

Post-COVID Mental Health Coping Strategies for Southern California Undergraduate Students

Vanessa Aguayo, Karen Austria, Dillon Gamette, Shelly Huang



Background

- ❖ "1 in 5 Americans will experience a mental illness"¹
- ❖ During 2020 to 2021 school year, 60% of college students in the United States suffered from at least one mental health problem²
- ❖ Since the pandemic, there has been a 39% increase in depression and 36% increase in anxiety³
- ❖ Successful and common coping strategies for mental health are exercising, meditation and being present⁴
- ❖ **Coping mechanisms** - "the strategies people often use in the face of stress and/or trauma to help manage painful or difficult emotions"⁵

Objectives

- ❖ To determine the most common coping mechanism for mental health practiced among Southern California college students post-pandemic
- ❖ To explore whether meditation and mindfulness would be the most common coping strategy among undergraduate students

Methods

- ❖ Cross sectional study conducted from April 2023 until May 2023 (n = 103 participants)
- ❖ Survey distributed to Southern California undergraduate college students (Between the Santa Barbara and San Diego region), ages 18-25, via social media (i.e. LinkedIn/Reddit/Instagram), QR code flyers, and word-of-mouth
- ❖ The study determined how exposure to mental health complications influences the outcome of college students' coping management and utilization of mental health resources
- ❖ Survey Questionnaire was broken into three sections:
 - Personal demographic questions
 - Student's perceptions and beliefs of how students at their campus manage their mental health
 - Beliefs regarding the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on student's mental health

Abstract



References

1. About Mental Health. (2021, June). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved January 26, 2023, from <https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.htm>
2. Abrams, Zara. "Student mental health is in crisis. Campuses are rethinking their approach." *American Psychological Association*, 1 October 2022. <https://www.apa.org/instant/2022/10/mental-health-campus-care>
3. Liu, C., Prudek-Amaker, S., Hyslop, H., & Chen, J. (2022). Priorities for addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on college student mental health. *Journal of American College Health*, 70(5), 1016-1038. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2020.1803862>
4. Pombo, E. Self-Help Techniques for Coping with Mental Illness | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness. *Nami.org*. Published February 1, 2019. <https://www.nami.org/About-NAMI/What-Is-Mental-Illness/Self-Help-Techniques-for-Coping-with-Mental-Illness>
5. GoodTherapy. (2018, September 26). Coping Mechanisms. *GoodTherapy.org Therapy Blog*. <https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/psychpedia/coping-mechanisms>

Commonality of Self-Care Practices Among Southern California Undergraduates

Figure 1:

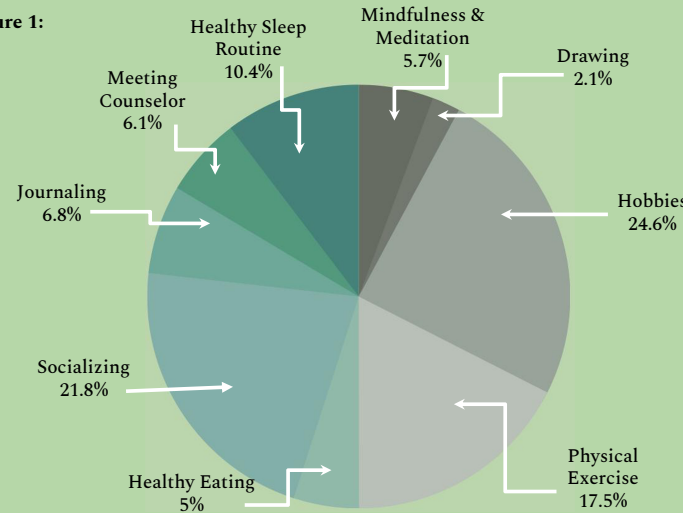
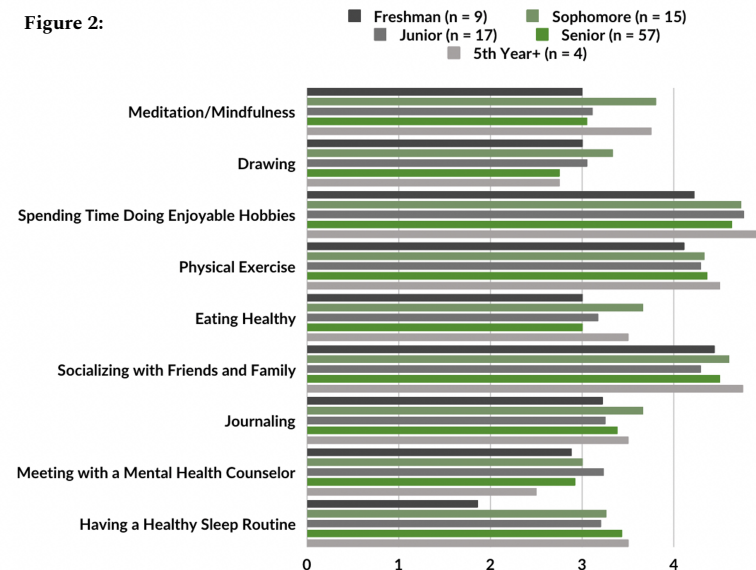


Figure 1: Shows the percentage of respondents who answered 5 on a scale of 1-5, how common they believe each coping mechanism is utilized to manage mental health.

Figure 2: Breakdown of the popularity of each mental health coping mechanism by academic year.

Standardized Commonality of Mental Health Coping Mechanisms by Academic Year

Figure 2:



Overall Results (standardized average scores)

1. Spending Time Doing Enjoyable Hobbies (4.64 / 5)
2. Socializing with Friends and Family (4.49 / 5)
3. Physical Exercise (4.33 / 5)
4. Journaling (3.40 / 5)
5. Having a Healthy Sleep Routine (3.27 / 5)
6. Mindfulness and/or Meditation (3.17 / 5)
7. Eating Healthy (3.14 / 5)
8. Meeting with a Mental Health Counselor (2.95 / 5)
9. Drawing (2.89 / 5)

Policy Implications

- ❖ Schools can provide additional resources by sending recurring emails that inform students of new hobbies and activities to cultivate outlets for students to manage mental health
 - Ex. of extracurricular activities provided by colleges: Intramural sports, recreational classes, clubs, etc.

Study Limitations

- ❖ Limitations of this study include:
 - Uneven distribution of participants by school year within respondents (55.3% of respondents: Seniors)
 - Uneven distribution of participants by school attendance (70.8% of respondents: UCSD students)

Conclusion

- ❖ Findings suggests that "spending time doing enjoyable hobbies" is thought of as the **most** common coping mechanism to manage mental health among students
- ❖ "Drawing" was found to be the **least** common coping mechanism to manage mental health among students
- ❖ Further analysis by academic year revealed that "meeting with a mental health counselor" was found to be **less** effective among Freshmen and Sophomores than Juniors and Seniors
- ❖ Meditation and Mindfulness was found to be **most** common among sophomores