

MENTAL HEALTH OF STUDENT-PARENTS

RESEARCH FOR THE JED FOUNDATION - MAY 2021



FLUENT
RESEARCH

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Introduction

The Jed Foundation is interested in developing a framework for colleges and universities in support of mental health of student-parents -- students who are also caregivers of children under the age of 18.

The Jed Foundation thus retained Fluent Research, LLC to conduct research to provide insights into the experiences and challenges of student-parents at institutions of higher learning, to assess the impact of these challenges on their emotional and mental health, and to gauge the most useful and desired forms of support.

The following report provides detailed findings from this research.

Research Objectives

- Explore the experiences of student-parents
- Identify the specific challenges that student-parents face
- Assess the perceived impact of being a student-parent on mental and emotional health
- Compare indicators of the mental and emotional health of student-parents with those of non-parent students
- Explore student-parent perceptions of their colleges and universities with respect to supporting student-parents and recognizing their needs
- Explore variations in student-parent experiences based on such demographic variables as age, gender, ethnicity, and economic status, as well as variables such as the size and type of school, and academic course load
- Determine which resources and types of support student-parents would find most appealing

Methodology

In order to achieve these objectives, Fluent conducted a two-phase program of research, consisting of an in-depth, online bulletin board discussion with current student-parents, followed by a nationally representative online survey of both student-parents and non-parent students.

Qualitative phase

- Online bulletin board
- Total sample: N=25 full-time students of 2- and 4-year colleges
- Age 18-45
- Parents of children aged 13 and under
- Field dates: January 5-7, 2021

Quantitative Phase

- Online survey
- Total sample: N=1022 college students
 - N=586 student parents
 - N=436 non-parent students
- Age 18-45
- Field dates: March-April 2021

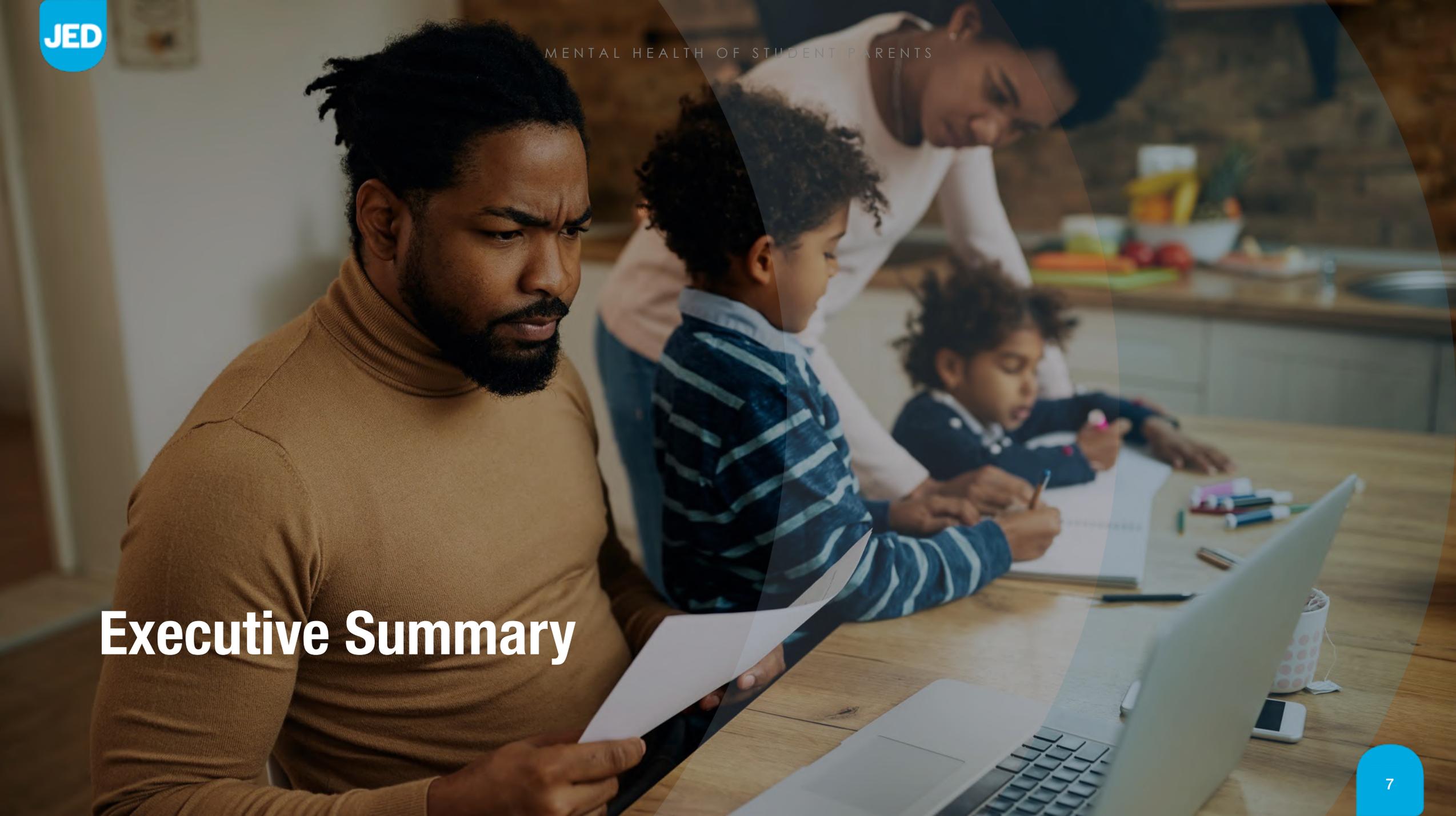
Sample Description

The survey sample comprised 1022 respondents:

- 586 student-parents
- 436 non-parent students

The student-parent sample was comprised of the following:

- 43% male; 56% female; 2% other
- 27% enrolled in 2-year institutions; 73% in 4-year institutions
- 57% campus-based institution; 43% online institution
- 54% enrolled full-time; 46% enrolled part-time
- 67% white; 19% African American; 15% Latinx; 6% Asian American; 5% other
- 56% receiving financial aid

The background image shows a man in the foreground, looking stressed and holding papers. In the background, a woman is helping two children with their homework at a table. A laptop is open on the table in front of the man. The scene is set in a kitchen or dining area.

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

- This research offers ample evidence of the challenges and stresses experienced by student-parents – and the adverse impact on emotional and mental health that results.
- Student-parents deal with a range of challenges, including constant juggling of childcare, employment, and coursework, lack of sleep, continual stress and anxiety, feelings of guilt, a sense of social isolation, and for some, a feeling that their college or university is not supportive or sympathetic to their situation.
- Four in ten student-parents describe the experience of attending school while raising a child as extremely or very challenging, with those receiving financial aid and those working full-time, most likely to find it “extremely” challenging.
- While many cope with these challenges well, and even say that the overall experience of being a student-parent is a positive one, for a large percentage – roughly one quarter to one third, these challenges cause severe adverse effects on their emotional and mental health.

Executive Summary

- A sizeable proportion of student-parents—around 4 in 10 -- are particularly challenged, feeling overwhelmed, suffering panic attacks and other negative mental and emotional effects, and often having thoughts of dropping out or suicide.
 - 41% of student-parents described parenting while attending college to be “very” or “extremely” challenging
 - 44% said they feel overwhelmed often or all the time
 - 37% said they have experienced multiple anxiety attacks
 - 33% said they experience extreme fatigue often or all the time
 - 38% said they have considered dropping out within the last 30 days
 - 18% said they have considered suicide within the last 30 days
- Student-parents are significantly more likely than non-parent students to report ideation of dropping out and of suicide.
- Those experiencing more severe emotional and mental health challenges are disproportionately younger (under age 30), female, non-White, and recipients of financial aid.

- A large segment of student-parents (around 4 in 10) express high interest in forms of support and resources to help them cope with mental and emotional issues.
- Highly appealing forms of support include access to affordable childcare, greater social inclusion or connection, suggestions for coping with stress, and access to counseling.
- The study suggests that there is a real and widespread need and desire for greater support, for mental health resources, and for greater institutional recognition and understanding.
- It also supports the idea that this population would benefit greatly from the Jed Foundation's resources and initiatives.
- More detailed findings from the research are provided in the report that follows.

Living Situation, Course Load, Work Load



Children and Childcare

Around half of student-parents have one child, and half have more than one.



1.6
mean
number of
children

One in four student-parents (26%) has no help with childcare.

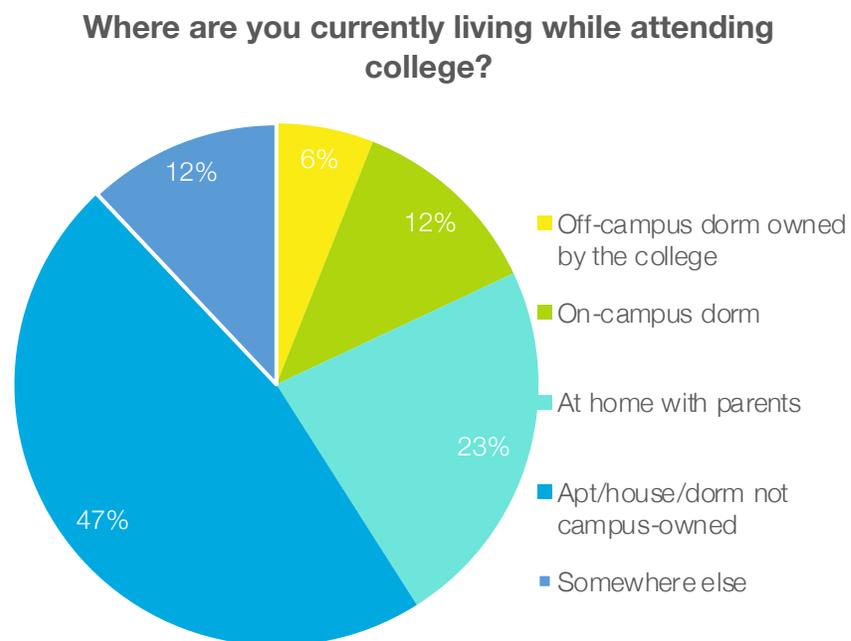
The majority of those who do have help get it from family: 50% from the child's other parent; 35% from the student-parent's own parents; 18% from other family members.

29% report having help from babysitters.

Only 20% say they have help from a daycare center.

Living Situation and Life Stage

The majority of student parents live off-campus.



Student-parents tend to be considerably older than non-parent students:

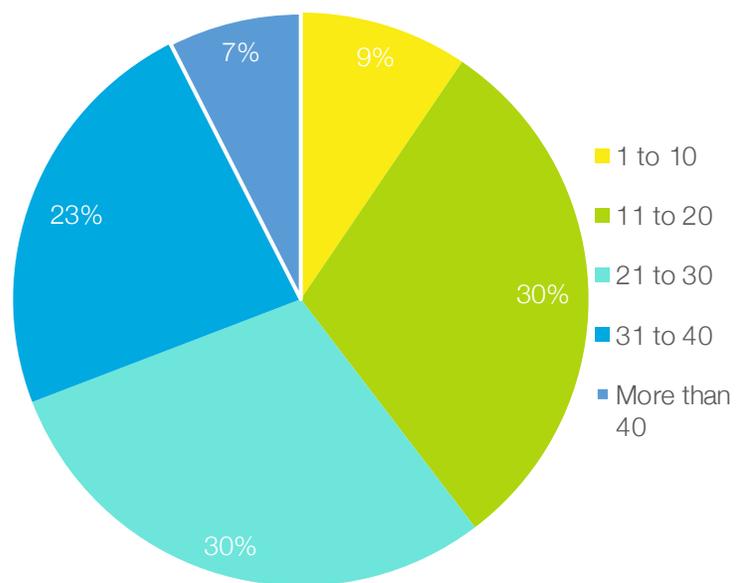
- 77% of student parents are age 25 or older, as compared with 22% of non-parent students.
- 63% are age 30 or older, as compared with just 10% of non-parent students.

