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Social connectedness is defined as having strong social relationships or networks. A high degree of social connectedness has been found to promote adjustment and psychosocial well-being of university students. Social connections enrich students' social lives, help them make new friends, and alleviate homesickness. However, first-year students often report difficulty making social connections, leading to psychological problems and high dropout rates. Students who fail to develop social networks face greater challenges integrating into the university environment (Jorgenson et al., 2018). A shift to online teaching during COVID-19, and its continued use, has impacted the opportunities students have to integrate socially, with implications for their adjustment and well-being (Elmer et al., 2020). This research utilizes a mixed-methods approach. Study 1 employs qualitative interviews (n=20) to: (1) explore how domestic and international students establish social connections in the post-COVID era; and (2) identify adjustment challenges students face during their first year of university. Study 2, using a sample of 300 NZ university students, will examine the validity of the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (Baker & Siryk, 1989), and its suitability for use in Study 3. Study 3 will employ a quantitative longitudinal design with survey data (n=400) collected at two time-points. It aims to investigate the influence of first-year university students' levels of social connectedness on adjustment to university and psychosocial wellbeing. This research will contribute to a greater understanding of the factors that impact the successful transition to a university environment. It may also enable tertiary institutions to develop strategies to enhance students' academic experience and safeguard their wellbeing.

Keywords

social connectedness; social networks; university students; adjustment; psychosocial well-being

References

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