

First-generation Students' Health Behaviors

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is Missouri's higher education substance abuse consortium dedicated to creating healthy and safe college campuses. The coalition is comprised of 21 public and private colleges and universities in the state who work to lower high-risk behaviors by implementing strategic plans for prevention utilizing 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. In the 2019 MACHB survey, a new question was added to ask if students are the first generation in their immediate family to attend college, which can help us examine discrepancies in health education and behaviors between first-generation students and their non-first-generation peers.

In the survey sample, a quarter (25%) of students are the first generation in their immediate family to attend college/university. The majority (73%) of them graduated from a Missouri high school. Sixty-four percent (64%) of the first-generation students are female while 35% of them are male. Compared with non-first-generation students, non-white and LGBTQAP students make up a higher percentage of the first-generation students (26% vs. 13%, 18% vs. 14%, respectively). Sixteen percent (16%) of the first-generation students identify as African-American or Native African, which is twice as much as non-first-generation students (8%). Most first-generation students pay their tuition by using loans under their own names, or scholarships (64% and 65% respectively). More than half (56%) of them are eligible to receive a Pell Grant. The average GPA for the first-generation students is 3.31, which is slightly lower than their peers (3.45).

Alcohol Use

According to the 2019 MACHB, 80% of first-generation students have consumed alcohol in their lifetime and 74% have consumed alcohol in the past year, which are similar to other students. However, among drinkers, 21% of the first-generation students started drinking before age 16, which is significantly higher than other students (16%). The binge-drinking rate for this population is 21%, which is slightly lower than other

students (23%). Among the first-generation students, the 21% of drinkers who started drinking before age 16 have riskier drinking behaviors and are more likely to experience negative consequences (Table 1). There are no significant differences in reasons for use, common locations of drinking, or binge-drinking rates between the first-generation students and other students.

First-generation Student Behavior [Table 1]

	Started drinking before age 16	Started drinking at/after age 16
Binge drinking rate in past two weeks	39%	24%
Driven after drinking	26%	18%
Rode with a driver who had been drinking (or rode with a drinking driver)	42%	25%
Been hurt or injured	15%	9%
Engaged in risky sexual behavior	26%	15%
Experienced a blackout/memory loss	43%	27%

Prescription Drug and Marijuana Use

Eleven percent (11%) of first-generation students have used prescription drugs in the past year without a doctor's prescription, which is slightly higher than other students (9%). Among these students, 64% said that the prescription drugs were given to them, which is significantly higher than their peers (55%). Most of them were given prescription drugs by their friends (76%). Other sources are from family (33%), roommates (12%), and strangers (7%).*

First-generation students also report using marijuana at higher rates than their non-first-generation peers. Compared to other students, there are more first-generation students that have used marijuana in their lifetime (42% vs. 37%) and more of them started using at or before age 16 (38% vs. 32%). The rate of using marijuana in the past year is also higher than others (31% vs. 28%), but marijuana derivatives and edibles are used at similar rates.

Interpersonal Violence & Mental Health

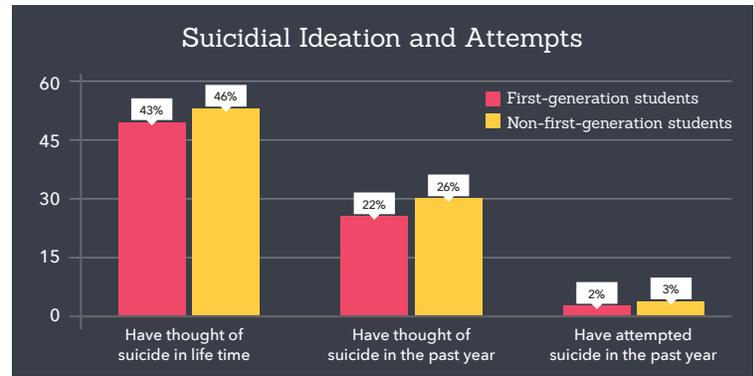
First-generation students report experiencing interpersonal violence at higher rates than non-first generation students. Approximately a third (33%) of first-generation students have experienced an abusive relationship in their lifetime and 18% have experienced abuse in the past year. Twenty-four percent (24%) of this population report experiencing non-consensual sexual contact (NCSC) in their lifetime. These rates are 28%, 13%, and 20% in non-first generation students, respectively. First generation and non-first generation students experienced NCSC in the past year at comparable rates; 7.1% vs. 7.0%.

Most (71%) first-generation students indicate that they have experienced at least one type of mental health concern in the past year. This number is 5% higher than their peers (66%). The comparison data for specific mental health concerns are shown in Table 2.

Mental Health Concerns [Table 2]		
	First-generation students	Other students
Anxiety	60%	56%
Major depression	37%	30%
Panic attacks	30%	27%
Chronic sleep issues	25%	18%
Eating disorders	11%	8.1%
Self-injury	5.9%	5.8%

Among first-generation students who experienced mental health concerns, only 59% of them sought assistance. The most common barriers that stop them from seeking assistance are: they don't think it is needed (55%), being afraid of judgement (31%), high cost or the insurance does not cover it (29%), it is not helpful (21%), and they do not have insurance (17%). Suicidal ideation and attempt rates of the first-generation students are also significantly higher than the rates of other students. Almost half (46%) of

this population have had thoughts of suicide in their lifetime, and 26% of students thought of suicide in the past year and 2.6% attempted suicide in the past year.



Retention

Since most first-generation students come from low income families, financial issues are an important factor that contributes to their decision of leaving the current institution. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of first-generation students thought about transferring or quitting school. Nearly half (42%) of them indicate that they “do not have enough money to pay for school” and 9.1% indicate that they “could not find a job”, which are the only two factors with significantly higher rates compared to other students (27% and 5.7%, respectively). There is a statistically significant correlation between first-generation status and leaving school because of financial issues.

Summary

A quarter of Missouri college students are the first generation in their immediate family to attend higher education. If they use substances, they start at a younger age, which could lead to riskier behaviors than other students. The most common difficulties they experienced in their well-being and school life are financial issues. To better serve these students, it is important for campuses to promote free services and supportive programs on-campus to target this population. Meanwhile, health and well-being education is another important task for campuses to work on with this group of students. To find more information and resources, please visit pip.missouri.edu.

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

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*Select all that apply

For more information, visit pip.missouri.edu

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