

# Mental Health

Center for the Study of Student Life

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**THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY**  
OFFICE OF STUDENT LIFE

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, mental health has become an increasingly prevalent issue on college campuses (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010; Soet & Sevig, 2006; Zivin, Eisenberg, & Gollust, 2009). Mental health issues may include stress, anxiety, depression, and related aspects such as hopelessness, loneliness, and suicidal thoughts. According to the American Psychological Association (2012), Millennials, ages 18-33, and Gen Xers, ages 34-47, are the most stressed generations, citing both high levels of stress and difficulty managing it. Data from the 2012 American College Health Association's National College Health Assessment II (ACHA-NCHA II) indicate that 13% of male college students and 17% of female college students across the U.S. had problems functioning because of depression in the last 12 months. In terms of academic performance, 29.0% of students cited stress, 20.2% cited anxiety, and 12.4% cited depression as substantial obstacles to their success.

This brief examines the rates of depression and stress among those enrolled at Ohio State's Columbus campus, the effects that these mental health conditions may have on their academic experience, and whether physical activity is related to these rates. This brief will explore:

- (1) Stress and depression among college students, both at Ohio State, and nationally
- (2) Relationships between mental health and academic performance
- (3) Relationships between physical activity, stress, and depression

## METHOD

The American College Health Association's National College Health Assessment II (ACHA-NCHA II) is a web-based survey assessing topics related to the overall health of students on college campuses, including general health, alcohol and other drug use, sexual behavior, nutrition, exercise, mental health, sleep, and impediments to academic performance. Ohio State participated most recently in spring 2012, recruiting 10,000 students across its campuses, receiving 1,548 responses, for a 15.5% response rate. This brief will focus on Columbus campus respondents (n=1447).

For national comparisons, data are reported from the spring 2012 national results of the ACHA-NCHA II, consisting of 90,066 students from 141 institutions across the country. Overall, the national survey had a 27% response rate across all colleges and universities.

## OHIO STATE RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

<b>Gender</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	37.1%	White	79.7
Female	62.8%	Black or African American	5.5
		Hispanic/Latino/a	3.6
		Asian or Pacific Islander	10.1
		American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian	1.2
		Biracial/Multiracial	2.4
		Other	2.6
<b>Class Rank</b>	<b>%</b>		
1	16.0		
2	15.2		
3	17.2		
4	16.9		
5+	5.5		
Graduate/Professional	28.2		
Not seeking a degree	0.4		

# RESULTS

## STRESS AND DEPRESSION: OHIO STATE AND NATIONAL

Table 1. Depression: Ohio State vs. National

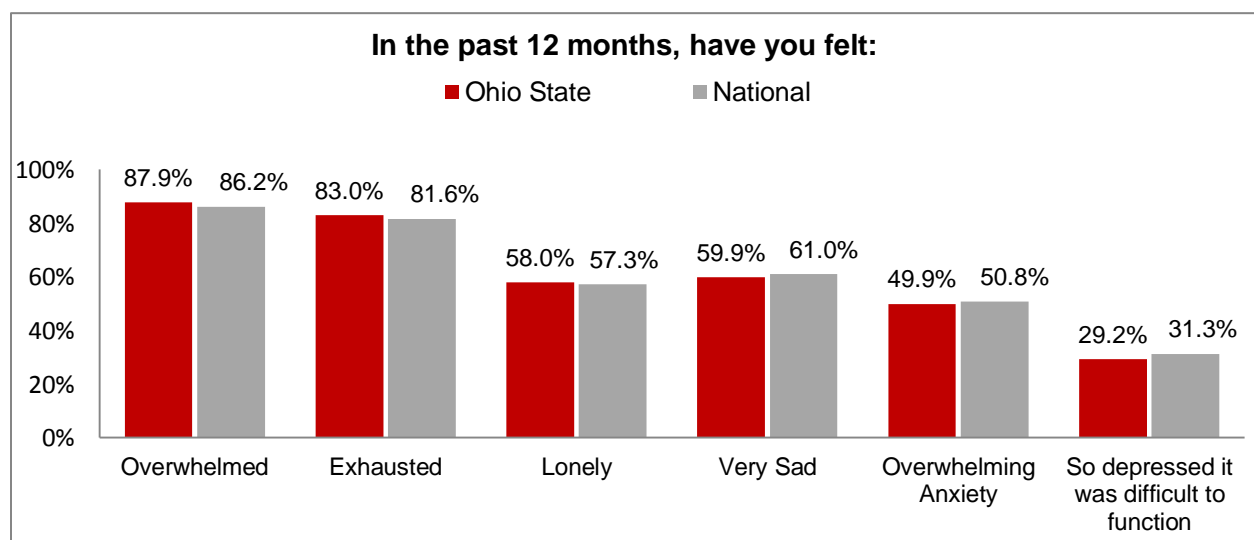
	National Sample	Ohio State Sample	Ohio State Females	Ohio State Males
Diagnosed with depression in last year	10.9%	11.2%	12.7%	8.6%
Intentionally injured self in last year	5.4%	4.2%	4.5%	3.5%
Received counseling from current university's counseling center	15.8%	14.9%	16.2%	12.4%
Would consider seeking help from mental health professional in the future, if having personal problem	71.6%	73.5%	78.1%**	66.1%**

