

Spring 5-1-2020

College Education Can Induce Stress, Anxiety, and Depression – Are You SAD?

Nathan L. Boyd

Follow this and additional works at: https://dc.ewu.edu/srcw_2020_posters



Part of the [Community Health Commons](#), [Other Mental and Social Health Commons](#), and the [Psychiatric and Mental Health Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Boyd, Nathan L., "College Education Can Induce Stress, Anxiety, and Depression – Are You SAD?" (2020). *2020 Symposium Posters*. 1.
https://dc.ewu.edu/srcw_2020_posters/1

This Poster is brought to you for free and open access by the 2020 Symposium at EWU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in 2020 Symposium Posters by an authorized administrator of EWU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact jotto@ewu.edu.


College Education Can Induce Stress, Anxiety, and Depression – Are You SAD?

Nathan Boyd, and Rosalee Allan, FACHE
Eastern Washington University, 526 5th Street, Cheney WA 99004



Background

- Numerous factors induce stress, anxiety, and depression (SAD) in college students.
- Symptoms include procrastination/avoidance, changes in sleep and eating habits, social isolation, loss of interest/pleasure in activities, and harmful or unhealthy coping behaviors.
- Studies have revealed that students who battle anxiety and depression are at risk for academic strain, eating disorders, substance abuse, and even suicide.
- In 2015, the Anxiety and Depression Association of America reported that 85% of college students experienced immense anxiety within the past year.
- The Center for Collegiate Mental Health has reported that anxiety and depression are the two leading reasons that students reach out for mental health services.
- However, stigma surrounding the topic of mental health can be a barrier preventing more students from seeking treatment for stress, anxiety, and depression.
- Medical professionals, counseling, and healthy habits can combat SAD conditions.



MENTAL HEALTH AND COLLEGE STUDENTS

College students can easily feel anxious trying to balance school, work, friends and family while also trying to figure out the rest of their lives.

Anxiety disorders are one of the most common mental health problems on college campuses.

FORTY MILLION U.S. adults suffer from an anxiety disorder and 75 percent of them experience their first episode of anxiety by the age of 22.

30% of college students reported that stress had negatively affected their academic performance.¹

85% of college students reported they had felt overwhelmed by everything they had to do at some point within the past year.¹

41.6% stated anxiety as the top presenting concern among college students.²

24.5% of college students reported they were taking psychotropic medication.²

Figure 1

Main Causes:
The transition into college can be a challenging one. For the first time students may be living away from home and are forced to become independent. A heavy syllabus, deadlines, exams, finances, families, working part-time or full-time, and the stress of choosing a lifelong career are only some of the reported challenges. Any combination of these factors can induce stress, anxiety, and depression (SAD) in college students.

Despite relatively high levels of psychological distress, many students in higher education do not seek help for difficulties. This is due to stigma associated with treatment of mental health.

The following statistics are provided to highlight the scale of SAD in college students:

- Psychological problems among student populations range from 2% to as high as 50%.
- In 2018, 54.4% of students who attended counseling did so for mental health concerns.
- In 2019, 43.6% of students who attended counseling reported stress as a concern.
- In 2019, 62.7% of students who attended counseling reported anxiety as a concern.
- In 2019, 49.3% of students who attended counseling reported depression as a concern.
- 41.9% of academic counseling case closures were due to end of the academic term. This correlates collegiate pressures and the possible need for counseling services.
- Most psychological disorders present between the ages of 15 and 24.

