

**WIU CENTENNIAL HONORS COLLEGE**  
**Thomas E. Helm Undergraduate Research Day 2023**

**Abstract**

Podium

Major: Psychology

Faculty Mentor(s): Kristy Keefe

---

**Transgender and gender non-conforming college students: Mental health outcomes at first session**

**Cole Jensen**

---

Increased focus on the unique mental health needs of gender diverse individuals such as transgender (TG) and gender non-conforming (GNC) people (National Institutes of Health, 2015) has emerged. Research has consistently revealed higher risk for mental health disorders, trauma exposure, and suicidal thoughts for TGNC (Valentine & Shipherd, 2018). College life can present a sensitive time for the development of mental health concerns (Hirshberg et al., 2023) but specifically for gender minority students (Lipson et al., 2019). A total of 3,166 TGNC and cisgender responses were harvested from The Center for Collegiate Mental Health database, a national sample from college counseling centers in 2018-2019. The current study hypothesized that TGNC would report higher mental health symptoms at first session, more risk indicators, use a higher number of sessions, and TGNC with recent sexual assault history would report higher symptoms than comparable cisgendered students. Analysis of the data showed that depression, generalized anxiety, social anxiety, academic concerns, and eating concerns were highest for TG and GNC students. Hostility scores were highest for GNC only and alcohol concerns were highest for cis male students. GNC students had the highest likelihood of suicidal thinking, self-injury, and recent sexual assault. The interaction of gender identity and recent sexual assault did not change first session symptom differences. Transgender students utilized the most individual therapy sessions. The results support the need for further revision of gender identity models in understanding gender non-conforming students and increased training for practitioners, counseling centers, and universities.