

Exploring Emotional Sensitivity and Counseling-Related Services:
A Needs Assessment Study for
Historically Black Colleges and Universities

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Abstract

This study explored emotional sensitivity and counseling-related needs of 114 African American college students at a historically black college in located the southwestern region of the United States. Despite previous studies, the results suggested that African American college students who attended a historically black college needed similar counseling services as those who attended majority white colleges and universities. In addition, the analyses in this study suggested that new and younger African American college students may benefit from the “typical” counseling and outreach services, such as, date rape education and drug education. Further studies in this area were recommended for historically black college administrators.

Purpose of the Study

Since the early-1950's, the increasing emotional problems of U.S. college students have led administrators to routinely assess the need for counseling-related services at colleges and universities (Chandler, 1994). Despite the growing need for counseling, there is a limitation in the receptiveness of counseling-related services at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Previous studies have suggested that the resistance to college services at HBCUs was due to cultural factors (Wallace & Constantine, 2005). For example, African Americans were more likely to use spiritual counseling versus professional counseling to resolve personal conflicts or emotional problems, such as, date rape and alcohol abuse. Other studies have suggested that economic priorities have limited the availability of counseling-services at HBCUs (Hutto & Fenwick, 2002). For example, HBCUs were more likely to fund student development services that emphasized tutoring and remediation (e.g. the academic needs). In many instances, these services were considered a higher priority because they directly affected student recruitment and retention. In either case, research has supported the need to address the emotional and personal concerns of African American college students (Chandler, 1994; Chandler, 1999). The purpose of this study was to explore emotional sensitivity and the need for counseling-related services at HBCUs located in the southwest region of the United States.

Method

Participants

The sample was 114 African American college students who attended a HBCU in the southwestern region of the United States. The sample was nearly 50% male and 50% female. The age range was 19-35. The average number of years attending college was two. This sample represented approximately 10% of the overall student body (approximately 1,000 students).

Measures

There were two surveys utilized in this study. One survey assessed three areas of emotionality. Emotion sensitivity was operationally defined as the individual's self perceived sensitivity, attribution, and regulation of emotions. The other survey was based on focus group discussions concerning the needs of students attending the HBCU. Based on the focus group discussions, the survey emphasized following domains: Academic Advising, Drug/Alcohol Awareness, Campus Life/Activities, HIV/STDs Education, Relationship Issues, Date Rape Education, International Student Support, Health Issues, Dorm Life Conditions, Library, Computer Technology, Class Instruction, Spirituality, and Financial Aid. The survey instructed each participant to rate their perceived needs based on the following rating scale: 1=Not Needed, 2=Somewhat, 3=Mostly, and 4=Greatly.

Procedures

A convenience sampling procedure was used to obtain the data. Two undergraduate assistants enrolled in a special topics/research class distributed and collected surveys at the HBCU. Each participant was informed that the survey was voluntary and anonymous. Information on how to contact the principal investigator was also provided.

Results

A descriptive analysis of emotional sensitivity can be found on Figure 1. Specifically, the analysis reported that 75% reported themselves as “emotionally sensitive”; 56% reported “living by emotions”; and 25% reported “allowing things to happen naturally”. Based on a selected sample, the Spearman rho analyses suggested significant relationships between age and perceived counseling-related needs. For example, the results suggested a significant negative relationship between age and the need for drug education on campus ($\rho = -.68, p < .01$). In addition, the results suggested a significant negative relationship between age and the need for date rape education on campus ($\rho = -.74, p < .01$). (See Figures 2-3).

Conclusion

Based on the pilot study, there is a need to further investigate emotional sensitivity and counseling-related services among African American college students who attend HBCUs. Although, there is a limitation in the generalizability of this study, the results suggested that new and younger students attending a HBCU may need counseling-related services more so than older or existing students. Based on the sample’s perceptions of emotionality, outreach services that include personal counseling are strongly recommended. Finally, counseling-related services may improve the perceptions of health, wellness, and academic performance. Creating personal adjustment courses that utilize both live classroom instruction and the internet (hybrid courses) may improve the acceptance and referrals for counseling-related services at HBCUs.

