



Mental Health, Substance Use, and Coping among Undergraduate University Students

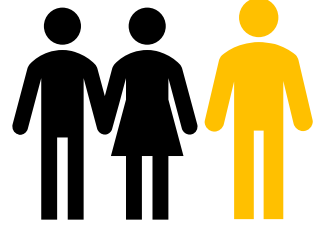
Dr Kim Hellemans (she/her)

Department of Neuroscience



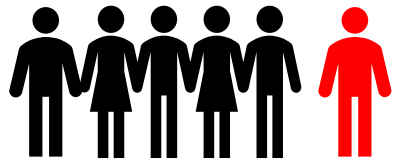
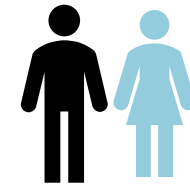
Carleton
University





**1 in 3 students have a diagnosed
mental health or substance use disorder¹**

**About 50% of Canadian students felt
“so depressed it was difficult to function”
& 68.9% “felt overwhelming anxiety”²**



**16.7% of Canadian students report
seriously considering suicide in the
past 12 months²**

1. WHO World Mental Health Surveys International College Student Project: Prevalence and distribution of mental disorders, 2018

2. American College Health Association- National College Health Assessment II: Canadian Consortium Executive Summary, Spring 2019

Why does it matter?



Academic success strongly
tied to student well-being.

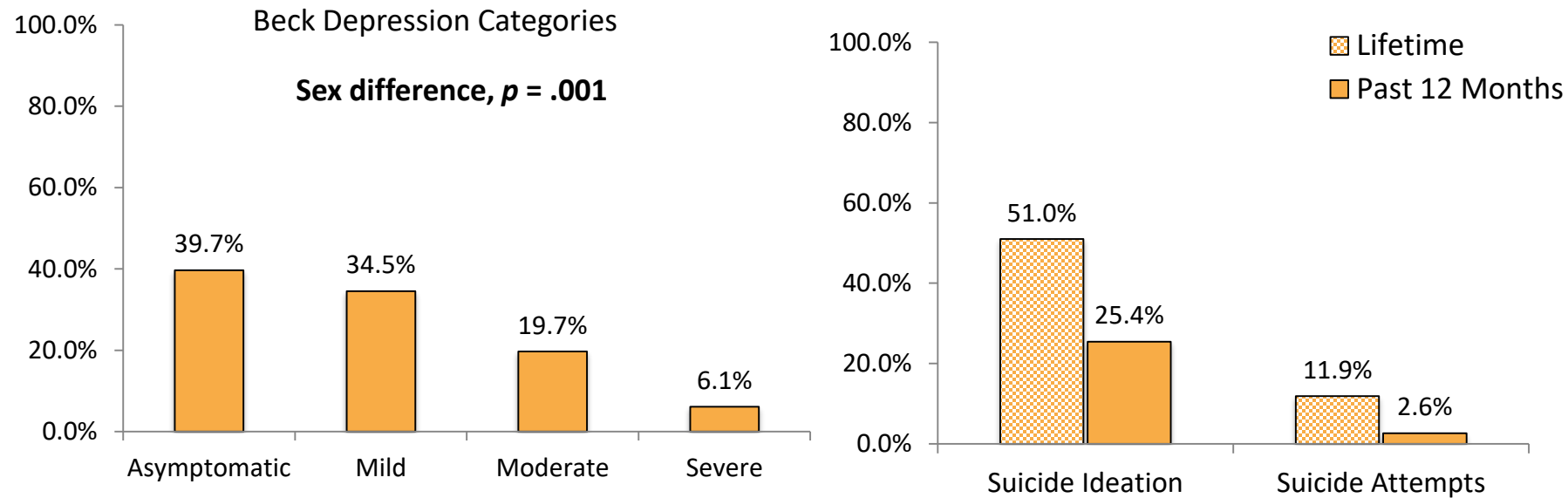


First year students particularly
vulnerable.



When students feel connected to their peers,
their professors, and their campus,
it buffers against the stress of university life.

The majority of students have depressive symptoms...