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ ; cross-tabulations were run with Ohio State data only.

Rates of depression among Ohio State students aligned closely with the national sample. Among students at Ohio State, more females than males were diagnosed with depression in the last year, and more females reported intentionally injuring themselves in the last year. While nearly three-quarters of Ohio State students overall would consider seeking help from a mental health professional in the future if they were having a personal problem, more females than males reported this; more females than males also indicated that they had received counseling from their current university's counseling center.

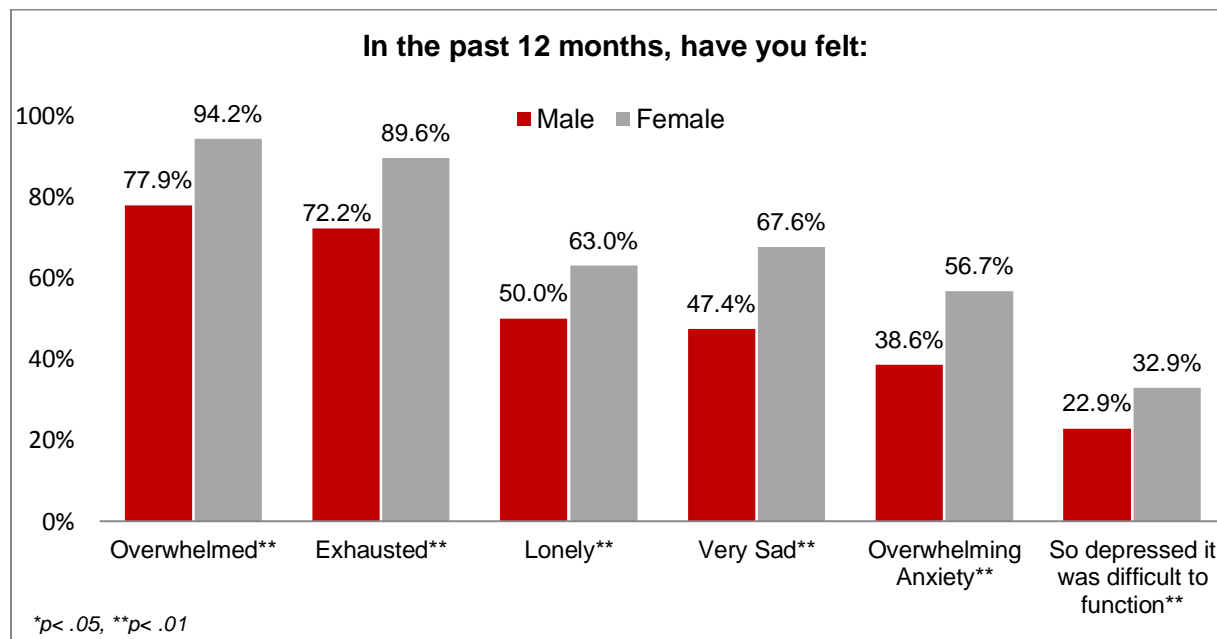
When asked about aspects of their mental health such as feelings of exhaustion, anxiety, loneliness and sadness, numerous Ohio State students indicated they struggled in these areas, as can be seen in Chart 1 below. With each of these categories, national data fall within approximately two percentage points of Ohio State results.

