

Depression, anxiety common among college students, finds study

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Depression and anxiety among college students is a growing public health problem. And new research from the University of Georgia suggests the problem may be worse for students who aren't the same race

as most of their peers.

The [new study](#) found that students who were not the majority race at a predominantly white [college](#) reported significantly higher rates of [depression](#) than their white peers.

At the mostly white university, more than half of the students who self-identified as races other than white reported feelings of mild depression. An additional 17% said they were experiencing moderate to [severe depression](#).

Students at the predominantly white institution all reported similar levels of [anxiety](#), regardless of race, with more than three in every five students saying they experience mild to severe levels of anxiety.

At the historically Black college, students who weren't Black experienced higher rates of anxiety and depression as well.

"Our study adds to the evidence of how important the work around inclusivity and mental health is in the college environment," said Janani Rajbhandari-Thapa, an associate professor in UGA's College of Public Health. "It's important to be mindful that not all students come with the same background, and we need to support them more."

First-generation students more likely to suffer depression

More than 3,100 students participated in the study during the COVID-19 pandemic, answering questions about feelings of hopelessness, sleep issues and lack of energy, among other topics.

The researchers found that first-generation students were also

significantly more likely to experience depression compared to students who weren't the first to attend college in their families.

All first-generation students surveyed expressed that they had some level of depression, regardless of the institution. Most reported mild symptoms, but more than half at the predominantly white university said they had moderate to severe levels of depression.

"I was an international student myself and can relate to the stresses of settling in during the first semester in the U.S. a little bit," Rajbhandari-Thapa said. "Being a first-generation student and experiencing college for the first time in your family comes with its own set of challenges and opportunities, and it is important that university faculty and staff work towards addressing the challenges."

"There are trainings and workshops in the workplace, but we need to do more to help new [college students](#) feel at home."

Socializing, sense of belonging helps safeguard against mental illness

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted daily life for most Americans. College students were particularly hard hit.

Where they would normally be socializing and engaging in group activities, many were masked up and socially distanced, preventing some of that integral interaction that strengthens social bonds. The additional stressors likely led to increases in stress and anxiety, but the researchers suggest that not all groups were affected equally.

Female students, for example, were harder hit with depression and anxiety than their [male counterparts](#), which reflects the larger social

pattern of [mental health](#) problems hitting women more intensely.

But the researchers say investing in diversity, equity, and inclusion resources can help students feel more at home on campus, regardless of their race or first-generation status.

"Belonging is so important," Rajbhandari-Thapa said. "I don't think there is ever enough support for first-generation and minority [students](#). Universities are starting to do this already, but it's important that we provide as much support as possible."

The research is [published](#) in the *Journal of American College Health*.

More information: Janani Rajbhandari-Thapa et al, Depression and anxiety among college students at Historically Black and Predominantly White universities during the COVID-19 pandemic: A cross-sectional study, *Journal of American College Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/07448481.2023.2230297](#)

Provided by University of Georgia

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