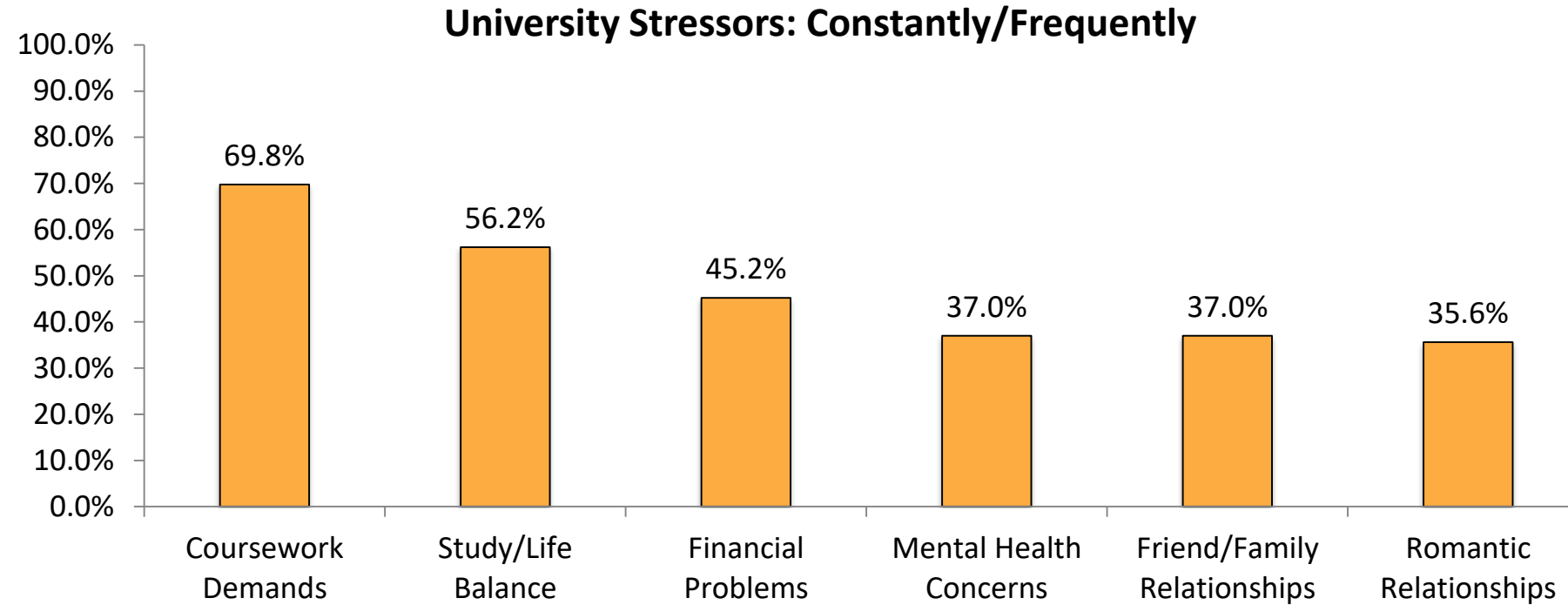


*Mental Health and Problematic Substance Use in University students:
Relationship to biomarkers of Stress and Immune function (2019)*



$N = 539$, 76.3% ($n = 411$) female, 23.2% ($n = 125$) male, $M_{age} = 19.4 \pm 2.1$

...are highly stressed...



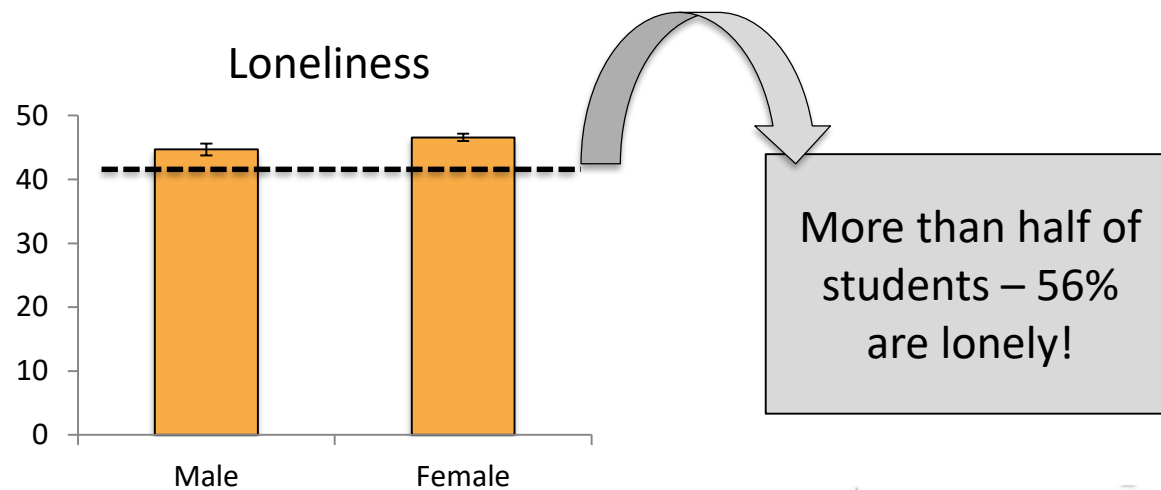
- Saliva & Blood – Genetics, Cortisol, CRP, IL-6, TNF-a, Methylation
- Collaboration – PMC & Registrar's office

University Transition Study – Fall 2019, First year students

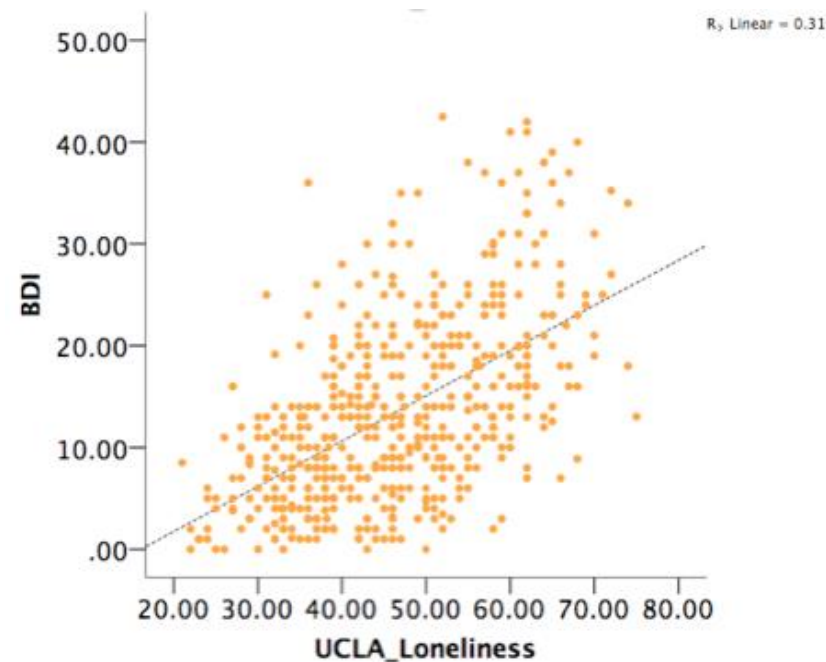


$N = 73$, (n=50 female , n=22 male, n=1 transgender), $M_{age} = 18.2$ yrs (± 0.74)

... are lonely...

