

WHOQoL psychological score and employability skills among students at the Universities of Luxembourg and Liege, Belgium.

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BACKGROUND

The SQALES (Students' Quality of Life and Employability Skills) project aims to help universities adopt the recommendations from Bergen (Communiqué of 2005) within the framework of the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA, Communiqué of Louvain, 2009). Universities have become subject to assessment in terms of productivity and competitiveness (European Council 1999).

Our objective was to compare students in the Faculties of Social Sciences at the University of Luxembourg (F-Lux) and Belgium (F-Bel) with regard to: 1) socio-demographic characteristics; 2) the WHOQoL-bref psychological domain; 3) employability skills; and 4) other relevant WHOQoL domain.

METHODS

The survey was conducted in 2008 among first-year student volunteers. Respondents completed an online questionnaire including the WHOQoL-bref (three domains: psychological [Cronbach's alpha, 0.76], social relationships [alpha, 0.71], and environment [alpha, 0.72]), and the Employability Skills scale (6 items - writing, critical thinking, problems solving, working effectively with others, leading others, ability to learn & use new technology [global score alpha, 0.69]). Analysis involved multiple regressions with interaction.

RESULTS

85 F-Lux students (age, 21.2 ±3.3) and 91 F-Bel (age, 18.6 ±1.0) participated. F-Lux had a greater proportion of females (75.3% vs 64.8% F-Bel). Psychological WHOQoL scores (74.6 vs 63.9) and Employability Skills scores (77.8 vs 68.3) were better for F-Lux. Both groups exhibited a correlation between psychological WHOQoL and employability, and the two other WHOQoL domains (Table 1); age had an effect in only the F-Bel.

Faculty of origin had a highly significant effect. Psychological WHOQoL was much higher among F-Lux than F-Bel. On average, there was no relationship between employability and mental health (correlation coefficient, -0.006, NS). In contrast, there was a significant association between faculty of origin and employability skills, which means that the interaction between employability and mental health was different in the two universities. Specifically, the association was positive among F-Lux and negative among F-Bel. Mental health was highly significantly positively associated with the social relationship and environment WHOQoL domains.

	F-Lux	rho	p	F-Bel	rho	p
Age	21.2 (3.3)	0.023	0.839	18.6 (1.0)	- 0.260	0.016*
Employability skills score	77.8 (11.8)	0.287	0.009**	68.3 (10.0)	- 0.213	0.043*
Social relationships WHOQoL score	77.5 (21.5)	0.587	<.001***	68.8 (17.8)	0.508	<.001***
Environment WHOQoL score	71.4 (13.2)	0.452	<.001***	68.4 (14.4)	0.538	<.001***

Table 1. Correlations between psychological WHOQoL-bref and Employability Skills (separated regression).

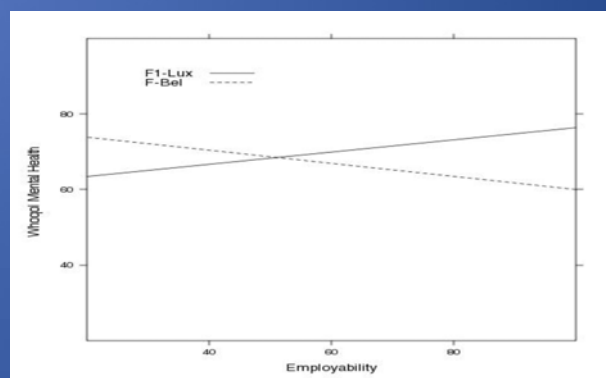


Figure 1. Predicted relations between psychological WHOQoL and Employability Skills (linear multiple regression).

CONCLUSION

Social sciences students in Luxembourg had better mental health and were older than their Belgian counterparts because their secondary education is a year longer than in other European countries. A large majority of the F-Lux had already established their professional affiliations. Acquisition of skills and knowledge that increase employability probably contributed to their mental health.

SQALES is a process and a tool that permits evaluation and follow-up of students to ensure that their needs for help are being met appropriately, thereby supporting them in acquiring skills, increasing well-being, and generally improving the environment on the campus and the relationships that exist there.

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