Employment and Course Load

77% of student parents work at a paid job while attending college – as compared with 51% of non-parent students.

30% of these work more than 30 hours per week.

Approximately how many hours do you work per week?



3.8

Mean number of courses

7

Average hours per week attending classes, lectures or labs

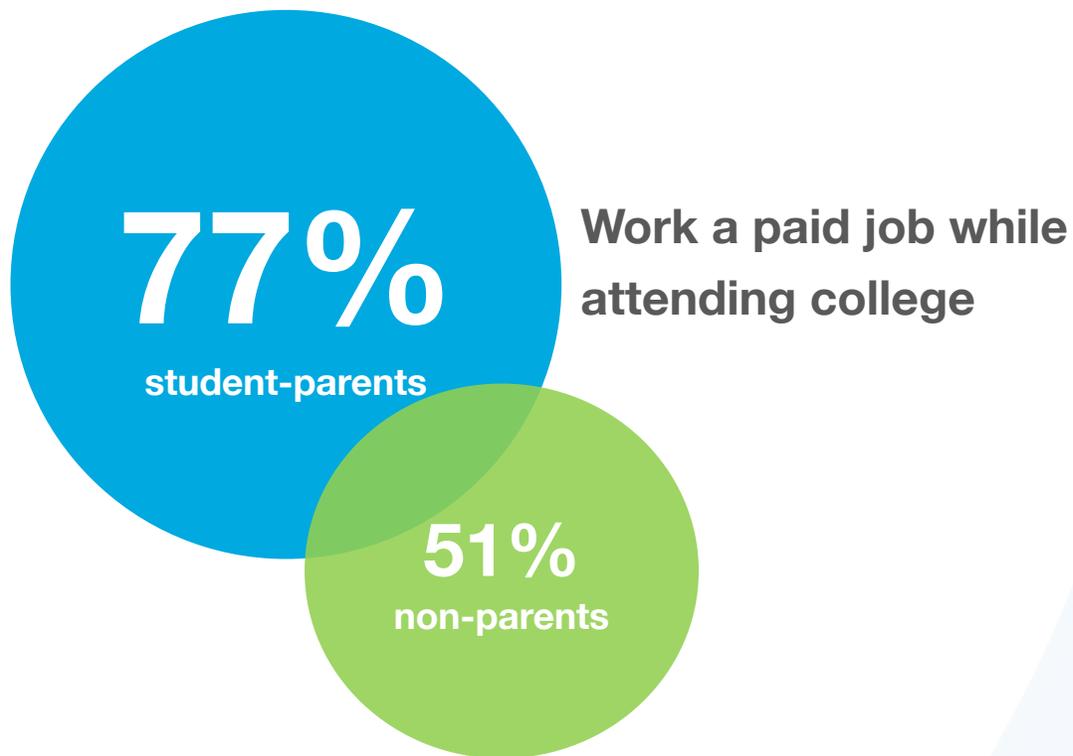
8.7

Average hours per week doing classwork or studying

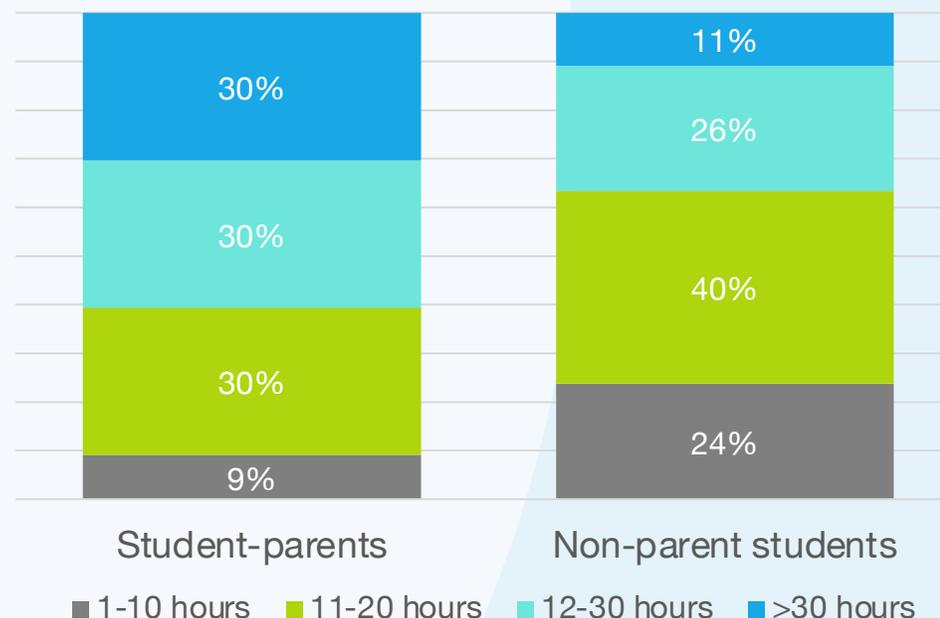
Student-parents also devote almost 16 hours a week to classes, class assignments, and study.

The student-parent profile differs in several regards from that of non-parent students.

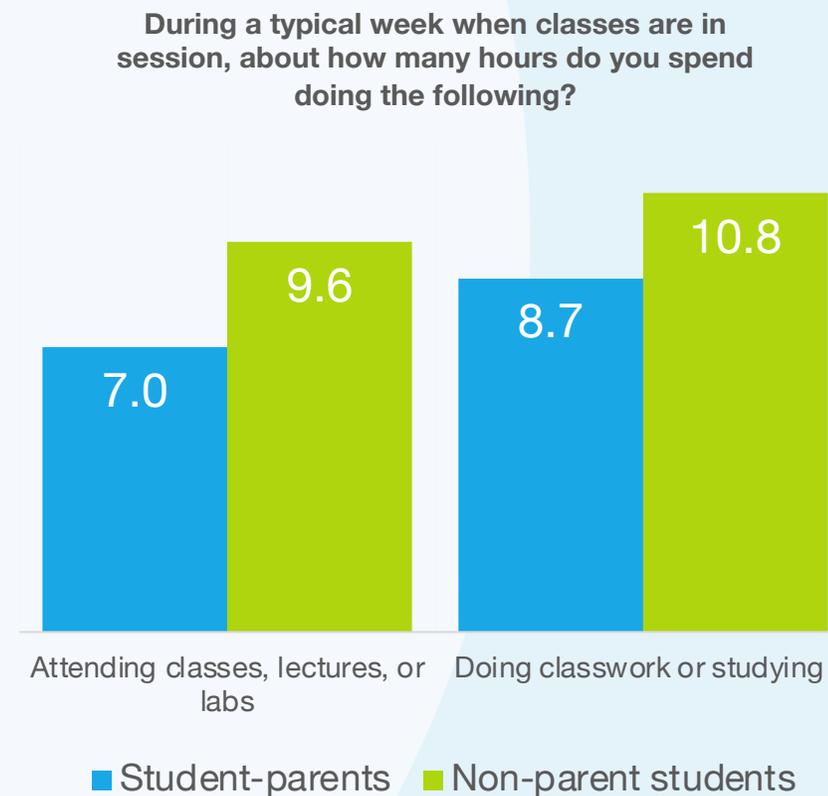
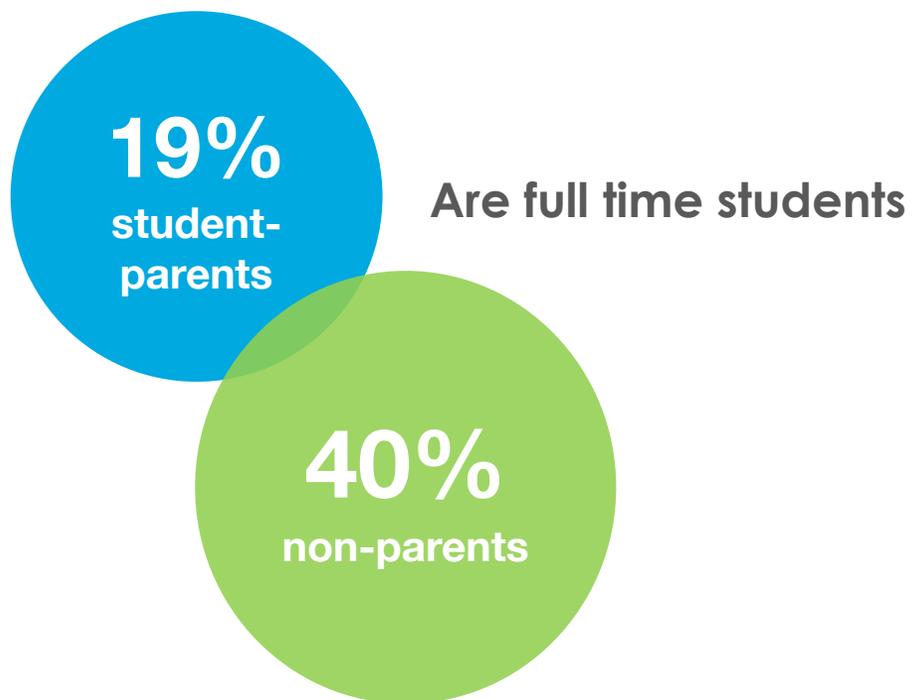
Student-parents are more likely than non-parent students to be employed, and also spend more hours working paid jobs in addition to classwork.



Approximately how many hours do you work per week?
(Respondents with paid jobs only)



Non-parent students spend more time attending class and studying than student-parents.



A woman with curly brown hair is sitting at a table, talking on a mobile phone. She is holding a small grey dog in her left arm. A young girl with blonde hair, wearing a colorful striped shirt, is sitting next to her, holding a small orange cat. A young boy with blonde hair, wearing a white shirt and blue overalls, is sitting in front of the woman, holding a white object. On the table in front of them is a laptop, a stack of colorful papers, and some toys. The background is a bright, indoor setting with green plants and a window.

Challenges and Sources of Stress

Student-parents describe a wide range of challenges that they face, creating enormous stress at times.

These challenges include the following:

- Time management
- Getting enough sleep
- Feeling permanently exhausted
- Limited time for self-care
- Balancing parenting, employment, and school
- Always feeling behind
- Maintaining focus
- Feeling guilty
- Financial worry
- Social isolation

41% of student-parents describe the experience of attending college while caring for a child to be “very” or “extremely” challenging.



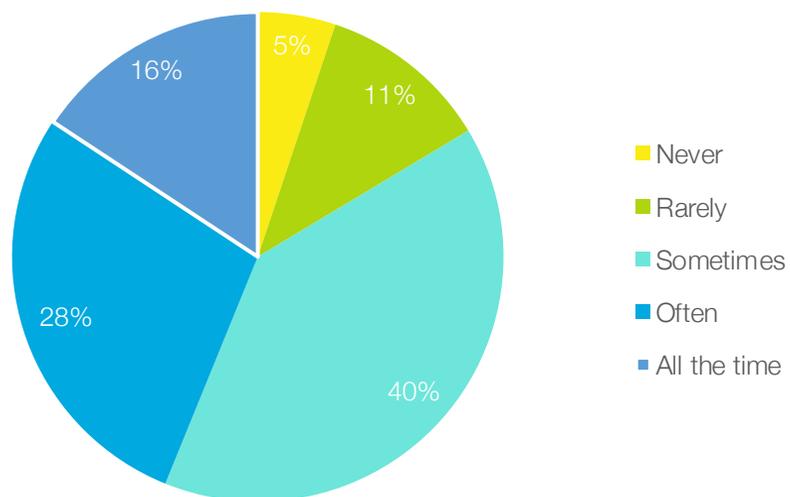
“Everything is a challenge. Paying bills is difficult, providing our basic needs is difficult, spending quality time, childcare, keeping the house clean, disciplining my children, saving money, being overly stressed and overwhelmed are some of the challenges I face.”

female student parent

Feeling Overwhelmed

44% of student-parents say they feel overwhelmed often or all the time.