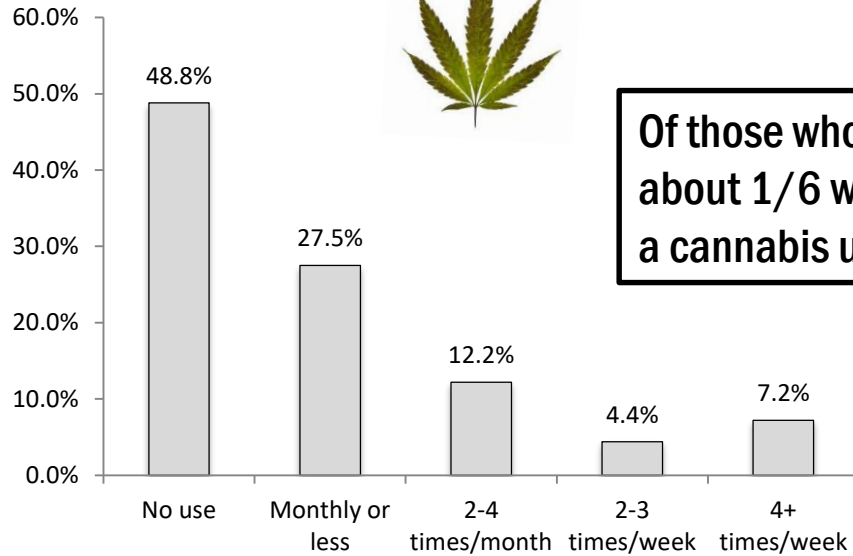


Social connections matter...
particularly to young women

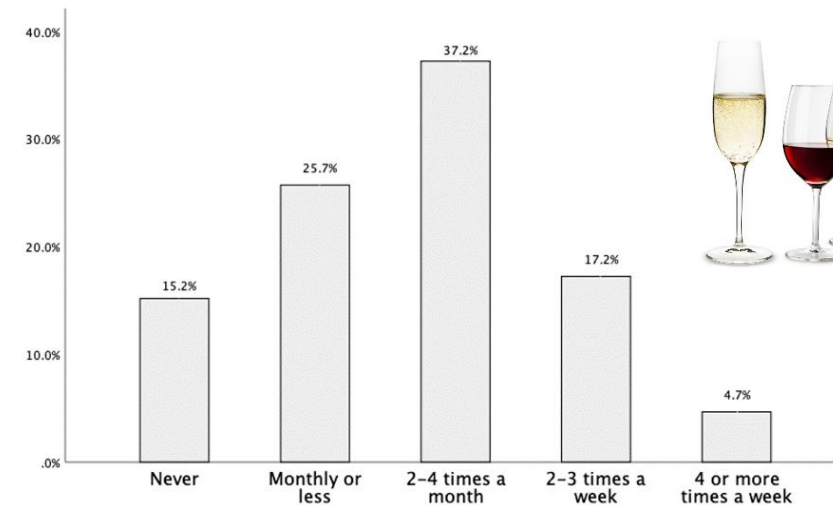


$r = .57, p < .0001$

...and are using substances regularly.



Of those who use cannabis, about 1/6 will go on to develop a cannabis use disorder



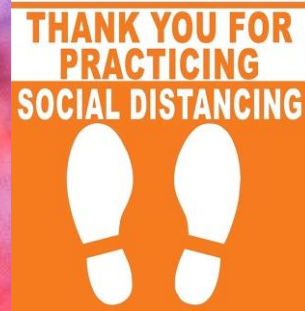
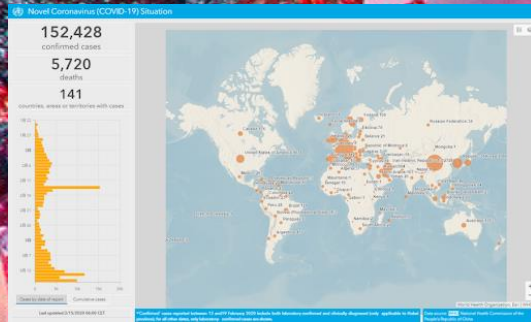
~ 1/5 students have drinking habits that exceed the low-risk drinking guidelines

*Mental Health and **Problematic Substance Use** in University students:
Relationship to biomarkers of Stress and Immune function*



$N = 539$, 76.3% ($n = 411$) female, 23.2% ($n = 125$) male, $M_{\text{age}} = 19.4 \pm 2.1$

COVID-19

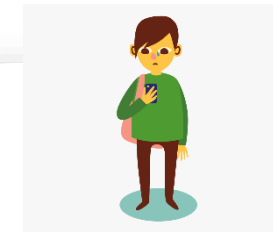



Initial response to
pandemic; shut-down

Social isolation
& physical
distancing

Prolonged
change to
society

STRESS





JUSTIN TRUDEAU, PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA

SearchFRANÇAIS

NEWSPHOTOS & VIDEOSJUSTIN TRUDEAU

THE TEAM

Home » News releases » Support for students and new grads affected by COVID-19

Support for students and new grads affected by COVID-19


April 22, 2020
Ottawa, Ontario

Post-secondary students are feeling the economic impacts of COVID-19. Many students were preparing to start a summer job in May, and are now worried about how to pay rent and cover basic living expenses, while recent graduates are struggling to find meaningful work. This is a critical point in their lives, and we must do everything possible to support their future.

The Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, today announced comprehensive support of nearly \$9 billion for post-secondary students and recent graduates. This plan will help provide the financial support they need this summer, help them continue their studies in the fall, and help many get the experience they need to start their careers. These measures include launching:


- the proposed Canada Emergency Student Benefit, which would provide support to students and new graduates who are not eligible for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit. This benefit would provide \$1,250 per month for eligible students or \$1,750 per month for eligible students with dependents or disabilities. The benefit would be available from May to August 2020.
- the new Canada Student Service Grant, which will help students gain valuable work experience and skills while they help their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. For students who choose to do national service and serve their communities, the new Canada Student Service Grant will provide up to \$5,000 for their education in the fall.

The Government of Canada will expand existing federal employment, skills development, and youth programming to create up to 116,000 jobs, placements, and other training opportunities to help students find employment and develop valuable skills this summer and over the coming months. In addition, to help students continue their studies in the fall, the government will:



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How do the socioeconomic characteristics of men and women in the years before they become business owners affect their business's performance?
ow.ly/4g8B50A92MV #CdnBusinesses #CdnBiz



12m



Public Services Retweeted



TBS Canada

@TBS_Canada

We are proud to serve you in Canada's both official languages! Let's keep up the good work and be on the lookout for any opportunity to overcome ourselves in



My **mental health** has dramatically taken a toll being in quarantine.

“My **productivity** has been very low. My life had a strict routine before the quarantine and now there's hardly any routine.

Loneliness. I'm a very social person and this pandemic is really taking a toll on me and my productivity.

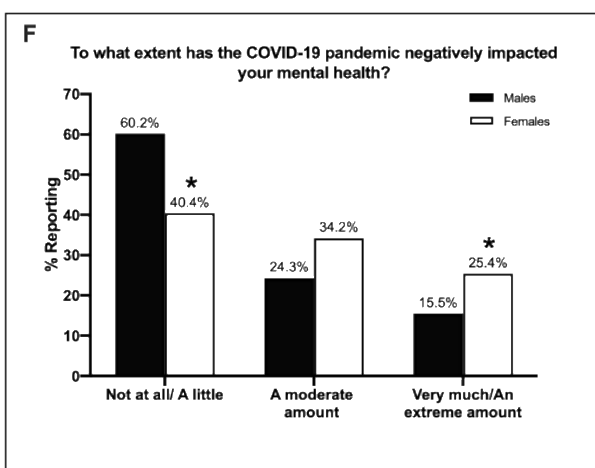
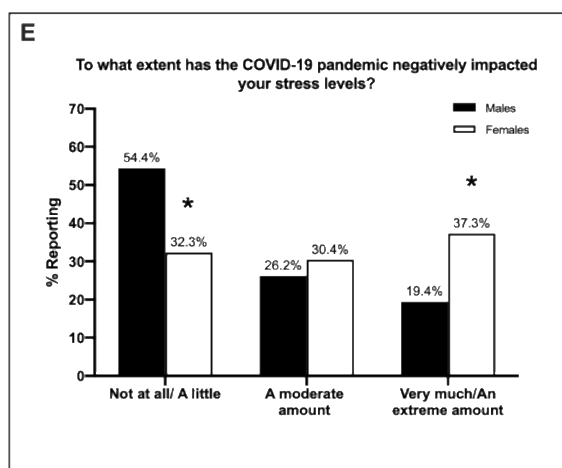
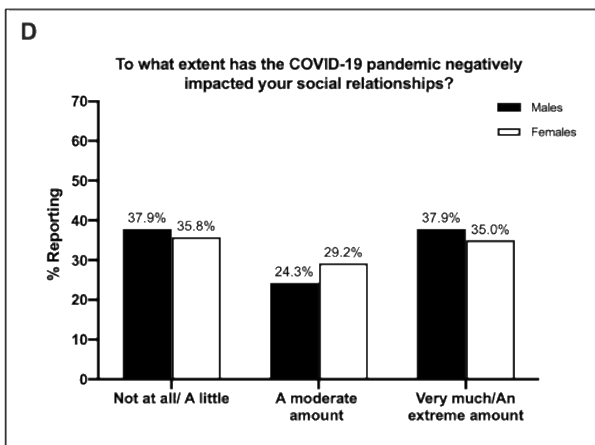
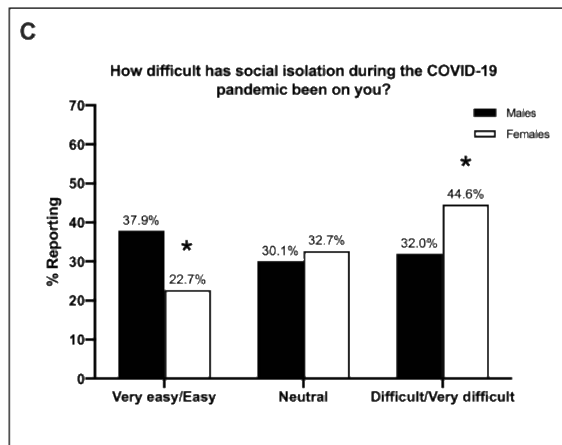
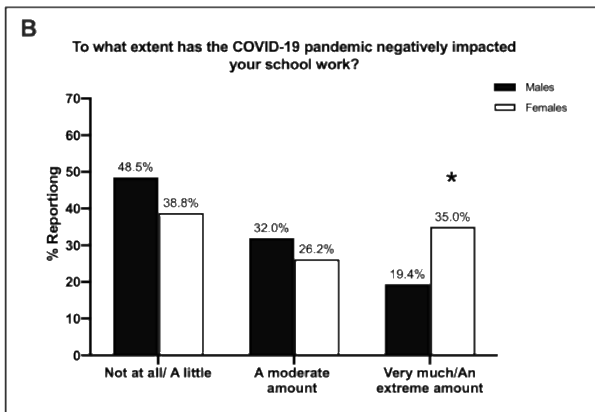
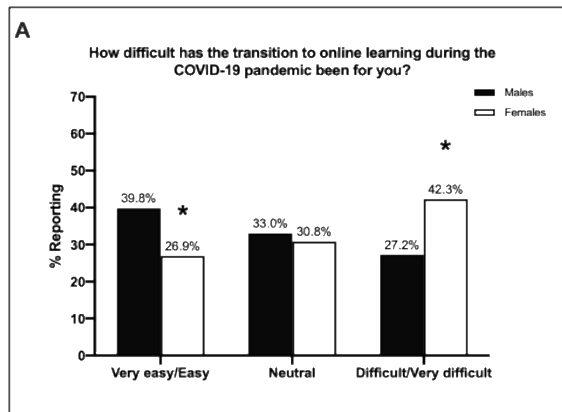
I cope by playing video games, going for walks and getting **high (weed)** since that's about all I can do at home.



