

**mtvU and Associated Press College Stress and Mental Health Poll
Spring 2008
Executive Summary**



March is a time when college basketball and the annual spring break sojourn place college students in the national spotlight, with millions rallying to celebrate the excitement and fun of the month. Meanwhile, midterms, looming graduation, spring break stressors and the 5th anniversary of the Iraq war – which personally affects a significant percentage of the college audience – weigh heavy on students' minds.

mtvU, MTV's Emmy-winning college network, has partnered with The Associated Press, to explore the impact these issues are having on today's college students.

Methodology:

- mtvU and The Associated Press commissioned Edison Media Research to survey college students across the U.S.
- Interviews were conducted on Thursday, February 28th through Thursday, March 6th.
- Edison interviewers surveyed 2253 respondents at a randomly selected sample of 40 colleges and universities.
- These forty colleges and universities were randomly selected from a national list of all accredited four-year universities with more than 1000 undergraduates.
- Colleges and universities that were primarily internet-based were not included in the sample.
- The sample was selected using a stratified probability methodology. All colleges and universities were grouped into four geographic regions and sorted by the number of undergraduates with a probability of selection based upon the number of undergraduates at each college or university.
- In order to qualify for the survey a respondent had to be between 18 and 24 years old and an undergraduate student.
- A five dollar incentive was offered to those who were asked to participate in the survey.
- Based upon the sample size and the design effect, the margin of error is +/- 3%.

KEY FINDINGS

Happiness vs. Stress:

Students report an overall positive outlook on life:

- Like most young adults, today's college students say they are somewhat or very happy with their lives (64%), and optimistic about their future (60% somewhat/very). Overall, students report that they enjoy themselves most or all of the time (45% "most of the time", 19% "all of the time").
- Even in light of recent high-profile campus tragedies, 86% of students say they feel somewhat/very safe on their campus (49% "very safe", 37% "somewhat safe").

Despite this positive outlook, stress is taking a toll on today's students:

8 in 10 college students say they have sometimes/frequently experienced stress in their daily lives over the past three months (39% "frequently", 41% "sometimes")

Considering the rising costs, intense competition and future focus that mark today's college experience, it is not surprising that school-related concerns are key drivers of student stress levels.

- 71% of students say that over the past three months the grades they receive in school have had some/a lot of impact on the stress they experience in their daily life (35% "some impact", 36% "a lot of impact").
- 74% of students say that over the past three months, their school work has had some/a lot of impact on the stress they experience in their daily life (37% "some impact", 37% "a lot of impact").
- 62% of students say that over the past three months financial worries have had some/a lot of impact on the stress the experience in their daily life (35% "some impact", 27% "a lot of impact").

For some students, the spring semester can bring additional stressors:

- Not surprisingly, soon to be graduating seniors are faced with the additional stressors of "finding a full time job after graduation (62% a lot/some impact)" and "getting into graduate school" (39% a lot/some impact).
- 45% of students say that they are somewhat/very worried about being in shape for Spring Break (10% "very, 35% "somewhat worried"), with the same percentage worried about not having enough money to enjoy it.

Despite being bombarded by IM, text messages and e-mails, as well as maintaining social networking profiles, very few college students view "keeping up" with all of these as a significant source of stress. Additionally, few students feel that the time they are spending online is interfering with time they spend with others "in person".

- 55% of students say that the internet is so important in their daily life at college they can't imagine living without it.
- 15% of students say that they have been unable to spend time with people "in person" at some point in the past three months because they were spending time on the internet.
- 13% of students say they have experienced some level of stress related to keeping up with instant messages and chats.
- 11% of students say they have experienced some level of stress related to keeping up pages on personal networking sites.

While in today's college environment, stress may be seen as "the norm", and for many students can prove to be a source of motivation, excess stress can be dangerous. Many students report experiencing various, potentially negative effects of stress:

At some point in the past 3 months:

- 63% of students felt like they couldn't get motivated or get things done
- 61% of students felt they were too tired to do things
- 58% of students felt worried or anxious
- 57% of students felt irritable or agitated
- 55% of students had trouble thinking or concentrating
- 53% of students have had trouble sleeping
- 42% of students felt lonely

The majority of students report that stress has interfered with both their academic and social lives:

- 63% of students say that at some point in the past three months they have felt so stressed they could not get their work done.
- 55% of students say that at some point in the past three months they have felt so stressed they didn't want to hang out or participate in social activities.

