

# Stress Levels And Disordered Eating (SLADE) Among University Students

Malak Alazzawi, Oluwakemi Ayeni, Vivian Chou, Kelly Nguyen  
University of California San Diego, BS in Public Health

## BACKGROUND

- Disordered eating: eating when bored or altering food intake, feeling repulsed to eat a certain food<sup>1</sup>
- Disordered eating leads to eating disorders (ED), affecting 708 million individuals<sup>2</sup> and have doubled in percentages since the early 2000s<sup>3</sup>
- College is a life stressor academically and financially that increases students' anxiety levels
- ED and mental health issues co-occur and are highly comorbid with up to 83% of those with ED<sup>4</sup>
- Studies say that individuals with ED have significantly higher risk for anxiety disorders<sup>5</sup>
- Current knowledge indicates there is a positive association between ED and anxiety levels among university students<sup>6</sup>

## OBJECTIVE

To determine how stress is associated with disordered eating levels among university students in the U.S.

## METHODS

- A cross-sectional mixed methods study was conducted among university students across the U.S. (N=116)
- In April 2022 to May 2022, an anonymous 13-question online survey was distributed to students through various student-run social media platforms (Facebook, Reddit, and Discord).
- The survey assessed students' stress levels, diet, and disordered eating.
- Pearson Chi-Square Test was conducted via ANOVA.

## RESULTS

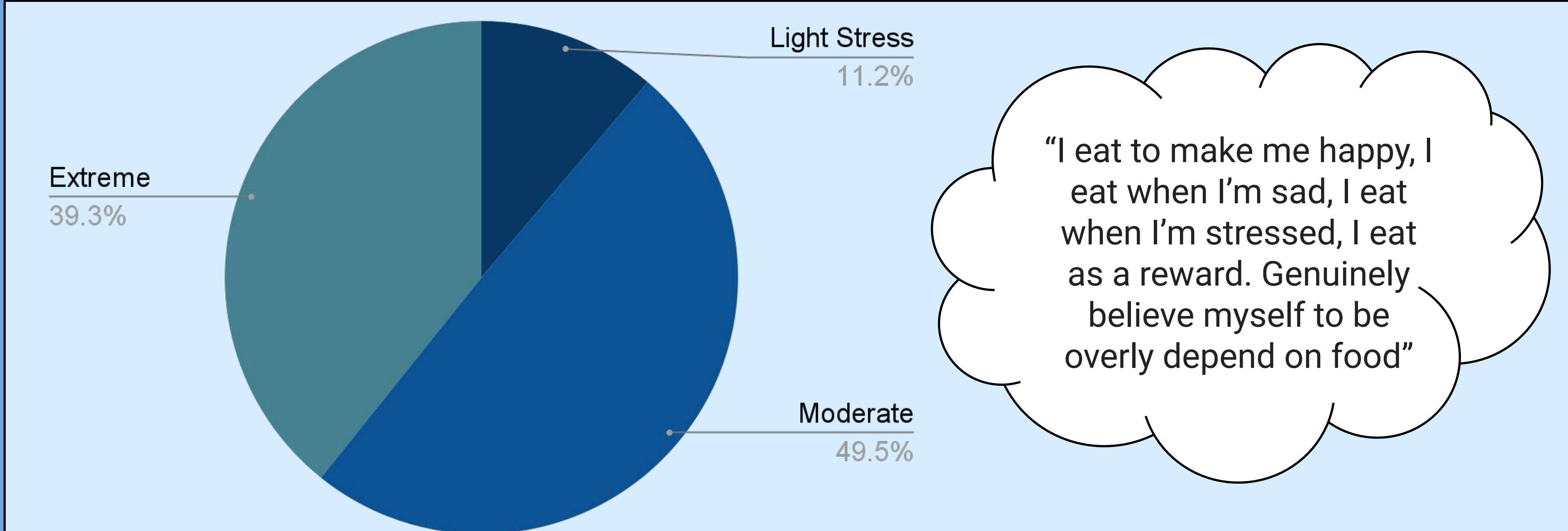
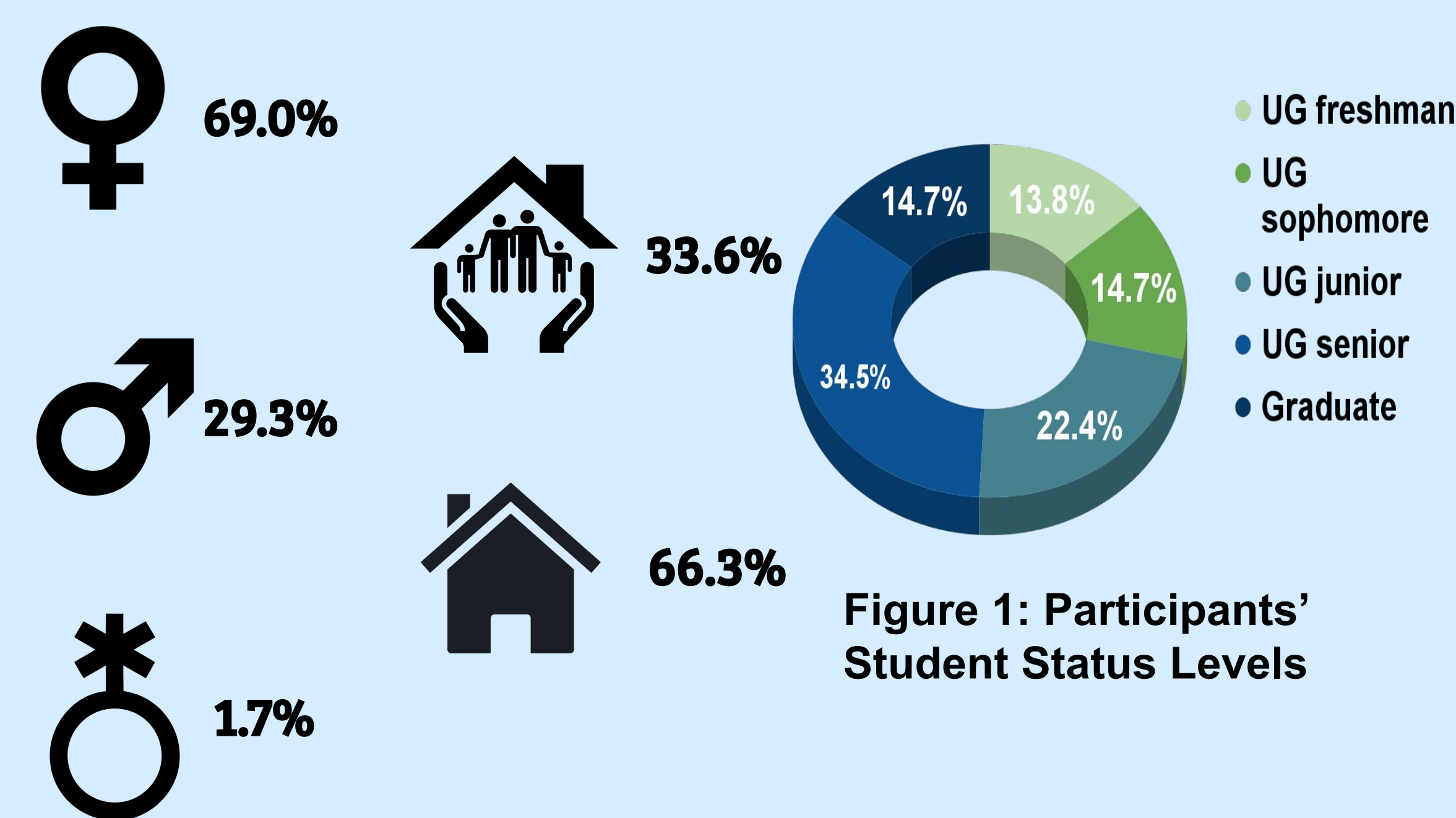