Online study May-August 2020

To what extent has the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted your...

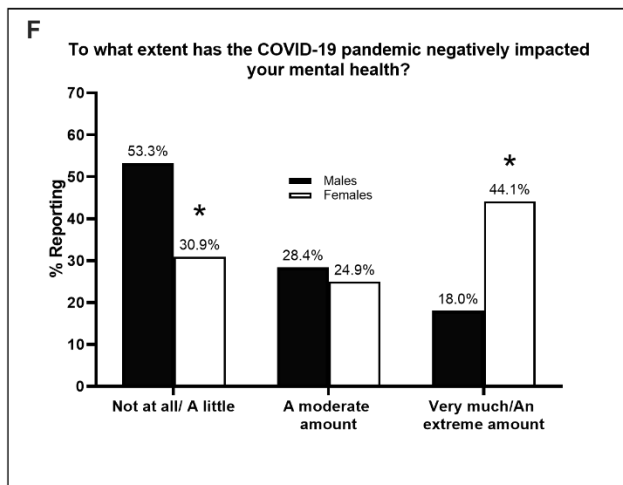
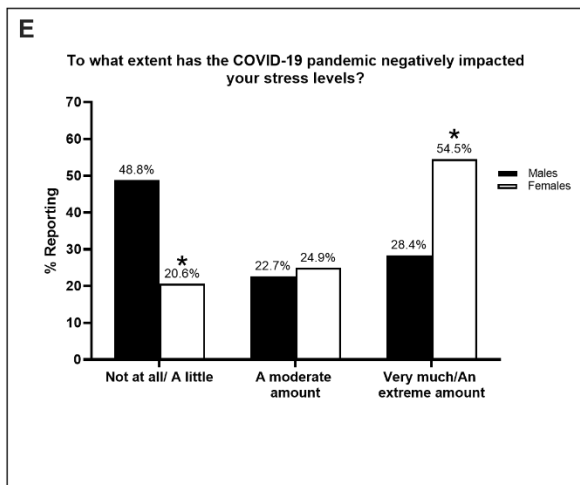
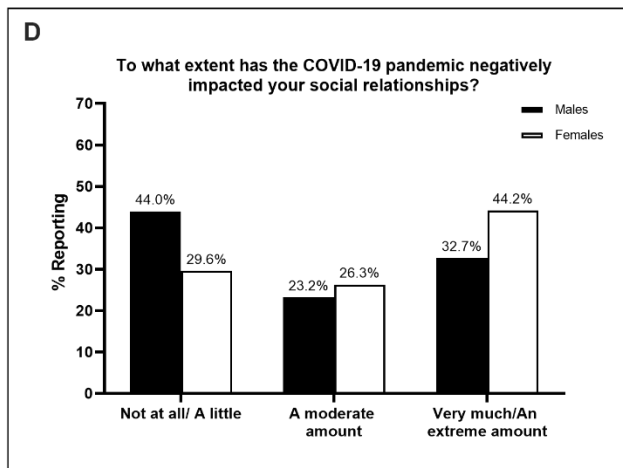
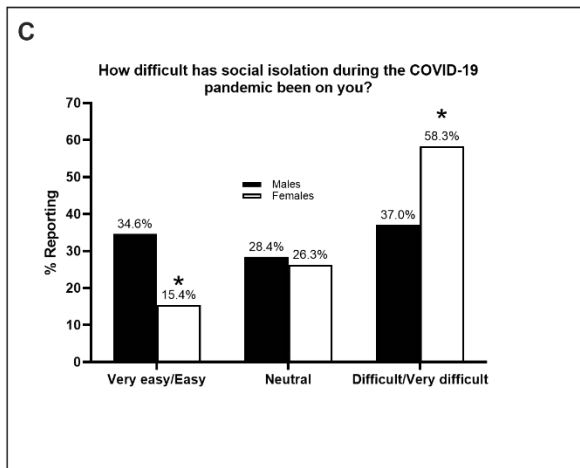
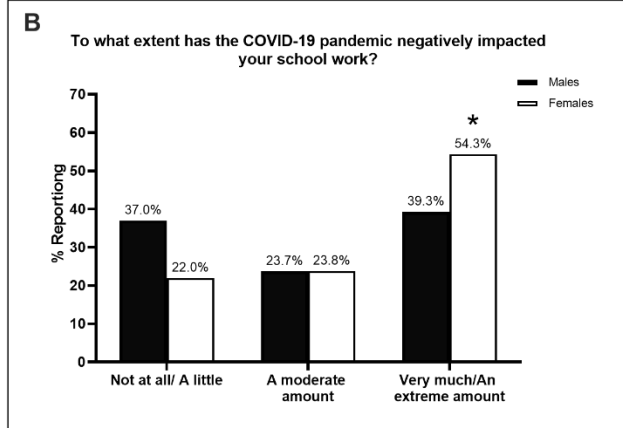
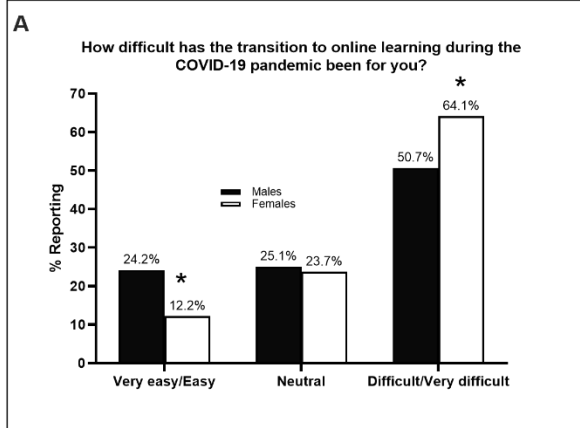
	Not at all	A little	A moderate amount	Very much	An extreme amount
Financial security	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mental health	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Stress levels	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical health	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social relationships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relationship with intimate partner	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Worry about your own health	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Coping With the COVID-19 Pandemic: Examining Gender Differences in Stress and Mental Health Among University Students

