Resiliency Among PhD Students: Navigating Doctoral Education as a Cohort

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Background

Graduate Education
- Graduate students may face numerous challenges with school-work-life balance and financial stressors.
- Graduate studies can leave students feeling vulnerable, overwhelmed and disengaged.

Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)
- Six item scale to assess the ability to bounce back or recover from stress.
- The BRS has been tested in undergraduate students, cardiac rehabilitation and fibromyalgia patients, and healthy controls.

Purpose

Assess resilience among a cohort of ten doctoral students at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) School of Nursing using the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS).

Methods

Process
- BRS administered at Years 1 and 2 via SurveyMonkey.
- BRS is psychometrically sound, contains 3 positive items and 3 negative items, and uses a 1-5 Likert scale.

Features of Resilience Include
- Bounce back or recovery from stress.
- Adapt to stressful circumstances.
- Stay positive & upbeat despite significant challenges.
- Function above the norm in spite of stress or adversity.

Survey Results

- Study results demonstrate resilience scores that are higher than the average scores of college students.
- The scores improved overtime, especially for the question, “It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event.”

Strategies to Promote Resiliency
- An e-mail distribution list was created to keep everyone informed of any new or current happenings within the school or professional community.
- A text list and a Facebook page created a sense of community within and outside of the classroom.
- Birthdays and special occasions are celebrated on monthly bases during the lunch hour with potlucks.
- The PhD program director hosted “Luncheon Touch Base” to check in with each student about their progress, once a quarter.

Results

- Sample: 10 doctoral students, 3 (30%) males and 7 (70%) females.
- Mean scores ranged from 3.5 to 4.2 for Year 1 and 3.8 to 4.3 for Year 2.
- The mean resilience score is 3.83 for Year 1 and 3.98 for Year 2. This is compared to the mean score in college students of 3.53.

Discussion

- There are effective strategies to stimulate and enhance doctoral students’ ability to withstand, adapt to and recover from the challenges of graduate education.
- It is critical to understand the contributing factors that promote and cultivate resilience during stressful times.

Conclusion


References