How often have you experienced a sense of being overwhelmed as a student-parent?



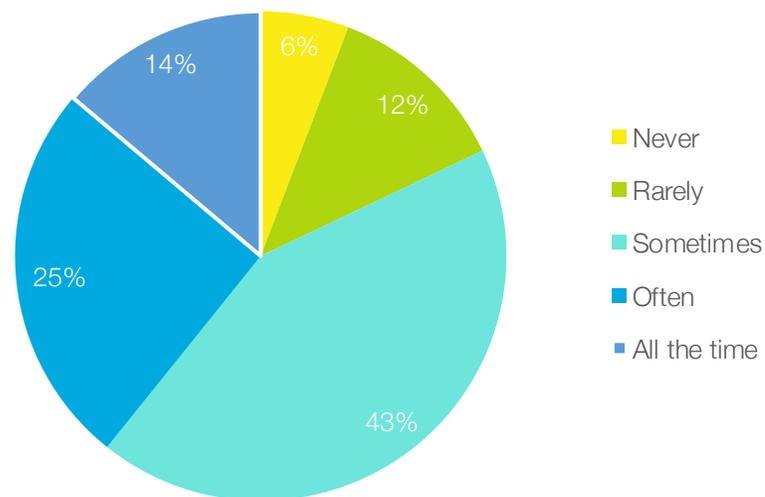
“Physically, I'm in a constant state of exhaustion. I know that can't be good for me but at least I don't have much longer! Mentally, I just feel overwhelmed a lot of times and sometimes I just feel like crying. Sometimes it feels like I'm going crazy because there's so much to do and I'm being pulled in so many directions.”

female student parent

Feeling Guilty

39% of student-parents say they feel a sense of guilt often or all the time.

How often do you experience a sense of guilt that coursework detracts from the time with family?



Women are significantly more likely than men to say they experience guilt often or all the time (46% vs. 31%).



“I have felt pretty intense anxiety and sometimes lots of guilt or sadness about the impact that my juggling so many things, will have on my kids. I worry that they will feel like I sacrificed too much of their childhood for these goals. I know it's all for their good in the end, but I struggle to really find a good balance.”

female student parent

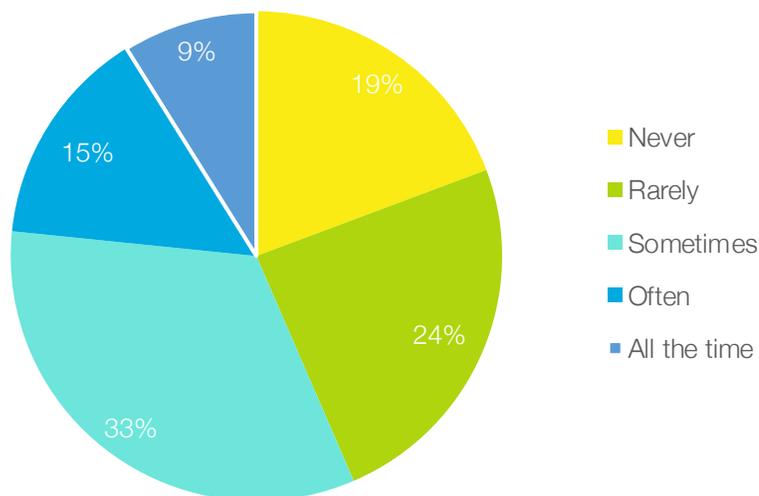
“I have 14 hours of class and 24+ hours of clinical time each week. I spend between 2-6 hours on classwork a day... It makes me feel insanely guilty because I can't spend a lot of time with my kids. They're doing virtual school, so they're home, but I can't spend a lot of time with them other than troubleshooting/school work because I'm doing my own school.”

female student parent

Sense of Social Isolation

24% of student parents have often felt socially isolated on campus.

How often have you experienced a sense of social isolation on campus due to being a student-parent?



In addition, 41% of student parents say they have occasionally or often been made to feel unwelcome.



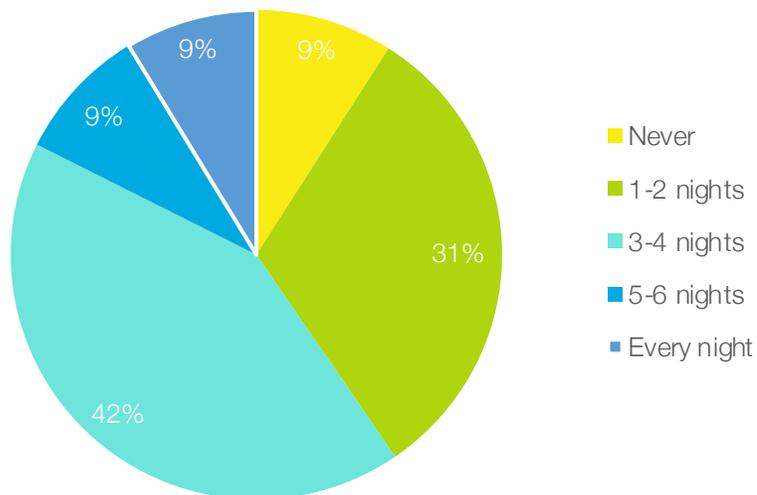
“A sense of social isolation is pretty much an all the time experience as a student parent for me. Even though I'm not too much older than most other students, most of them don't have kids, and the ones that do don't have as many as I do. Which makes it difficult to make good friends at school. On the flip side, most of my friends who have kids, aren't in school so they don't understand what its like to have to manage all of these things at once. As a parent and a student it's immensely difficult to find people who can relate to you, and sometimes it feels nearly impossible to have a social life at all.”

female student parent

Not Getting Enough Sleep

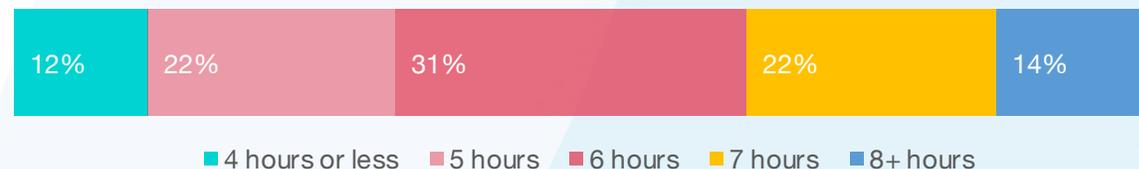
40% of student-parents say they get enough sleep just two nights a week or less.

During a typical week when college is in session, how often do you feel that you get enough sleep?



“I am permanently exhausted. Academic work is intense in the last years. I like to do all my work when I can concentrate which is typically when everyone else is sleeping. So, I have limited sleep time.”
female student parent

On an average night when college is in session, how many hours of sleep do you get?



Extreme Fatigue

33% of student-parents say they have experienced extreme fatigue often or all the time.

How often have you experienced extreme fatigue during your time as a college student, on a scale of 1-10, where 1 means never and 10 means all the time?

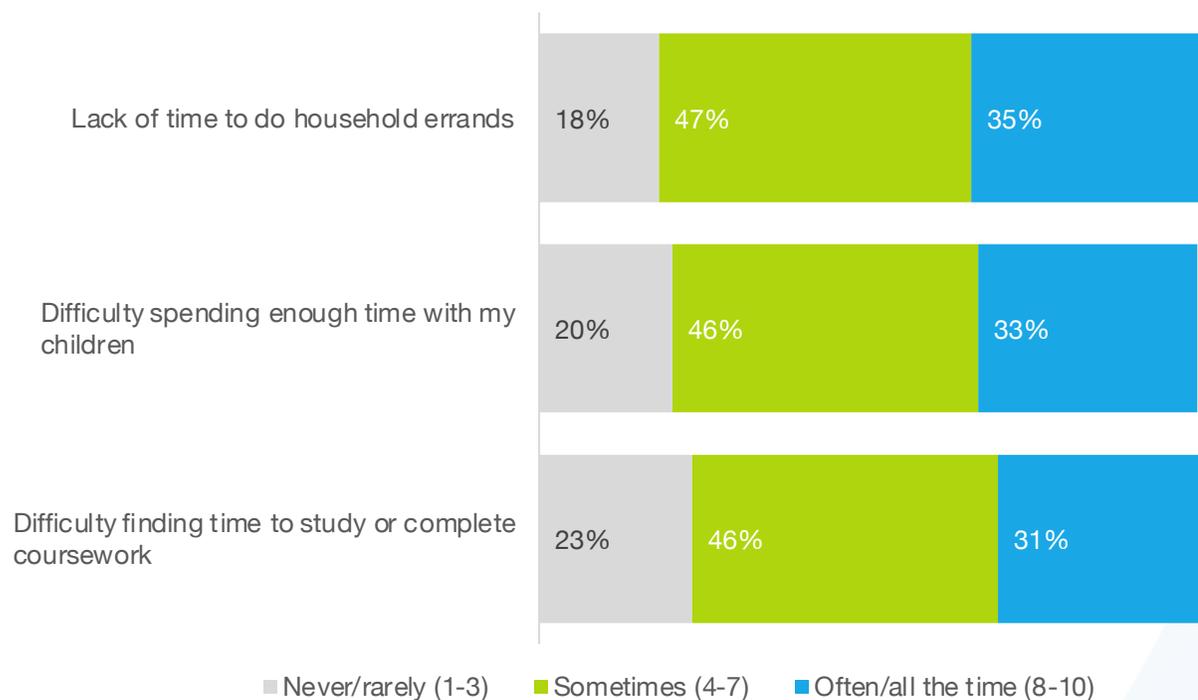


“I don't have a lot of time for self-care. Sometimes I get overwhelmed with everything that I need to do as a student and as a parent. There just doesn't seem to be enough time in the day and I often feel "burnt out" with everything. It feels like I'm always forgetting something or behind in something. I keep a pretty organized planner and I write out things I need to do as a parent (like teacher calls, help with homework, etc.) but it's a little harder to schedule self-care knowing that there's just so much that SHOULD be doing right at that moment.”
female student parent

Time Management

Around 1 in 3 student-parents say they face time management challenges often or all the time.

When you are in the school year/semester/quarter, how often do you face the following challenges, on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 meaning never and 10 meaning all the time?

