

Abstract Title: Personality-Targeted Intervention Effects on Pandemic Distress and Coping Drinking in Undergraduates: A Pilot Study of UniVenture

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Background: The COVID-19 pandemic has led to marked emotional distress for many undergraduates. Effective interventions that are accessible during lockdown are needed. Personality-targeted interventions led to reductions in distress pre-pandemic. Objectives: This pilot examined whether delivery of UniVenture (a personality-targeted intervention for undergraduates) would be associated with reductions in general anxiety, COVID-specific distress, and coping-drinking when delivered remotely during the pandemic. Methods: 90 undergraduates with elevations on the Substance Use Risk Profile Scale were recruited from 5 universities. Participants received a personality-specific group-based intervention over 2 facilitated, distance-delivered sessions involving goal setting and coping skills training (87% retention). Pre-intervention and one-month post-intervention, participants completed the Generalized Anxiety Disorder–7, subscales of the COVID Stress Scales-Brief, and the Brief Alcohol Motives Measure. Results: Multilevel intent-to-treat growth models, with time [pre, post] at level-1, and personality group [4 levels] and covariates at level-2, showed pre- to post-intervention reductions for general anxiety, COVID-specific danger/contamination fears, and xenophobia. Supplementary multilevel growth models in each personality group separately revealed pre- to post-intervention reductions in: general anxiety for the anxiety sensitive [AS] students; and COVID-specific reassurance-seeking and coping-with-depression drinking for the hopeless [HOP] students. Conclusion: Results suggest promise for UniVenture as an accessible intervention to help at-risk [particularly AS and HOP] undergraduates manage distress during a global pandemic.