

80% university students mentally stressed

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More than 80 percent of university students are struggling with psychological distress with almost one-fifth of these classified as having a serious mental illness, according to a UQ study.

Further, the rate of [psychological distress](#) among university [students](#) surveyed (83.9 percent) is almost three times higher than in the general population (29 percent).

The study, published in the November edition of *Australian Psychologist*, found rates of serious mental illness among the sample (19.2 percent) were more than five times higher than in the general population (three percent).

Study author Dr Helen Stallman, a clinical psychologist and researcher with UQ's Schools of Medicine and Pharmacy, said she was not only worried and surprised that so many students were distressed but that only one-third (34.3 percent) of the most seriously affected reported consulting a health professional.

Her study of almost 6500 Australian university students found the typical profile of a distressed student to be undergraduate students in their second, third or fourth year, and aged between 18 and 34.

Dr Stallman said the seriously affected group reported reduced capacity or total impairment for 10 days of the previous month.

The study found 83.9 percent of students surveyed reported elevated

distress levels with 64.7 percent of these exhibiting mild to moderate symptoms [mental illness](#). Only 16 percent of the sample were classified as not having any [mental distress](#), Dr Stallman said.

Dr Stallman said of the 34.3 percent of the serious group who reported seeking help, most (67.3 percent) visited their general practitioner while only 9.3 percent consulted a [psychiatrist](#), 20 percent a psychologist and 30.4 percent a counsellor.

The study revealed a number of protective factors associated with a lower the risk of [mental health problems](#) among students.

These included: students living in a situation where there was a higher connectedness and interrelatedness such as in university housing or with parents or a partner.

"Both life experience and experience as a student also seem to be protective factors," Dr Stallman said.

"Older students and postgraduate students seem more resilient, perhaps because of increased coping strategies, or at postgraduate level, self-selection of students who have effective coping measures."

Dr Stallman said the study highlighted a need for universities to be proactive in promoting the mental health and wellbeing of students in addition to specific traditionally targeted areas such as alcohol abuse.

Provided by University of Queensland

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