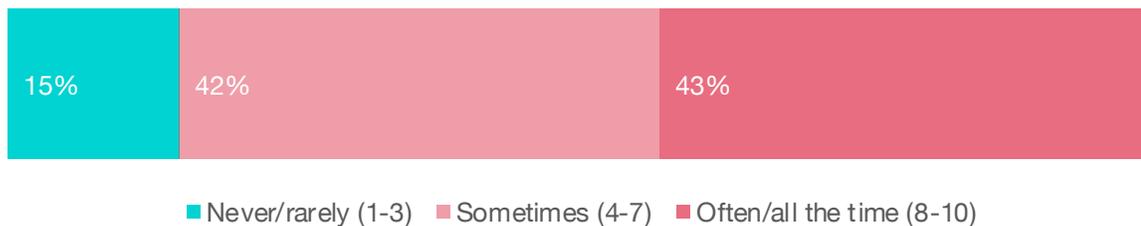


“It's very hard to be in full student mode when I'm a parent 24/7. Trying to manage my time so that the kids are situated so I can study barely works, because I'm always thinking of parent things, like do I need to go grocery shopping again. Can I afford to shop right now when I have this test coming up. Should I wait until after the test to get groceries. What will we all eat, Can I afford to order food? will it be enough to last a couple days? There's a lot of this unsettled feeling, like I have to be ready to cater to my children.”
female student parent

Feeling Stressed

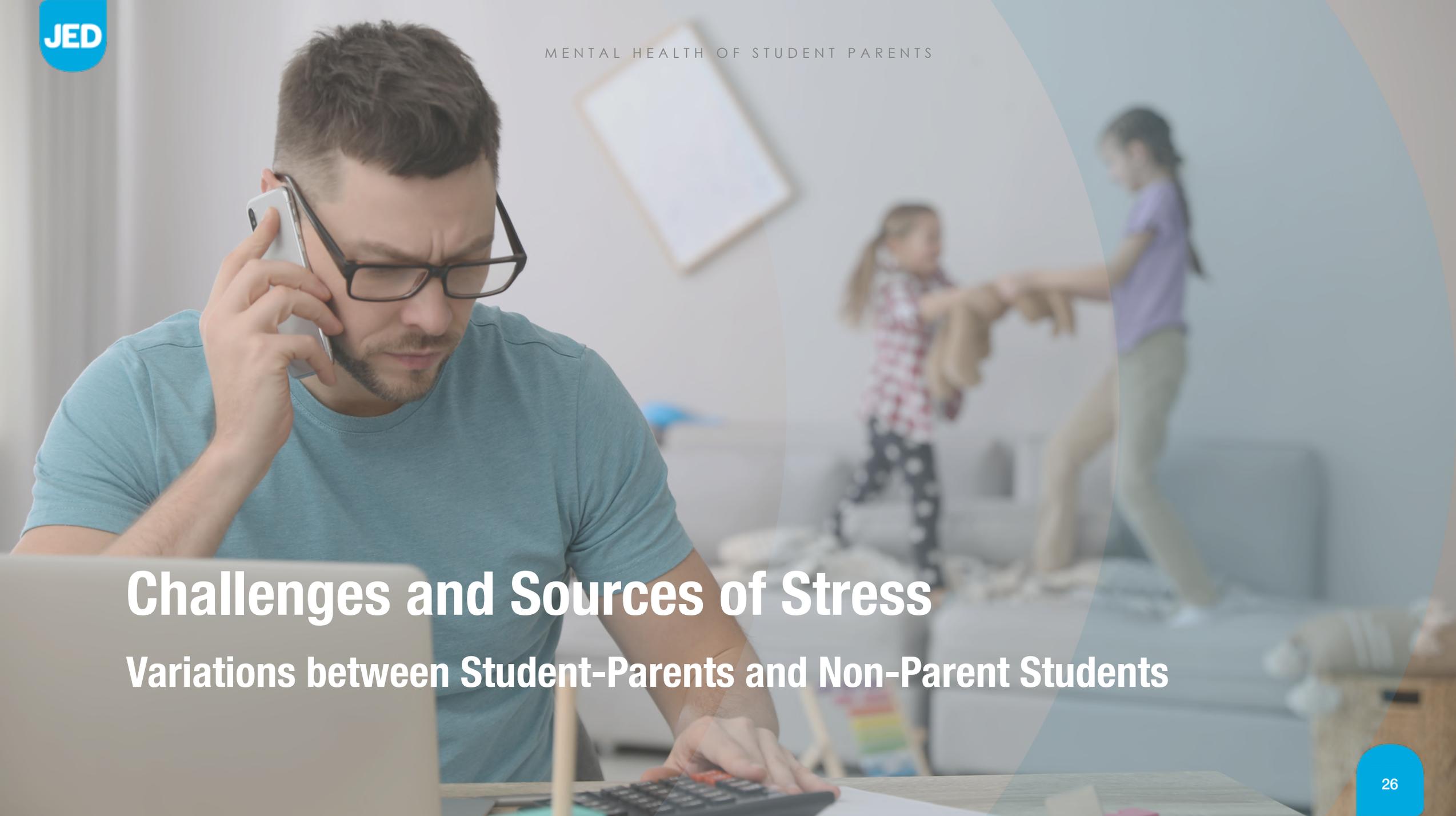
43% of student parents say they have experienced stress often or all the time.

How often have you experienced stress during your time as a college student, on a scale of 1-10, where 1 means never and 10 means all the time?



“Sometimes I feel overwhelmed and stressed. I used to be someone who worked out at least 5 times a week and eat healthy, now I’m not even working out and on a constant emotional rollercoaster. I’m constantly having to find ways to relax, so I don’t have a breakdown. I have to play the Sims 4 or relax with the kids and sometimes time does not permit that.”

female student parent



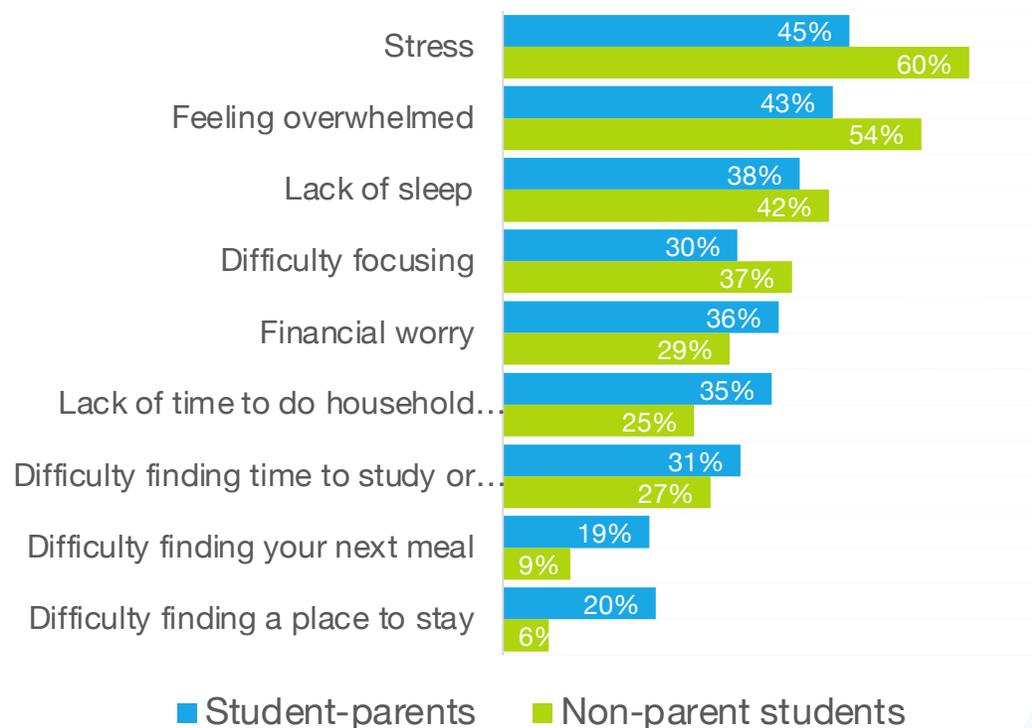
Challenges and Sources of Stress

Variations between Student-Parents and Non-Parent Students

While both parenting and non-parenting students are stressed and overwhelmed, student-parents are more likely to also face financial worry, lack of time for household care, and food and housing insecurity.

When you are in the school year/semester/quarter, how often do you face the following challenges on a scale of 1 (“never”) to 10 (“all the time”)?

(Percent of respondents reporting 8 or higher)

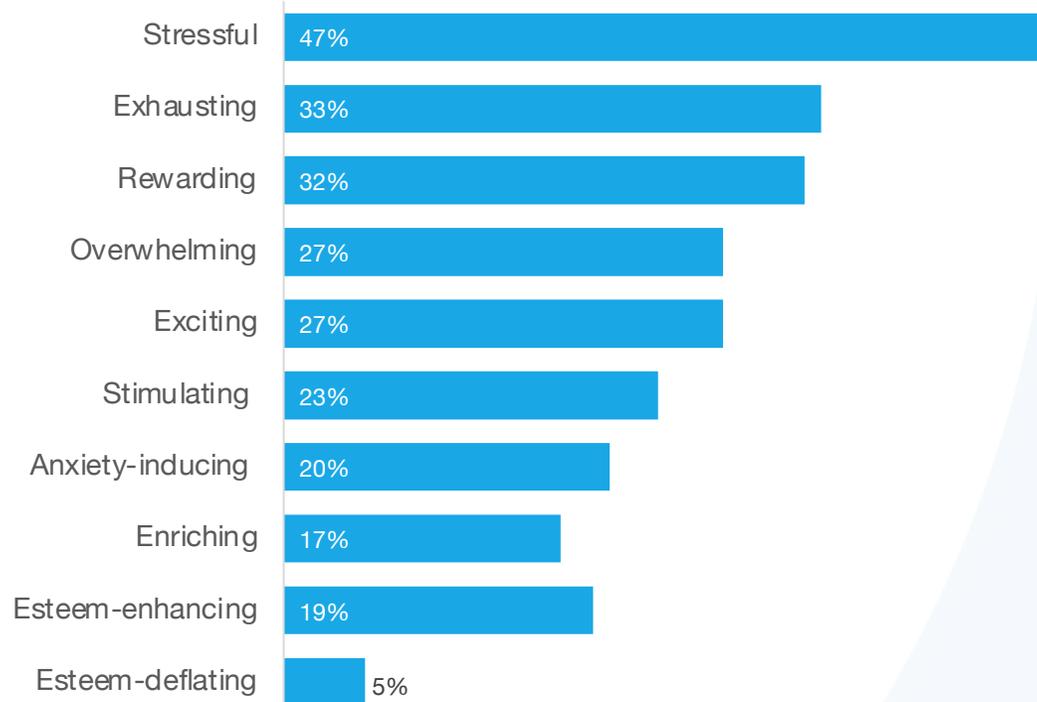


- Although stress is a top challenge among all students, parents and non-parents tend to face different types of challenges during the academic year.
- Student parents are more likely than non-parents to report facing challenges related to a **lack of time and/or resources**, such as financial worry, lack of time to do household tasks, and food and housing insecurity
 - One in three student-parents (32%) find it difficult to spend enough time with their children
- Non-parent students are more likely to experience challenges related to **anxiety and workload**, such as stress, feeling overwhelmed, and difficulty focusing.

Associations with Being a Student

When asked a range of positive and negative associations they might make with being students, “Stressful”, “exhausting” were the most common associations among student-parents – along with “rewarding.”

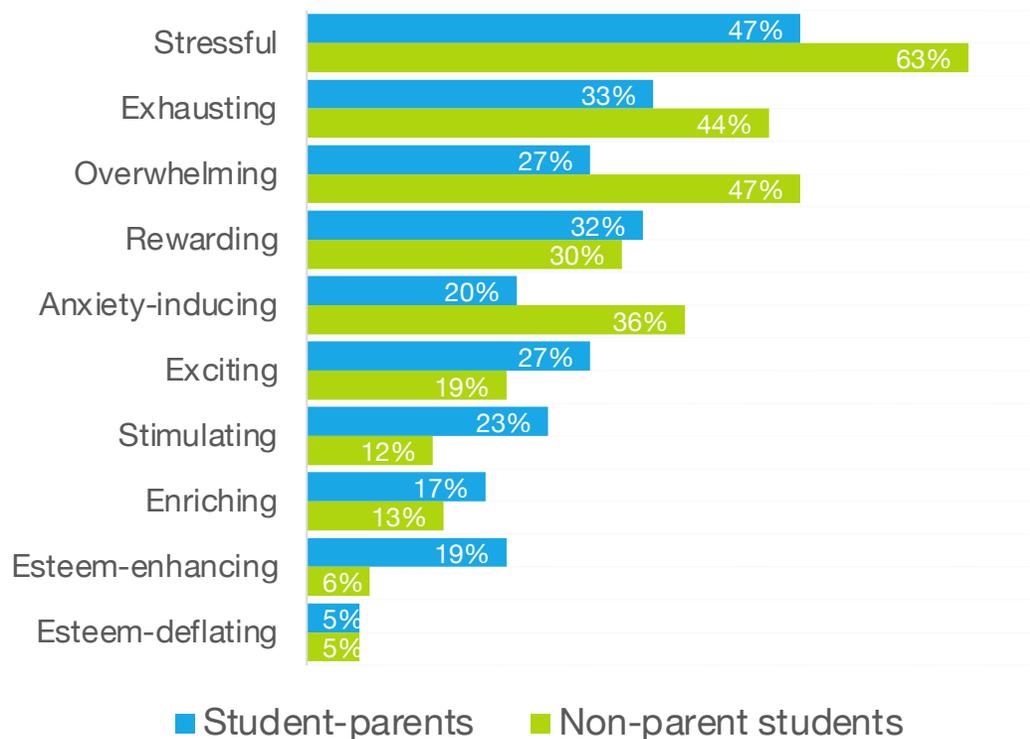
Which of the following words do you most associate with being a student?
Please choose up to 3.



