

# Mental Health and Well-Being of Fraternity and Sorority Students in Missouri

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. Examining student mental health concerns enables PIP to track the wellbeing of Missouri college students of specific subpopulations. This brief focuses on stress, suicidal thoughts, and help-seeking behaviors for Missouri college students who are in Fraternity and Sorority life (including IFC, PHA, National Pan-Hellenic Council Fraternities/Sororities, and Multicultural Fraternities/Sororities).

## The Sorority and Fraternity Experience

Approximately 24% of Missouri college students are members of fraternities or sororities, traditionally referred to as "Greek" students. Fraternities and sororities provide students with a variety of opportunities academically, professionally, and socially. However, college can present both an exciting and stressful experience for students, especially those who are balancing more than academics alone.

## Mental Health and Well-Being

According to the 2018 MACHB, 26% of Missouri college students report overwhelming stress and 4% report unbearable stress in the past two weeks. For students involved in Greek life, the rate of experiencing overwhelming stress (28% Greek v. 26% non-Greek) and unbearable stress (3.6% Greek v. 4.3% non-Greek), is comparable to their non-Greek peers.

Students in Greek life report that their leading sources of stress include academics (95%), financial concerns (56%), future plans (55%), and time management (55%). Although these rates are similar for students in Greek life and those who are not in Greek life, outside organizations or responsibilities, such as commitment to fraternities or sororities, pose a significantly greater amount of stress for Greek students than for their non-Greek peers (44% v. 19%)\*.

*\*indicates check all that apply*

In the past year, the most common mental health concerns reported by Missouri college students in Greek life include anxiety (54%), panic attacks (25%), major depression (24%), and chronic sleep issues (17%). Students in Greek life reported experiencing anxiety, at a slightly higher rate than their non-Greek peers and experienced chronic sleep issues and major depression at slightly lower rates than their peers.

	Greek	Non-Greek
Anxiety	54%	52%
Chronic Sleep Issues	17%	19%
Panic Attacks	25%	25%
Major Depression	24%	28%
Did Not Experience Any	36%	39%

## Suicide

Compared to their peers who are not involved in fraternity or sorority life, Greek students report lower rates of suicidal thoughts in their lifetime (38% v. 42%), suicidal thoughts in the past year (19% v. 21%), and suicide attempts in the past year (1.5% v. 1.9%). In addition, forty-eight percent (48%) of Greek students report being concerned about a friend having suicidal thoughts or behaviors in the past year.

For more information, visit [pip.missouri.edu](http://pip.missouri.edu)

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

## Help-Seeking Behaviors for Mental Health and Suicide

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When stressed, Greek students mainly feel like their best on-campus resources include friends or peers (92%), the university counseling center (30%), or a professor or faculty member (17%). Off campus, students in Greek life mainly feel like they can go to friends or peers (86%), parents (79%), siblings or extended family (57%), or a mental health professional (18%).\*

For Greek students who reported experiencing anxiety, major depression, or mental health-related issues, 67% sought assistance, primarily from friends and family (50%), their university counseling center (13%) an off-campus mental health provider (9%) or an off-campus medical doctor (10%).\*

Forty-six percent (46%) of students in Greek life sought assistance for their suicidal thoughts or attempts, primarily from their university counseling center (12%), an off-campus medical doctor (11%), or an off-campus mental health provider (11%). When asked how likely students were to bring up the topic of suicide with someone at risk, sixty-three percent (63%) of Greek students reported that they would be likely to very likely to bring it up.

## Statewide Resources

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Ask. Listen. Refer.<sup>1</sup> is a statewide online suicide prevention training program that is designed to help individuals prevent suicide. Campus faculty, staff, and students learn how to identify people at risk for suicide; recognize the risk factors, protective factors, and warning signs of suicide; and respond and get help for people at risk. The training only takes about 20 minutes.

RESPOND is an eight hour workshop offered at the University of Missouri and campuses across the state and country. RESPOND empowers individuals to offer effective support to other individuals in crisis. The training gives an overview of mental health symptoms and offers an action plan to help RESPOND effectively. For more information on workshop dates, contact Christy Hutton at [huttoncc@missouri.edu](mailto:huttoncc@missouri.edu).

## Resources Specific to Greek Life

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The National Panhellenic Conference (NPC)<sup>2</sup>, an umbrella organization that focuses on advancing the sorority experience, and the North American Interfraternity Conference (NIC)<sup>3</sup>, the trade association for inter and national men's fraternities, both provide programming to positively support and empower Greek students during college.

Individual member organizations may have their own programs to support the health and safety of their members. For example, Theta Chi's Sacred Purpose<sup>4</sup> program addresses the challenges that fraternity members may face during college and provides resources and education on topics such as recognizing signs of depression and suicide prevention and intervention.

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

Report prepared 11/2/18 by Michelle Burns, graduate assistant. Data prepared by Alex Swanson, graduate research assistant, and Dong Ding, research coordinator.

### References:

1. Ask. Listen. Refer.: [www.asklistenrefer.org](http://www.asklistenrefer.org)
2. The National Panhellenic Conference: [www.npcwomen.org](http://www.npcwomen.org)
3. North American Interfraternity Conference: [nicfraternity.org](http://nicfraternity.org)
4. Sacred Purpose: [www.sacredpurpose.thetachi.org](http://www.sacredpurpose.thetachi.org)

Published November 7, 2018