Chart 1. Mental Health: Ohio State vs. National

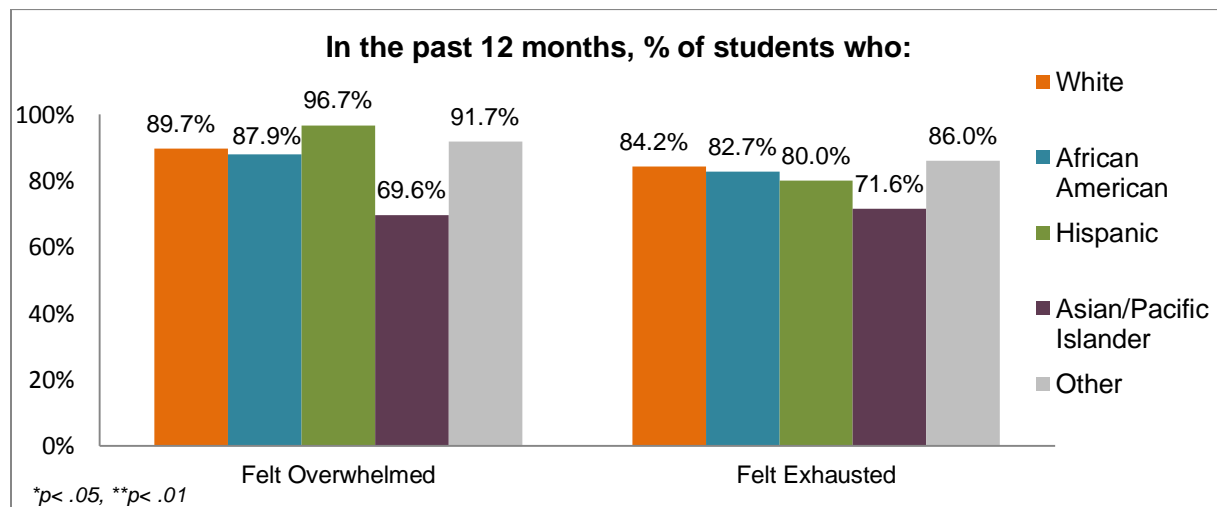


Similar to depression, more female than male students struggled with each of the aforementioned aspects of mental health, most notably feeling overwhelmed and exhausted. Comparisons are shown in Chart 2. Comparisons between races and ethnicities can be seen below in Chart 3.

**Chart 2. Stress and Mental Health: Gender**



**Chart 3. Stress and Mental Health: Race/Ethnicity**

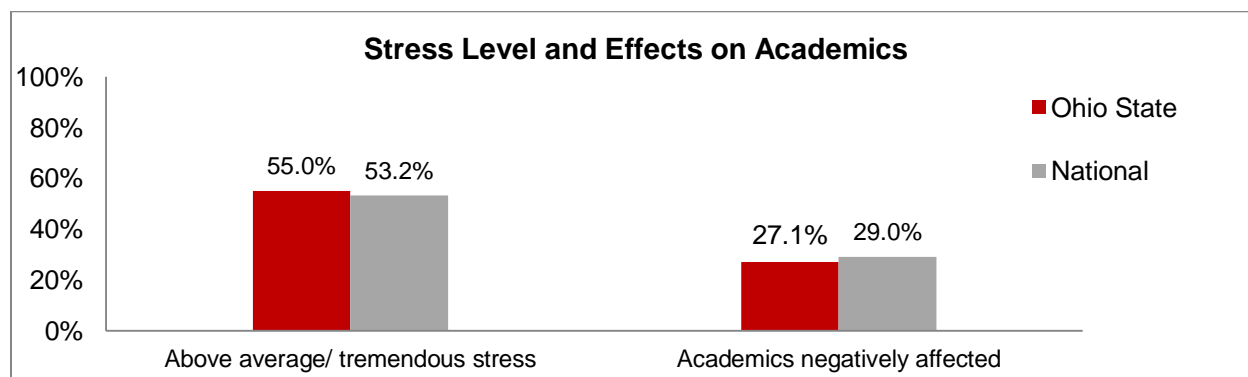


Note: Other was recoded to include American Indian/Alaska Native/Biracial/Multiracial/Other

## MENTAL HEALTH AND ACADEMICS

Eisenberg, Gollust, Golberstein, and Hefner (2007) found that 18.4% of undergraduates in their study reported missing academic obligations because of mental health problems. They also discovered that 44.3% reported impaired academic performance resulting from mental or emotional problems. The following data explore the relationship between mental health and academic success. Chart 4 displays the percentage of students who reported *more than average/tremendous stress* in the last 12 months. Comparisons among various demographic variables can be found in Table 2.