Positive associations, such as “rewarding”, “exciting”, and “stimulating” were actually more common among student-parents than among non-parent students.

Among all students, top associations with being a student are stressful and exhausting. However, student-parents are more likely than non-parents to associate being a student with positive attributes.

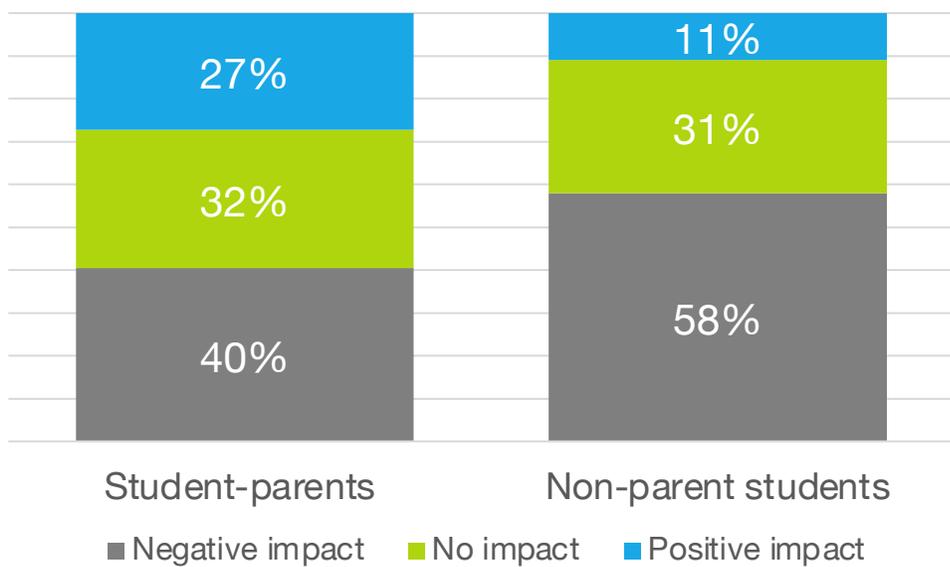
Which of the following words or phrases do you most associate with being a student? Please choose up to 3.



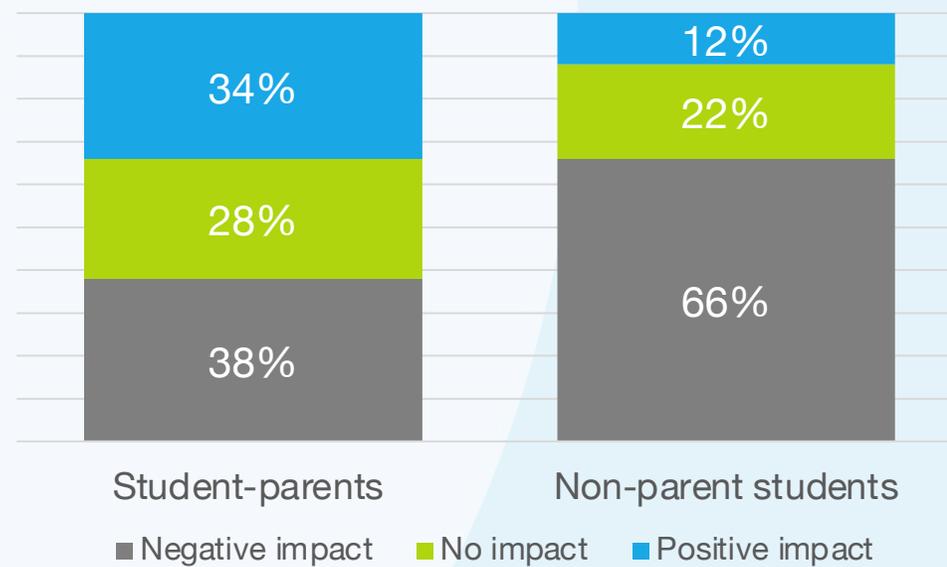
- Student-parents are more likely to consider being a student to be **exciting, stimulating, and esteem-enhancing**.
- Non-parent students are more likely to consider being a student to be **stressful, overwhelming, and anxiety-inducing**.

Student-parents are also more likely to feel that being a student has a positive impact on their physical and emotional health, while non-parent students are more likely to feel that it has a negative impact.

How has the experience of being a student affected your physical health?



How has the experience of being a student affected your mental and emotional health?



A woman with long brown hair, wearing a dark blue graduation cap with a gold tassel and a light-colored top, is smiling. She is holding a rolled-up white diploma tied with a red ribbon in her left hand and a baby in a grey long-sleeved shirt in her right arm. The background is a blurred indoor setting.

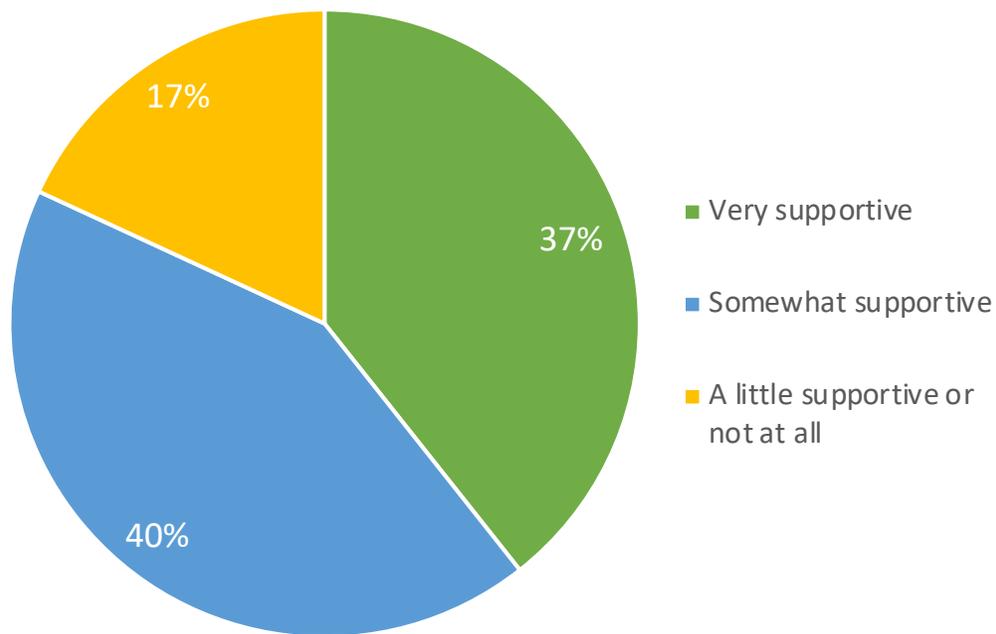
Institutional Support

Room for Improved Support from Colleges and Universities

- This research suggests scope for improving support for student-parents by colleges and universities. Although they experience frequent stress, anxiety, and negative emotions, and student-parents feel that their institutions are not always supportive or understanding of their challenges.
- They often experience social isolation, a sense that they are less welcome on campus, and feel a lack of sympathy from faculty.
- In addition, many student-parents say that their schools do not offer resources such as childcare facilities or information on emotional and mental health.

Perceptions of Institutional Support

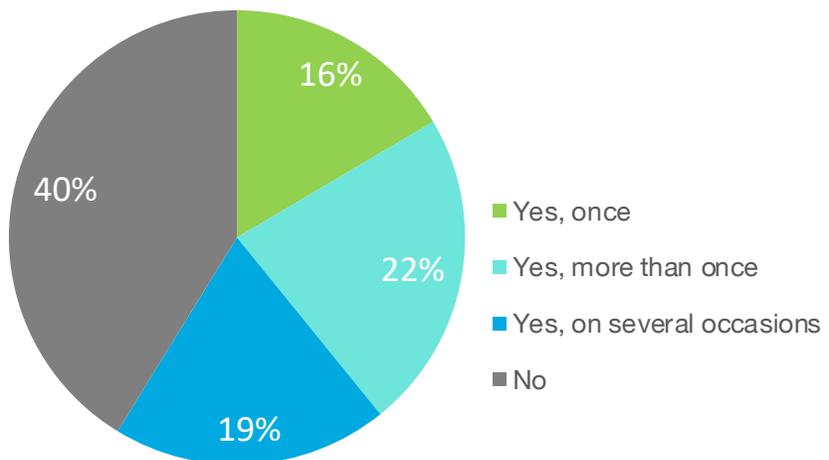
To what extent do you feel that your college or university is supportive of student-parents?



- Men are significantly more likely than women to say their college or university is highly supportive (44% vs. 31%).
- And white student-parents are more likely than other races/ethnicities to say their institution is highly supportive (44% vs. 27-29%).

Experiences with School Personnel

Have you ever had an experience with a faculty member or school official that made you feel they were unsympathetic to the challenges of being both a student and a parent?



57% report having an experience with a faculty member unsympathetic to their situation as student-parents.

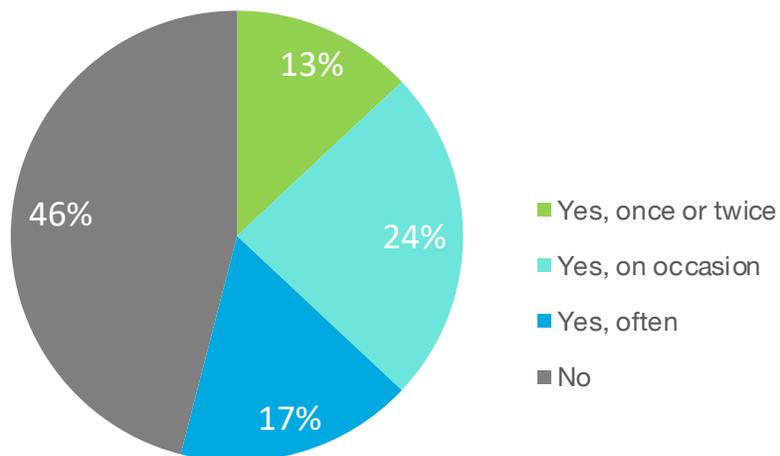


“I had a professor who was not sympathetic at all to the plight of parents and I felt she was being very demeaning in her responses to me and the requests to retake the exam I was forced to have to retake the class entirely after missing such a major exam. The experience made me feel very singled out for being a parent. It was seen as making an excuse to not be able to attend due to my children being sick.”

female student parent

Feeling Less Welcome

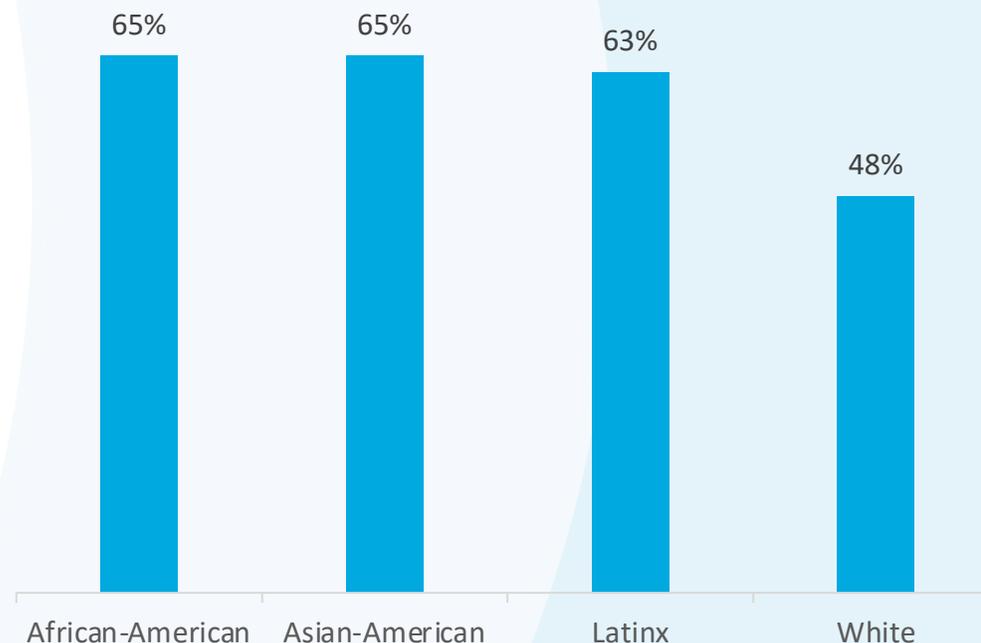
At your school, have you ever been made to feel unwelcome or less welcome than other students because of being a student-parent?



