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Health Behaviors of Generation Z Students in Black Sororities and Fraternities

Sara K. Kaylor, EdD, RN, CNE¹

Jasmine L. Rodgers, SN²

Michael Callihan, PhD²

(1)The Capstone College of Nursing, The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL, USA

(2)Capstone College of Nursing, The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL, USA

Purpose: The transition to college is a stressful time for many students, and the establishment of independent lifestyle skills and behaviors is key. For many, immersion in a university-sponsored sorority or fraternity can help ease this transition, as such peer organizations serve to inform individuals' social norms or perceptions of what is appropriate, expected, or prevalent behavior in given situations through shared organizational values and cultures (Reno & McNamee, 2015). While membership may assist students with social and peer group transitions, vast interdisciplinary literature demonstrates links between Greek-life membership and diminished health and wellbeing, including lowered body esteem, increased likelihood of disordered eating behaviors, high-risk drinking episodes, and substance, smoking, and hookah use (Cheney et al., 2017; Reno & McNamee, 2015; Sidani, Shensa, & Primack, 2013; Soule, Barnett, & Moorhouse, 2015).

Although links between Greek-life membership and health behaviors are documented, a gap exists that specifically addresses those of Generation Z students in Black sororities and fraternities. Experts in generational research anticipate increasing levels of stress, anxiety, depression, distractibility, and internet addiction among this overall population, potentially attributed to the prevalence of constant exposure to electronic multimedia (Patel, 2017; Paterson, 2017; Turner, 2015). The purpose of this presentation is to describe findings from a pilot study that explored the health, safety, and risk behaviors of Generation Z students active within Black university-sponsored sororities and fraternities.

Methods: A qualitative phenomenological research design was used to meet the study's purpose and objectives. Methods for data collection included unannounced observation of human group behaviors, windshield surveys, and individual interviews with participants. Data analysis was done by hand using Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step method.

Results: Preliminary findings surrounding the sociocultural environments of these students leads the investigators to propose there are both health and risk behaviors unique to this emerging adult population that have important implications for health and wellness research, care, and education. Identified themes center upon the role of Black sorority/fraternity social influences on members' drinking behaviors, substance and e-cigarette patterns of use, and factors surrounding decisions related to eating and physical activity.

Conclusion: The transition to young adulthood and independence is an important developmental phase. Findings from this study support trends indicating that Generation Z students have poor dietary habits, low physical activity levels, and decreased emotional health due to mounting stress, anxiety, depression, and a fear of failure, regardless of affiliation or not with a sorority or fraternity (ACHA, 2017; Melnyk et al.,

2014; Melnyk et al., 2016). This is concerning because similar data trends exist for post-college adults (≥ 25 years of age) which emphasizes that lifestyle behaviors developed in college and young adulthood commonly carry over into adulthood, thus becoming an established baseline of behaviors that can shape a lifetime of beliefs and patterns (Melnyk et al., 2014). Individuals with strong, loyal identifications to Greek life as part of his or her overall sense of self can be powerfully influenced by their organization, thus affecting multiple facets of living, decision-making, and sharing of experiences (Reno & McNamee, 2015).

Title:

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Keywords:

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Abstract Summary:

This presentation describes a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the health, safety, and risk behaviors of Generation Z students in Black sororities and fraternities. A background of the issue will be offered, findings of the study will be shared, and implications for future work will be discussed.

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First Primary Presenting Author

Primary Presenting Author

Sara K. Kaylor, EdD, RN, CNE
The University of Alabama
The Capstone College of Nursing
Assistant Professor
Tuscaloosa AL
USA

Author Summary: Dr. Sara Kaylor is an Assistant Professor at The University of Alabama Capstone College of Nursing, with teaching expertise in undergraduate Health Assessment and Master's level Case Management courses. Her research interests include exploring health and wellness factors that play into creating and sustaining healthy living, learning, and work environments. Dr. Kaylor is a past Scholar in the Nurse Faculty Leadership Academy (2016-2017), sponsored by Sigma Theta Tau International and The Elsevier Foundation.

Second Secondary Presenting Author

Corresponding Secondary Presenting Author

Jasmine L. Rodgers, SN
The University of Alabama
Capstone College of Nursing
Student Nurse
Tuscaloosa AL
USA

Author Summary: Ms. Jasmine Rodgers is a BSN student at The University of Alabama Capstone College of Nursing, anticipating to graduate in December 2020. She currently serves on a faculty-mentored undergraduate research team exploring the health, safety, and wellness behaviors of Generation Z college students.

Third Secondary Presenting Author

Corresponding Secondary Presenting Author

Michael Callihan, PhD
The University of Alabama
Capstone College of Nursing

Assistant Professor
Tuscaloosa AL
USA

Author Summary: Dr. Callihan is an Assistant Professor at The University of Alabama Capstone College of Nursing. His primary areas of research interests includes biomechanical analysis of lifting and moving tasks commonly performed in the nursing profession.