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Introduction

COVID-19 has altered society and caused students to experience disruptions in their education, leading to separation from their peers and routines such as sleeping, eating, and going to school breaking down. Consequently, these factors have led to elevated stress and anxiety. It is crucial that school psychologists be informed of evidence-based practices for addressing pandemic-related anxiety and that school psychology trainers emphasize tele-health services in training programs, as this delivery method becomes a more common practice.

Effects on Students

With the pandemic causing unprecedented changes, Rajkumar (2020), noted that early research indicates rates of anxiety among adolescents increasing all over the globe. According to Cost, et al. (2021), 42.6% of Canadian adolescents surveyed experienced a worsening in anxiety levels since the pandemic's start. In China, Zhou, et al., (2020) found that the pandemic coincided with anxiety symptoms rising to 37.40% of middle and high school students surveyed. In Germany, Ravens-Sieberer, et al., (2021) reported a roughly 10% rise in anxiety levels among adolescents since the pandemic's outset. And in Paraguay, Rioz-Gonzalez & Palacios (2020) reported anxiety symptoms present among 46.74% of those ages eighteen to nineteen surveyed during the pandemic. Furthermore, de Figueiredo, et al. (2021) found that the pandemic's immediate effect on adolescents includes distress, hopelessness, lack of emotional processing, psychiatric disorders, and suicidal thoughts. Hence, anxiety levels among students are rising and those consequences are one of the primary reasons for these increases.

How School Psychologists Can Help and How Training Programs Can Adapt

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

School psychologist trainers should include the following in their programs, and school psychologists can help by:

- **Telehealth:** Boldt et al.'s (2021) findings indicated that CBT is effective in teleconferences and in individual, group, and family formats as a method of reducing anxiety levels. Therefore, virtual-based CBT programs can and should be prioritized in treating students suffering from pandemic-related anxiety.
- **Exposure Activities:** Kalvin et al. (2021) discussed several strategies that could be used in a telehealth format, should this continue to be necessary. This includes a hierarchy of exposures to treat separation anxiety; if the student is fearful of a parent not being present, the parent could leave for a 5-minute period, then a 15 minute one, then a 30 minute one, and so forth. This can be developed via teleconference between the child, parent, and clinician.
- **Treatment Plans:** Haig-Ferguson et al. (2020) proposed that a CBT-based treatment plan for COVID-induced health anxiety include reduction of unhelpful safety-seeking behaviors. To accomplish this, practitioners should help the students develop a tolerance for uncertainty and assist them in recognizing how extreme use of measures designed to prevent contracting COVID-19 may be increasing rather than decreasing anxiety. Understanding this distinction will help adolescents better understand what necessary and appropriate precautionary measures are and what are not.

Social Emotional Learning

With cognitive regulation, emotional regulation, and social skills, school psychologists can help by:

- **Cognitive Regulation:** Cognitive regulation encompasses a myriad of skills including problem solving, goal setting, and decision-making. Providing a way to organize their assignments, such as a planner, can help students manage their workload. School psychologists can introduce self-monitoring and awareness strategies through online tools can help students monitor their progress and see their strengths and needs for growth (Kamei & Harriot, 2021)
- **Emotional Regulation:** Sharing stress reduction strategies such as breathing techniques, yoga, listening to music, and mindful meditation can be helpful for students to reflect their emotions. Having a check-in with students can give teachers and staff a gauge on how a student is feeling and what they can do to help them regulate their emotions.
- **Social Skills:** As a result of the pandemic, children have had a more difficult time connecting with their peers, causing social isolation and withdrawal. Boldt et. al (2021) proposes that online peer support can help students connect, provide and seek emotional and informational support as well as to share experiences and thus reduce the disrupted social networks. This can be done through collaborative online learning such as breakout rooms and online group projects to stay engaged with their peers. This is another element that trainers should include in their programs.

Physical Activity

Boldt et al. (2021) mentioned physical activity as an adaptive coping strategy that can reduce anxiety levels. This is significant because one of the many consequences of the pandemic has been a reduction in movement behavior, especially among children.

- **Exergames:** Exergames have several important advantages; they're easy to set up and use, they're safe for most populations (including young people), they don't require a great deal of physical space to use, and they can very fun. And beyond the psychological benefits that come with their use (besides lowering anxiety, they can promote motivation and self-efficacy) they've also been linked to a variety of positive health effects, which is significant given that COVID-19 can be more damaging for those that are less physically healthy to begin with.
- **Online Videogames:** Viana & de Lira (2020) singled out video games that encourage physical movement, or exergames, as a method to achieve this goal
- **Exercise Routines:** practitioners can suggest that adolescents adapt regular workout routines to combat their anxiety and, if their family owns any, take part in exergames as an example of one thing they can do safely and inexpensively.

Autonomy & Structure

School psychologists and training programs can help implement the following:

- **Autonomy:** Neubauer, et al., (2021) reported that maintaining autonomy and routine are crucial for students' mental wellbeing. Having autonomy in the classroom involves allowing student choices for learning, recognize student perspectives, and reducing unnecessary stress for students. By giving students the opportunity to have a variety of assignment choices with their interests and flexibility, students become able to use their voices to seek help and become more empowered in their learning. This can be done with the use of choice boards or letting students use a variety of online learning tools to do their work.
- **Structure:** Communicating clear expectations with respect to student behavior through visual aids, social contracts, and guidance lessons for students helps minimize academic and behavior issues for students. Chiu (2021) explains that having a suitable learning structure helps students feel competent, effective and challenged in their learning. Families are also encouraged to develop routines and outline a schedule for daily activities to combat the anxiety that can accompany the loss of routine.

*References available upon request
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