

Minds of SU: Student Mental Health Research Report

A comprehensive research report produced by Syracuse University student teams with Hill Communications and TNH Agency in partnership with Real Chemistry.

September 2021 – December 2021

Key Survey Findings

What we learned from students

Statements:

- * “I feel less focused on my academics as I should be, I don’t confide in many people anymore, I have narrowed down my friend groups significantly.”

- * “I’ve lost a lot of motivation. I’m finding it hard to focus, and I have never been a lazy person until COVID hit.”

- * Increases in mental health awareness

- * “I think I’ve just been more aware of mental health and self-care, even more aware of other people and how they are feeling.”

- * “I feel like I am more mature and I don’t let little things give me as much anxiety.”

- * Changing Attitudes towards Schooling

- * “I think in-person classes and social life on campus has been the driving factor in my personal growth more so than isolated time during quarantine.”

- * “I feel like I’ve become more lazy in what I do”

- * Isolation

- * “I think I was able to find more about myself because I spent a lot of time alone.”

- * “I’ve become more closed off in terms of my emotional state. I don’t really share how I’m truly feeling with others as much as I used to.”

- * Mental Health Methods and Strategies

- * “Journaling”

- * “Taking time for myself”

- * “Enjoying my hobbies”

- * “Reading”

- * “Self care and coping strategies”

- * “Watching my favorite shows or listening to my favorite playlists”

- * Reflections and Changes

- * “I’m much more mature, more in touch with my own emotions and mental state, and much more pragmatic.”

- * “I have become more open minded about everything, and I have been determined to be the best person I can be to not help myself but to help others.”

Statistics and Figures

The numbers behind the knowledge

In our survey of 131 Syracuse students, 71.8% of respondents are white, 21.4% are Asian, 7.6% are Hispanic or Latino, and 3.1% are Black/African American.*

In terms of academic year, 14.62% were first year students, 26.15% were sophomores, 36.15% were juniors, 21.54% were seniors, and 1.54% were graduate students.

Numbers do not add up to 100% because some respondents selected multiple options.

Causes of Stress

* Academics

* 34.4% of students ranked academic pursuits as what causes them the most stress at school.

* School and Personal Life Balance

* 32.8% of students said their greatest stress comes from balancing their school work and personal time.

* Finances

* Only 8.4% of students ranked finances as their greatest cause of stress at school.

Mental Health Perceptions

* 88.5% of students said they agree in some way that the pandemic changed the way they think about their own mental health.

* 52.6% of students said they agree or strongly agree that a stigma or negative perception still exists around mental health.

* 52.7% of students said their mental state declined in some way compared to their life before COVID-19.

* 51.15% of students said they sometimes prioritize their mental health over other obligations such as school, work, and social life.

* 33.59% of students said they rarely prioritize their mental health over other obligations such as school, work, and social life.

On and Off Campus Resources

* 37.8% of students found that talking to friends or family was the most beneficial strategy to handling their mental health struggles.

* 15.9% of students said they did feel supported by Syracuse University's mental health services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

* 43.2% of students said they did not feel supported by Syracuse University's mental health services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

* The Social Landscape

* Preference of Mental Health Content on Social Media

Social Listening

What we learned from social media

1. COVID-19 has had immediate and often detrimental impacts on the mental health status of students.

- * Receiving an education through Zoom is a large source of stress for many, especially those who rely upon the physical academic work environment to remain focused.
- * Aside from the educational aspect, the lack of social interaction with others at school results in feelings of loneliness. Students who rely upon in person schooling for meals and relationships have decreased access to the stability school could previously provide.
- * Students felt uncertainty and unsafe at school based on their perceived lack of transparency from administration regarding COVID-19.

2. Social media is where students turn for help.

- * According to a study published by McKinsey, Gen Zers indicated their first step in managing behavioral-health challenges was going to social platforms like TikTok and Instagram for advice.
- * This reliance on social media may be due, in part, to the provider shortages in many parts of the country: 64 percent of counties in the United States have a shortage of mental-health providers.
- * Digital and free resources like mental health accounts absolves Gen-Zers of the financial burdens of seeking mental health care, both in the short-term and long-term.
- * How-tos, tips and tricks, personal anecdotes and graphic heavy slides are all content compositions that can be utilized to specifically target the college demographic through social media channels.

3. Students of color are disproportionately affected.

- * Historically, POC have had less access to mental health resources, facing increased stigmas and negative attitudes towards mental healthcare from their respective cultural communities.
- * A lack of diverse healthcare professionals of color (school counselors and therapists, psychologists, etc.) provide another barrier to seeking help.
- * This could be addressed by introducing more programs designed specifically to ensure that many POC stories are shared in effort to recognize the difficulties many face.

Success Stories

What are students most proud of accomplishing during the pandemic?

- * Focusing on Mental and Physical Health – many respondents shared their pride in taking time for themselves and their physical and mental wellbeing; examples include increased exercise and taking time to reflect on relationships with others.
- * New Skills – many students took the time at home to explore their interests and find new hobbies.
- * Maintaining Academic and Career Goal Success – many respondents expressed that they were happy with how they maintained or improved their grades; many also mentioned pride in getting internships or other career opportunities.