation
- Time management
- Work-life balance
- Financial concerns
- Long-term and short-term goals
Discussion

How does self-care fit into the life of a graduate student?
Self-Care in Graduate School

- Sources of burnout and/or compassion fatigue? What happens when we experience this?
- Barriers to practicing self-care? How can we overcome these barriers?
- What do YOU do to practice self-care? Any tips?
Self-Care Strategies

I know self-care is important, but how do I do it?
Self-Care Strategies for Your Internal Environment

1. Mindfulness
   – Increasing awareness of burnout and compassion fatigue

2. Taking care of your physical health
   – Sleep hygiene
   – Healthy eating
   – Exercise
   – Do activities other than work!
Self-Care Strategies for Your Internal Environment

3. Stress/anxiety reducing strategies
   – Paced breathing
   – Progressive muscle relaxation
   – Body scan

4. Self-compassion
   – Kristin Neff (http://self-compassion.org/)
Self-Care Strategies for Your External Environment

1. Set limits (and stick to them)
   - Learn to say no
   - Learn to set your limits in terms of timeframes and workloads
   - Become good at disappointing others – Yes, but...
   - Buy happiness where it counts (e.g. house cleaning, pre-made meals)

2. Schedule activities
   - Schedule time to work
   - Schedule time for other activities
   - Create a calendar to visualize your workload
Self-Care Strategies for Your External Environment

3. Break it down
   - Divide your tasks into smaller tasks and schedule time to work on them
   - Use calendars to plan tasks for bigger projects (like your thesis)

4. Keep track
   - Create lists to manage your tasks
   - Set timeframes for each task
   - Reward yourself when completed
Self-Care Strategies for Your External Environment

5. Create a work environment that works for you
   - Schedule important tasks at times when you are the most productive
   - Silence/music
   - 50/10 rule - Pomodoro timer: https://pomodoro-tracker.com/
   - Working buddy
Self-Care Action Plan

Let’s do it!
Create Your Self-Care Action Plan Now!

1. Identify two self-care activities you can start TODAY
2. Schedule them into your regular routine
   • Mark it on our calendar!
3. Plan ahead
   ▪ How will you get around your barriers?
4. Re-assess how things are going
Self-Assessment

Rate yourself on how well you are implementing your self-care plan:
– Physical health (sleep, nutrition, exercise)
– Stress
– Incorporating relaxation/meditation/other forms of spirituality
– Scheduling, maintaining balance and limit setting
– Positive work environment

ASK YOURSELF:
– In which areas am I taking care of myself as well as I can? Not?
– Which areas can I improve on? How?
Transfer to Everyday Life

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Don’t</th>
<th>Do</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>– Don’t be overly enthusiastic</td>
<td>– Start small and gradually increase activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>– Feel guilty</td>
<td>– Practice mindfulness (if you do feel guilty)</td>
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<tr>
<td>– Prioritize shoulds over wants</td>
<td>– Make a plan and stick to it</td>
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<td>– Treat your self-care plan as less important than your other responsibilities</td>
<td>– Write it down, and keep it somewhere you can see</td>
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<td>– Add extra things to your schedule without subtracting something else</td>
<td>– Keep open spaces in your schedule</td>
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Resources and References