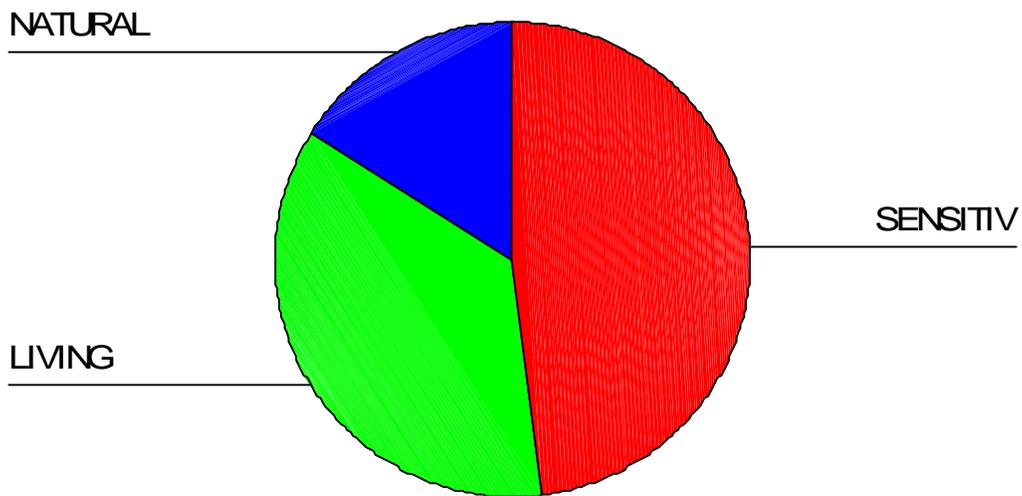
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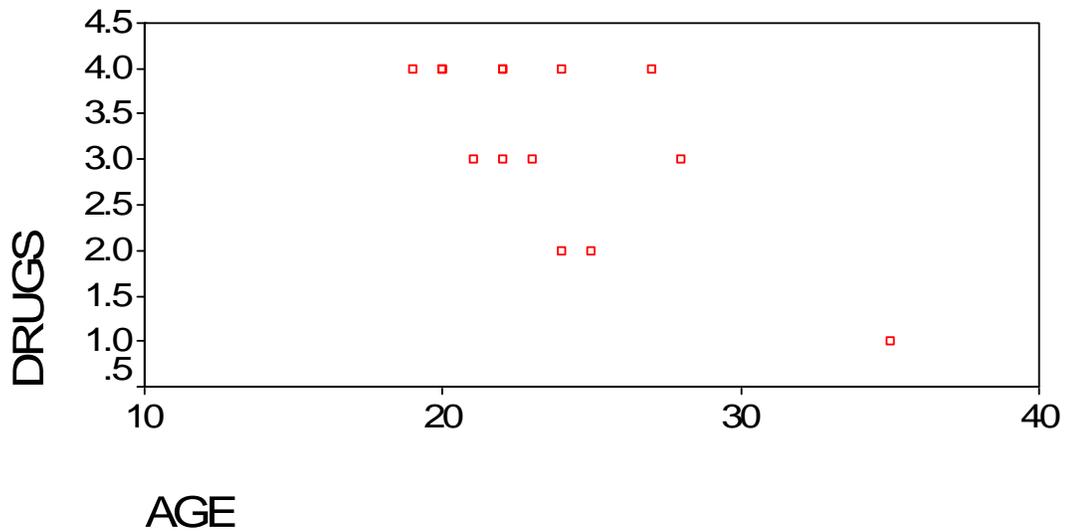
Figure 1. Emotional Sensitivity

n=100



Note: Sensitiv=Reported Themselves as “Emotionally Sensitive” =75%; Living=Reported Themselves as “Living by Emotions”=56%; Natural=Reported Themselves as “Allowing Things to Occur Naturally”=25%. The high emotional sensitivity in this sample suggested the need for HBCU administrators to create counseling-related services that address personal adjustment, coping skills, and interpersonal relations.

Figure 2. Relationship Between Age and Drug Education

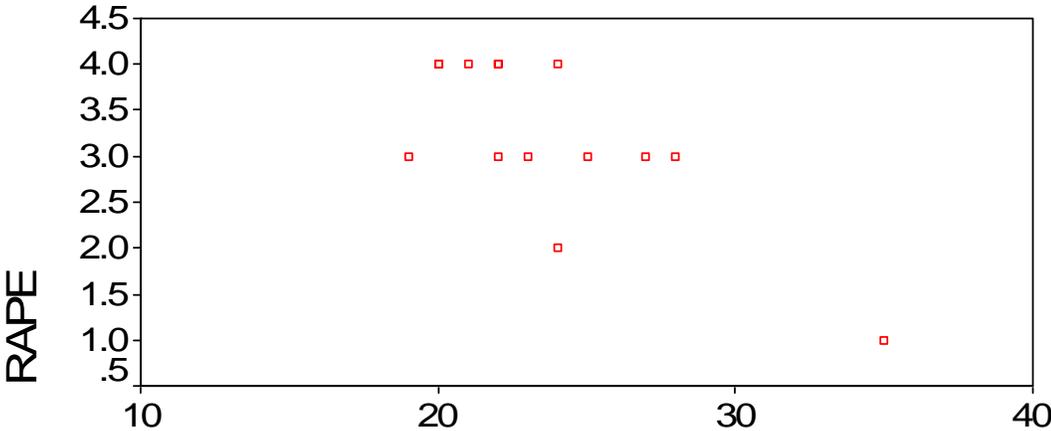


$\rho = -.68, p < .01$

$n=14$

* Note: New and younger African American college students may perceive the need for drug educational services more so than existing and older African American college students.

Figure 3. Relationship Between Age and Date Rape Education



AGE

$\rho = - .74, p < .01$

$n=14$

Note: New and younger African American college students may perceive the need for more date rape educational services than existing or older African American college students.

