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Program: Department of Leadership and Adult
Education

Dissertation Title: Emerging Adult's Perceptions
of Toxic Leadership: A Case Study

Major Professor: Dr. Patricia Whitfield

RESEARCH QUESTIONS / PROBLEMS:

1. What are the characteristics of toxic family leadership as described by emerging adults who reside in substance abuse group homes?
2. What is the role of leadership within the family as described by emerging adults who reside in substance abuse group homes?
3. What do emerging adults who reside in substance abuse group homes describe as risky behaviors?
4. How do emerging adults who reside in substance abuse group homes explain the impact that toxic family leadership has on their risky behaviors?
5. How do emerging adults' explanations differ by race/ethnicity and gender?

METHODS:

Two semi-structured interview protocols, which comprised of open-ended question related to family and leadership was utilized. One-on-One face to face interviews were conducted with each participant via the data collection process of the Qualitative Instrumental Case Study.

RESULTS / FINDINGS:

Although some participants believed they witnessed positive relationships within the family, the findings indicate that each participant was exposed to toxic leadership within the family unit. The misuse of prescribed medications, physical and verbal abuse, and drug and/or alcohol abuse were among the key components of toxicity experienced by emerging adults. Two males and three females were introduced to drugs by and did drugs with their parents. More than half of the participants indicated they had grown up witnessing alcoholism in the family. As a result, several of them were more likely to experience the same behavior, indicating this was a multigenerational issue; in that grandparents, parents, and children all participated in risky behaviors, such as reckless driving, drug and alcohol abuse.

SIGNIFICANCE / IMPLICATIONS:

Emerging adults who participated in this study now know (a) the term that is associated with their age group and (b) how to name the toxic situations they endured within their family units. Organizations, facilities, and individuals who work with families can help develop policies that address issues emerging adults face within their homes and communities. They can consider how to create optimal environments that will help to sustain the wholeness of the emerging adult.

THEMES/ATTRIBUTES	PARTICIPANTS and DATA POINTS												
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	
EMERGING ADULTHOOD													
Identity Exploration	x	x	x	x		x							
Instability			x				x			x	x		x
Feeling in-between	x		x		x		x						
Self-focused	x	x			x		x	x		x			
Possibilities		x				x	x		x	x	x	x	x
FAMILY DYNAMICS													
Horizontal and Vertical Stressors	x	x		x		x	x		x			x	
Differentiation of Self						x	x		x	x	x		x
Emotional Cutoff	x					x	x	x	x	x			
Multigenerational Transmission		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x			
Nuclear Family Emotional System				x		x			x	x	x	x	x
Societal Emotional Process	x		x	x			x		x				x
TOXIC FAMILY LEADERSHIP													
Physical / Sexual Abuse (Tenet: Narcissism & Abusive Supervision)				x	x	x		x		x	x		
Emotional Toxic Environment (Tenet: Authoritarian Leadership)		x		x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Teens / Children Emulate Parents (Tenet: Unpredictability)	x			x			x			x	x		x
Drug Introduction by Parents (Tenet: Self Promotion)				x	x		x						x
RISKY BEHAVIORS													
Reckless Driving				x						x			x
Illicit Drug Use	x	x	x				x			x			x
Alcohol Abuse	x		x	x						x			x
Other Substance Abuse					x		x	x	x	x			x
Sexual Relationships		x				x							x
SUBSTANCE ABUSE GROUP HOMES													
Importance of Sustaining Recovery	x	x	x		x		x		x	x			
Voluntary and Mandatory Treatment	x	x	x	x	x						x	x	
Other Factors Related to Substance Abuse	x			x	x	x		x	x			x	