

Student Safety During Spring 2020 Virtual Learning Due to COVID-19

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is Missouri's higher education substance misuse consortium dedicated to creating healthy and safe college campuses. The 2020 Students' Well-being Survey assessed Missouri college students' health experiences during the pandemic. The survey was implemented at 13 public/private Universities/Colleges in mid-September with a 19% response rate (N=5446). Campuses were voluntarily participated which included 2-year and 4-year schools located in rural/urban areas.

Background

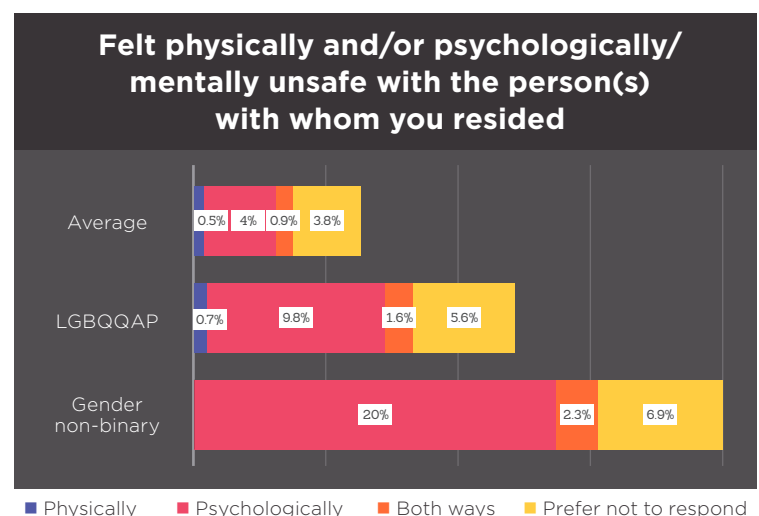
From March to May 2020, most campuses operations were disrupted and shifted to virtual learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, stay at home orders were implemented in most of the states in the US. This may have been the first time that many college students were faced with spending an extended amount of time with their family members, partners, and roommates while also needing to focus on academic work. The pandemic led to a sudden and unexpected change.

For some students, this sudden change has proven to be challenging. The 2020 Students' Well-being Survey included 3 questions that assessed students' experience of safety during the virtual learning time from March to May. These questions asked students if they felt physically and/or psychologically/mentally unsafe with the person(s) with whom they resided; if they felt pressured, threatened or forced to do something they didn't want to do by someone important to them; or if they were unable to access medications (including, but not limited to birth control and/or anti-retroviral therapy) because of someone important to them.

On average, 5.4% of Missouri college students indicated that they did not feel safe during the virtual learning time due to COVID-19 in the spring of 2020. More students reported feeling psychologically/mentally unsafe than those who reported feeling physically unsafe (4% vs. 0.5%). Although it is important to note that nearly 4%

students chose not to respond to this question. Eleven percent (11%) of students reported feeling pressured, threatened or forced to do something by someone important to them, while 2.2% preferred not to respond. A few students (3.3%) reported that they were unable to access medication because of someone important to them.

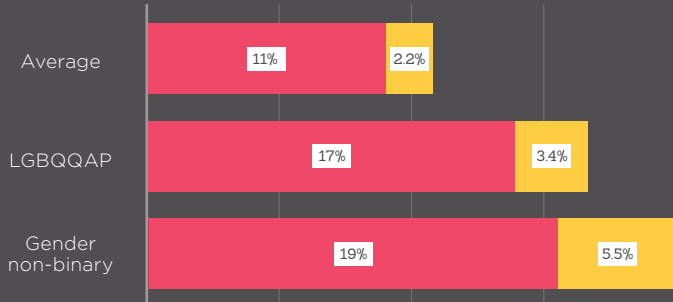
Among all different demographic groups (including age, sexual orientation, gender, race, year in school), we found the data about safety of students who self-reported as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Questioning, Asexual, and Pansexual (LGBQQAP) and gender non-binary (including transgender, gender queer, self-identify, and prefer not to respond) felt significantly different than their peers. The following charts show the differences:



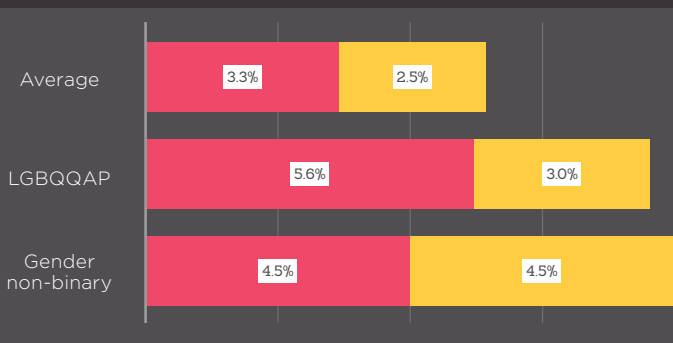
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Funded by the Missouri Department of Mental Health, Division of Behavioral Health