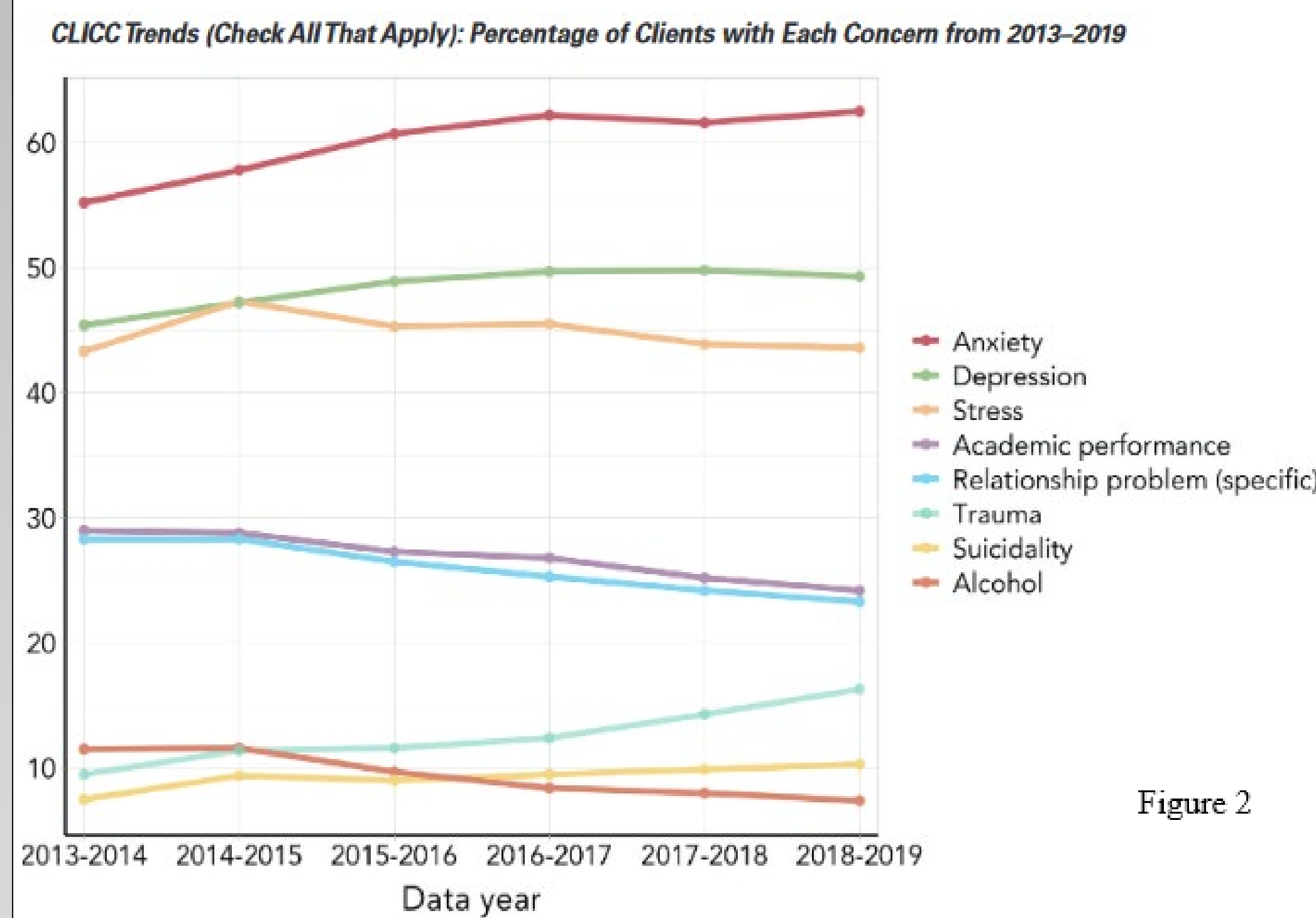


Figure 2

Area of Distress	Level of Distress
Depression <i>(Feelings of isolation, apathy, worthlessness, sadness)</i>	Moderate
Generalized Anxiety <i>(Racing thoughts, tension, possible panic attacks)</i>	Elevated
Social Anxiety <i>(Feelings of shyness, self-consciousness, and social discomfort)</i>	Moderate
Academic Distress <i>(Lack of confidence in academics, concentration difficulties, problems completing school-work)</i>	Moderate
Eating Concerns <i>(Preoccupation with food, concern about overeating)</i>	Elevated
Frustration <i>(Problems with temper, anger, irritability)</i>	Moderate
Family Distress <i>(Stress in family relationships)</i>	Low
Alcohol Use <i>(Overuse of alcohol, negative consequences from drinking)</i>	Elevated
Thoughts of Ending My Life <i>(Ranges from benign passing thoughts to serious suicidal thoughts with intentions to act)</i>	Yes

Study Objectives

The purpose of conducting this secondary research is to generate mental health and well-being awareness for current and future college students, reduce stigma, and equip students with healthy coping mechanisms to combat these conditions. Common mental health conditions, causes, and effects experienced by students will be highlighted to inform readers of the issue. Stigma and its negative effect on seeking treatment will be discussed in hopes of breaking barriers. Also, a list of healthy behaviors that students can utilize to benefit their mental well-being will be composed for reference and guidance.