Figure 2: Analysis of Self-Reported Stress Levels Among University Students  
88.8% reported to experience moderate or extreme stress levels.

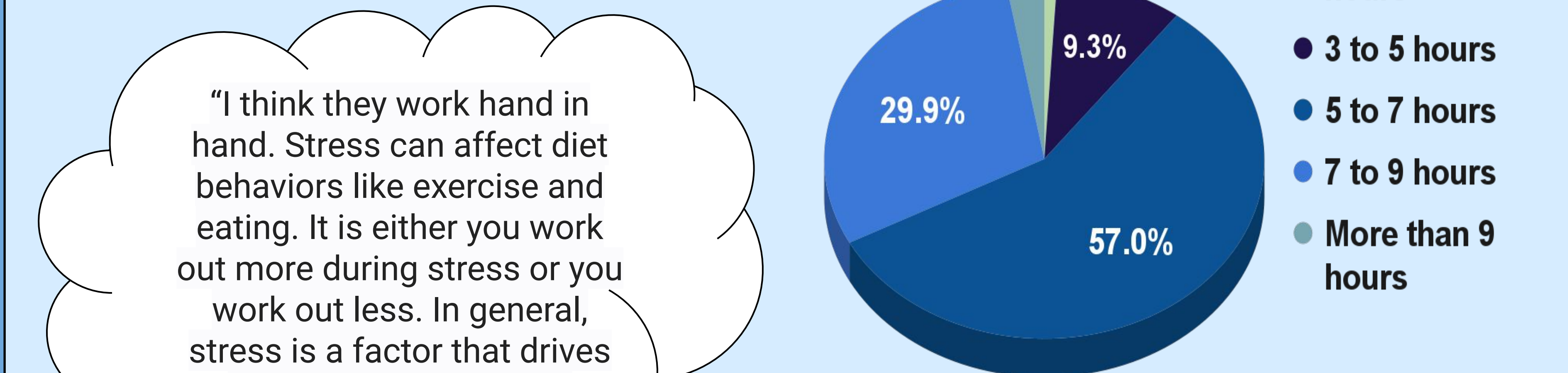


