

College Students Face Mental Health Crisis as 51% Rate Well-Being as Poor, New Survey Reveals

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More than half of U.S. college students rate their mental health as fair, poor, or terrible, according to a [new national survey](#) released by The Steve Fund that reveals a deepening mental health crisis on campuses nationwide.

The study, conducted by The Harris Poll among 2,050 students ages 18-24 at four-year institutions, found that 51% of U.S. college students rate their mental health as fair, poor, or terrible, signaling what researchers call a "looming mental health crisis" affecting millions of young people.

One in four students said college had a negative impact on their mental health, while more than 7.5 million young people from historically disadvantaged backgrounds in the U.S.—over one in five—struggle with their mental health.

The crisis disproportionately affects students of color, who face additional stressors including discrimination and feelings of isolation. Approximately 9% of Black and White students, 6% of Hispanic and Asian students, and 1% of Indigenous students described their campus as hostile.

"Our findings highlight the critical need to address the mental health challenges faced by students on college campuses," said Stephanie Bell-Rose, President of The Steve Fund, in the report. "It is essential that institutions provide mental health services to the specific needs of students, ensuring they have the resources necessary to thrive both academically and emotionally."

The survey revealed a strong demand for targeted mental health approaches. Eighty percent of students of color (Black, Asian, Hispanic) want mental health programs tailored to their background, while more than 3 in 4 students believe colleges must invest more in targeted mental health support.

Two in 5 students report struggling with imposter syndrome, a phenomenon particularly acute among underrepresented groups who often feel their academic success is undeserved.

The research, which builds on a 2017 baseline study, shows both concerning trends and promising developments. While mental health challenges persist, students demonstrated increased awareness of available resources and greater willingness to seek help compared to seven years ago.

Beyond mental health struggles, the survey exposed ongoing campus climate issues. Students of color were significantly more likely than white peers to report negative experiences, including threats of physical violence and discrimination.

More than 4 in 10 students have experienced discrimination related to race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. Over half of all students witnessed discrimination in the past year with Black and Asian students having the highest percentages of negative experience.

Despite these challenges, most students rated their overall campus climate positively, though disparities remain across racial and ethnic groups.

The study's findings come amid broader scrutiny of higher education's capacity to support student well-being during a period of historic funding pressures and post-pandemic recovery.

Dr. Jasmine Haywood, strategy director at Lumina Foundation, which supported the research, noted the study "highlights important challenges while suggesting thoughtful, practical steps forward."

The Steve Fund, founded in 2014, has dedicated its efforts to transforming campus environments to better support students' mental health needs, particularly those from historically marginalized backgrounds.

The organization offers several initiatives, including the Excellence in Mental Health on Campus program and Family Corner, which provides families with advocacy tools for supporting students' emotional well-being.

The survey was conducted between February 29 and April 1, 2024, with a margin of error of ± 3.6 percentage points.