

**College Students with Chronic Illness: A comparison with health first-year students (217996)**

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**Background**

- Up to 15% of all adolescents have some type of special health care need. Young adults who have or had childhood chronic illness are at increased risk for poor social, medical, and educational outcomes as compared to their healthy peers.
- Childhood chronic illness is relatively common, yet few studies examine the prevalence or effects of chronic illness among young adults with chronic illness as they transition to college

**Purpose**

- This study tested the hypothesis that college freshmen with chronic illness have lower health-related quality of life (HRQoL), are lonelier, and miss more days of class than their healthy peers.

**Methods**

- Students at a private university were given the opportunity to participate in an online survey via email, within one month of the start of their freshman year. The study had IRB approval.
- **Survey Content**
  - Demographics, including a question about the students' specific chronic conditions
  - UCLA loneliness scale
  - CDC 4-item Health-Related Quality of Life scale
  - Questions about the students' usage of college health services
  - Questions about class attendance.
- **Analysis**
  - Survey results were analyzed using SPSS 16.0. Loneliness between groups was analyzed using an independent samples t-test, after testing for equality of variance.

**Findings**

- 163 students responded to the survey:
  - 23 with chronic physical illness (14%) and 24 with a chronic mental illness (15%)
  - 118 without a chronic illness (72%)
- Students with a chronic illness reported significantly higher levels of loneliness than healthy freshmen. Average loneliness scores were:
  - Chronic physical illness: 47.7
  - Chronic mental illness: 53.4
  - No chronic illness: 41.4
- Chronically ill freshmen had lower HRQoL and missed more days of class.
- Less than 15% of chronically ill freshmen had a local physician.

**Implications for practice**

- Physicians and colleges should work to increase awareness and use of available health services.
- Interventions should be developed and targeted to address the increased rates of loneliness and lower HRQoL for chronically ill freshmen during their transition to college.

**Future studies** should examine:

- 1) The prevalence of chronic illness among college students.
- 2) The medical course of college students with chronic illness.

**Limitations**

- This study had a low response rate of 10%.
- It is not possible to determine prevalence rates of chronic illness in college freshmen from this study.