Figure 3: Self-Reported Sleep Quality Over the Past Month  
57.0% reported to sleeping 5 to 7 hours on an average basis over the past month.

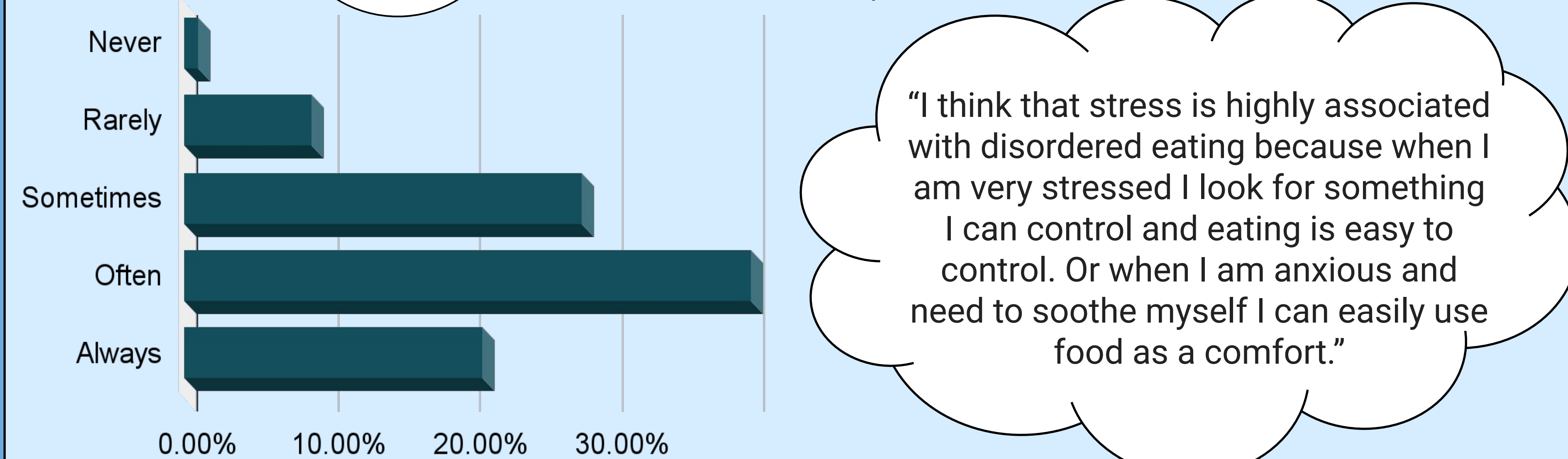
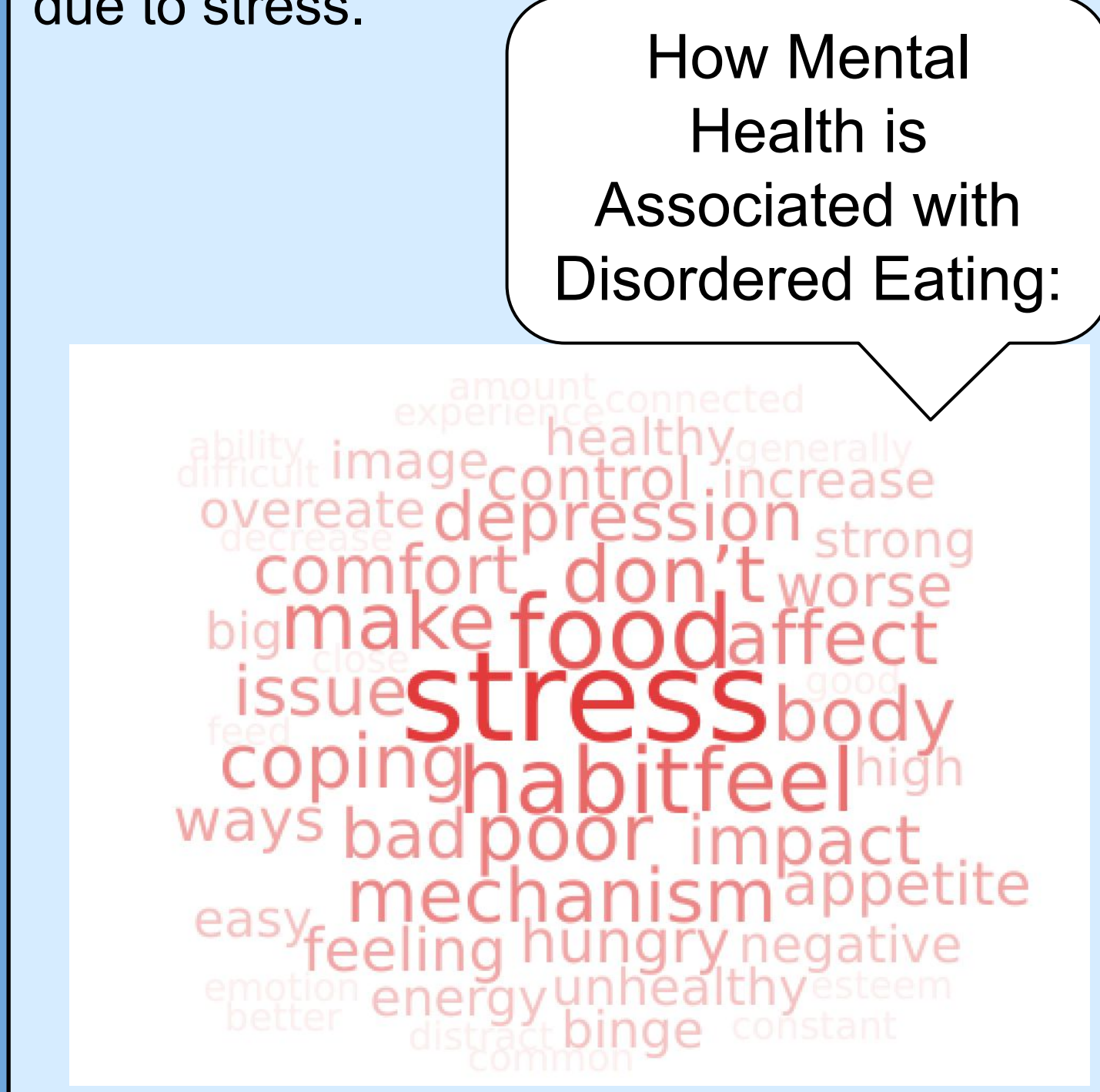


