

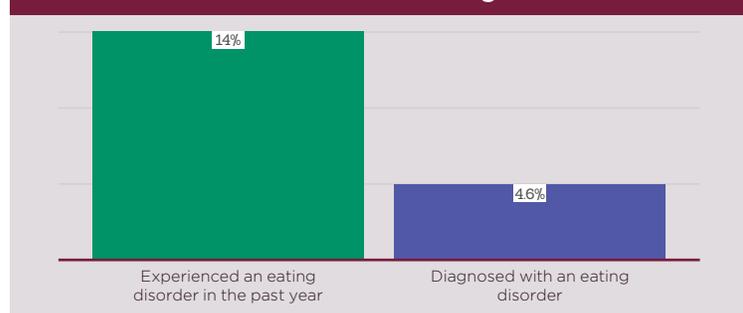
The Relationship Between Eating Disorders and Substance Use Among Missouri College Students

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is Missouri's higher education substance misuse consortium dedicated to creating healthy and safe college campuses. The coalition is comprised of 24 public and private colleges and universities in the state working to prevent high-risk behaviors by implementing evidence-based strategies. To measure progress and obtain data needed for the implementation of programs, PIP created the Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (MACHB) Survey. The MACHB is an annual, online survey that has been implemented each spring since 2007. The survey assesses the roles that alcohol, drugs (illicit and prescription), tobacco/nicotine, interpersonal violence, and mental health have on student health and wellness. This brief will focus on the intersection of eating disorders and substance use among Missouri college students.

Prevalence of Eating Disorders

According to the 2021 MACHB survey, 14% of Missouri college students report experiencing an eating disorder in the past year, and 4.6% of students report being diagnosed by a medical or mental health professional with an eating disorder.*

Chart 1 - Prevalence of Eating Disorders



Additionally, the percentage of students who report experiencing an eating disorder in the past year has increased steadily since 2016.

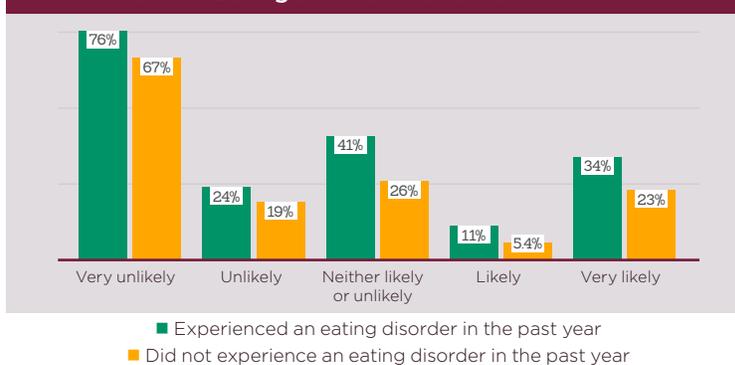
Chart 2 - Past Year Experience of Eating Disorders



The Intersection of Eating Disorders and Substance Use

Students who had experienced an eating disorder in the past year were more likely to have engaged in substance use compared to students who had not experienced an eating disorder (as shown in chart 3). Students who had experienced an eating disorder were more likely to report both past year alcohol use, as well as binge drinking (consuming 4+ drinks for women or 5+ drinks for men in a 2-hour period at least once in the past 2 weeks) compared to students who had not experienced an eating disorder. There were also higher rates of other substance use including past year cannabis use, past year prescription drug misuse (either use of someone else's prescription or misusing their own prescription), and past year use of tobacco/nicotine products.

Chart 3 - Eating Disorders and Substance Use

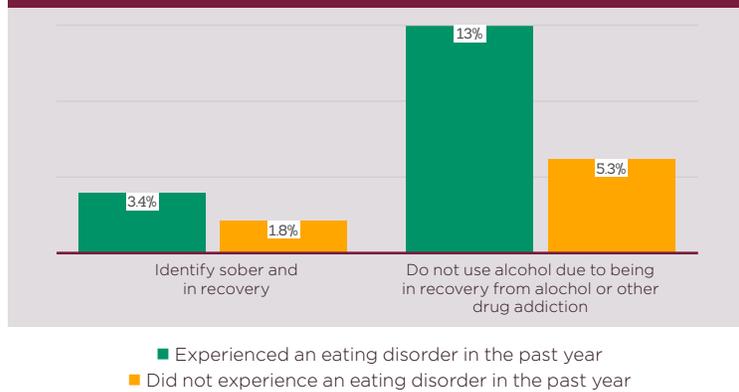


For more information, visit mopip.org

Funded by the Missouri Department of Mental Health, Division of Behavioral Health

Eating Disorders and Substance Use Recovery

Chart 4 - Eating Disorders and Substance Use Recovery



More students who had experienced an eating disorder in the past year report identifying as sober and in recovery from alcohol or other drug addiction than students who had not experienced an eating disorder (3.4% compared to 1.8%, respectively). Additionally, 13% of students who report experiencing an eating disorder in the past year do not use alcohol because they are in recovery from alcohol or other drug addiction, compared to only 5.3% of students who did not experience an eating disorder in the past year.

Summary

The co-occurrence of mental health and substance use disorders is common, and MACHB data supports a correlation between experiences of eating disorders and higher rates of substance use. Students who report

experiencing an eating disorder report both higher rates of substance use and higher rates of being in recovery due to alcohol or other drug addiction. Given the rise in the percentage of students who report experiencing an eating disorder, it is important to screen for eating disorders in clinical services like counseling and mental health centers. Seeing as there is a correlation between substance use and eating disorders, best practices might aim to incorporate screening for substance use disorders among those who report experiencing an eating disorder. Furthermore, when aiming to address the potential co-occurrence of these concerns, integrative approaches might be most beneficial and give students the opportunity to gain insight of these intersections for themselves.

Resources

Body U is a free, online program funded by the Missouri Eating Disorders Council and coordinated by Washington University in St. Louis. It is available to anyone in Missouri and helps address body image, mood, and anxiety. Participants complete a 5-minute confidential survey and then access a program tailored specifically to their needs. Visit bodyu.org to learn more.

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

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The MACHB asks about both experiences and diagnoses of various mental health concerns, as students often note experiencing signs and symptoms, such as disordered eating, but have not taken steps and/or do not have access to see a professional for a formal diagnosis