54% report having been made to feel less welcome than other students.

Among younger student-parents (ages 18-29), the figure was 67%.

% saying they have been made to feel less welcome than other students

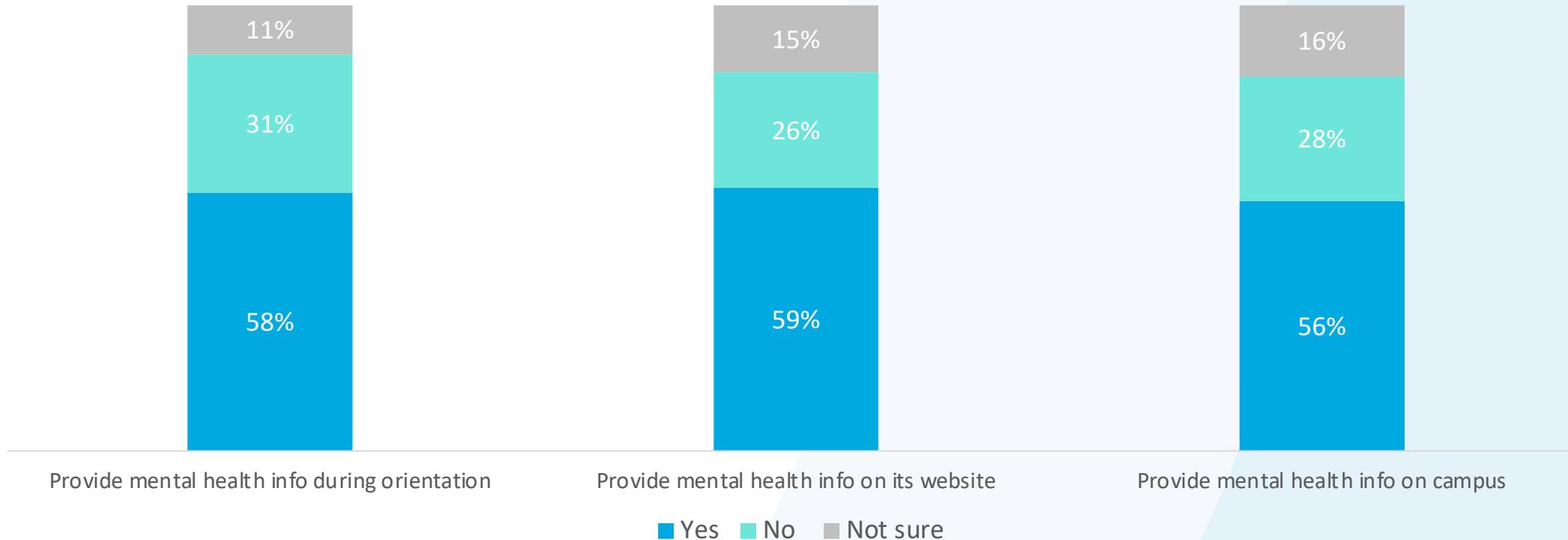


Minority respondents were also significantly more likely than white respondents to say they have been made to feel less than welcome.

Providing Information About Mental or Emotional Health

Around 40% of student-parents report are unaware of mental health information being provided by their schools.

Does your college or university do any of the following?



A photograph of a man and a young child sitting at a desk in a dimly lit room. The man, with a beard and wearing a striped shirt, is looking at a large computer monitor. The child, also wearing a striped shirt and a headset with a microphone, is looking at a laptop. The monitor displays a grid of data or charts. The overall mood is focused and professional, suggesting a work environment where a child is present.

Impact on Mental and Emotional Health

Impact on Mental Health

The array of challenges takes a toll on mental and emotional health.

The combination of stressors and negative emotions leads to more serious emotional and mental outcomes, including anxiety attacks, depression, thoughts of dropping out of school, and thoughts of suicide.

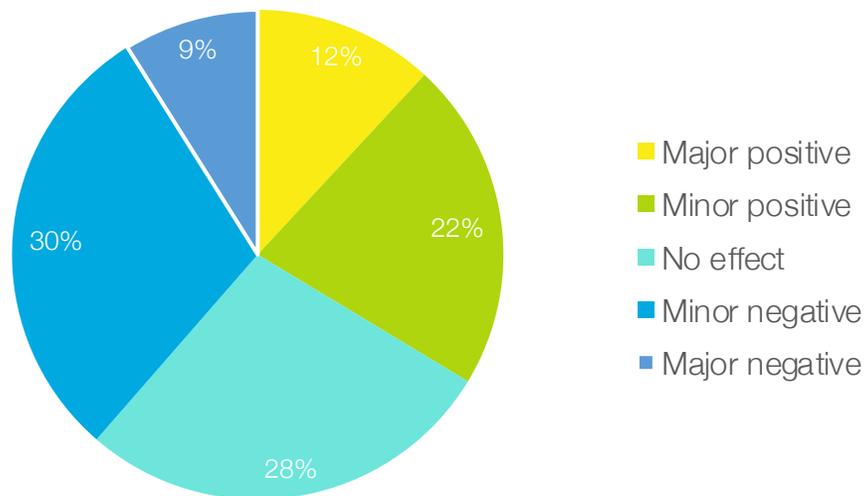


“Anxiety and depression are pretty high at times. I have been lucky to attend counseling provided by my university and have made great progress in regulating my emotions. I am extremely socially isolated. I moved to this state for college and have been unable to make serious friendships and have no family connections nor the time to go out into the community and foster these relationships. I am extremely stressed and experience extreme fatigue during the school year.”

female student parent

Nearly 4 in 10 student-parents perceive their student experience as having a negative effect on their mental health.

How has the experience of being a student affected your mental or emotional health?



The perception of negative mental or emotional effects are significantly more common among younger student-parents (49%) and among female student-parents (44%).

Perceptions of positive effects are more common among older student-parents (36%) and male student-parents (38%).

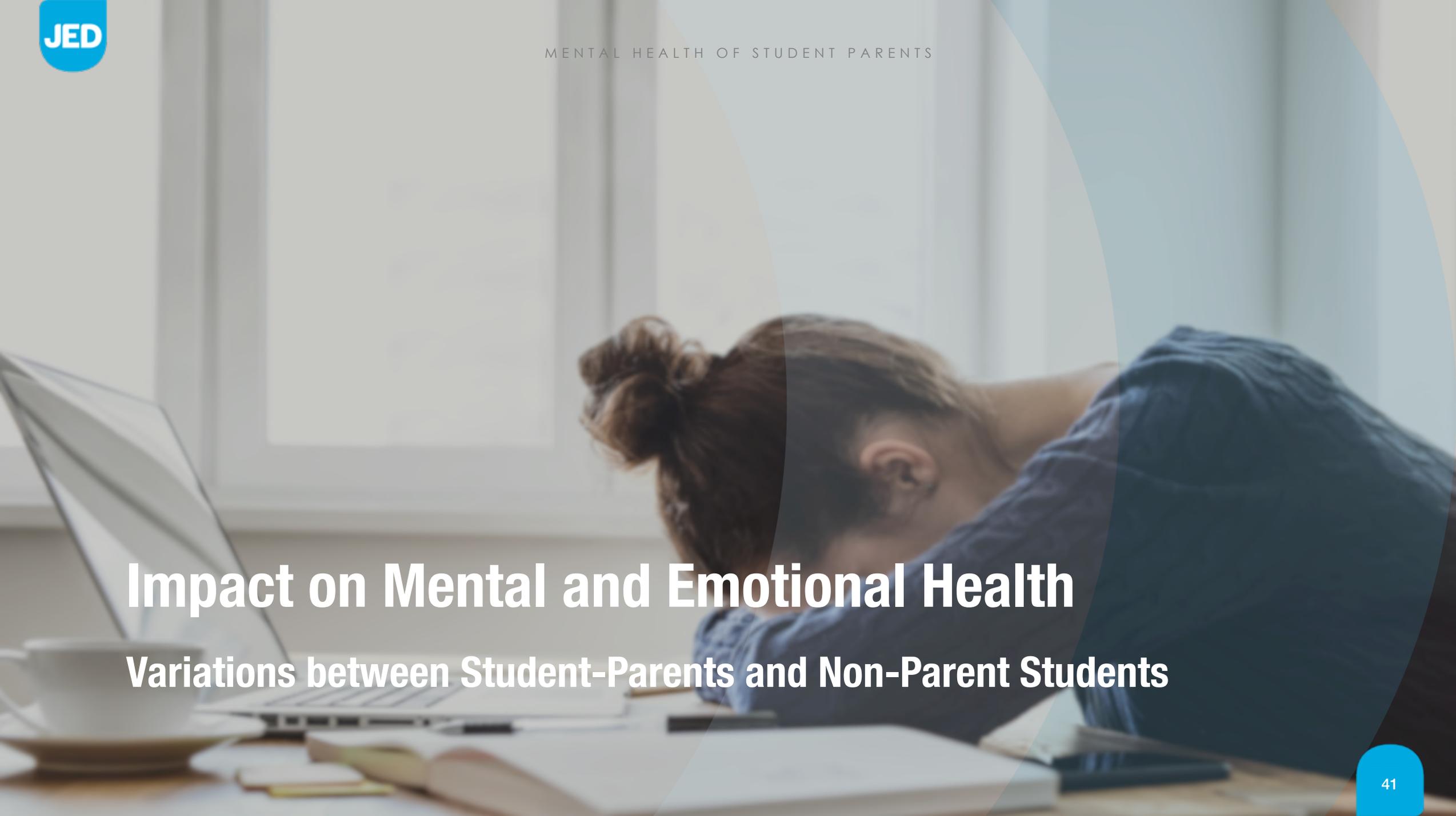


“Juggling family time with school and work has been especially challenging. School this past semester has demanded so much more time than usual that it has become almost unmanageable and seems to push out all my other normal human activities. Finances are rather unpredictable as well due to job changes that came with the pandemic situation. Stresses are high.”
(male student parent)

Experiences of Negative States and Emotions:

- More than a quarter of student-parents indicated that they experience a variety of negative emotions or states very often or all the time. These include:
 - Stress (43%)
 - A sense of being overwhelmed (40%)
 - Anxiety (39%)
 - Extreme fatigue (33%)
 - Difficulty regulating emotions (29%)
 - Depression (28%)
 - A sense of social isolation (28%)
- In addition, roughly a quarter of student-parent respondents report having felt a variety of negative emotions most or all of the of the time over the previous 30 days:
 - 27% said they felt hopeless all or most of the time; 22% said depressed; 26% said worthless; and 26% said angry.