Figure 4: Analysis of the Impact Stress Has on Eating Habits  
89.9% of students reported a change in their eating habits due to stress.



	When you are stressed, how often has it impacted your eating habits?						Total
	Never	Rarely	Someti mes	Often	Always		
Zero-No Count	1	6	8	7	1	23	
rml % within Stress	4.3%	26.1%	34.8%	30.4%	4.3%	100.0%	
Stress >Normal Count to Extreme Stress	0	3	20	33	19	75	
% within Stress	0.0%	4.0%	26.7%	44.0%	25.3%	100.0%	
Total	1	9	28	40	20	98	
% within Stress	1.0%	9.2%	28.6%	40.8%	20.4%	100.0%	

Table 1: Cross Tabulation Table between Stress Levels and its Impact on Eating Habits

Table 2: P-value Analysis of Table 1 Using Pearson Chi-Square Test  
P-value was found to be 0.001, indicating an association between stress and eating habits.

	Chi-Square Tests		
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2 Sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	17.609 <sup>a</sup>	4	0.001
Likelihood Ratio	16.799	4	0.002
Linear-by-Linear Association	15.07	1	0
N of Valid Cases	98		

a. 4 cells (40.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .23.

## CONCLUSION

- Majority of participants with greater than normal stress to extreme stress have more irregular eating habits, they reported eating more or less than an average person.
- p-value=0.001; there is sufficient evidence that changes in eating habits are significantly related to stress
- Qualitative and quantitative data show positive association between increased stress and increased disordered eating behaviors.
- 20.0% reported to never or rarely perform self-care during times of stress, indicating how students may not have the resources available to them to help alleviate stress and their health concerns.
- More research is advised for more representation of university students as most of the population were mostly UCSD students.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Implementing policies that require universities to offer mental health resources and raise awareness to healthy coping mechanisms
- Mindfulness and nutrition education-based programs would help alleviate stress and disordered eating behaviors.

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Corresponding Authors: Malak Alazzawi, [malazzaw@ucsd.edu](mailto:malazzaw@ucsd.edu); Oluwakemi Ayeni, [oyayeni@ucsd.edu](mailto:oyayeni@ucsd.edu); Vivian Chou, [vschou@ucsd.edu](mailto:vschou@ucsd.edu); Kelly Nguyen, [ken047@ucsd.edu](mailto:ken047@ucsd.edu)

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