The overall goal is to provide students with the tools to navigate these challenges while pursuing a college education. It is important that these issues be addressed in order to enhance the education, health, and overall well-being of students worldwide.

Results

Secondary research and literature analysis of several reports and journals identified the following information:

- Stress, anxiety, and depression (SAD) are common mental health concerns of college students, and SAD may be on the rise
- Causes include academic, social, economic, and family distress while in college
- Effects of SAD include an elevated risk for reduced academic performance, headaches, sleeping problems, eating disorders, substance abuse, and suicidal thoughts or actions
- Both personal and public stigma can act as barriers to treatment and reduce access to care
- Students, parents, peers, and college administrators all play a role in combining efforts to combat SAD and stigma surrounding mental health
- In 2017, CCMH discovered that "treatment provided by counseling centers was found to be effective in reducing mental health distress"

Conclusion

Research clearly displays the prevalence of college students struggling with mental health and well-being while in college. The everyday accepted pressures of the collegiate journey have unintended adverse effects on psychological well-being. The number one case closure reason reported by counseling clinicians was the end of the academic term. Treatment services are concluded when academic pressures have ended for the current semester/quarter. This fact alone correlates stress, anxiety, and depression (SAD) with the collegiate journey.

Top Case Closure Reason

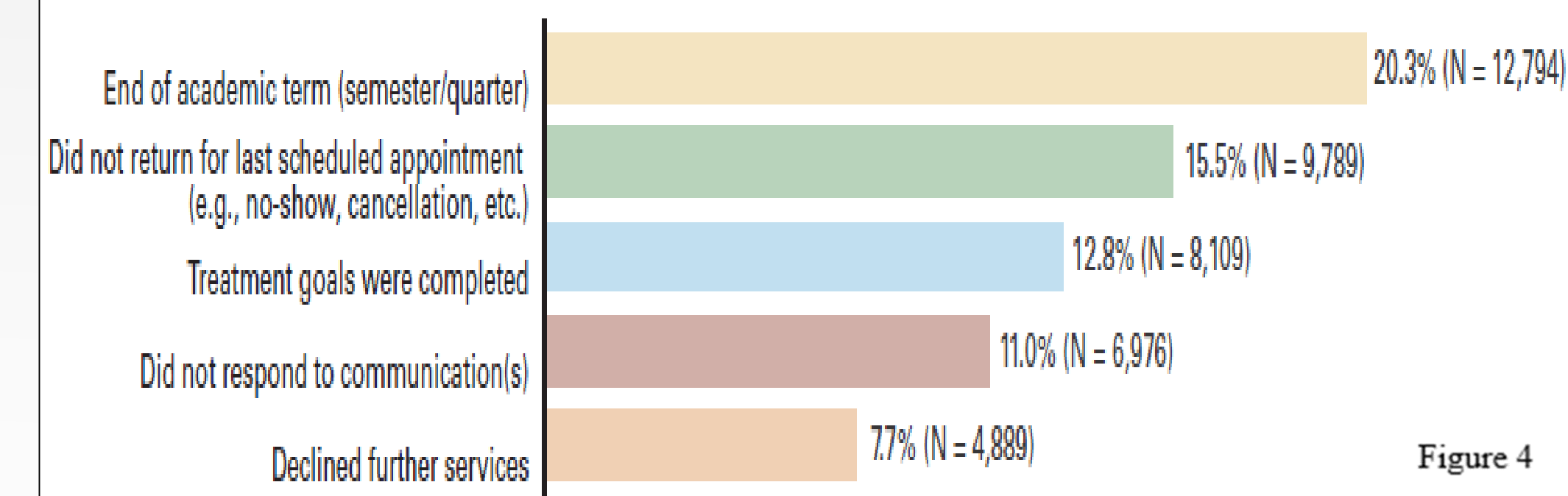


Figure 4

However, studies have proven that seeking treatment through a counselor or medical professional is effective in reducing mental health distress. Therefore, the stigma barriers surrounding treatment of mental health must be broken down. The idea is to communicate that SAD is both common and treatable. Through communicating the commonality of struggling with mental health and well-being, and normalizing the issue, stigma can be reduced to increase the likelihood that those suffering SAD will seek help.