Rebecca Prowse^{1†}, Frances Sherratt^{1†}, Alfonso Abizaid¹, Robert L. Gabrys¹, Kim G. C. Hellemans¹, Zachary R. Patterson¹ and Robyn J. McQuaid^{1,2,3*}

¹ Department of Neuroscience, Carleton University, Ottawa, ON, Canada, ² University of Ottawa Institute of Mental Health Research, Ottawa, ON, Canada, ³ School of Psychology, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON, Canada



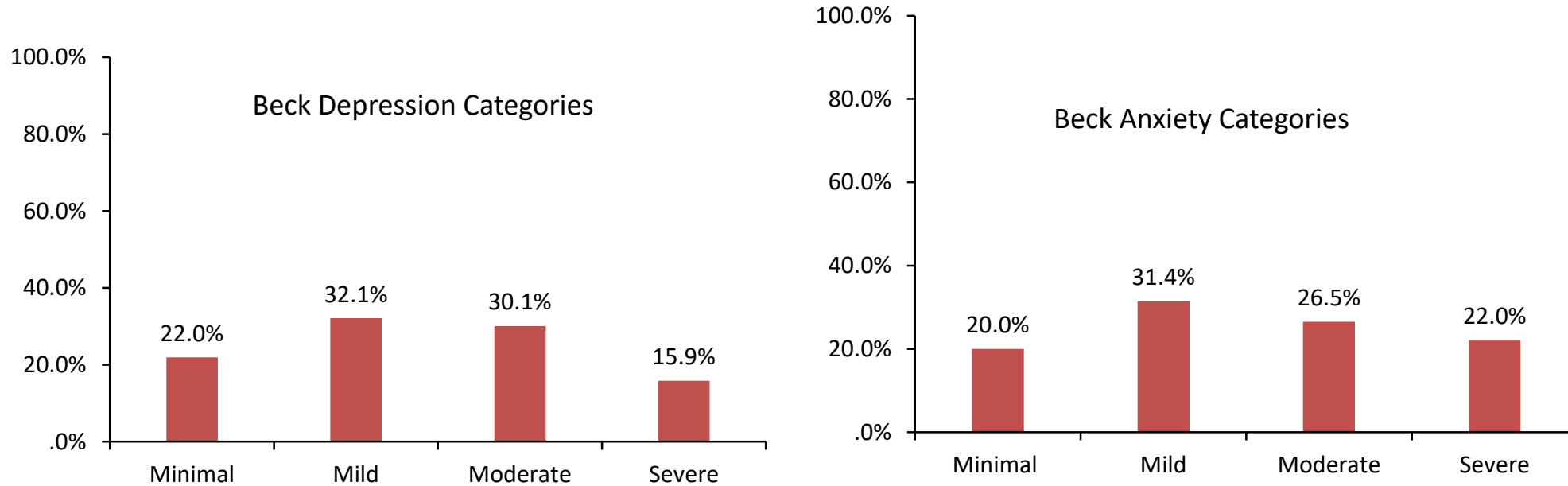
Fall 2020

↑ 20%

↑ Females only

↑ Stress levels in both genders;
20% increase in females

1st and 2nd year students experiencing high levels of mental health symptoms during COVID



