

Anxiety, Stress, and Suicide

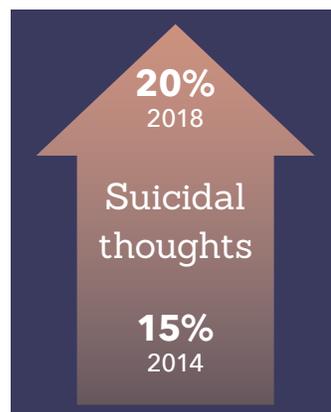
Partners in Prevention (PIP) is a statewide coalition of 21 public and private colleges and universities in Missouri with the mission of building safe and healthy campuses. PIP tracks students' high-risk behaviors and behaviors that promote health and wellness through the annual implementation of the Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (MACHB) survey. By examining student mental health concerns, PIP can track the overall wellbeing of Missouri college students. This brief focuses on trends in suicidal thoughts, anxiety, and stress over the past five years in Missouri college students.

Introduction

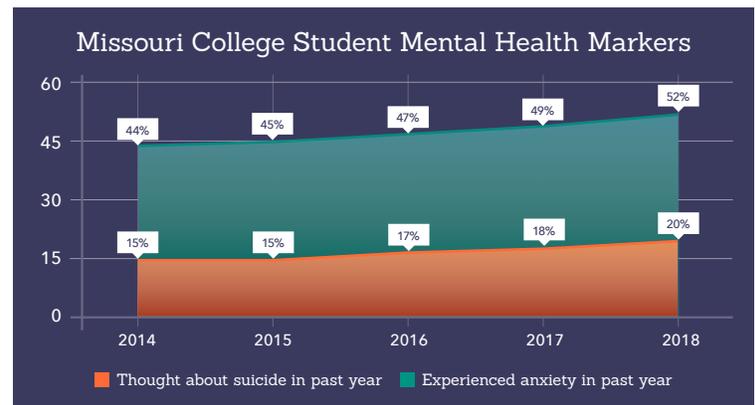
According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide rates among the American public have risen significantly since 1999. Specifically during this time period, Missouri has persistently ranked among the highest with a 36% increase. Furthermore, suicide is the second highest cause of death in individuals ages 15-24.¹ College students are in a particularly high risk group when it comes to dying by suicide. It is critical for college administrators, faculty, staff, and students to understand how to assist those who are contemplating suicide so that they are able to get the assistance they need.

Missouri College Students' Suicidal Thoughts

According to the MACHB, rates of suicidal thoughts and experiences of anxiety have increased over the past five years, which follows the trends reported by the CDC. In Missouri, the rate of students who reported experiencing anxiety in the past year has increased from 44% in 2014 to 52% in 2018. Similarly, the percentage of students who report having suicidal thoughts in the past year has increased from 15%

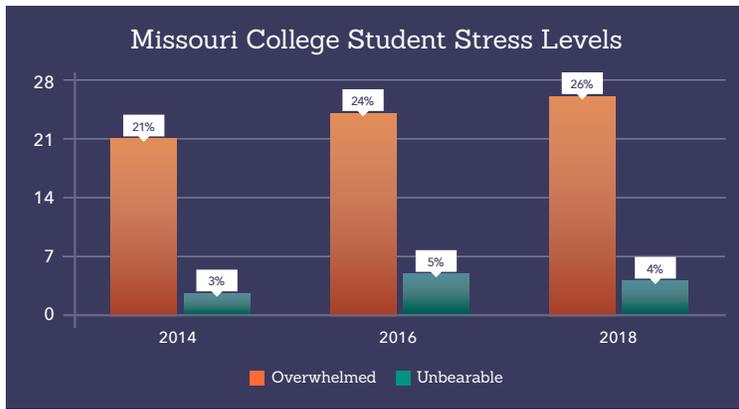


in 2014 to 20% in 2018. At the intersection of stress and anxiety in 2018, 49% of students who thought about suicide in the past year also experienced anxiety.



Stress Levels

Every two years, students who take the MACHB are asked to report their stress levels over the past two weeks. From 2014 to 2018, there has been an increase in students who report feeling both overwhelmed and that their stress is unbearable. Current students report feeling overwhelmed at a rate of 26%, which is higher than their 2014 peers (21%). This remains true for the students who report feeling that their stress is unbearable with an increase from 2.7% in 2014 to 4.2% in 2018. This specific data is collected on a bi-yearly basis, and therefore it is important to continue to watch this trend as stress, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts continue to rise.



Programs and Education

Ask. Listen. Refer.

Ask. Listen. Refer. is a free, statewide online suicide prevention training program designed to train and educate students, faculty, staff, and other members of college and university campuses across Missouri. The program trains individuals to 1) identify people at risk for suicide 2) recognize the risk factors, protective factors, and warning signs of suicide, and 3) respond to and get help for people at risk. Learn more and complete the training at asklistenrefer.org.



RESPOND

While RESPOND training is not offered specifically through Partners in Prevention, it is a recommended

training for PIP institutions. It is an 8 hour, in person training that empowers participants to recognize and effectively support and refer a person experiencing a mental health challenge or crisis. If you are interested in more information about how your mental health center can license RESPOND, contact us at pip@missouri.edu or, contact Christy Hutton at huttoncc@missouri.edu.

Additional PIP Resources

PIP offers a wide range of resources about suicide prevention. Information offered includes multiple data briefs, best practices for suicide prevention, national resources, additional research, and poster campaigns. This can be found in our suicide prevention WIKI, which can be found at pip.missouri.edu/topics/suicide.html.

Contact Partners in Prevention at (573) 884-7551.