Additionally, medical providers can help students equip themselves with healthy behaviors to manage SAD and help the status of their mental health and well-being. These habits and behaviors include:

- Establish a support system (friends, family, medical providers) and check in routinely
- Learn meditation, exercise, self-soothing, and deep breathing techniques
- Embrace daily challenges, celebrate successes, and combat negative self talk
- Break down large assignments into smaller and more manageable pieces

One report surveyed college students to reveal coping behaviors that were found to be most helpful and most widely practiced. The image below displays the reported behaviors of the surveyed students and how widely practiced they are. The most helpful practices were:

- Getting quality sleep to help relax the mind and body (44.1%)
- Talking to family members and friends (41.3%)
- Better time management (38.9%)
- Emotional support (36.1%)

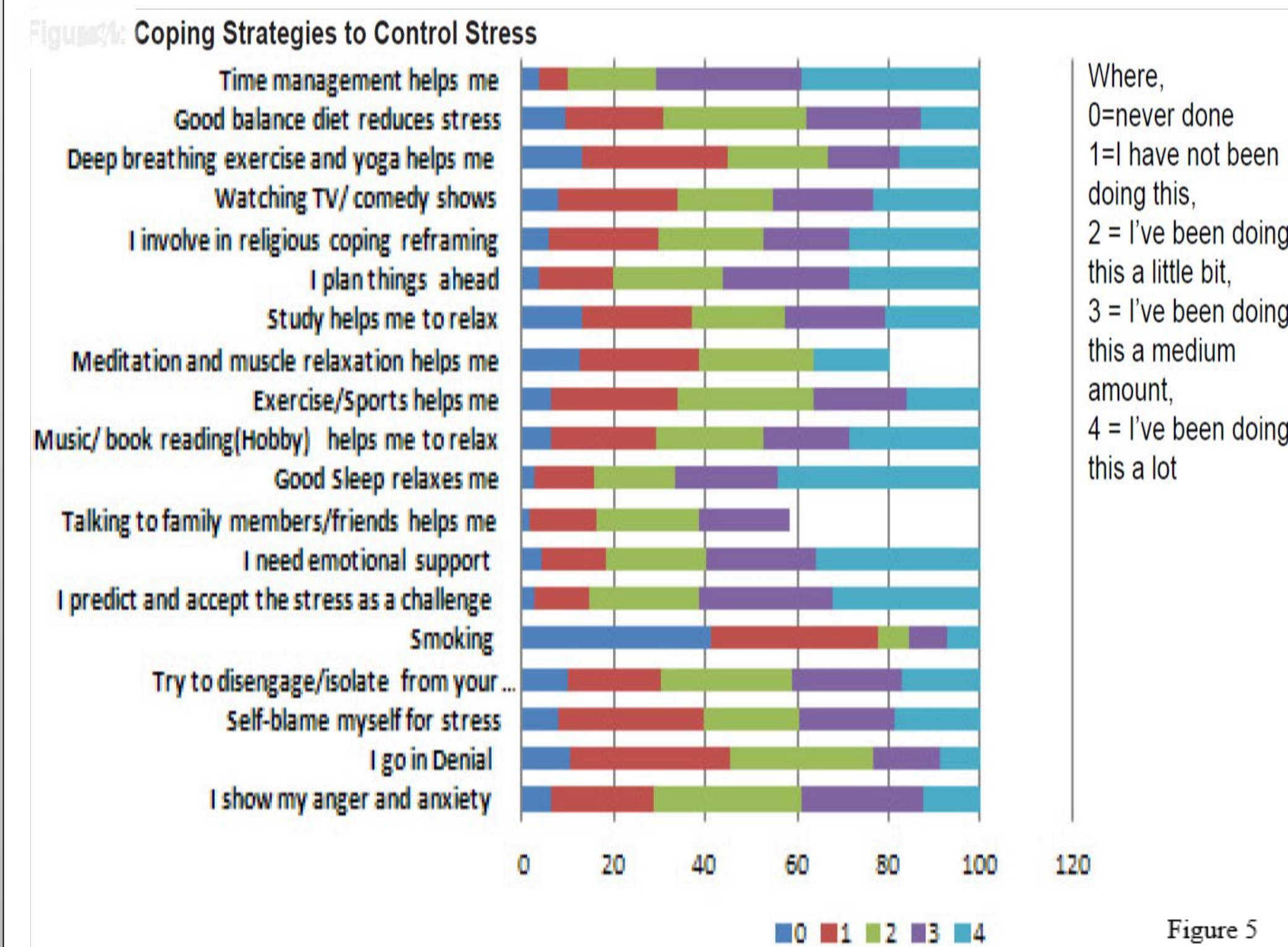


Figure 5

Future Implications

Trends: Average Subscale Scores (2010 to 2019) Figure 6

Item	9-Year Change	2010-2019	Lowest	Highest	2018-2019
CCAPS-62					
Depression	+0.22		1.59	1.81	1.81
Generalized Anxiety	+0.25		1.61	1.87	1.87
Social Anxiety	+0.24		1.82	2.05	2.05
Academic Distress	+0.03		1.85	1.89	1.88
Eating Concerns	+0.04		1.00	1.05	1.05
Hostility	-0.05		0.99	1.04	0.99
Substance Use	-0.12		0.65	0.77	0.65
Family Distress	+0.07		1.29	1.36	1.36

When observing the current trends in data it is apparent that SAD has been on the rise over the past 9 years. It is fair to assume that these trends will continue, along with the adverse effects they impose on college students. Therefore, the importance of providing quality care and access to medical professionals who specialize in mental health is of dire importance. Colleges must spread awareness of SAD. Students must be told that it is okay to reach out for help. Medical professionals must treat students and equip them with the necessary tools to combat SAD on their own.

References