Understanding Student Stress and Resilience: Examining the Biological Correlates of Mental Health; Preliminary Data



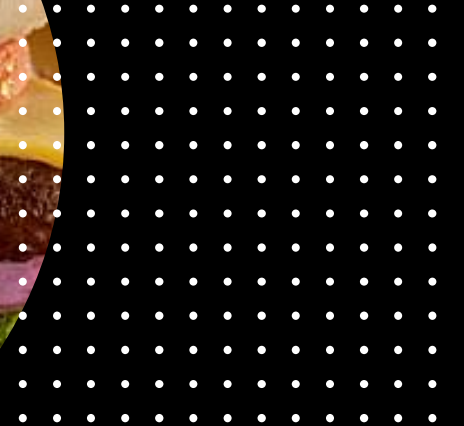
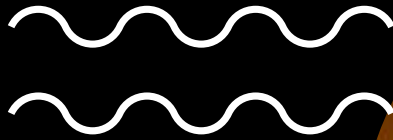
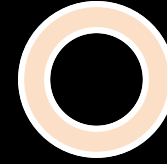
N = 248, 80.1% (n = 197) female , 19.9% (n = 49) male, 1st & 2nd yr UG attending a University, and living in, Ontario



To deal with the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic, how much have you been...

	Not at all	A little	A moderate amount	Very much	An extreme amount
Exercising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
On social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using cannabis	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Vaping nicotine products	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Eating fast food/sweets	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Watching TV/Netflix	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Drinking alcohol	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Connecting with friends/family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To cope with
the COVID-19
pandemic more
females
reported that
they were...





**HOW CAN
WE SUPPORT
STUDENT
MENTAL
HEALTH?**

**Course design
(inside the
classroom)**

**Respond, Refer,
Report
(outside the
classroom)**

How do we
know when a
student isn't
doing well?



Hello Dr. Hellemans,

I hope this email finds you well, or as well as one can be in these weird times. I am writing because I need some guidance. I find I am struggling to keep up with my classes even though I care very much about learning. I am working around 30+ hours/week currently but have spoken to my manager to reduce the number of hours I am working to see if it helps. My struggles may also stem from having been out of school for about six years now, I graduated high school in 2014.

My mental health is suffering greatly right now. I have always had such high expectations for myself and I was so excited to get back into school finally and get myself started on my career path. I can't help but feel disappointed in myself for not being able to reach my goals.

I bring all of this up because as a graduate student who is currently enrolled (as a TA, an RA, and a student), my ability to feel comfort in my own home is gone (something i was not anticipating) and I feel as though my ability to deal with stress is diminishing as a result. I am sleeping about 4 hours a night, and can manage about 2-3 hours of screen time before my brain and eyes are screaming for me to stop

SUPPORTS FOR OUR STUDENTS

RECOGNIZE/RESPOND

Do you understand your students? Do you know how they are feeling mentally, physically and emotionally?

Sometimes students will tell you when they are not feeling well. Telling someone can be an overwhelming thing for a student to do, so it makes sense to ask:

*"I am concerned you're not handing in assignments/meeting deadlines/showing up to tutorials
- is everything OK?"*

REFER



Ask how you can help.



Know the Resources



Assist with navigating
supports and resources



HOW TO RESPOND



Are they registered with PMC? Encourage them to engage with their PMC Coordinator to see if they need additional supports



Are they experiencing any changes in mood/anxiety/are they not doing well?
(See page 2)



Are they overwhelmed, struggling to organize their time? Refer to CSAS and FITA




You or the TA can be occasionally checking in/reaching out, and providing appropriate referrals.
(See page 2)

Sometimes it's about mental health, other times it's about coping. Sometimes it's both!



BOUNDARIES



Home /

Student Support Certificate

NEWS

ABOUT THE OVPSE



STAFF AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Our Excellence Journey

Staff Engagement
Opportunities

Student Support
Certificate

SUPPORTING OUR STUDENTS

FRAMEWORKS AND



The Student Support Certificate is designed to help faculty and staff at Carleton University enhance their capacity to address student needs. The certificate provides growth and development opportunities aligned with the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services' (CACUSS) Competency Model.

The certificate provides a core level of training in a variety of competency areas, such as:

- Communication;
- Emotional and interpersonal intelligence;
- Intercultural Fluency;
- Indigenous cultural awareness;
- Post-secondary acumen;
- Equity, diversity and inclusion;