Female student-parents are significantly more likely to report frequent experience of stress, anxiety, and being overwhelmed, as are younger student-parents, those enrolled full-time, and those receiving financial aid.



Impact on Mental and Emotional Health

Variations between Student-Parents and Non-Parent Students

Anxiety Attacks



“I have developed extreme anxiety stress and fatigue.”

female student parent

“I ended in the ER having an anxiety attack.”

male student parent

70%
Anxiety attack

37%
Multiple

70% of student-parents reported experiencing an anxiety attack during their time in college -- as compared with 61% of non-parent students, with 37% saying they have experienced more than one such attack.

Contemplating Dropping Out



“My physical health has remained relatively stable. There have been times that I may stress eat, and I have less time to workout than I would like but that's just life I think. My mental health on the other hand has probably suffered a bit more. When the stress is more than I can handle it leaves me feeling incompetent. Then I beat myself up questioning whether going to school is even worth it, if I have what it takes, if I'm being a good enough parent, etc. I've probably thought about dropping out at least once per semester.”

female student parent

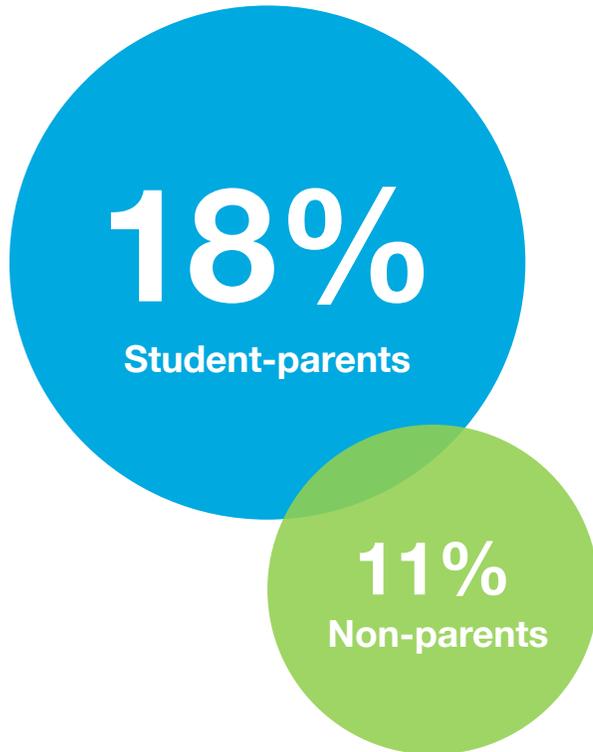
38%
Student-parents

25%
Non-parents

38% of student-parents said that they had considered dropping out of school within the previous 30 days – compared with 25% of non-parent students.

Among, those receiving financial aid, the figure was 50%; among 18-29-year-olds, it was 45%; and among those working while taking classes, it was 40%.

Suicidal Ideation



18% of student-parent respondents report that they had considered committing suicide within the previous 30 days – as compared with 11% of non-parent students.

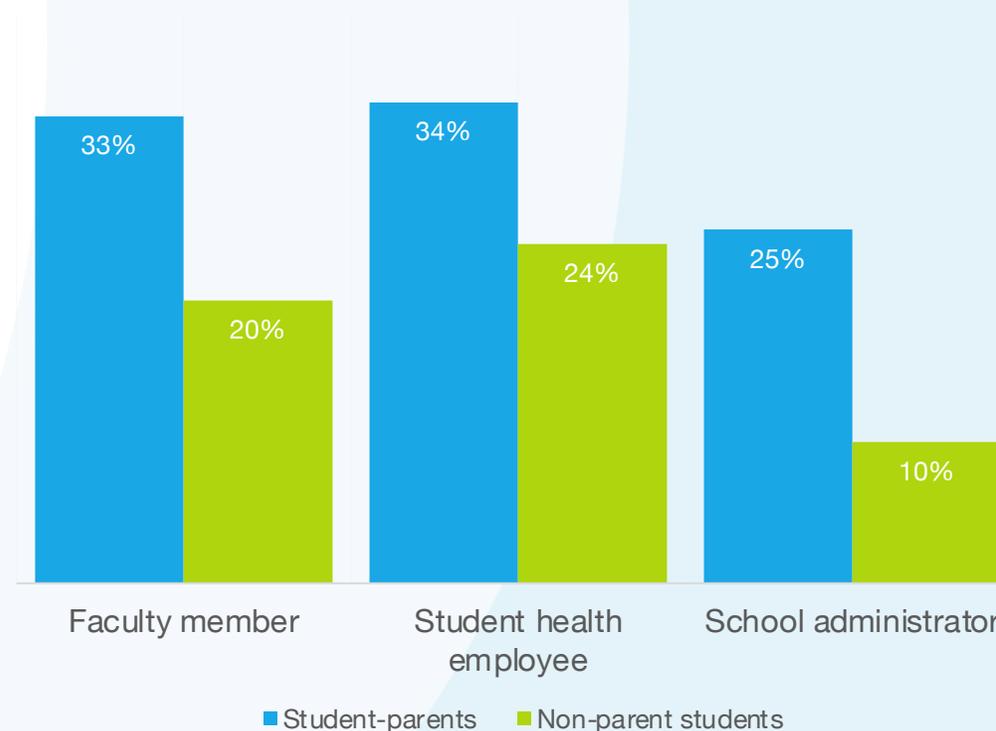
This percentage was significantly higher among student-parents receiving financial aid (26%); among those at private institutions (24%), among those working in addition to studying (22%), and among males (22%).

Seeking Out Help

- Nearly half (47%) of student-parents said that they have sought out help or advice for a mental health issue, compared with 39% of non-parent students.
- Among those student-parents receiving financial aid, the figure was 60%; among those in public institutions it was 53%; and among female student-parents it was 50%.

Student-parents are also significantly more likely than non-parent students to have requested help from faculty, administrators, and student health employees.

Have you ever requested help with issues of emotional and mental wellbeing from...



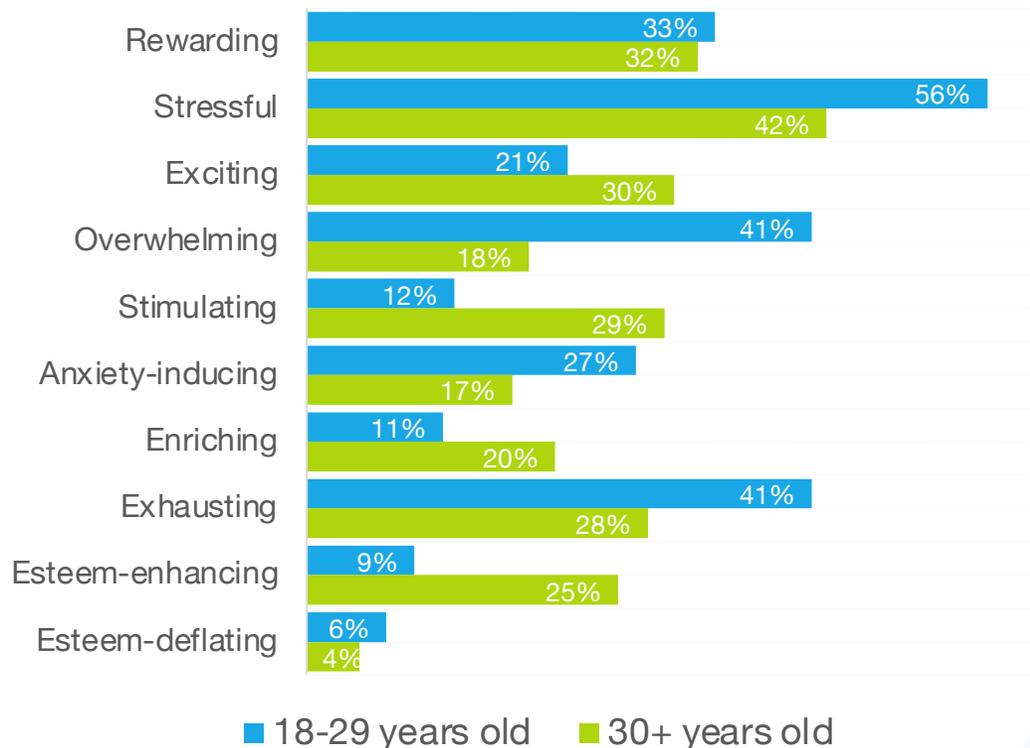


Risk Factors for Student-Parents

Among student-parents, younger students, mothers, students receiving financial aid, and students enrolled full-time are at the greatest risk for adverse mental health outcomes.

Variations in Student-Parent Experience by Age:

Which of the following words or phrases do you most associate with being a student? Please choose up to 3.



- Younger parents (ages 18-29) tend to have more negative associations with being a student than older parents (ages 30 and older).
- Younger parents are more likely to consider being a student as **stressful**, **overwhelming**, **anxiety-inducing**, and **exhausting**.
- Older student parents are more likely to feel that being a student is **rewarding**, **exciting**, **stimulating**, and **enriching**.

Variations by Age

Older student-parents (age 30 +) are significantly more likely to have positive associations with being a student than are younger ones, and younger student-parents are significantly more likely to have negative associations.

	Total sample	Age 18-29	Age 30+
Rewarding	32	33	32
Exciting	27	21	30
Stimulating	23	12	29
Esteem-enhancing	19	9	25
Enriching	17	11	20
Stressful	47	56	42
Exhausting	33	41	28
Overwhelming	27	41	18
Anxiety-inducing	20	27	17
Esteem-deflating	5	6	4

Younger student-parents are also more likely than older student-parents to say they feel stressed often (55% vs. 39%), and to say they feel overwhelmed often (52% vs. 37%).

And younger student-parents are significantly more likely to say they often experience anxiety (44% vs. 36%).

Variations by Age:

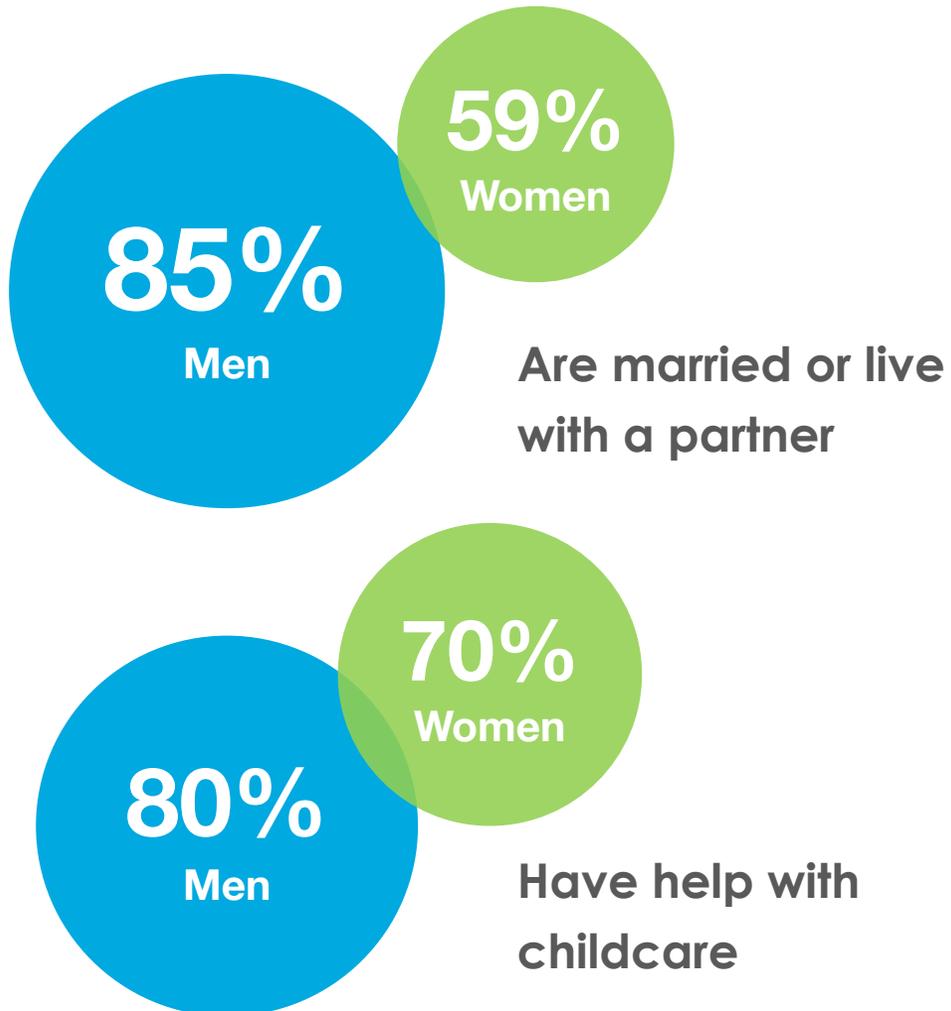
When you are in the school year/semester/quarter, how often do you face the following challenges on a scale of 1 (“never”) to 10 (“all the time”)?