Report Prepared by Erica Braham, graduate research assistant. Data prepared by Dan Reilly, research coordinator, Dong Ding, graduate research assistant, Erica Braham, graduate research assistant, and Alex Swanson, graduate research assistant.

References

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/suicide/index.html>

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Finances and Stress

Partners in Prevention is Missouri's higher education substance abuse consortium dedicated to creating healthy and safe college campuses. The coalition is comprised of 21 public and private colleges and universities in Missouri. Each year, PIP implements the Missouri Assessment of College Behaviors (MACHB), a statewide survey of college students designed to assess high-risk behaviors. The MACHB provides demographic data that can be utilized to assess risk factors for academic retention related to finances, demographics, and stress.

Academic Retention and Finances

Many factors affect academic retention among college students. Financial situations often require additional obligations that shift focus from academic responsibilities to obtaining money in order to finance education. The MACHB assesses the ways in which Missouri students pay for their education, along with the levels of stress they feel, and their thoughts of quitting school with key indications of why they are thinking of discontinuing their education.

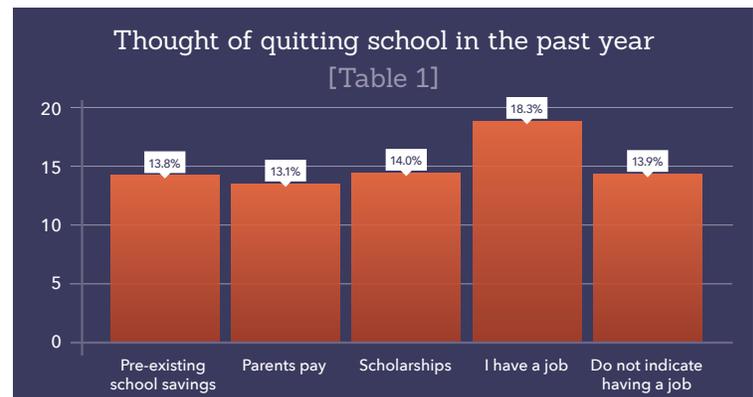
Students who take the MACHB report how they pay for a majority of their education. Options include pre-existing school savings, parents pay, scholarships, and having a job. In 2018, 33% of Missouri College students indicated that they pay for a majority of their education with a job. 22% reported having pre-existing school savings, while 63% indicated scholarships. 46% of Missouri college students report that their parents help them pay for school*.

*Select all that apply

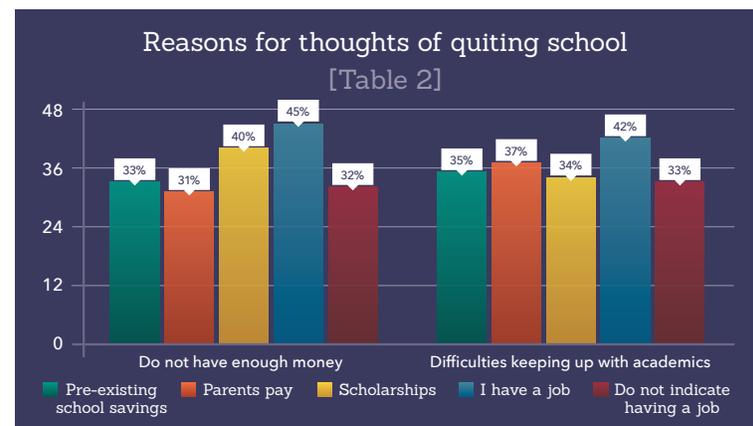
Students with Jobs

According to the 2018 MACHB, 18.5% of students who have jobs to primarily fund their education reported thoughts of quitting school. Compared to counterparts who possess pre-existing school savings, scholarships, and parental support, this number is the highest (see table 1).

The MACHB asks students who indicate thoughts of discontinuing their educations to identify factors that contribute to their overall thoughts of quitting school.



These factors include not having enough money and difficulties keeping with academics. According to the 2018 MACHB, students who have jobs report both not having enough money (45%) and difficulties keeping up with academics (42%) as a barrier to retention at a higher percentage than their peers. Students who do not indicate having a job but indicate thoughts of quitting school report these barriers at a rate of 32% and 33% respectively. Financial support that comes primarily from other sources to fund education may counter some of these barriers and other stressors that exist with having a job while in school.



These potential stressors are not specifically indicated by the MACHB, but as the MACHB asks about stress in general, students who report having a job indicate that they are overwhelmed at a rate of 30% compared to their peers with pre-existing school savings (26%). These trends remain the same for students whose primary sources of funding come from other means. Additionally, working students report that stress has impacted their academic (29%) and personal (40%) lives considerably or a great deal more frequently than their peers.

Title [Table 3]		
	Stress impacted academic life considerably/ a great deal	Stress impacted personal life considerably/ a great deal
Pre-existing school savings	24%	33%
Parents pay	26%	33%
Scholarships	26%	34%
I have a job	29%	40%
Do not indicate having a job	25%	33%

Discussion

Although this cannot be interpreted as causal data, it is important to consider factors that may influence academic retention in higher education. As Missouri students strive to complete school, levels of financial support may affect the ways in which students can keep up with their academics. Additionally, as students with jobs to primarily finance their education indicate being more academically and personally stressed, more steps can be taken to assess the extent to which finances and job duties influence the lives of Missouri college students.

Contact Partners in Prevention at (573) 884-7551.

Report prepared 7/23/18 by Erica Braham, undergraduate research assistant.. Data prepared by Dan Reilly, research coordinator, Dong Ding, graduate research assistant, Erica Braham, undergraduate research assistant, and Alex Swanson, graduate research assistant.

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