

10<sup>th</sup> Annual Congress on MENTAL HEALTH

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**Post-Covid mental health of college students and correlations with maltreatment in childhood****Emily Smith Schafer***University of South Carolina, USA*

**Statement of the Problem:** A universal negative impact on mental health because of COVID-19 has been noted. College students who must manage mental health difficulties often struggle in the classroom and so have lower graduation rates. Experiencing high levels of depression and/or anxiety can significantly impact overall functioning for students in both their educational and personal lives. Additionally, researchers have long reported associations between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and adult mental health. This study measured the levels of depression, anxiety, and disordered eating among college students. It adds to the literature by assessing students from lower SES, rural, two-year campuses, an understudied population.

**Methodology & Theoretical Orientation:** Bronfenbrenner's ecological model was used to situate participants in a macrosystem of a post-pandemic, rural, two-year college experience, their microsystem SES by household income, and their history of trauma through their ACE score. Participants self-reported on survey measures, 1. ACE Questionnaire; 2. Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale; 3. Eating Attitudes Test; 4. State Anxiety Inventory for Adults.

**Findings:** Results indicated that our sample, on average, scored above the clinical cutoff for both depression and anxiety. We also found that a slim majority of participants (52%) had experienced zero ACEs, which is higher/better than the national average. However, our sample had a significantly higher percentage of those with three or more ACEs versus the national average, 30% vs 21.5%. See Figure 1 for correlation data.

**Conclusion/Significance:** The average college student is struggling with major depression and generalized anxiety. This is alarming and provides considerable weight to the assertion that there should be an increase in mental health services for college students. Significant, positive correlations between ACEs and depression and anxiety show that those with childhood trauma ought to have immediate access to such resources. Recommendations are made for campuses to become trauma-informed.

**Biography**

Dr. Emily Smith Schafer holds a PhD in international family and community studies from Clemson University and an MA in clinical psychology. Prior to entering academia, she worked as a psychotherapist and continues to consult with local practitioners and non-profits. She writes trauma-informed curricula and was the co-founder of a mentoring non-profit for young children in poverty founded on social justice and racial equity principles. It was informed by the most up-to-date development, literacy, and mental health research, resulting in commendation by the national office of juvenile delinquency prevention. She pioneered a program with the city of Virginia Beach for teenage girls in foster care with exceptionally high needs. She joined the faculty of USC Union in 2019, and her research is broadly centred on childhood and racial trauma and resilience. In 2020, she was awarded the early career research award from the southeaster psychological association.