Reaching out for help:

While they are aware of where or whom to reach out to for help, students overall seem reluctant to take advantage of some of the resources available to them. Friends are the first place students turn when they are in emotional distress.

- The majority of students' report they are confident they would know where to turn for help if they were in serious emotional distress or were thinking about hurting themselves (56%); however "professional" resources are not top of mind.

Friends and family are the most sought out resources for students:

- 76% of students say they would turn to friends for help
- 63% of students say they would turn to parents for help

While many students report being familiar with the counseling resources available on their campus (46% "somewhat/very familiar"), fewer students would seek them out.

- 20% of students say they would turn to school counseling for help
- 18% of students say they would turn to a Resident Advisor
- 17% of students say they would turn to a crisis hotline

Overall, students seem reluctant to seek counseling or professional help to deal with their stress or other emotional issues:

- 7 in 10 students say that since starting college they have *never* considered talking to a counselor or mental health professional to help deal with stress or other emotional issues.
- 15% of students report having received support or treatment from a counselor or mental health professional since starting college.

Reaching "crisis mode":

- 34% of students say they have felt depressed at some point in the past 3 months.
- 16% of students say that they have a friend who has talked about wanting to end their life in the past year.
- 13% of students say they have intentionally cut or injured themselves in the past 3 months.
- 13% of students report they have been diagnosed with a mental health condition (like depression, anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder or others).
- 11% of students say they have a friend who made a suicide attempt in the past year.
- 9% of students indicated they themselves have seriously thought about ending their own life in the past year.
 - *Among those who said they have considered suicide in the past year, only half said they have considered talking to a counselor or professional and four in 10 have actually received such help.*
 - *Among those with a diagnosed mental health condition, the numbers rise dramatically, with 23% reporting they have seriously considered suicide (vs. 6% undiagnosed).*

Gender differences:

While female students report higher levels of stress than their male classmates, they are also more likely to be aware of the resources available to them.

- 45% of females say they have *frequently* experienced stress in their daily lives (compared to 34% of males).
- The effect of school-related stressors weigh heavier on females than their male peers.

<i>A Lot of Impact</i>	Female	Male
Grades in School	40%	32%
School Work	43%	30%

Social activities and relationship issues play a greater role in the daily stress experienced by female students:

- 4 in 10 female students say that they have been so stressed in the past three months that they didn't want to hang out with friends or participate in social activities at least once or twice (34% of males).
- 27% of females say that family issues have had "a lot of impact" on the stress they experience in their daily lives (14% of males).
- 21% of females say that relationship/dating issues have had "a lot of impact" on the stress they experience in their daily lives (17% of males).

Females report being more confident they would know where to turn to for help if they were in serious emotional distress or were thinking about hurting themselves ("very sure" 62% females, 51% males). While friends remain the first place most would turn, females are more likely than males to consider professional/campus services.

- 32% of females say that since starting college they have considered talking to a counselor or mental health professional to help deal with stress or emotional issues (19% of males).
- 22% of females say they would turn to "school counseling" for help (17% of males).
- 20% of females say they would turn to "Resident Advisors" for help (16% of males).
- 15% of females report having been diagnosed with a mental health condition (11% males).
- 13% of females say they would turn to "private therapists" for help (8% of males).

Effect of the War in Iraq:

Aside from school related issues, national issues prove to be a source of personal stress for some students:

50% of students say they know someone who has served or is currently serving in Iraq or Afghanistan since October 2001.

Among those that know someone who has served:

- 55% say they experienced some/a lot of stress related to this person's service.
- 66% think it is somewhat/very difficult for service members to adjust back to life in the U.S. when they return from war in Iraq or Afghanistan.
- 57% think the U.S. governments has done a somewhat/very poor job providing veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with the medical and psychological treatment they need

68% of students think the U.S. "made a mistake in going to war with Iraq"