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THRIVING COLLEGE STUDENTS INDEX REPORT



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Introduction

About the College Student Mental Wellness Advocacy Coalition & Survey

The [College Student Mental Wellness Advocacy Coalition](#) envisions a world where all young adults thrive with the support of residential communities who teams are dedicated to promoting and advocating for mental wellness. Composed of 24 college student residential housing companies across the U.S., the Coalition is committed to better understanding our residents, encouraging open dialogues, and raising public awareness about the importance of mental wellness. Our teams are dedicated to promoting and advocating for mental wellness to facilitate personal fulfillment, academic success, and the realization of each of our resident’s full potential.

For the past two years, the Austin, Texas-based nonprofit Hi, How Are You Project conducted a College Student Fall Mental Wellness Survey to better understand the student experience. The goal? To create customized peer-to-peer training programs that have become guiding tenets for American Campus Communities’ (ACC) Residence Life program. In 2022, ACC and Hi, How Are You Project expanded the effort, which led to the creation of the College Student Mental Wellness Advocacy Coalition. This collaboration brings together the nation’s leading student housing providers to better understand and improve their residents’ mental health and wellness.

This report highlights the findings from the 2022 Thriving College Students Survey, conducted on October 10th (World Mental Health Day) and for several weeks thereafter. The Hi, How Are You Project and the Coalition partnered with [Ipsos](#), a world leader in research, to design and conduct the survey.





College Student Mental Wellness Advocacy Coalition members conducted email outreach to residents resulting in a total of **18,168 currently enrolled college students** taking this survey, making this study one of the **largest of its kind**. They were given the choice to take it in English, French and Spanish. This report is intended to serve as a valuable resource for students and their peers, parents and other family members, universities, and student housing providers to support college students’ mental health and well-being.

College Freshman	1,270 (7%)
College Sophomores	4,879 (27%)
College Juniors	5,399 (30%)
College Seniors (including 5th year)	4,358 (24%)
Graduate Students	2,141 (12%)

**Note: Counts do not sum to total of 18,168 due to some respondents answering “I don’t know” or “No answer”*



2022 Survey Top Line Takeaways

	Most students view their mental health as an important part of their well-being		Thriving students are more likely to feel connected to their residential community than struggling students
	Hosting more social gatherings, trivia nights, game nights, or meetups are ways to help students' well-being		Listening to music, socializing, and watching TV/movies are the top ways students support their mental health

Detailed Findings

What is Thriving?

Alongside questions about mental well-being, behavioral habits, and access to well-being resources, this survey categorized students into three distinct groups:

- Thriving,
- Maintaining, and
- Struggling.

Respondents were asked to rate their current lives on a scale of 0 through 10, where 0 represents the worst possible life and 10 represents the best possible life. Respondents were also asked how they think their lives will rate in the future. Leveraging this time-tested approach based on the Cantril Scale for life evaluation, most respondents fell into one of the three groups based on their responses. (Note, not all students fell into one of the three subgroups. Rather, they are included in the total respondent/student population group throughout the report.)

- **Thriving students** rated their current life as 7 and higher and their future life as 8 and higher.
- **Maintaining students** occupy the in-between, rating their current life between 5 to 6 and their future life between 5 and 7.
- **Struggling students** rated their current life 4 and below and their future life 4 and below.

Students who fall in the **Thriving** category are living their best lives and see the future as even brighter. Conversely, students who fall into the **Struggling** category don't have a very good opinion about the current state of their life, and they aren't optimistic that this is going to change. Those students that fall in the **Maintaining** category are uncertain. They think their current life could be better, but they may not see a path to thrive in the future or are uncertain about how to improve their current reality.

This *Thriving College Student Index* allows us to better understand the students that are Thriving and take a closer look at their habits, behaviors, relationships, and connection to their housing communities. By further understanding Thriving students, we can dig deeper into the behaviors of those students in the Maintaining and Struggling categories to identify potential opportunities that can help foster positive environments and relationships. Throughout the report, the results from Thriving, Maintaining, and Struggling students are compared to the overall student respondent base to contribute to the understanding of the various groups and how we may be able to help.



