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Poll shows stress pains many in college

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STRESS POLL HIGHLIGHTS

GENDER MATTERS: Male students reported less stress than women by many measures. Of the students who said they never have sleeping problems, 61% were men, and 39% were women. Of those reporting that dating and relationships had a major impact on the stress in their daily lives, 55% were women and 45% men.

FAMILIES-RACE: Some 17% of whites said they seldom or never feel understood by their families; 28% of blacks, 29% of Asians and 31% of Hispanics said the same.

WHEN IT GETS REALLY BAD: One in 10 students said they feel life isn't worth living at least sometimes; a third report feeling lonely that often and four in 10 feel depressed sometimes. Of those saying they had tried or considered suicide recently, there was little distinction by sex, age or race.

LIFELINES FOR HELP: Most said they would turn to friends, parents or siblings in that order in an emotional crisis. About a third said they would talk to a boyfriend or girlfriend, a quarter named a clergyman or professor, and about a fifth said they would seek out a school counselor, another relative, a resident adviser, online help or a telephone hotline. A tenth would use a private therapist. Four% said they wouldn't consult anyone.

DRINKING, DRUGS AND PARTYING: More than a quarter of students said they sometimes think they need to cut down on drinking or going out. A third said that at least sometimes they want to use drugs or alcohol to relax.

WHERE THE BOYS AND GIRLS ARE: Four in 10 said they're taking a trip for spring break, while about the same number said they're going home. More than four in 10 said they're

By Alan Fram And Trevor Tompson, Associated Press

WASHINGTON — College kids are so frazzled they can't sleep or eat. Or study. Good grief, they're even anxious about spring break.

Most students in U.S. colleges are just plain stressed out, from everyday worries about grades and relationships to darker thoughts of suicide, according to a poll of undergraduates from coast to coast. The survey was conducted for the Associated Press and mtvU, a television network available at many colleges and universities.

Four in 10 students say they endure stress often. Nearly one in five say they feel it all or most of the time.

But most are bearing it. Nearly two-thirds in the survey say they enjoy life.

The majority cite classic stress symptoms including trouble concentrating, sleeping and finding motivation. Most say they have also been agitated, worried, too tired to work.

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"Everything is being piled on at once," said Chris Curran, a junior at the Albany College of Pharmacy in Albany, N.Y. He said he has learned to cope better since starting school. "You just get really agitated and anxious. Then you start procrastinating, and it all piles up."

Many cite eating problems and say they have felt lonely, depressed, like they are failures. Substantial numbers are even concerned about spring break, chiefly not having enough money or being in good physical shape.

More than a quarter of the students sometimes think they



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worried about having enough money and being in good enough shape. Fewer than one in five said they were concerned about excessive drinking or casual sex. Source:

Source: This Associated Press survey was conducted by Edison Media Research from Feb. 28-March 6 by having 2,253 undergraduate students fill out confidential forms. The margin of sampling error was plus or minus 3 percentage points. The students, age 18-24, were handed the questionnaires at 40 randomly chosen four-year schools around the country.

should cut down on drinking or going out. A third say they sometimes want to use drugs or alcohol to relax. About 15% say they're at least somewhat concerned about drinking too much on spring break.

One in five say they have felt too stressed to do schoolwork or be with friends. About the same number say things have been so bad in the past three months that they have seriously considered dropping out of school.

Darker still, about one in six say they have friends who in the past year have discussed committing suicide, and about one in 10 say they have seriously considered it themselves. Friends have actually tried to end their lives in that time, one in 10 say.

In this ocean of campus anxiety, 13% say they have been diagnosed with a mental health condition such as depression or an anxiety disorder.

Of that group, two-thirds say they always or usually follow their treatment, one-tenth say they have been unable to stick to it, and the rest are not on a plan. The perils of halting treatment were highlighted last month when police said the girlfriend of Steven Kazmierczak, who fatally shot five people and then himself at Northern Illinois University, told them he had stopped taking medication.

All is not doom and gloom for today's students.

Six in 10 in the survey say they are usually hopeful and enjoy life. Half even concede they feel understood by their families.

"I enjoy college, I'm enjoying my experiences," said Emily McMahan, a University of Cincinnati junior.

Even so, the survey shows plenty of sources of stress, led by the seven in 10 students who attribute it to school work and grades. Financial problems are close behind, while relationships and dating, family problems and extracurricular activities all are named by half as adding pressure.

College women have a more stressful existence than men, with 45% of females and 34% of males saying they face pressure often. The youngest students cite frequent stress most often. Whites report more stress than blacks and Hispanics.

From schoolwork to dating, women are likelier than men to say they experience pressure from virtually every potential source of distress in the survey. Six in 10 women and just four in 10 men say family issues cause problems, though the differences between the sexes in most areas are slimmer.

The future doesn't look any easier.

Besides balancing her approaching graduation with the 20-hour-per-week job that helps finance school, Jeanette Devereaux-Weber said she has a new pressure: beginning her post-college life. The anthropology major at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wis., said she has not decided what to do.

"It doesn't feel like looking for a summer job anymore, it's looking for a career, it's things that will shape everything to come," she said. "Sometimes it feels like you have to make the right choice right away or you will be behind everyone else."

The poll shows a spotty sense among students of how to find assistance handling pressure. Just over half say they are sure whom they would turn to for help. Only one in seven say they were very familiar with the counseling offered at their schools.

Overall, 26% of students say they have considered talking to a counselor or getting other professional help. Just 15% say they have actually done so.

"The profession needs to do more to make us more approachable," said Christine Moll, a professor in counseling and former director of counseling services at Canisius College in Buffalo

Professional help, though, is not atop students' lists when they need help. Three-quarters say they would be most likely to turn to friends, nearly two-thirds cite their parents and half say they would talk to siblings. Only one in five say they would seek out school counselors.

"I'm with a guy who just let me shave my head to a mohawk and didn't say a word about it," said Amber Culbertson-Faegre, a senior at Missouri State University in Springfield, Mo., who has seen counselors in the past. "He comes over and talks me through it" when pressure builds, she said.

Of the 9% who said they had considered suicide in the past year, only half said they had considered talking to a counselor or professional and four in 10 had actually received such help.

While 11% said they had friends who had tried committing suicide in the past year, that doesn't mean there have been that many attempts because many people often know each individual who has tried.

According to the most recent figures from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, far less than one of every 100 people age 18 to 24 tried to injure himself in 2006. There were fewer than 3,500 suicides out of 29 million people of that age in 2005.

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The students, age 18-24, were handed the questionnaires at 40 randomly chosen four-year schools around the country.

To protect privacy, the schools where the poll was conducted are not being identified and the students who responded were not asked for their names. Those mentioned in this story were not among those polled and did not necessarily attend schools involved in the survey.

MtvU's sponsorship of the poll is related to its work on "Half of Us," which it runs with the Jed Foundation, a non-profit group that works to reduce suicide among young people. "Half of Us" is a program designed to raise awareness about emotional problems faced by college students.

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