

KEY FINDINGS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ON THE MCHBS

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is Missouri's higher education substance abuse consortium focused on promoting healthy behaviors on college campuses. In order to gain an understanding of the current health behaviors of college students, PIP implements the Missouri College Health Behavior Survey (MCHBS) each spring. The information gained from the MCHBS not only allows PIP to learn more about the risky behaviors of Missouri college students as a whole, but also provides the opportunity to focus on the behaviors of particular demographics and sub-populations.

DISCUSSION

International students face distinct challenges as non-permanent residents on the college and university campuses across the State of Missouri. While they are less than 5% of the student population, their needs and challenges are so diverse and unique that they undoubtedly require specific attention and resources. The following seeks to identify more precisely the health behaviors of these students.

International students have a weaker and less permanent connection to the university or college, fellow students and organizations. They overwhelmingly describe wanting to be more connected on campus and having a lesser sense of belonging among students. International students are also more likely to consider leaving college or university in the past year (nearly 1 in 3). With the exception of student government and athletics they are also considerably less likely to be involved in any campus activity or student organization than other students.

While alcohol is a commonly cited concern for the health of college students, this proves to be in stark contrast to the health behaviors of international students. The same

holds true of marijuana, where international students are more likely to refrain from use.

International students are also less likely to describe having stress and being negatively affected by their stress. They are less likely to report having suicidal thoughts or having a mental health disorder. Unfortunately, while they are less likely to report negative mental health outcomes, they report having fewer personal and contacts to help them cope when problems do arise.

SUMMARY

While it seems that international students have more positive and healthier behaviors when compared to the average college population, they are overwhelmingly disconnected from campus and at-risk for problems as they do not have the resources or connections to help cope when problems or consequences arise. Providing a network of support and establishing a base of resources and contacts for international students appears to be the greatest service and need that still exist for the health and well-being of international students.

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