Mental health disorders are widespread among college populations with approximately 30% of university students scoring high on mental health assessments, the average prevalence of depression being 31%, and suicide being one of the leading causes of death among university students (Eskin et al., 2016; Ibrahim et al., 2015; Schwartz, 2006).

On a college campus, negative mental health outcomes can impact students’ academic performance, retention, and graduation. Thus, Healthy Campus 2020 outlines a number of objectives related to reducing outcomes related to stress, anxiety, suicide, and other mental health disorders including:

- Reducing the proportion of students who report that stress and anxiety adversely affect their academic performance; and
- Reducing the proportion of students who report attempting suicide in the past 12 months.

**CURRENT STUDY**

The purpose of the current study was to:

- Determine the greatest health concerns of undergraduate students;
- Identify the prevalence of undergraduate students reporting stress and anxiety as an impediment to academic performance; and
- Identify changes in the proportion of students who are considering suicide.

Using information learned from this study can impact strategic planning of campus health promotion and mental health counseling centers, and help advocate for increased resource allocation for stress and anxiety prevention programs.

**METHODS & DATA ANALYSIS**

**SURVEY DESCRIPTION**

The Healthy Gators Student Survey is a two-form prevalence survey created by the Healthy Gators Coalition in 2007. The survey has been administered to a random sample of college students in 2008, 2010, and 2013.

**METHODOLOGY**

A random sample of 7,500 undergraduate students, over the age of 18, with local addresses on file was provided by the Registrar’s Office.

The informed consent and survey link were sent via e-mail to the sampled students in February 2016. The first 10, middle 10, and last 10 participants to complete the survey were offered an incentive to receive a $50 Visa gift card.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Thematic analysis was used to analyze open-ended responses to the question, “What is the single greatest health concern affecting your life right now?” We compared undergraduate health from 2013 to 2016 using the Healthy Gators Student Survey of 2013. Study data are summarized descriptively and two-population proportion tests were used to determine the differences in prevalence of mental health behaviors of interest. All statistical analyses were completed using Minitab 17.

**SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS**

A total of 1511 students completed the survey (735 Form A; 776 Form B). The majority of respondents were women (72%), and the mean age was 20.2 years. Participants identified as White (76%), Asian (12%), Black (6%), Multiracial (5%), and American Indian or Alaskan Native (1%). No participants identified as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.

![Figure 1. Proportion of undergraduate students seriously considering leaving the university one or more time due to poor...](image)

**RESULTS**

A total of 591 health concerns were submitted via an open-response item. The greatest undergraduate student health concern was stress and anxiety (28.6% of responses). In addition, stress (32.7%) and anxiety (27.6%) were the two most reported impediments to academic performance.

The proportion of students who reported seriously considering leaving the University due to poor mental health increased 9.8% between 2013 and 2016 ($p$ = 0.001; Figure 1). There was no significant change in the proportion of students who considered leaving the university due to poor physical health.

In 2013, 16.1% of undergraduates reported ever considering suicide and 6.1% of students considered suicide in the 12 months prior to taking the survey (Figure 2). In 2016, there was a 3.9% increase in the proportion of students reporting considering suicide in the last 12 months (p = 0.013), and the 4.2% increase in ever considering suicide was trending to significance (p = 0.057).

![Figure 2. Proportion of undergraduate students considering suicide](image)

**DISCUSSION**

Our findings indicate that stress and anxiety are at the forefront of undergraduate student health concerns. These results are consistent with other random sample surveys among University of Florida college students since 2008. In addition to stress, other health concerns of undergraduates include weight management, medical conditions, nutrition, and sleep.

Over 30% of undergraduate students reported that stress was an academic impediment causing them to receive a lower grade on an exam or important project, receive a lower grade in a course, not complete or drop a course, and/or cause a significant disruption in their thesis, research, or practicum work.

Fifty-percent of undergraduate students reported seriously considering leaving the university at least one time due to poor mental health. More concerning, however, is that this proportion has been an increasing trend since 2008. Furthermore, special attention should be focused on students who are experiencing increased suicidal ideation as this may lead to a higher frequency of completed suicides in the student population.

Health promotion practitioners, mental health providers, and campus administrators can use these findings to justify the allocation of resources to create programs and services that will address student mental health concerns. Specifically, college health promotion specialists can:

- Develop stress reduction programs to increase student knowledge and behavioral control of positive stress-reduction strategies (e.g., mindfulness, physical exercise, and time management strategies); and
- Emphasize the role of social support networks.

Examples of such interventions include the UFlourish social marketing campaign created by GatorWell Health Promotion Services and the Counseling and Wellness Center using funds provided by a three-year SAMSHA grant to produce tailored stigma reduction messages:

**References**


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