- Ahuja, K. K., Dhillon, M., Juneja, A., & Sharma, B. (2017). Breaking barriers: An education and contact intervention to reduce mental illness stigma among Indian college students. *Psychosocial Intervention*, 26(2), 103-109.
- Figure 1. Anxiety and Depression Association of America. (2015). Teens and College Students. Retrieved from <https://adaa.org/living-with-anxiety/college-students>. Copyright 2015 by ADAA.
- Bhujade, V. M. (2017). Depression, anxiety and academic stress among college students: A brief review. *Indian Journal of Health & Wellbeing*, 8(7), 748-751.
- Burns, J., Lee, R., & Brown, L. (2011). The Effect of Meditation on Self-Reported Measures of Stress, Anxiety, Depression, and Perfectionism in a College Population. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*, 25(2), 132-144.
- CCMH. (2019). Center for Collegiate Mental Health 2019 Annual Report. *Penn State University*, 1-33. Includes Figures 2, 4, 6. Copyright 2019 by CCMH.
- Figure 3. Center for Collegiate Mental Health. CCAPS-Screen. (2020, March 30). Retrieved from <https://ccmh.psu.edu/ccaps-screen/>. Copyright 2020 by CCMH.
- Jahan, F., Siddiqui, M. A., Mitwally, M., Jasim Al Zubidi, N. S., & Jasim Al Zubidi, H. S. (2016). Perception of stress, anxiety, depression and coping strategies among medical students at Oman Medical College. *Middle East Journal of Family Medicine*, 14(7), 16-23. Fig. 5. Copyright 2016 by Middle East Journal of Family Medicine.
- Laidlaw, A., McLellan, J., & Ozakinci, G. (2016). Understanding undergraduate student perceptions of mental health, mental well-being and help-seeking behaviour. *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(12), 2156-2168.
- LeBlanc, N. J., Marques, L. (2019, August 27). Anxiety in college: What we know and how to cope. Retrieved from <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/anxiety-in-college-what-we-know-and-how-to-cope-2019052816729>
- Mokre, K. (2020). Five Tips for Navigating the Stress and Anxiety in College. *Anxiety And Depression Association of America*. Retrieved from <https://adaa.org/learn-from-us/from-the-experts/blog-posts/consumer/5-tips-navigating-stress-and-anxiety-college>