

Spring 2017

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Tsoggerel, Tsolmon, "A Research Proposal: The Relationship Between Seasonal Affective Disorder and Reading Behavior of Undergraduate College Students" (2017). *MBA Student Scholarship*. 55.

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A Research Proposal: The Relationship Between Seasonal Affective Disorder and Reading
Behavior of Undergraduate College Students

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MGMT5500

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February 15, 2017

Abstract

The purpose of this research proposal is to investigate the relationship between Seasonal Affective Disorder and reading behavior of undergraduate college students of Rhode Island during winter months /Nov-Feb/. Undergraduate students aged between 18-25 from five different colleges are to be the unit of study. The research will aim to: (1) assess the seasonal mood changes in sample units; (2) describe possible prevalence of SAD; (3) investigate the correlation between SAD occurrence and change in reading behavior of students.

Upon the completion of the study, college libraries and book businesses will be able to use the research to optimize their inventories during winter months, improve undergraduate college students` satisfaction on reading experiences and, by extension of course, contribute to preventing depression amongst young adults.

Keywords: seasonal affective disorder, latitude, reading behavior, self-help books, relationship

Statement of Problem

As photoperiod length or duration of daylight decreases during the short, dark days of winter many individuals struggle with seasonal affective disorder or SAD. As the name illustrates, those affected people experience feelings of sadness and loss of energy, especially during December, January and February when the days are shorter. Since SAD is mainly associated with individual's exposure to the sunlight, it is logically apt to suggest that northern parts of USA, especially Rhode Island where average daylight length is 9:47 hour in the winter solstice, would hold notable rate of SAD prevalence. Existing research has found higher prevalence in young adults, especially in women. Also, World Health Organization predicted that by 2020 depression will become the second leading cause of disease worldwide (World Health Report 2001 – Mental Health: New Understanding, New Hope).

What appeals to reader's preferences on reading topics are different for each and every individual reader and their own solo flight of thought. However, reader's interest, current state of mind and future plans can be represented by the genre of books they are reading or titles they are searching. Based on sales statistics, demand for self-help books are increasing at constant and many consumers try self-help books as a cost effective, readily available primary source of relief, independent of a therapist (Glasgow & Rosen, 1978; Ogles, Lambert & Craig, 1991; Starker, 1990).

Since there is no previous research works questioning if people choose self-help books as a counselling method when their moods start to change due to seasons change, this research will aim to investigate the relation between occurrence of SAD and selection of reading topics for undergraduate students in Rhode Island.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER AND READING TOPICS

Research questions

Is there any relationship between occurrence of Seasonal Affective Disorder and reading behavior of undergraduate college students?

Hypotheses:

H0: There is no or negative relationship between occurrence of Seasonal Affective Disorder and preference toward self-help books for undergraduate college students aged 18-25.

H1: There is a positive relationship between occurrence of Seasonal Affective Disorder and preference toward self-help books for undergraduate college students aged 18-25.

Literature review

Seasonal Affective Disorder

Syndrome. Winter depression has been defined and studied since 1980s as Rosenthal et al. (1984) first described Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) as syndrome of recurrent episodes of depression that occur annually, usually in winter season at same time each year. SAD is often associated with a lack of energy, hypersomnia, overeating, weight gain and, perhaps most notably, depressed mood (Kliger & Levy, 2008).

According to Dryden-Edwards (2016), SAD is most common in young adult women aged 18-35, although it can affect men or women of any age. Besides, according to Rosenthal (2006), nearly 6% of the US population (or 18 million Americans) is reportedly afflicted with SAD, with another 14% (or 42 million) suffering from a milder form of 'winter blues'. Which makes potential 60 million people are affected by SAD. Especially, those who live in northern latitudes are most at risk (Melrose, 2015). A significant correlation between latitude and prevalence was found in North America and it was two times higher compared to Europe (Magnusson, 2000; Patten et al, 2016). Since SAD is caused by lack of sunlight, it is logical that people in northern parts are more affected due to short duration of daylight that lasts for approximately 9:47 hours during winter months (Nov-Feb).

Diagnosis. According to Melrose (2015), in order to evaluating seasonal mood and behavioral variations, the most commonly used tool that is freely available for public and does not require special training is The Seasonal Pattern Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ) which was developed by Rosenthal and colleagues by 1984 and the questionnaire can be retrieved from <http://www.guilford.com/add/forms/rosenthal2.pdf>. However, previous research showed that employing SPAQ as a screening tool for SAD brings a good specificity but a questionable

sensitivity, tending to overestimate the prevalence of SAD in a population sample (Mersch et al 2004; Thompson et al 2004).

