

Iarovici, Doris. *Mental Health Issues and the University Student*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2014. 264 pp. \$34.95 paperback (ISBN 978-1421412382)

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All of us who work in academia and who regularly have contact with students have realized how more and more mental health issues are becoming a bigger problem in colleges and universities. Yet, just as in many other fields, we have not received proper training on how to deal with those issues and instead leave those problems to professionals such as counselors or lawyers. The drawback is that whether you are a faculty or an administrator you will frequently have close encounters with behavioral problems. That is why I read Iarovici's book with great interest and was not disappointed with the experience.

The book is divided into two sections and twenty-two chapters. The first section is introductory in nature and provides us with a wealth of facts (statistical and otherwise) which are really informative and, sometimes, even shocking. The first chapter is titled "Crisis on the College Campus?" She shows how there seems to be an increase in the levels of stress found among college students. She attributes that increase partially to a better ability to diagnose that condition but also to an intensification of pressure by parents for their kids to succeed, particularly for them to get into the right college and the issues related particularly to the cost of attending those institutions.

She then mentions the clusters of suicides and campus shootings as another symptom of the problem even when the aggression does not occur on campus as was the case of Jared Loughner who in January 2011 shot Representative Gabrielle Gifford and nineteen others, killing six of them. Loughner had been recently suspended from Pima Community College for psychological issues.

Iarovici also mentions that issues related to alcohol abuse are more frequent among college students than the general population and college students are less likely to receive treatment for alcohol or drug abuse than the rest of the population. She also shares the results of a survey showing that when college students are asked about the ten top impediments for good academic performance they cite the top ones in the following order: stress, sleep disorders, Internet/computer game addiction, depression, and alcohol. She also mentions

that these days when students seek advice at college counseling centers 24 percent are already on some form of mental health medication compared with 9 percent twenty years before.

The second chapter is an excellent summary of how the demographics of college students have changed in recent decades and how that might have influenced the increase in mental issues. For one, the percentage of low-income students attending college has increased while the cost of college has soared. The number of international students has also increased and they have more difficulties in adapting since they tend to be new to American culture and society. The surge of students who are veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are also of special concern because many of them suffer from Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). To that we have to add a growth in the proportion of older students, students with disabilities, and members of the LGBT community, all of them with circumstances unique to their social conditions.

In chapter three she reminds us that generational differences also create variations among groups in terms of their expectations and anxieties. For example, for members of the Millennial generation (born between 1981 and 2004), who constitute the majority of the college population today, their major concern is to get a good job. Members of Generation X (born between 1961 and 1981) tend to be more cynical and pessimistic. Failure to recognize characteristics like these may lead those of us who work in postsecondary education to draw the wrong conclusions when it comes to reading into certain behaviors.

The first section of the book concludes with a chapter on the psychiatrist's role in college mental health. There we learn that although the number of psychiatrists working in mental health centers on campuses has increased, only about two thirds of higher education institutions have these professionals on campus and even when they do, they do not have enough of them specialized in all types of disorders. Worse yet, after obtaining counseling many students refuse to take certain medication such as antidepressants and anti-anxiety drugs for a variety of reasons. Therefore we cannot assume that colleges and universities are solving, in general terms, the mental health issues facing them.

The rest of the chapters deal with more specific problems, their diagnoses and treatment including—but not limited to—sleep disorders, loneliness, perfectionism, eating disorders, depression, and impulsive behaviors. Other chapters are aimed more at psychiatrists than the general reader such as explaining how to deal with emergency situations and models of treatment and

their challenges, such as prescribing issues, individual versus college needs, and suicide prevention.

In the epilogue of the book, Iarovici tells us that she sees an increase in the number of psychiatric staff on campuses out of need although that “may alarm university administrators from a resource management perspective.” That is entirely true in this day and age of decreasing budgets for both public institutions that receive less state support and for private ones that invest more and more money in recruiting students in order to remain competitive. It seems that investing in more counseling staff needs serious consideration given the data provided in this book. If not, just think of cases such as the one at Virginia Tech in 2007 in which a single shooter killed thirty-two people and wounded seventeen more during an attack that lasted two hours and that ended with the attacker committing suicide. The attacker, Seung-Hui Cho, a senior at Virginia Tech, had severe anxiety disorders during middle and high school but because of federal privacy laws (FERPA) Virginia Tech was unaware of those problems. Cho, whose stalking behavior of female students had been reported to the school authorities, was declared mentally ill by a Virginia special justice and was ordered to undergo treatment but was never institutionalized or prevented from buying guns.

Although in the aftermath of an independent investigation changes in gun and privacy laws for cases like these were enacted, one wonders if a better counseling service would have helped to prevent this tragedy. The state of Virginia paid eleven million dollars in settlements to the victims and their relatives, thousands of dollars in fines, and suffered a loss of prestige from the manner in which the whole incident was managed.

Leaders of colleges and universities should ask themselves, given cases like this, if they have the appropriate policies and resources to prevent these kinds of tragedies.

Although I do not think this was ever in the author’s plan when she wrote the book, I wish I could have found some material on two issues related to mental health and academia. One is the concern about faculty members who display odd behaviors, something that is being observed more and more frequently although one wonders what is at the root of this problem. For example, are these behaviors based in mental illnesses or it is because the sense of insularity and job security of tenured professors allows them to display eccentric behaviors? (I suspect both are true.) The other has to do with legal matters: so many times we feel that we need to intervene just to be told by university lawyers that there are legalities that

prevent us from being more proactive when we observe disruptive behaviors in the college community.

In any case, Iarovici's book is an excellent source of information for people who work in colleges in general and administrators in particular about the problem of mental health issues on campuses that seem to be increasing in both gravity and complexity.