Felt pressured, threatened or forced to do something you didn't want to do by someone important to you

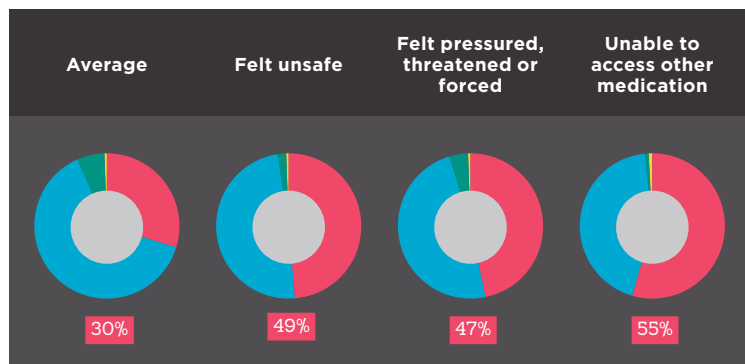


Were unable to access other medication, including but not limited to birth control and/or anti-retroviral therapy, because of someone important to you



■ Yes ■ Prefer not to respond

Feeling unsafe, pressured, threatened, or unable to access medication is also associated with stress levels. On average, 30% of students reported their stress level as either overwhelming or unbearable. The chart below shows that students who experienced feeling unsafe, pressured, threatened or forced to do something, or were unable to access medication during the virtual learning time in the spring of 2020 were more likely to experience high stress levels (overwhelming or unbearable stress) than other students.



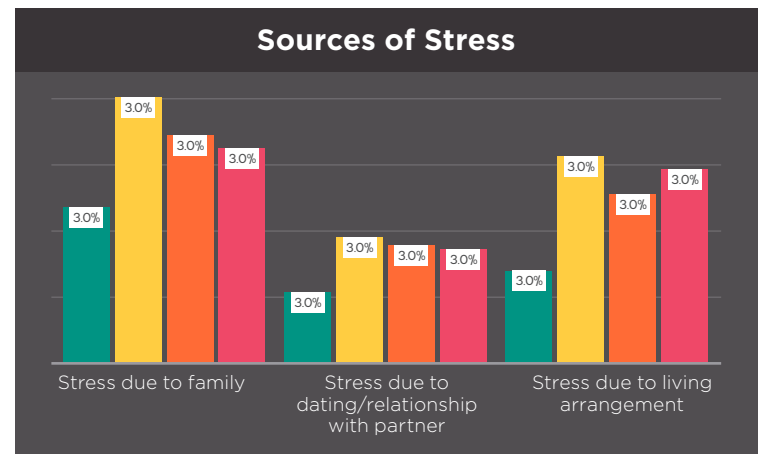
■ High stress levels ■ Low stress levels ■ No stress ■ Prefer not to respond

During the March to May 2020 campus operation disruption due to COVID-19, over 70% of students who experienced feeling unsafe, pressured, threatened or forced to do something, or were unable to access medication lived with their parents and/or other family members. Other people they lived with* are listed in the following table.

	Who felt unsafe	Who felt pressured, threatened or forced	Who were unable to access other medication
Roommates/friends	17%	15%	17%
Spouse/dating partners	12%	15%	17%
Parents/other family members	74%	71%	70%
Alone	5.2%	6.3%	3.9%

*Check all that apply

Among students who experienced stress and also experienced feeling unsafe, pressured, threatened or forced to do something, or were unable to access medication, more than half (63%, 54%, and 51%, respectively) of them indicated that family was a major source of that stress. These numbers are significantly higher than the average of 37%. The other two common sources of stress were dating/relationship(s) with their partner(s) and their living arrangements.



■ Average ■ Felt unsafe ■ Felt pressured ■ Unable to access other medication

Summary

LGBQQAP and gender non-binary students indicated that they were more likely to feel unsafe, be pressured, threatened or forced to do something, or be unable to access medication than their peers. Students who felt unsafe, or were pressured or threatened to do something reported that they were more likely

to experience high stress levels. It is important to note that being back at home can be challenging for some students, especially for LGBTQQAP and gender non-binary students. It is crucial for our campuses and coalition to provide information about coping strategies to relieve stress, as well as virtual resources to assist with safety issues before winter break. For

more information about Partners in Prevention and to explore our research, visit pip.missouri.edu.

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

Report and Data prepared 11/4/19 by Dong Ding, Research Coordinator.
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