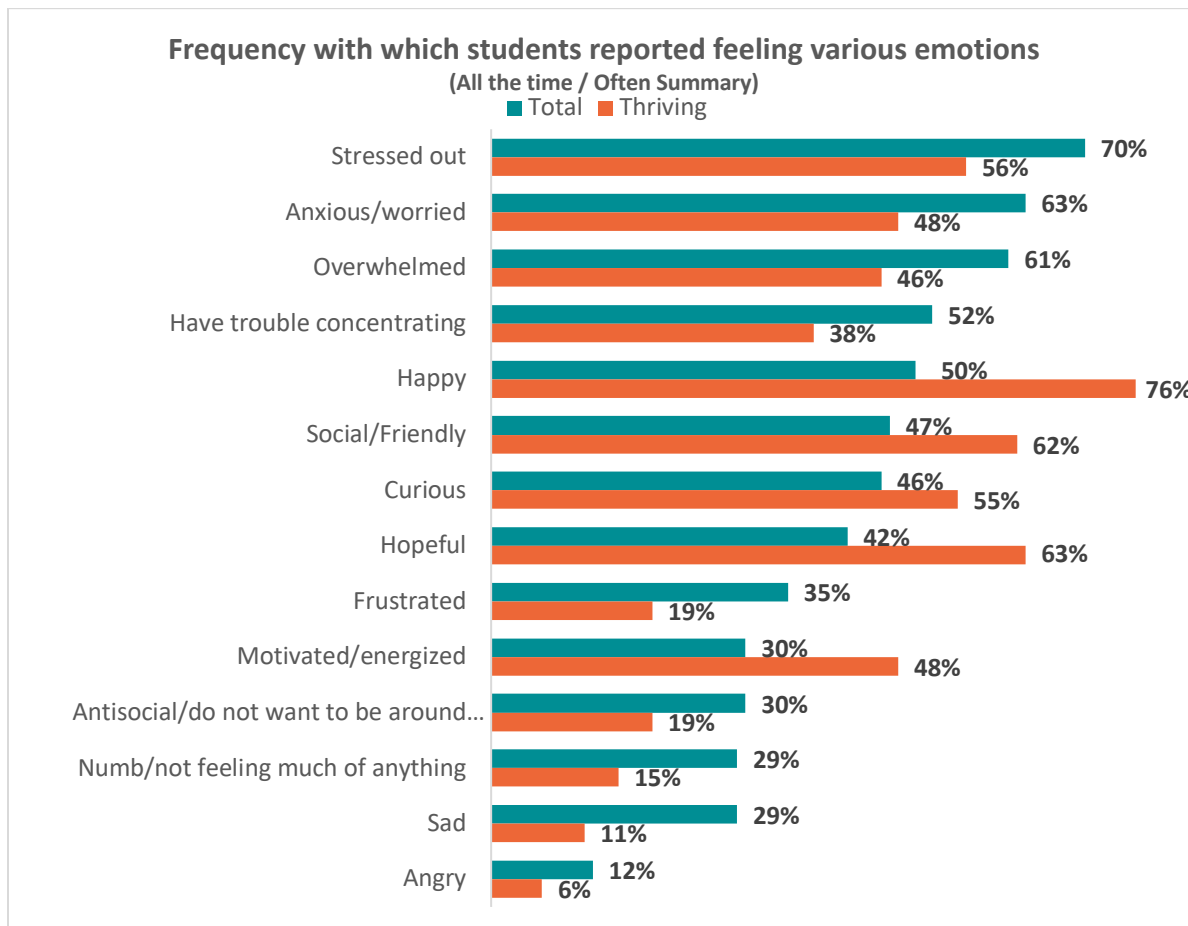
How do students in each category compare to each other?

Out of the 18,168 students who responded to the survey,

- **39%** fell into the **Thriving category**, meaning they rated their current lives as a 7 or above and their anticipated future lives as an 8 or above.
- A far smaller number of the overall sample were classified as **Maintaining (13%)** or **Struggling (3%)**.

The **44% of students who did not fall into any of these categories** are considered a part of the “overall respondent/student” population. These students answered the current and future questions on opposite extremes. For example, a current life rating of 2 out of 10 and a future life rating of 9 out of 10. We include these students in figures for the overall population, but they are not included in one of the three defined categories.

The generally positive outlook a Thriving student has on their current and future life is reflected in their survey answers: **Thriving students were far more likely to report feeling generally positive emotions compared to the overall college student.** In the chart below, which is sorted by total respondents, the differences in groups are clear.



B4. How often, if at all, would you say that you feel each of the emotions listed below? % “All the time” or “Often”



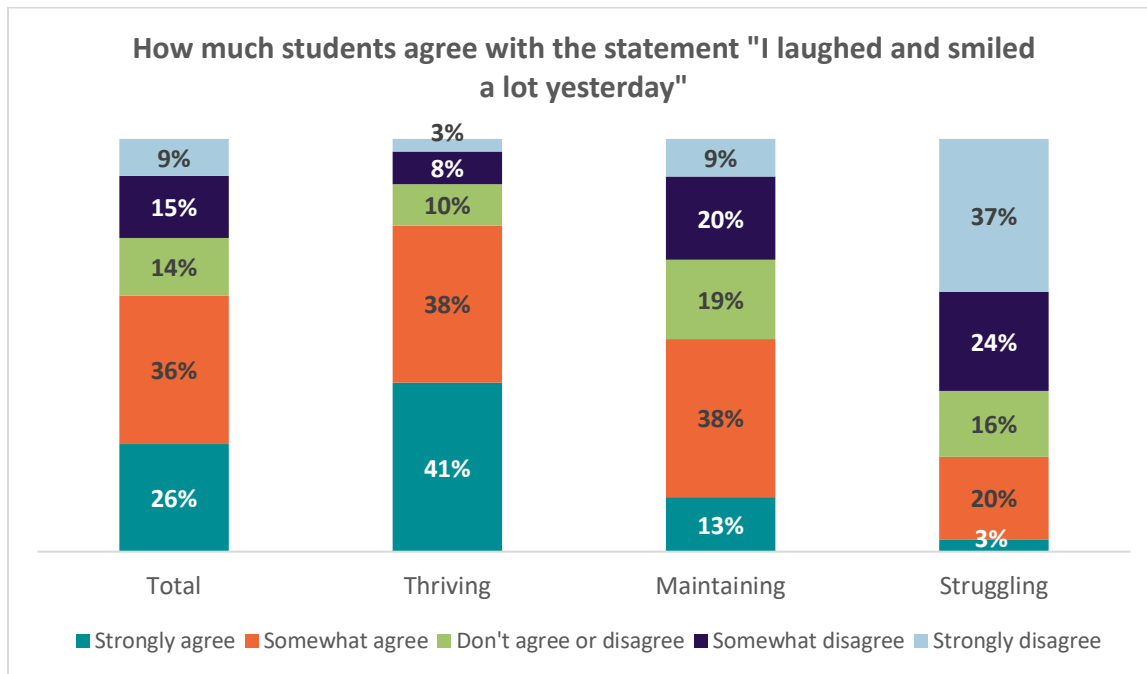
When asked how they are feeling “All the time” or “Often”, the top emotions students chose from the list above are negative, as they report feeling:

- Stressed out (70%),
- Anxious/worried (63%),
- Overwhelmed (61%),
- And that they have trouble concentrating (52%).

Maintaining and Struggling students mirror the overall college student, with more negative emotions taking the lead, while Thriving students more frequently reported positive emotions.

Thriving students reported feeling **happy** (76%) all the time or often, which is higher than other emotions. This was followed by **hopeful** (63%), **social/friendly** (62%), and **curious** (55%). The tendency of Thriving students to report that they were feeling more positive emotions all the time or often is much greater than that of the Maintaining or Struggling students.

This was further conveyed when students were asked whether they laughed and smiled a lot on the previous day. **Eight of 10 Thriving students agreed they laughed and smiled the day before they took the survey (80%), while only 62% of students overall felt the same.** Evaluating this from a student group level leads to even more contrasting results among the categories:



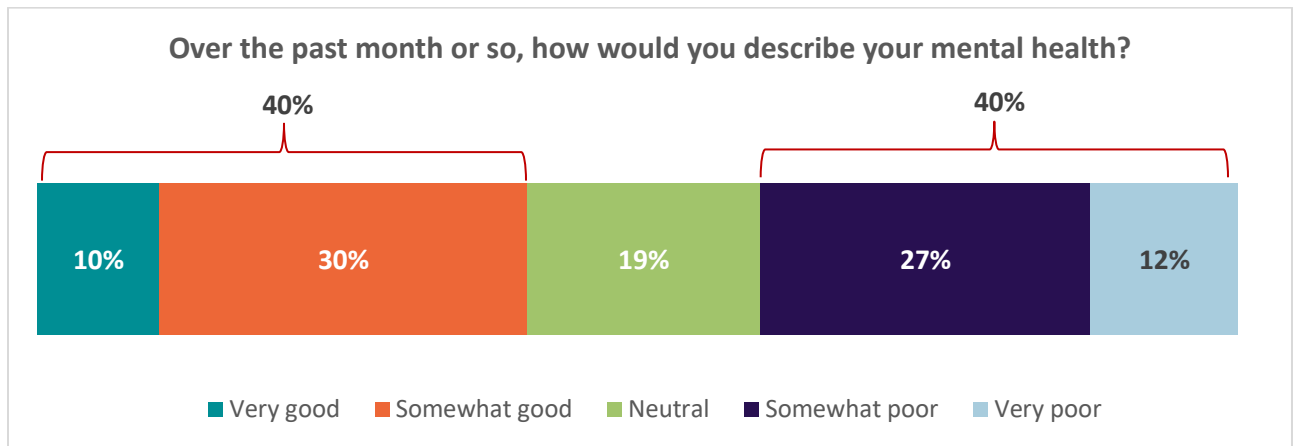
B7. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? -I laughed and smiled a lot yesterday

Struggling students were considerably less likely to say they “laughed and smiled a lot yesterday.” Maintaining students were much more likely to fall in the middle ground in their answers, with nearly two-fifths (38%) stating that they somewhat agree. Interestingly, the same percentage of Thriving students felt this way, and the overall student is just slightly behind (36%).



How do students view their own mental health?

When asked how students would describe their mental health over the past month from “Very good” to “Very poor,” there was an even split among students overall who reported very or somewhat good (40%) and very or somewhat poor (40%). Categorizing students as Thriving, Maintaining, or Struggling is based on a self-reported assessment of a student’s current and future life. However, this question asks specifically about students’ state of mental health over the past month. **By asking this question, we were able to capture a “real-time” assessment of how students feel about their mental health.**



B6. Over the past month or so, how would you describe your mental health?

The general student population was nearly identical on both sides of the scale when reporting their mental health in the past month:

- Around **one-tenth** felt **strongly positive (10%)** or **strongly negative (12%)** about their mental health in the past month.
- Over **a quarter** felt **somewhat positive (30%)** or **somewhat negative (27%)** about their mental health in the past month.
- **A fifth (19%)** did **not feel pulled one way or the other.**

There is an **opportunity to have an impact** on the population who did not strongly feel one way or the other by **fostering positive environments and promoting habits known to contribute to healthy mental wellbeing.**

Diving into the student subgroups reveals different results. Thriving students were far more likely to report that their mental health has been good in the past month (68%) compared to Maintaining (20%) and Struggling (5%) students. However, significantly more Maintaining students (28%) than Thriving (17%) and Struggling (7%) students reported that their mental health has been neutral in the past month.