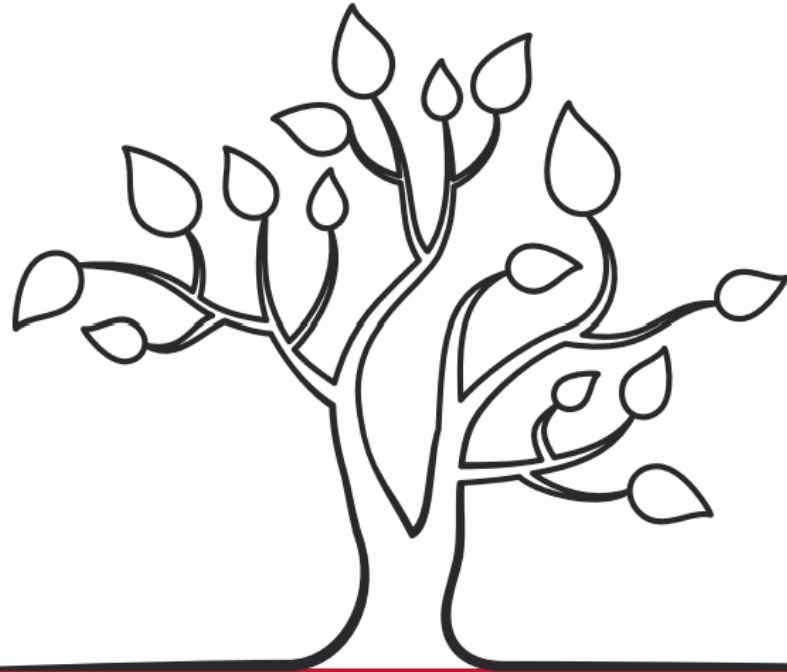
I'm so glad you've come to speak to me about how you're doing. Thank you for trusting me with that. Your living circumstances certainly do not sound conducive to mental health at all, particularly during a pandemic. I can only imagine how that must be for you.

...I've cc'd Michelle Baulch who is our on-campus care manager. She supports graduate students and I think having a meeting with her to discuss some strategies for ensuring your wellness moving forward would be of great benefit.

Copying Yolanda Yip to this email, one of our incredible SSSC mentors.

Yolanda, would you mind organizing a chat with XXXX who would benefit from having some tips/strategies on time management. He's in my first year neuro course.

Lead with compassion. Learn with respect.



Ensure every correspondence is compassionate, even if it is firm. Bear in mind when students are not doing well, sometimes they can act out – it is therefore meaningful to approach issues of conduct from the perspective of care and support. When in doubt contact the Office of Student Affairs at **osareports@carleton.ca**.

carleton.ca/studentaffairs



Wellness
CARLETON UNIVERSITY

carleton.ca/wellness

STRUGGLING WITH MENTAL HEALTH *IS NOT...*

- ✗ A sign of weakness
- ✗ Evidence that a student cannot “cut it” in your course/program
- ✗ A suggestion that a particular individual is different/a deviation from the norm
- ✗ A reason to not support a student for any of the above

“I want to thank you for giving us a manageable and top-quality course from DAY ONE. Thank you for considering our mental health in a way that I haven’t really seen from my other instructors. Thank you for your continued support as I adjust to university life, online learning, and the circumstances of this COVID-19 pandemic.”

REPORT

- **Debrief** – an important step after a difficult conversation and doing so with your chair or supervisor is appropriate.
- **Report up not out** – keeping your chair or supervisor informed is key, and other Carleton employees on a “need to know basis” is appropriate.
- When concerned for a student’s **safety**, don’t hesitate; you are trying to help them access support.
- When in doubt – **Care Report**
- **Follow up** with the student if appropriate just to check-in that they are not having trouble accessing supports you provided.

Acknowledgments



Mental Health - Care & Research
Santé mentale - Soins et recherche



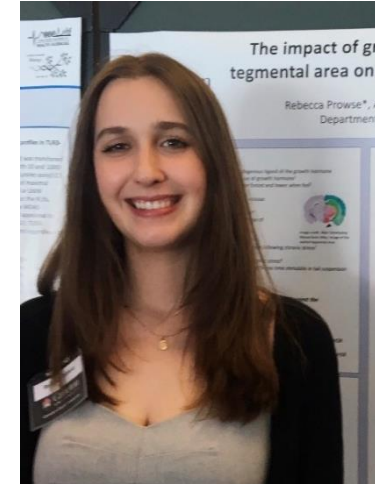
Kelly Schincariol



Dr Zachary Patterson



Dr Ashley Thompson



Rebecca Prowse



Frances Sherratt



Ayeila Daneshmend



**Dr Robert Gabrys,
Research & Policy Analyst, CCSA**



**Dr Robyn McQuaid,
Scientist, ROH Institute for Mental Health Research**



Dr Alfonso Abizaid



Next Steps...



- ✓ How will COVID-19 influence mood and substance use over time? → Longitudinal study
- ✓ How does the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic impact key hormones and genes implicated in stress ? → First year transition study
- ✓ How are students from marginalized groups faring with regard to their experiences with mental health resources on campus? → Campus Mental health studies
- ✓ What about Graduate students? → Graduate Mental health, COVID-19, and Cannabis Use study
- ✓ How does problematic cannabis use and mental health relate to academic outcomes, particularly among males? → Ongoing; Pan-Canadian Cannabis use study

Expectations and Considerations

- Early data suggest we should expect increased mental health problems and problematic substance use
 - ✓ Must continue to pivot “circle of care” online with adequate supports
 - ✓ Telehealth and text services are effective
 - ✓ More, and better paid, psychiatrists needed
- 1st year cohort particularly vulnerable
 - ✓ If living at home, will they be somewhat protected?
- 85% of students seeking on-campus support are white, heterosexual female
 - ✓ We need to better meet the demands of our diverse campuses
- Conversations around substance use on campus have been traditionally from a punitive/sanctions perspective
 - Need to re-focus around ‘substance use health’ and employ a harm reduction lens