Treatment. For many years, a large number of SAD sufferers have benefited from the exposure to artificial bright light, which has become the first, to-go choice. Positive results have also been reported after the use of antidepressant medications (Meesters & Gordjin, 2016). However, Vitamin D supplements, and counselling approaches are also emerging as effective treatments (Melrose, 2015).

Depression among college students

Gallagher found that 10-15% of college students struggle with depressive illness (Gallagher, 2002). Furthermore, Furr, Westefeld, McDonnell, and Jenkins (2001) reported that 53% of students experienced depression at some point during their college years; Results of Your First College Year Survey found that 10% of women and 15% of men frequently felt depressed and 43% of first year women and men frequently felt overwhelmed by all they had to do (Sanderson, 2003).

Factors that causes depression include sleep deprivation and Kelly, W. E. et al (2004) found in his study that the average sleep-length reported by the sample who are college students was 6.96 hours per 24-hour period. He also stated that result of his study is consistent with previous research suggesting that college students who attain less sleep tend to be less psychologically healthy. Therefore, logically, college students, since they do not have enough sleep, are sensitive to develop depression. Besides their busy schedule and hectic daily activities, effect of SAD also weighs in to accumulate depression as those suffering from SAD frequently experience nightmares and symptoms of insomnia (Sandman et al, 2016).

About *self- help* books

Since Benjamin Franklin first published Poor Richard's Almanac in 1732, Americans become consumer of self-help books which become quite popular throughout 19th century and till today (Redding et al, 2008). Popular self-help books have emerged as a multimillion-dollar- per-year industry and have become an integral feature of modern American culture (Rosen, Glasgow, & Moore, 2003). Initially, self-help books were written about physical health or inter-personal communication guide. Today, numerous self-help books are available for coping with a wide range of mental health problems. These books may be used as a self-prescribed and self-administered treatment, providing a very cost-effective substitute for professionally delivered therapy. Self- help books may also be used as a therapist-recommended component of professional treatment. According to one large survey, 85% of psychologists reported recommending self-help books to their patients (Norcross et al., 2000). From sales statistics, we can see that self-help genre is becoming more popular every year. To illustrate that, genre classification of Amazon's top 500 book providing the fact 97 out of top 500 are self- help books and 7 of them placed in top 10 books by sales (Richardson et al, 2008).

Thomas Cash (2000) stated in his study: "Many consumers try self-help books as a cost effective, readily available primary source of relief, independent of a therapist (Glasgow & Rosen, 1978; Ogles, Lambert & Craig, 1991; Starker, 1990). Offering prescriptive advice in a variety of areas including anxiety, stress, diet, exercise, weight loss, self-esteem, body image, addictions, and relationships, these books are a prominent part of the current mental health care environment".

Methodology

Design

The purpose of the present study is to find out the relationship between occurrence of seasonal affective disorder and undergraduate students` preference toward self-help books. To obtain primary data from the unit of study, self-administrative questionnaires will be distributed to undergraduate college students from selected colleges in order to reach more accurate and deeper definition of each unit of study. The questionnaire will both measure individual`s sensitivity to seasonal affective disorder, using SPAQ and their current preference toward reading topics at the same certain point in time.

Longitudinal study or repetitive surveys on the same sample group will be conducted over time in order to determine consistency of seasonally special feature suggested in the research hypothesis.

They survey will not coincide with any special activities during the academic year.

Instrumentation

Direct approach to collect data or questionnaire method will be comprised of three parts.

The first part of the survey measures respondent`s sensitiveness to seasonal affective disorder by using SPAQ (Seasonal Pattern Assessment Questionnaire). SPAQ consists of six questions in which participants self-evaluate the magnitude of seasonal changes in sleep duration, social activity, mood, weight, appetite and energy level. The publicly available questionnaire can be retrieved from can be retrieved from

<http://www.guilford.com/add/forms/rosenthal2.pdf>.

Second part will cover what genre of books they are reading currently at the time of survey as an open-end question.

Last part will measure respondent`s preference toward genres of books they would choose shown as set of multiple choice question which includes twelve different book images which look identical but only titles differ. Twelve books include 3 books from each genre which are historical, art & sport, fiction novel, self-help. The titles are subject to change for each time of study over time however, the genre proportion will be kept same for the entire research.

Sampling and Data collection

In accordance with theory of Seasonal Affective Disorder, the mostly affected people are who experience short sun-light in their daily life in long winter months. Therefore, sampling frame is from northern part of the US. To use more convenient sampling approach, the sample will consist of undergraduate college students of five different colleges in the state of Rhode Island.

Selected colleges are:

University of Rhode Island

Brown University

Roger Williams University

Johnson & Wales University

Community College of Rhode Island.

100 undergraduate students from each school comprises 500 students (n=500) as unit of study.

In order to investigate seasonally odd pattern, the same sample will be surveyed 12 times: for 3 years, in each season (in the middle of every season).

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