



SOUTH DAKOTA  
STATE UNIVERSITY

# Improving Students' Stress Management Skills and Access to Counseling

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## INTRODUCTION

- Per the 2020 Healthy Minds Study<sup>1</sup>, the prevalence of common mental health issues has been increasing.
- Despite the growing need to receive services, only 29% reported receiving mental health therapy/counseling in the past year<sup>1</sup>
- The Student Voices Survey<sup>2</sup> found that 43% of all students and 63% percent of students reporting poor mental health would grade their college's response to student mental health and wellness services a C or lower.
- This indicates that universities should actively assess levels of stress and mental health disorders and ensure students are aware and have access to needed services.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

- A survey was designed to obtain a baseline assessment of the overall well-being of students (Pharm.D. and Medical Laboratory Science).
- The survey asked a variety of quantitative and qualitative questions and was distributed via email using QuestionPro.
- The quantitative questions measured the degree to which students agreed with a series of statements via a 7-point Likert scale (strongly agree -> strongly disagree).
- The response rate was consistent amongst the groups of students (P1, P2, P3, P4 classes).

Figure 1. % of Students Who Indicate They Would Attend Counseling

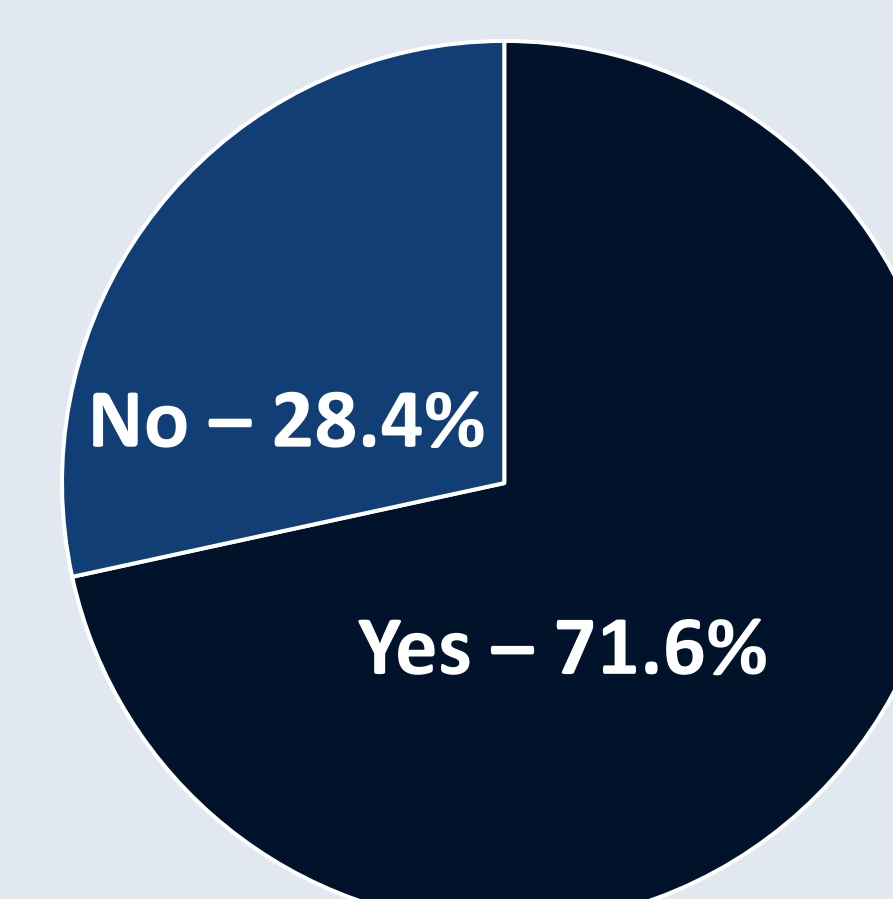


Figure 2: % of Students Who Indicate They Adequately Manage Their Stress

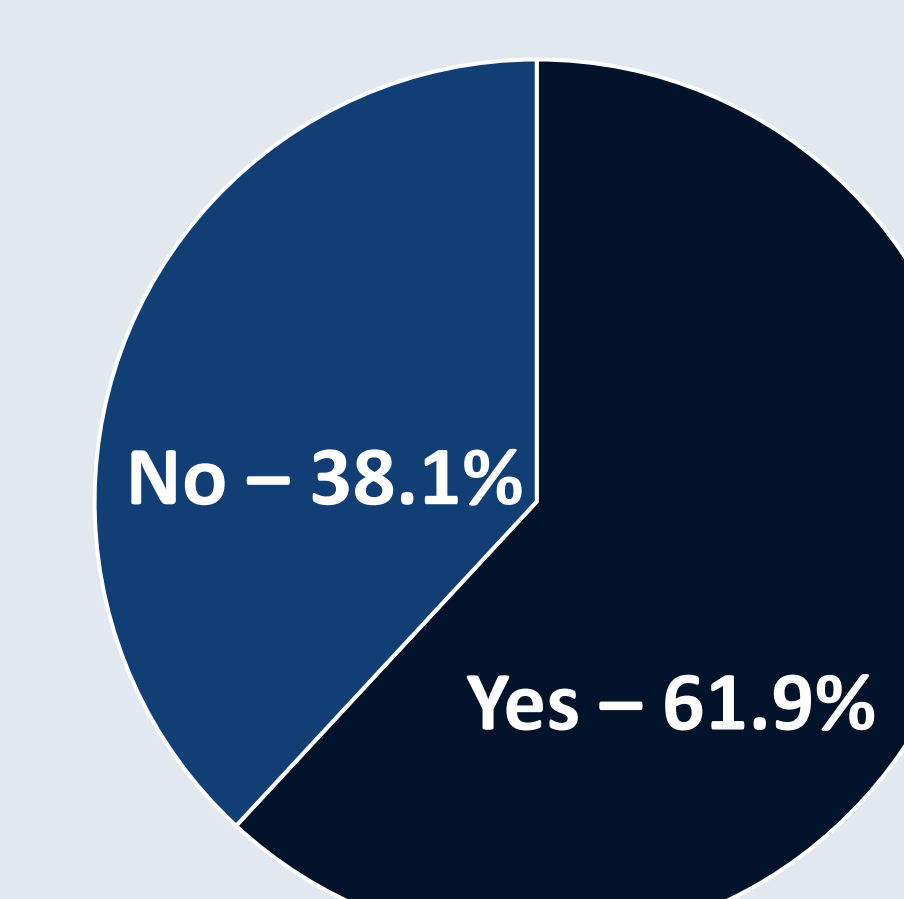


Table 1. % of Students Who Indicate They Have Attended Counseling

| Have Attended Counseling |       |
|--------------------------|-------|
| Yes                      | 7.4%  |
| No                       | 92.6% |

## IMPLICATIONS

- A significant portion of students do not feel like they adequately manage their stress and even a higher percentage do not feel comfortable approaching faculty and staff with mental health concerns.