What do students do to support their mental health?

Professional Help and Resources

When asked “*I do not need mental health treatment or help right now,*” only 37% of the overall student population agreed, with 43% disagreeing.



When looking at this by categories:

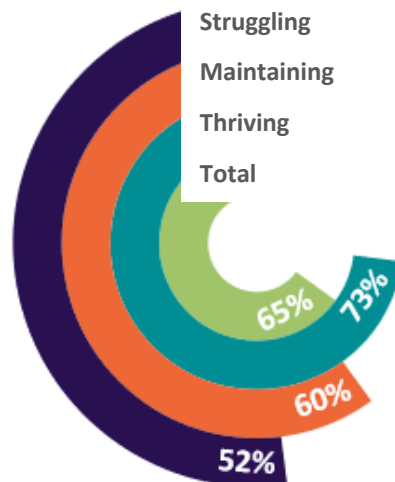
- **Struggling** students were the most likely to **disagree (68%)**, while about half of **Maintaining** students **disagreed (51%)**.
- More than half of **Thriving** students (52%) agreed with the statement, and **28% disagreed**.

*Note, “treatment or help” was not defined for those taking the survey.

One obstacle standing in the way of students receiving help is the ability to find it. **Most students (71%) agreed they could find professional help** if they needed it, but fewer (**53%**) think they would be able to **find a therapist or counselor that understands their personal background and experiences**. This suggests students may be dissuaded from seeking help because they don’t feel they would find mental health professionals that would understand them personally. Furthermore, findings suggest that with the reduction of the social stigma surrounding the open discussion of mental health, students may be more apt to find the appropriate mental health resources or professionals.

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of students **said they have searched for information on how to improve their mental health**. Maintaining students (69%) were significantly more likely to have searched than Thriving students (62%). Although searching is important, one critical area where Thriving students do better than the rest is finding free information about mental health, as illustrated in the chart below.

Knows where to find free information on mental health
(Strongly agree/Agree summary)



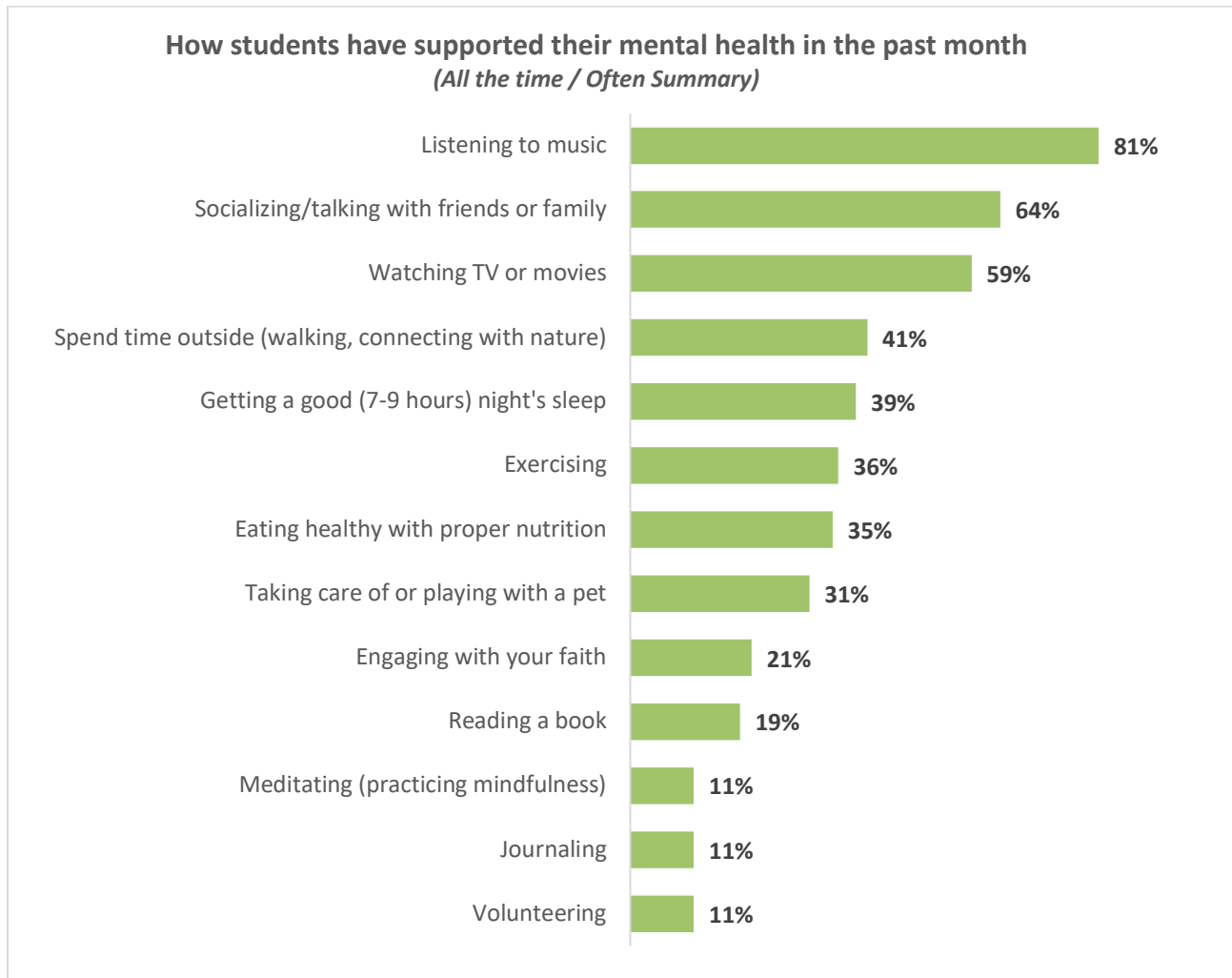
B7. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? - I know where to find free information about mental health. % “Strongly Agree” or “Somewhat Agree”