**Chart 4. Stress and Academics: Ohio State vs. National**



**Table 2. Stress and Academics: Comparisons**

	Gender		Rank		Residency Status	
	Male	Female	Undergraduate	Graduate	Domestic	Int'l
Above average/tremendous stress	45.4%**	61.0%**	52.1%**	62.2%**	56.5%**	43.2%**
Academics negatively affected by stress	22.2%**	29.7%**	29.6%**	19.7%**	27.8%*	19.0%*

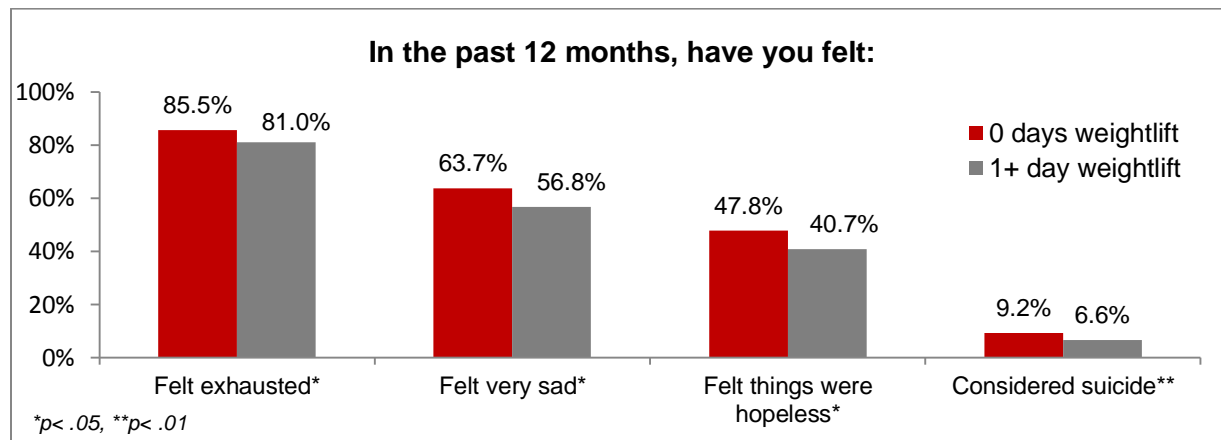
\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

There was no correlation ( $r = .02$ ) between GPA and stress. Approximately 10% of students earning A's and B's reported tremendous stress, as compared with 30% of students who reported earning D's and F's.

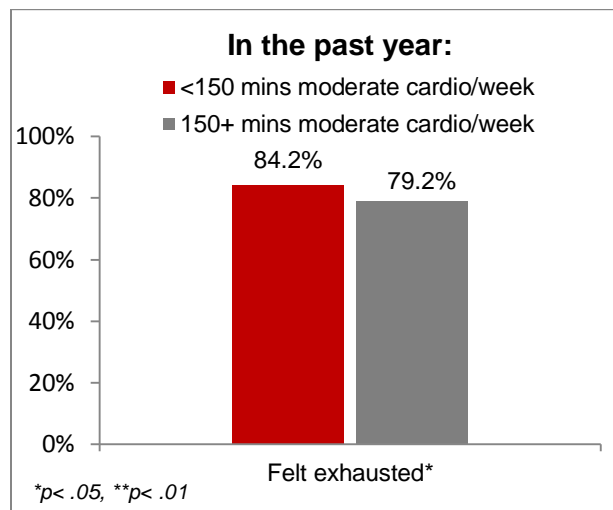
## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, STRESS, AND DEPRESSION

Physical activity has been and continues to be linked to a variety of outcomes, including depression, stress, and learning (Centers for Disease Control, 2011). According to ACHA-NCHA II data, those who engaged in regular forms of cardiovascular and resistance exercise were less likely to experience negative outcomes related to their stress and mental health, as compared to those who did not, as can be seen in charts 5 through 7 on the following page.

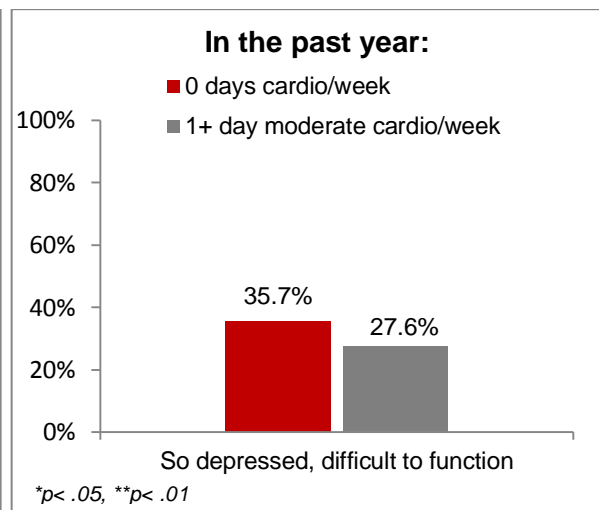
**Chart 5. Resistance Training and Mental Health**



