
ANNOTATION

Archer, Robert B. “An Exploration of Hardiness of College Students At-Risk.” EdD dissertation, Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota, 2005. 139 pp.

This quantitative study sought to assess the hardiness of attitudes and dispositions of Community College students in a program for at-risk students. The study utilized a commercially valid and reliable instrument for hardiness, the Personal Views Survey III-R[®], which aggregates scores from the three sub-scales of commitment, control, and challenge (48-49). For the purpose of this study, the researcher defined the “disposition” of hardiness as “a pattern of learned attitudes and skills that can enhance personal effectiveness” (8). At-risk students were identified as first-year students at the participating Community College who were members of the “Student Support Services” (SSS) program (2). Students who were members of the SSS program met one or more of the following criteria: coming from low income, being a first-generation college student, or having a documented disability (89). The population meeting these criteria was 61, and the sample that participated in the study was n=50.

The purpose of this study was to assess if the study participants had the internal attitudes and dispositions for successful adaptation and functioning in college (2). The stated objective of the SSS program was to offer support and resources to students until they obtained a baccalaureate degree (89). The instrument provides an internal scoring system for the three sub-categories which are then aggregated for a total hardiness score. Scores were stratified in categories in accordance with collected demographic data, and were then analyzed for statistical significance via cross-tabulation, t-test, ANOVA, and chi-square as appropriate (57-59). The study framework was based on the following five questions: a) to what extent do students participating in the SSS program demonstrate scores on the instrument that indicates hardiness?; b) are participant scores different from the instrument measuring hardiness for males and females?; c) are participant scores for the instrument measuring hardiness different for different age groups?; d) are the participant scores for the instrument measuring hardiness different from different ethnic groups?; and e) are the scores on the instrument measuring hardiness different for students with one, two, or three risk factors? (7-8).

The review of literature builds a context of how hardiness is understood within adult learning theory. An appropriate review of adult learning theory is presented (11-17), and is built upon a depiction of the at-risk student experience (17-19). The author then turns his attention to foundational building blocks of the concept of “hardiness” through the examination of relevant social and positive psychology constructs. This review includes the presentation of literature pertaining to adult learning psychology (19-25), risk factors (25-28), protective factors (28-30), and resilience in adulthood (28-33). Archer then presents literature that synthesizes current literature of the chief construct under study – hardiness (33-38) – with particular attention to the work of Maddi and Khoshaba and a line of research where hardiness is understood to be a disposition that increases the likeness of resilience. The final section of the review of literature

presents an informative account of the development of the hardiness instrument utilized in this study, the Personal Views Survey III-R© (38-45).

Chapter three contains a concise summary of the methodology utilized in the study, data collection and analysis procedures, internal threats to validity, ethics, as well as instrument validity and reliability data (46-60). Notably, the author gives a detailed description of the three individual sub-campuses which make up the Community College under study, and the participation of each sub-campus in the study (46, 50). While the author does not discuss the statistical power of the sample utilized in the study, specifics are provided as to the population of the study and recruitment of the sample (46-48). Data is presented on studies of the instrument's validity resulting in an alpha of .80-.88 for the aggregate hardiness measurement (49). The author also presents reliability study data via test-retest stability [for three months, .58; for six months, .55; and with earlier hardiness measures, .91] (50). Finally, ethical protocols are described to protect participant harm, confidentiality, and the adherence to professional standards.

The results are presented clearly and concisely in chapter 4 of the study. Collected demographic data of the participants is presented via tables and figures (63-66). Hardiness scores, from the three sub-scales of commitment, control, and challenge as well as aggregate hardiness scores, are presented (67-73). Significantly, the mean aggregate hardiness score of the sample under study was 35.84, which was 4 points of the validated Hardiness Institute norm of 32 (67). Given a 95% confidence interval for the mean scores of this sample, the first null hypothesis, that students in the SSS program would not demonstrate scores on the instrument that would indicate hardiness, is rejected (68). For the remaining four variables under study, differences in hardiness based on the gender, age, ethnic group, and presence of one to three risk factors did not present statistically significant results (75, 79, 82, 86). Therefore, corresponding null hypotheses (two through five) cannot be rejected.

Based on the data presented, the 50 participants of this sample demonstrated the presence of hardiness above the standardized norms of the instrument and the hardiness percentile rankings presented by the Hardiness Institute (91). This is an interesting finding, and the author suggests that perhaps this sample had a greater propensity for the demonstration for hardiness since as a group they had taken the courageous step to enroll in college even though all participants had one, if not more, at-risk factor (92). Hardiness was consistently demonstrated throughout by members throughout the sample, which led the acceptance of the null hypotheses concerning the effect of gender, age, ethnic group, or number of present risk factors (92-98).

Future researchers may consider studies attempting to replicate these hardiness results utilizing this instrument protocol with other larger groups of students or with students of differing ethnicities (101). An encouraging observation that can be made based on this research is that, for this sample, the data does indicate that these at-risk students did demonstrate the disposition of hardiness which may increase their resilience (99).