Thriving students (73%) were significantly more likely than both Maintaining (60%) and Struggling (52%) students to report that they knew where to find free information on mental health. **Connecting students to accessible mental health information may be an effective approach in helping them find needed resources.**



Self Help and Social Support

To better understand “self-help” behaviors, we asked students which activities they have done in the past month to support their mental health. In certain cases, third-party support is important; however, there are many activities that students use regularly to support their mental health.

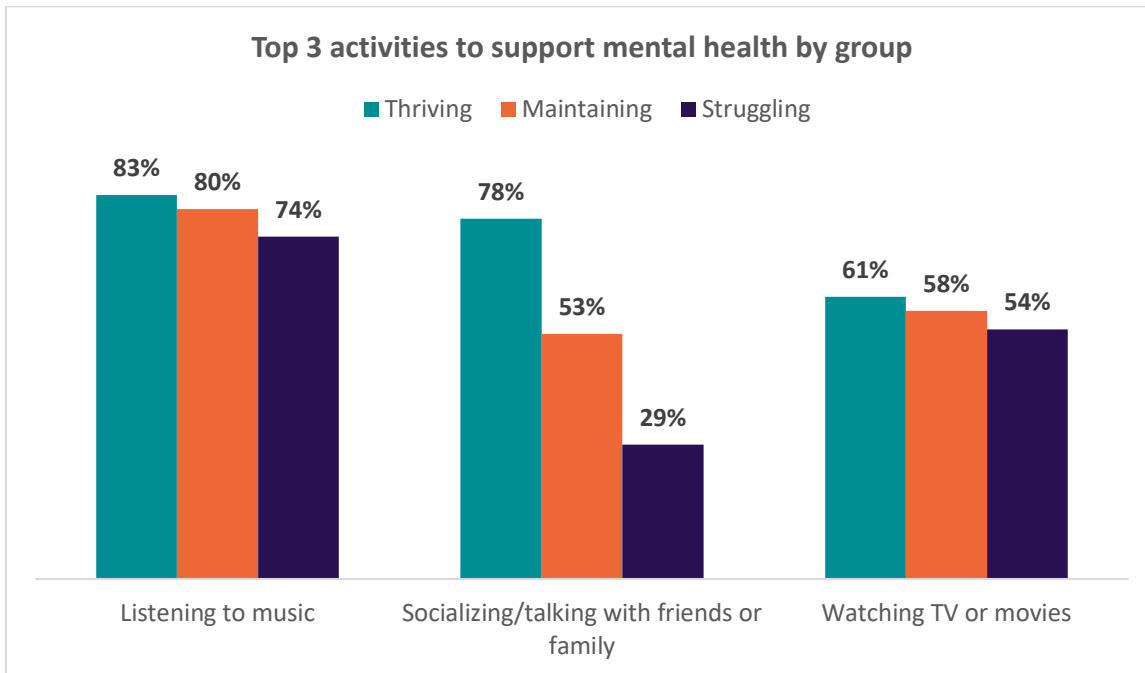


B11.

Please indicate the amount of time you have spent doing the following activities during the past month to support your mental health. % “All the time” or “Often”



Listening to music was by far the most popular activity students report doing to support their mental health, topping other activities by 15 percentage points. Music was the first choice among Thriving, Maintaining, and Struggling students, although at different intensities among those groups. Socializing ranked second to listening to music. Notably, there was a large disparity between Thriving and Struggling students when it comes to socializing.



B11. Please indicate the amount of time you have spent doing the following activities during the past month to support your mental health. % “All the time” or “Often”

Thriving students were considerably more likely to report socializing or talking with friends and family to support their health than Maintaining or Struggling students. This disparity is greater than the variation between other popular activities, like listening to music or watching TV or movies.

“There is a positive link between strong social connections, personal relationships, and mental wellness. The data reveals that Maintaining and/or Struggling students are far less likely to list socializing with friends or family as something they have done all the time or often in the past month.”

