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The Impact of a College Course on Mental Health: A Scoping Review

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Abstract

Ninety percent of colleges and universities in the United States offer conceptualized health and wellness courses (CHWC) that are meant to improve students' general health and wellness knowledge. Prior literature reviews have mostly focused on physical benefits of such courses. The purpose of this literature review is to investigate course content and structure, and how effective college-based CHWCs are at improving mental health (MH) variables. Ten (10) articles published in English between 2010 and 2023, met our inclusion criteria, which represent 2419 subjects. Courses that focused on MH strategies, resulted in improved MH outcomes such as Meditation Practices, Mindfulness Strategies, Resilience Training, Growth Mindset and coping mechanisms. There is opportunity for CHWCs to adopt strategies that will improve MH outcomes.

Comments

Aurelia Lencioni and Sabina Mursalova are co-first authors.

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Introduction

The 2021 annual report by the Center for Collegiate Mental Health reported:

- 153,233 students sought university counseling.
- 65.5% reported anxiety as a problem.
- 49.1% reported stress as a problem.
- 47.2% experienced depression.

Are there teaching strategies for a college health and wellness course that improve students' measures in mental health?

Methods

Databases searched: CINAHL, EBSCO Host, Eric, PsychINFO, MEDLINE, SPORTDiscus.

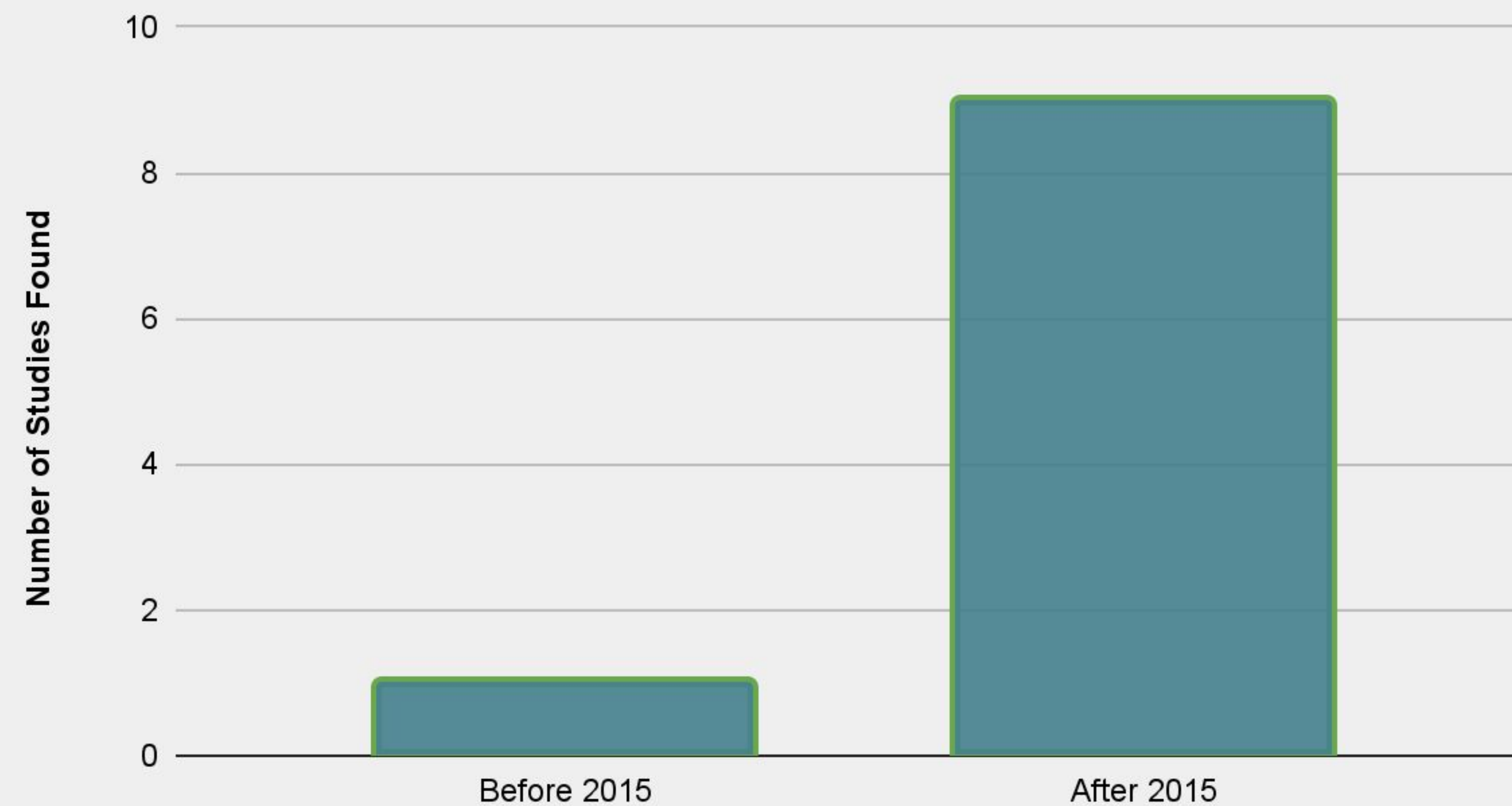
Search terms: intervention; stress; college course; student; mental health; anxiety; depression; negative affect; cognitive behavioral strategies.

Inclusion Criteria: Health and Wellness courses or programs taught to college students, measuring mental health outcomes (stress, affect, anxiety, depression) before and after course completion, from 2003-2023.



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Number of MH Studies Over the Years



Research Measures

PROMIS Depression and Anxiety symptom measures
Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC 10) total score
Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)
Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)
Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI)
Modified version of CBT Skills Questionnaire
Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (MHC-SF)
Positive and Negative Affect (PANAS)
Valuing Happiness Scale

Interventions Used

Buddhist Meditation Coaching
Meditation Practices
Mindfulness Strategies
Resilience Training
Growth Mindset
Positive Psychology Wellbeing
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Techniques

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Results

Number of articles included: 10
Range of subjects: 12-616
Total number of subjects: 2419
Course length range: 4-16 wks

Discussion

Important Findings:

Increased research in college students' mental health over the past 10 years.
The most effective interventions were mindfulness and cognitive behavioral techniques.

Common Limitations:

Self report bias; attrition; no control group; not enough diversity;

Future Research:

Need for: longitudinal studies; understanding mediators; what are effective teaching strategies; if findings can be generalized.

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