

College Assessment for Risk Evaluation of Depression (CAREd): A New Screening Instrument Created for College Freshmen

Background

- The transition to college can be stressful for many students, leaving them susceptible to negative emotions and coping responses (Brandy et al., 2018).
- All college freshmen have a heightened risk for depression onset (Ebert, 2019).
- In a national study, 44% of college students screened positive for depression, with 23% positive for a provisional diagnosis of major depression (Eisenberg et al., 2023).
- The American College Health Association reported significant mental health symptoms among college students. Alarming, 28.1% of screened positive for suicide risk (ACHA, 2024).
- There is no population-specific instrument available that can screen for the risk of depression in college freshmen.

Purpose

The purpose of this poster is to enable the learner to describe the psychometric properties of the College Assessment for Risk Evaluation of Depression (CAREd) screening instrument.

Theoretical Framework

The CAREd was developed following grounded theory analysis (Charmaz, 2014) of interviews with 33 students who self-identified a depression history.

Research Methods

IRB approval at Valparaiso University

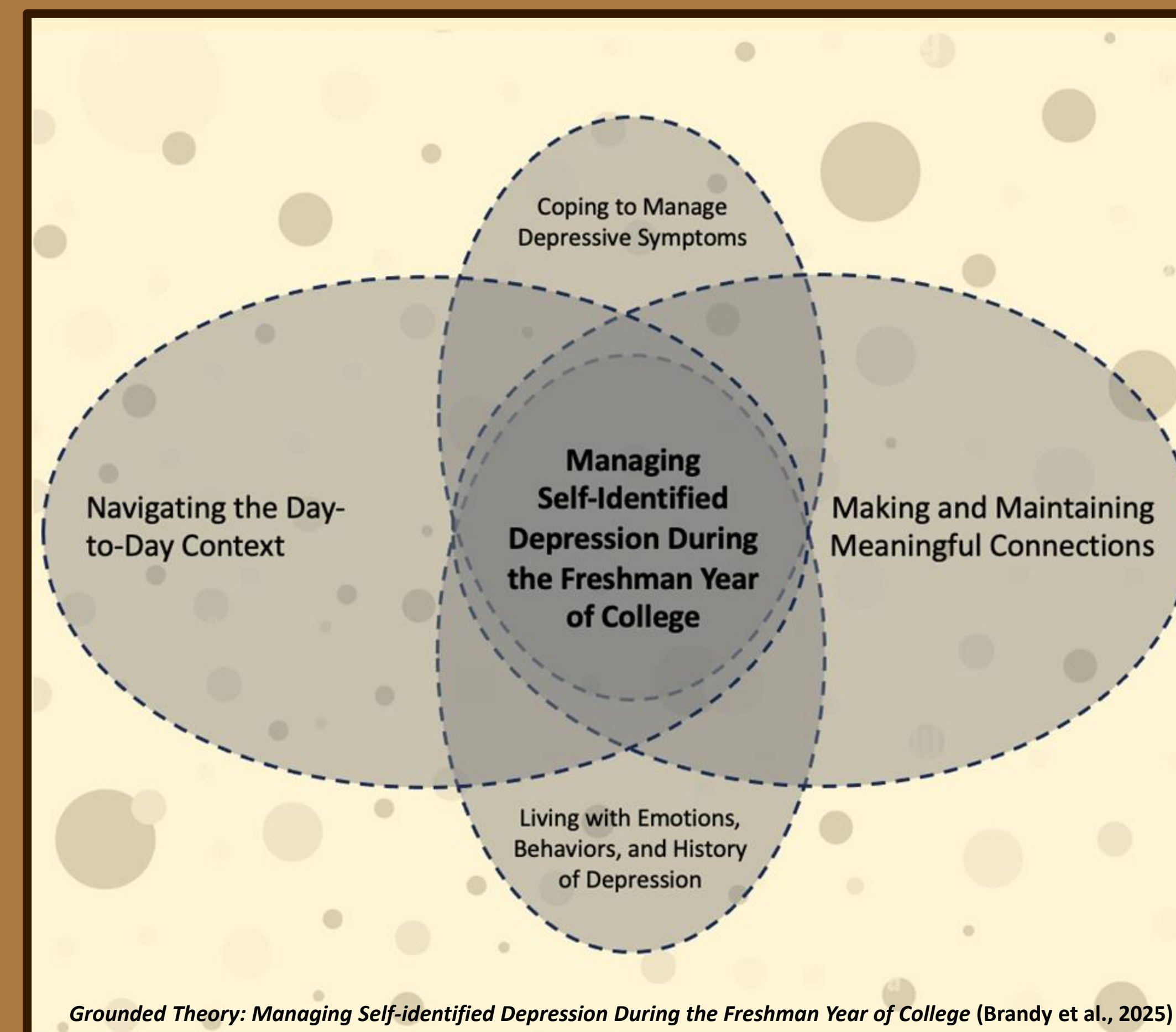
Instrument Development:

- The initial CAREd instrument was composed of 56 items representing all four categories.

Psychometric Testing of the CAREd:

- **Design:** Nonexperimental, cross-sectional
- **Sample:** $n = 257$ undergraduate students
- **Setting:** Two private, midwestern universities
- **Data Collection:** via SurveyMonkey
 - Demographic questionnaire: 16 items
 - CES-D: 20 items, 4-point Likert scale (0-3) (Radloff, 1977)
- **Data Analysis:** College Assessment for Risk Evaluation of Depression (CAREd)
 - 56 items, 4-point Likert scale (0-3)
 - Item analysis: Inter-item correlations 0.3-0.7, corrected item total correlation of 0.3, and increase in Cronbach's alpha if item was deleted
 - Thematic contribution
 - Criterion validity with CES-D
 - Factor analysis: Principal Component with Varimax rotation

Julie Brandy, PhD, RN, FNP-BC, CNE
Theresa A. Kessler, PhD, RN, ACNS-BC, CNE, FAAN
Grace M. Gass, MSN, RN
Rachel Fischer DNP, RN, FNP-BC



Results

Psychometric testing resulted in a 25-item CAREd instrument

- **Range of Scores:** 8 to 66 ($M = 32.81$, $SD = 12.31$)
- **Cronbach's Alpha:** $r = 0.91$
- **Criterion Validity with the CES-D:** $r = 0.81$ ($p < 0.001$)
- **Factor Solution:** 3-factor solution explained 43.15% of the variance

Factors with Item Examples

Factor 1: A Burden to Self and Others

*I feel like I'm a bother to others.
I find it hard to ask for help.*

Factor 2: An Internal Battle

*I feel like I want to give up.
There are days when I don't want to get out of bed.*

Factor 3: A Recognition of Repercussions

*I make excuses to avoid spending time with friends.
I use unhealthy coping strategies.*

Discussion: Implications for College Health Professionals

- The strong psychometric properties of the CAREd support a valid and reliable population-specific instrument to screen for depression risk in college freshmen.
- The items on the CAREd address diverse psychosocial stressors such as financial strain, social isolation, and family expectations.
- The CAREd could be added as a resource on a university's website to allow self-administration, making screening more equitable and universally accessible.
- The CAREd can be easily completed in less than 5 minutes prior to an intake interview or distributed online campus-wide to screen marginalized and non-marginalized students.
- College health professionals can use the CAREd to identify first-year college students at risk for depression, enabling early interventions.

Conclusions and Future Research

- The incidence of depression continues to increase in the college population, making early identification of depression an important priority.
- Initial psychometric testing (Field, 2024) supports the CAREd as a standardized instrument to identify the risk of depression in freshmen college students.
- Use of the CAREd as a population-specific screening tool can identify students who could benefit from early interventions for depression symptoms.
- Students who receive early interventions will be better able to cope and be successful during their freshman year of college (Brandy et al., 2018).
- Professionals from other colleges and universities are welcome to join in further research through participating in upcoming analysis of the criterion validity of the CAREd.