**Chart 6. Cardiovascular Exercise and Exhaustion**



**Chart 7. Cardiovascular Exercise and Depression**



Similarly, fewer varsity athletes (43.1%) experienced *more than average/tremendous stress* compared to non-athletes (55.5%), and fewer intramural sports participants (47.8%) reported this degree of stress compared to non-participants (57.9%). Intramural sports participants also struggled less when it came to other aspects of mental health, as can be seen in Chart 8.

**Chart 8. Intramural Sports and Mental Health**

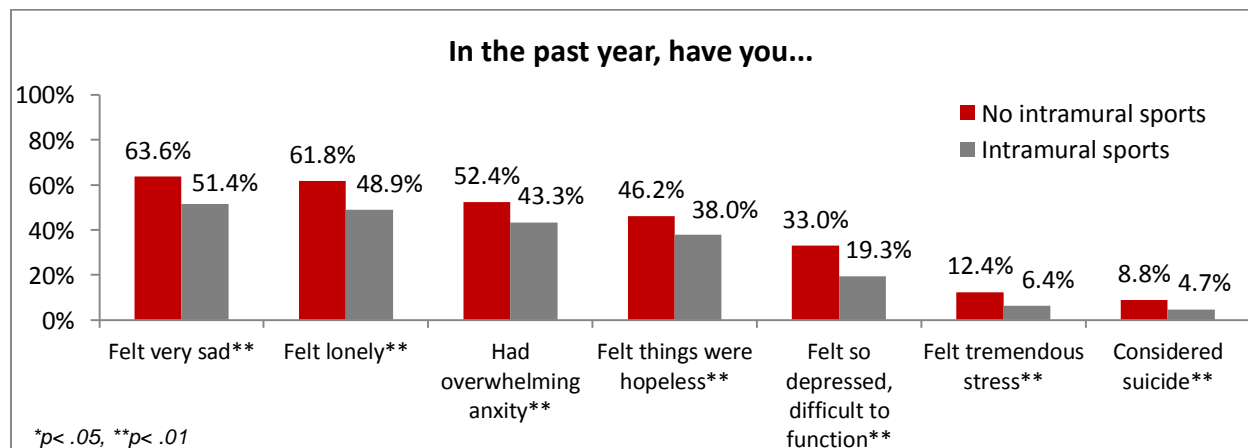


Table 3 shows the reported average level of stress according to type of physical activity. Significant differences emerged, with those who participated in physical activity experiencing significantly lower levels of stress than those who did not participate in physical activity.

**Table 3. Physical Activity and Level of Stress**

<b>Physical Activity</b>	<b>Average level of stress 1-5 1=No stress; 5=Tremendous stress</b>
Not a varsity athlete (n=1351)	3.57
Varsity athlete (n=47)	3.21**
Not in Intramural sports (n=1002)	3.62
In intramural sports (n=406)	3.42**
Not in club sports (n=1282)	3.58
In club sports (n=122)	3.41*
Did not lift weights in last week (n=688)	3.62
Lifted weights in last week (n=720)	3.51**
Did moderate cardio <150 minutes in past week	3.55
Did moderate cardio 150+ minutes in past week	3.60
Did vigorous cardio <80 minutes in past week	3.57
Did vigorous cardio 80+ minutes in past week	3.55

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01

## CONCLUSIONS

According to the data, Ohio State students struggle with stress and depression, and both affect different groups of students in different ways. While a large number of students reported that they would consider seeking help from a mental health professional if they were having a difficult time, it is important to use these results to better understand the ways in which students might be struggling so that the university can work to prevent such hardship.

There are some important distinctions to be made regarding the relationships between stress and academic success, most importantly that stress appears to negatively affect academic performance across demographic variables. There may be nuances to be explored regarding the differences between males and females, undergraduate, graduate and professional students, as well as domestic and international students. GPA is another aspect that may warrant further investigation as it relates to academic performance.

The data also tell us that engagement in physical activity, both cardiovascular and strength-based, can produce positive effects on mental health. This is not limited to individualized bouts of exercise, but also to organized team sports, which are a combination of physical activity and social interaction. Further research may help to clarify these findings.