– Dr. Sonia Krishna, Board of Directors, Hi, How Are You Project

Listening to music or watching TV is easy, on demand, and requires little individual effort. However, socializing and talking with friends requires interaction, reciprocation, engagement, and in certain circumstances, planning. We believe there is an opportunity here for those interested in promoting good mental health to facilitate positive social interactions.

These results suggest that facilitating and executing social events around music might be a sweet spot in leveraging an activity of high interest to promote social interaction. These types of events can bring together students across all categories with the common foundation of music and facilitate the social interactions that are so important to good mental health.

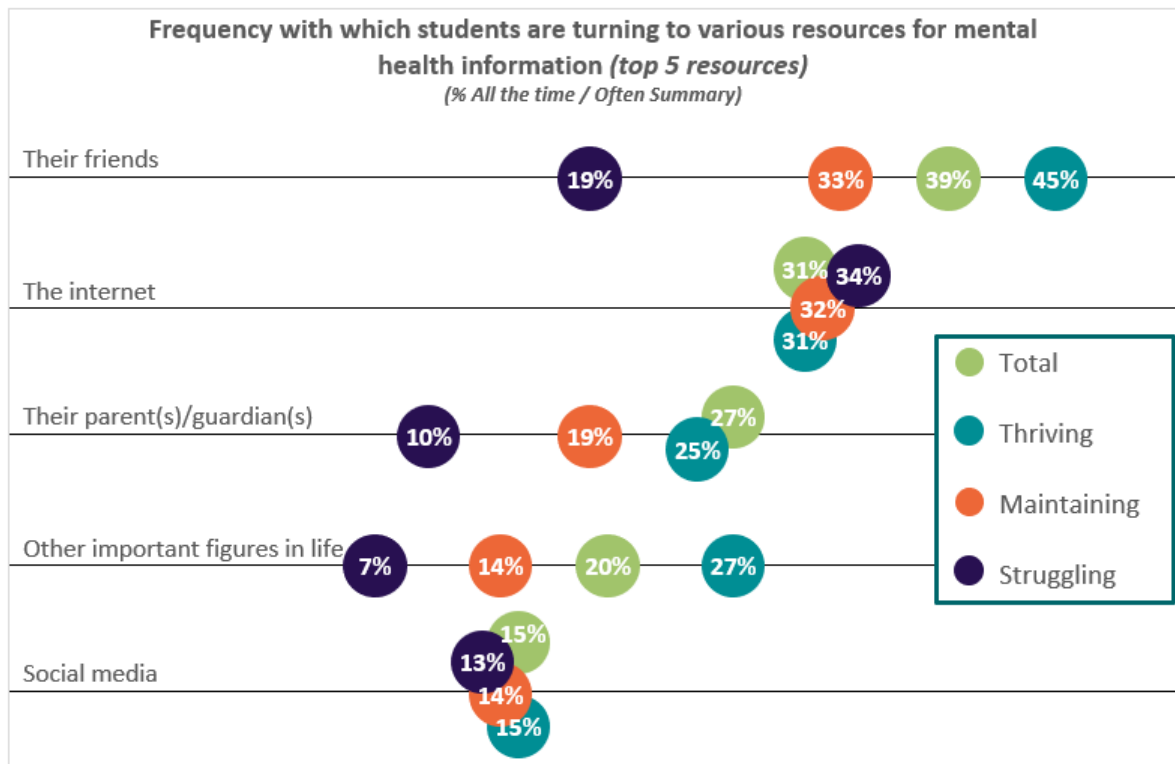


It is worth noting that negative stigma around discussing mental health was highly correlated with poor mental health. People with the best mental health have strong support networks and feel less stigma around talking about mental health. Students with poor mental health were most likely to fear they will be judged if they talk about mental health (59% vs. 35% of students with good mental health).

As illustrated above, talking to others about mental health can be challenging, yet nearly seven in 10 (67%) students agreed that they feel comfortable talking about mental health with those closest to them. Mirroring the above finding regarding socializing with friends or family to support their mental health, this comfort level varies drastically among the index groups:

- **Thriving** students (78%) were **20 percentage points more likely** than **Maintaining** students (58%) to **agree they feel comfortable discussing mental health with those closest to them.**
- Just over a third of **Struggling** students (37%) felt the same way.

Despite the variations between groups in comfort levels talking to those closest to them about mental health, over **nine in 10 students (92%) viewed mental health as an important component of their overall health and well-being.** Students, especially those Maintaining or Struggling, might be less comfortable talking to others about their mental health, but they still recognize the value of mental health regarding their overall well-being. Thriving students (94%) were slightly more likely than Maintaining (91%) to feel this way, yet both mentioned index groups were significantly more likely than Struggling students (82%) to view their mental health as important to overall health and well-being. The chart below shows the top five resources students are turning to most frequently:



B8. How often, if at all, do you go to the following sources for information about mental health? % “All the time” or “Often”

