# UC San Diego

Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science

# **Paycheck to Panic: The Relationship Between Financial Literacy** and Stress Among UC San Diego Undergraduate Students

#### • (\$ •

# Background

- Financial stress refers to anxiety or worry resulting from financial or economic challenges<sup>1</sup>
- Financial stress is linked to mental health issues like depression and anxiety<sup>2</sup>
- In 2024, **75%** of US students experienced **moderate** to high financial distress<sup>2</sup>
- A study found financial literacy rates were lower among: 26% female, 24% minority, and 33% first-generation college students<sup>3</sup>
- Inadequate financial literacy and resources may lead to **debt, financial insecurity**, and ongoing **stress**<sup>2</sup>
- While financial literacy has been studied broadly, there is limited research on U.S. college students in the past 10 years

# Objective

To examine the relationship between receiving **financial** literacy courses and financial stress among undergraduate students at UC San Diego

# 

#### Methods

- Cross-sectional study conducted among undergraduate UCSD students (**N=75**)
- Convenience sampling through social media (Snapchat and Instagram) and outreach to professors
- Anonymous 33-item Qualtrics survey was distributed (from **April 2025** to **May 2025**)
- Exposure: financial education accessibility • Financial literacy course taken status and evaluation of individual's financial knowledge
- Outcome: frequency of financial stress during financial decisions based on one likert scale item:
- $\circ$  1= Never
- $\circ$  2 = Rarely
- $\circ$  3 = Sometimes
- $\circ$  4 = Often
- $\circ$  5 = Always
- SPSS v29 used to conduct Chi-Square test, Independent Sample t-test and ANOVA

# Isabel Flores, Stella Neuschul, Melissa Barajas

UC San Diego Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science

Results				
Characteristics	n (%)	Literacy Course Receipt		
Gender		Receipt Financial Literacy Course n Mean (SD) p-valu		
Female	42 (56)	Yes 9 3.00 (1.22)		
Male	33 (42)	0.66		
Race/Ethnicity		No 66 2.82 (1.01)		
White or Caucasian	42 (56)	An independent samples t-test was conducted indicating		
Asian	24 (32)	there is no statistical significance among those who took a		
Hispanic or Latino	15 (20)	financial literacy course and those who did not		
Black or African American	3 (4)	(t-statistic=0.50, p=0.66)		
Middle Eastern or North African	3 (4)			
Age		Table 3. Average Stress Level by Race/Ethnicity Ranked		
Mean (standard deviation)	20 (1)	Highest to Lowest		
Class level		Race/Ethnicity Average Financial Stress		
First-year (Freshman)	6 (8)	Bi-racial (Hispanic/Latinx and 325		
Second-year (Sophomore)	16 (21)	White/Caucasian)		
Third-year (Junior)	23 (31)	Hispanic/Latinx 3.20		
Fourth-year and up (Senior)	30 (40)	Tri-racial (Asian, Hispanic/Latinx, 3.00		
First-generation college student	25 (33)	White/Caucasian)		
Transfer students	9 (12)	Middle Eastern/North African 3.00		
Employment status		White or Caucasian 2.84		
Unemployed	40 (53)	Asian 2.72		
Part-time employment	34 (45)	Black/African American 2.33		
Full-time employment	1 (1)	Bi-racial (Asian, White/Caucasian) 2.20		
College education funding		Bi-racial (Middle eastern/North 2.00		
Parental support	56 (75)	African, White/Caucasian)		
Scholarships/Grants	34 (45)	A one-way ANOVA revealed no statistically significant		
Federal/Private student loans	19 (25)	association between race/ethnicity and financial stress (F-statistic=0.80, p=0.61)		
Personal savings	19 (25)			
Part-time/Full-time employment	15 (20)			
Average financial stress scale	2.81	Figure 1. Average Financial Stress Level by Financial Literacy Employment First-Generation and Transfer		

#### Table 4. Association by College Education Funding and **Employment Status**

Financial Stress	Chi Square Statistic	p-value
College education funding	114.87	0.01
Employment status	19.87	0.01

Chi square test revealed a statistically significant association between financial stress and college education funding (p=0.01) and employment status (p=0.01)

Additional results: A chi-square test revealed there is no statistically significant association between

socio-demographic variables and financial literacy

# **9**0.5 Ave

Φ

SS

S

Fin

Based on a one-way **ANOVA**, the only statistically significant difference in financial stress level was among first-generation status (F-statistic=6, p=0.017)



# \$=



feedback.







## Conclusions

• Participants who completed a financial literacy course exhibited slightly higher average stress levels than non-participants, although not statistically significant • Slightly higher stress levels among course participants may be due to increased financial awareness

• No significant differences in financial literacy were found across socio-demographic variables • Contradicts existing literature that finds lower financial literacy among certain groups, this may be due to the small sample size and convenience sampling

• This study shows there is evidence of a relationship between financial stress and college education funding, employment status, and first-generation students

 Findings support prior research linking financial stress to worries about repaying education funding and working longer hours to cover living costs

• Future research should incorporate a timeline to measure stress levels before and after taking a financial literacy courses

 Analyzing the specific content of the course may help understand its impact on financial stress

### Acknowledgments

This study was managed through the Bachelors of Science in Public Health at UCSD. We would like to thank our capstone Professor France Nguyen-Grozavu and teaching assistant Luan Nguyen for their help and

# **Policy Implications**

• Incorporate financial literacy courses into the UCSD general education curriculum with collaboration from the financial aid office

• More comprehensive interventions may be necessary to achieve meaningful stress relief among first-generation students and Hispanic and Caucasian ethnic groups

### References