- With barriers in place that make it difficult for students to access the counseling services provided by the university, this college felt the need to remove those barriers and offer more direct access.
- Our College developed a partnership with the veterinary medicine program on campus to share a mental health counselor position that was dedicated to the students in our programs.
- The two programs shared the cost of the position, and the position was housed in the student health clinic.
- Wait times for a counseling session were reduced significantly (from several months to less than a week).
- This new approach to providing mental health counseling services was received very positively by students in our professional programs.

## OBJECTIVES

**The aim of this study was to:**

- Describe a college's response to results from a student survey on well-being.

## RESULTS

- A total of 176 students responded to the survey, with a fairly consistent response rate across the classes (overall – 49.2%, MLS1 – 56.5%, MLS2 – 28.6%, P1 – 59.8%, P2 – 47.4%, P3 – 42.9%, P4 – 49.4%).
- 38.1% of the respondents did not agree with the statement “I adequately manage my stress” and 72.2% did not agree with “I feel comfortable approaching college faculty and staff with my mental health concerns.”
- A total of 71.6% of students agreed with the statement “I would attend counseling myself” but only 7.4% of reported ever doing so.
- Qualitative comments identified long wait times and difficulty accessing counseling when off-campus for experiential experiences as barriers to attending.

## REFERENCES

1. Eisenberg, D. et. al, The Healthy Minds Study, 2021. Available at: <https://healthymindsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/HMS-Fall-2020-National-Data-Report.pdf>.
2. Inside Higher Ed and College Pulse, Student Voice Survey, 2021. Available at: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/04/14/students-struggling-not-seeking-campus-mental-health-support>