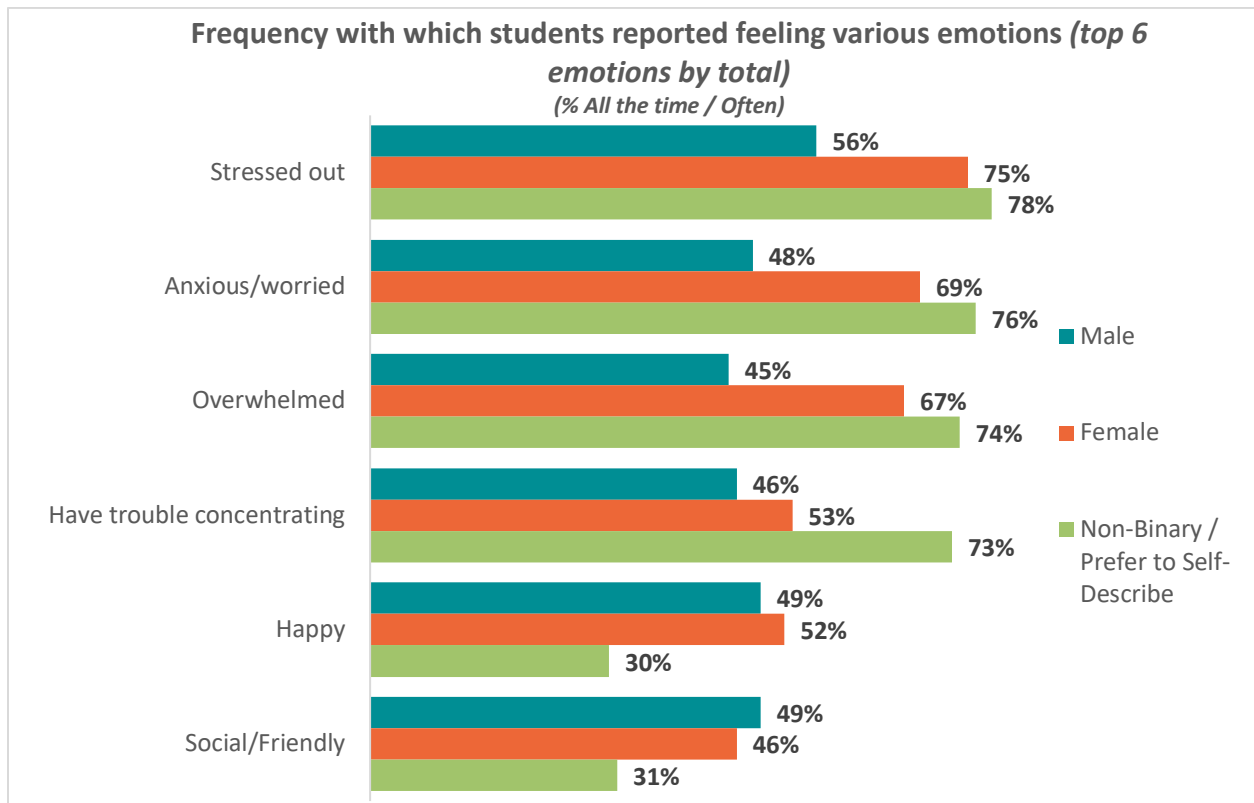


Although friends were reported most frequently as the top resource, still less than half (45%) of Thriving students reported turning to friends all the time or often for information. This resource was also the most varied among groups, with only 19% of Struggling students reporting turning to their friends.

Gender disparities between students' outlook on mental health and wellbeing

When diving deeper into gender differences it was clear that overall, **females were more optimistic about their futures**. However, they were also more likely, along with those who identify as non-binary or prefer to self-describe, to report lower feelings about life currently; this outlook on current life left more males (42%) in the Thriving group than females (39%) and those who identify as non-binary or prefer to self-describe (23%).

Males (47%) were more likely than females (38%) and those who identify as non-binary or prefer to self-describe (25%) to report that their mental health had been very or somewhat good in the past month. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that males are more positive. When asked what words or phrases best described how they felt on the day they took the survey, **all students reported negative emotions most often**. However, the frequency with which males reported feeling these emotions all the time or often was lower than that of females and those who identify as non-binary or prefer to self-describe.



B4: How often, if at all, would you say that you feel each of the emotions listed below? % "All the time" or "Often"



Findings also indicated that **males** might be **less comfortable talking to others regularly about mental health**:

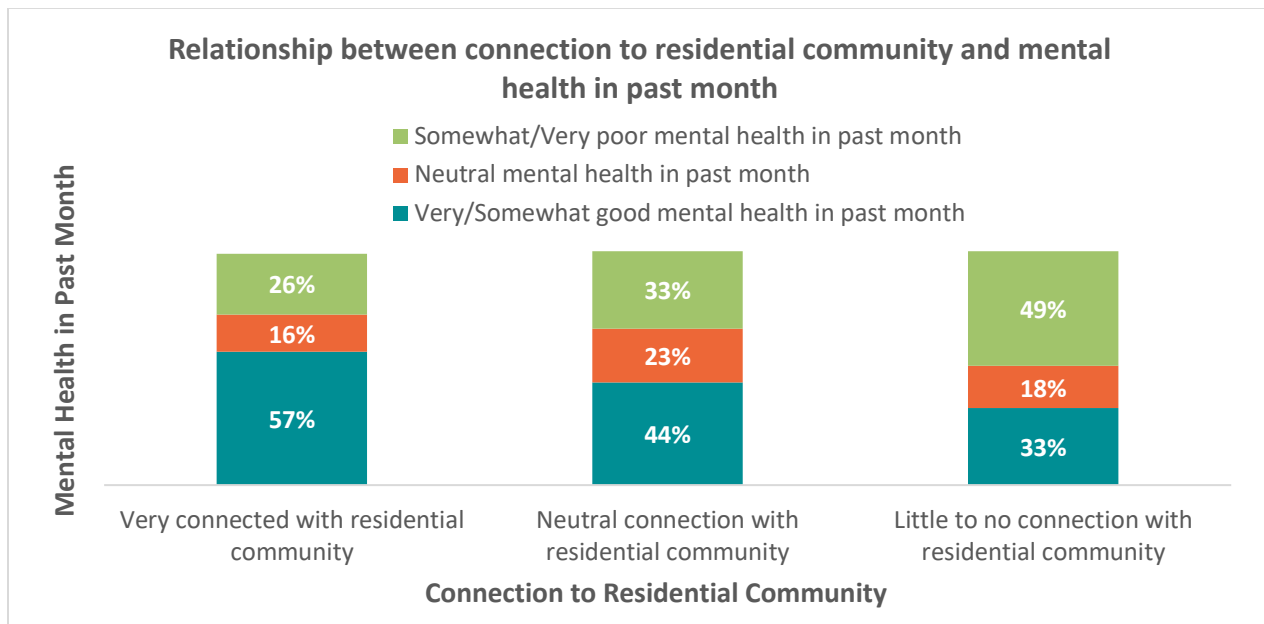
- Females (**60%**) and those who identify as non-binary or prefer to self-describe (**68%**) were more likely than males (**38%**) to report talking with their friends.
- Females (**15%**) and those who identify as non-binary or prefer to self-describe (**17%**) were more likely than males (**11%**) to report talking with their doctor.

This could suggest that the societal stigma associated with discussing mental health manifests more strongly in males, making them more hesitant to discuss their own mental health issues.

Strong relationships between students and their residential communities may help overall wellbeing

The data shows that **Thriving** students (21%) were **more likely to feel connected to their residential community than were Maintaining** (10%) and **Struggling** (6%) students. Students that reported feeling very connected to their residential community were the most likely to laugh and smile a lot (76%), feel comfortable talking about their mental health (77%), and feel that they have access to mental health resources (74%).

A strong relationship between students and their residential community may also correlate with students' positive outlook. Students who felt very connected (57%) or a neutral connection (44%) to their residential community were significantly more likely to feel very or somewhat good about their mental well-being, compared to those who report feeling little to no connection (33%).



B6. Over the past month or so, how would you describe your mental health?

B12. How would you describe your personal connection to your residential community?

Struggling students (46%) were over two times more likely to believe that their residential community is not able to help support their mental well-being compared to Thriving students (22%).



“This study supports a common perception that mentally healthy individuals have strong and positive relationships in their lives. The data reinforces that those relationships are not limited to friends and family and even extend to an individual’s relationship with their residential communities. Being part of a community and facilitating the growth of positive social interactions and relationships among student residents may contribute positively to the mental health and well-being for all.”
–Jennifer Cassidy, on behalf of the College Student Mental Wellness Advocacy Coalition

Among students who believed that their residential community could support their well-being, the most popular option was to simply **host more social events and activities, like social gatherings, trivia nights, games, and meet-ups**. Mental health and wellness events were less popular (17%) but still represent one option for residential communities. Below are some common terms drawn from the data on how community builders can support mental wellbeing.



B13.1. You answered that “Yes” your residential community can support your mental wellbeing. What types of things can your residential community do to support your mental health and wellbeing?



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Conclusion

The mental health and well-being of all people is a topic of current focus across the country and around the globe. Now, more than ever before, society, organizations, governments, and individuals are all taking steps to better understand and improve mental health. This inaugural look at college student mental health through the lens of the Thriving College Student Index aims to provide better understanding, clarity, and actionable insights that can be used to foster good mental health. The research and methodology are purposefully designed to be repeatable and future administrations will continue to build on and leverage this knowledgebase. The College Student Mental Wellness Advocacy Coalition is passionate about helping students improve their mental well-being and removing the stigma from openly discussing mental health.

About Ipsos

Ipsos is one of the largest market research and polling companies globally, operating in 90 markets and employing over 18,000 people.

Our passionately curious research professionals, analysts and scientists have built unique multi-specialist capabilities that provide true understanding and powerful insights into the actions, opinions and motivations of citizens, consumers, patients, customers, or employees. Our 75 solutions are based on primary data from our surveys, social media monitoring, and qualitative or observational techniques.

Our tagline "Game Changers" sums up our ambition to help our 5,000 customers move confidently through a rapidly changing world.

Founded in France in 1975, Ipsos has been listed on the Euronext Paris since July 1, 1999. The company is part of the SBF 120 and Mid-60 indices and is eligible for the Deferred Settlement Service (SRD). ISIN code FR0000073298, Reuters ISOS.PA, Bloomberg IPS:FP www.ipsos.com.