Percent of respondents reporting 8 or higher



- Younger student parents are more likely than older parents to experience **stress, feel overwhelmed,** and have trouble **finding time to do coursework** during the semester.
- Compared to older parents, younger parents are more likely to
 - Report that being a student has a negative impact on their mental or emotion health (49% vs. 32%).
 - Consider dropping out (45% vs. 34%).

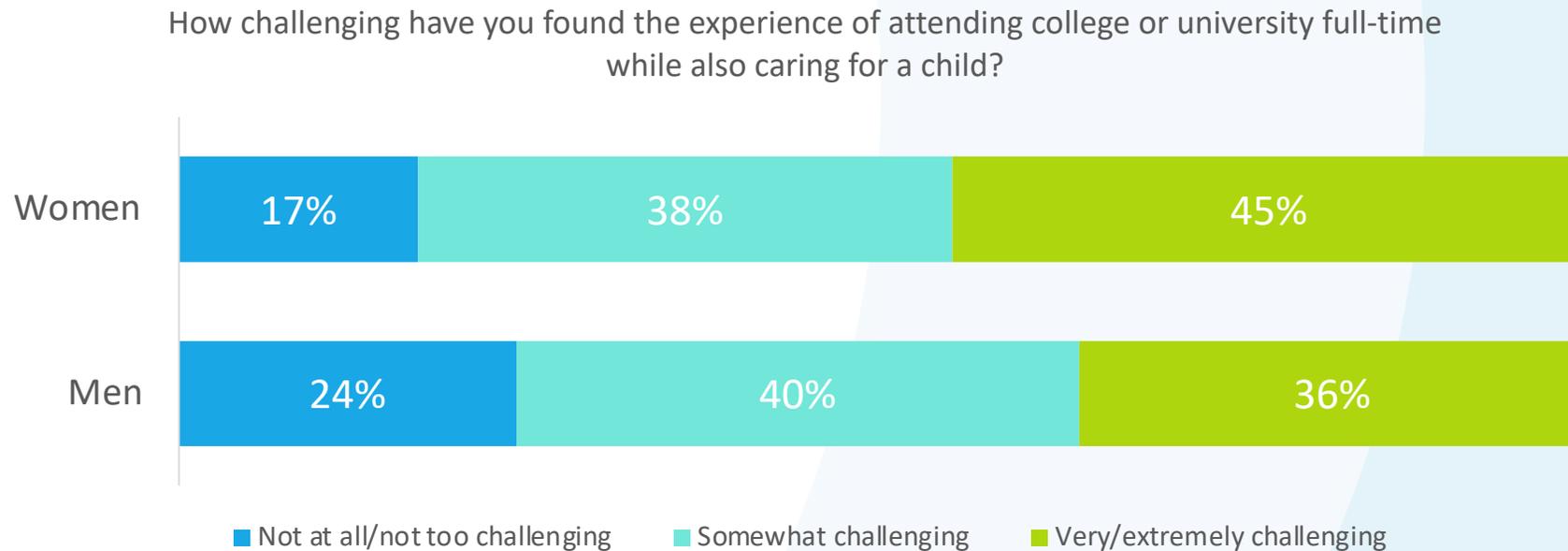
Variations by Gender



- **Fathers are more likely than mothers to have help caring for their child(ren).**
- Among student-parents who have help, fathers are more likely than mothers to receive help from their child's other parent (53% vs. 49%), while mothers are more likely than fathers to rely on a daycare center (24% vs. 15%).

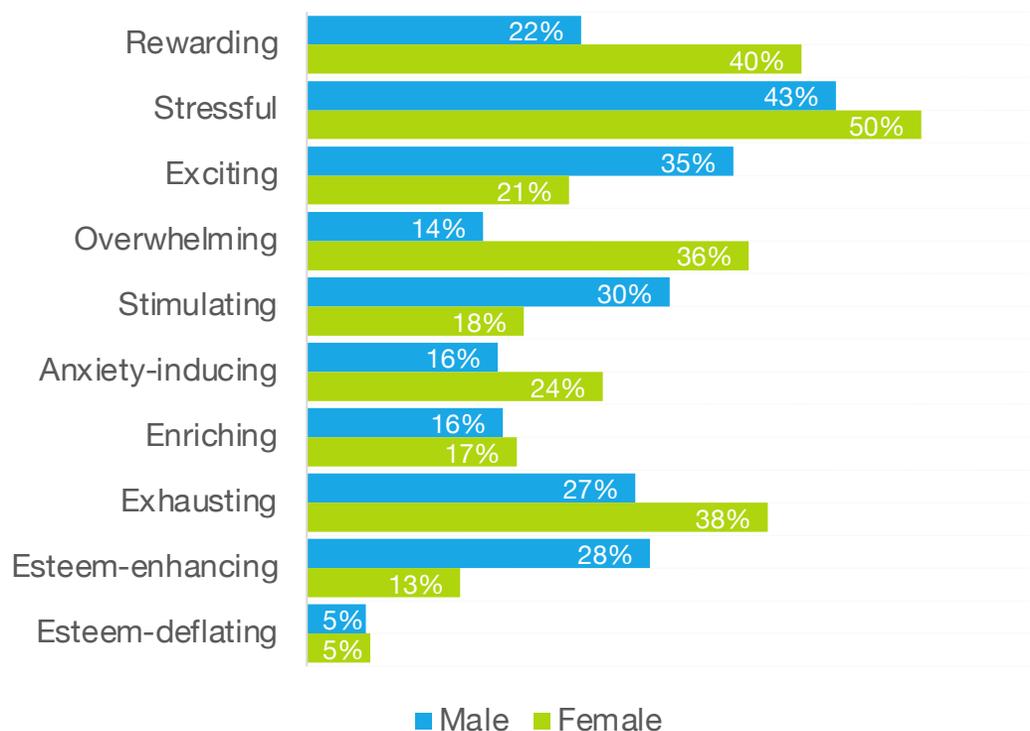
Variations by Gender

Mothers are significantly more likely than fathers to say being a student-parent is very or extremely challenging.



Variations by Gender

Which of the following words or phrases do you most associate with being a student? Please choose up to 3.



- Student-mothers are more likely than fathers to consider being a student-parent to be **rewarding**. However, they are also more likely to find it **stressful**, **overwhelming**, and **exhausting**.
- Fathers are more likely than mothers to say being a student-parent is **exciting**, **stimulating**, and **esteem-enhancing**.

Variations by Gender

There is some significant variation in associations by gender, too, with female student-parents more likely to hold a range of negative associations.

	Total sample	Female	Male
Rewarding	32	40	22
Exciting	27	21	35
Stimulating	23	18	30
Esteem-enhancing	19	13	28
Enriching	17	17	16
Stressful	47	50	43
Exhausting	33	38	27
Overwhelming	27	36	14
Anxiety-inducing	20	24	16
Esteem-deflating	5	5	5

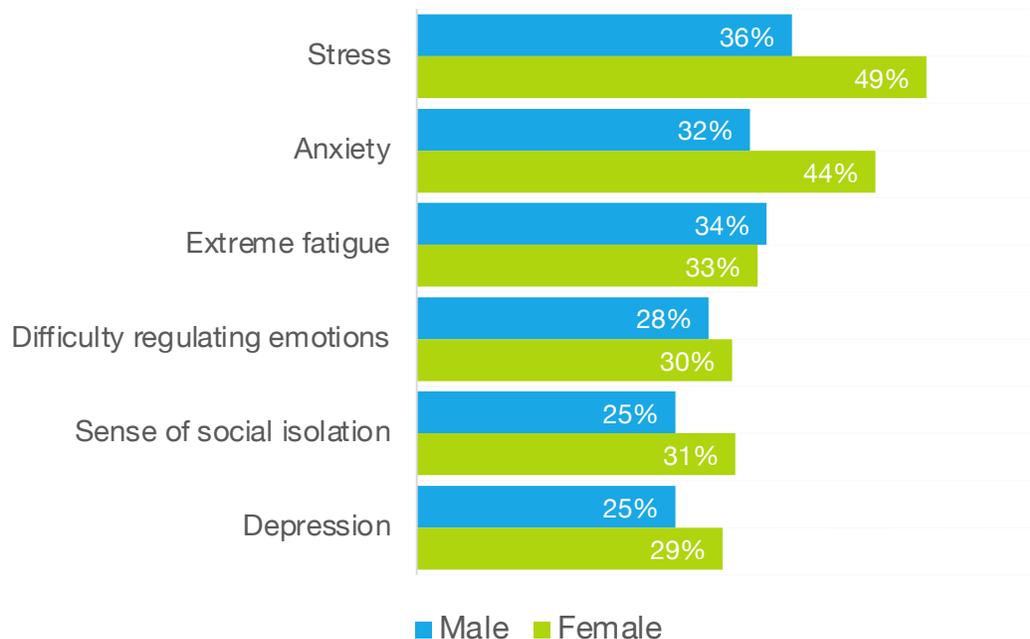
Female student-parents are more likely than male student-parents to report feeling stressed often (51% vs. 37%), and to report feeling overwhelmed often (50% vs. 34%).

Female student-parents are more likely than male to report often feeling anxiety (44% vs. 32%).

Variations by Gender

How often have you experienced the following during your time as a college student on a scale of 1 (“never”) to 10 (“all the time”)?

Percent of respondents reporting 8 or higher



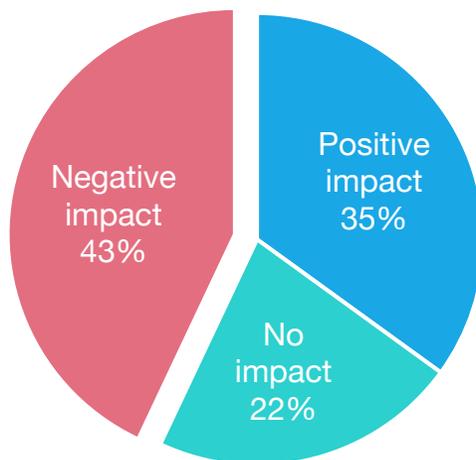
- Student mothers are also more likely than fathers to frequently experience **stress** and **anxiety**
 - More student-mothers have at least one anxiety attack while in college than fathers (73% vs. 66%)
- Although they report less stress and anxiety, student fathers are more likely to consider suicide than mothers (22% vs. 11%).

Variations by Receipt of Financial Aid

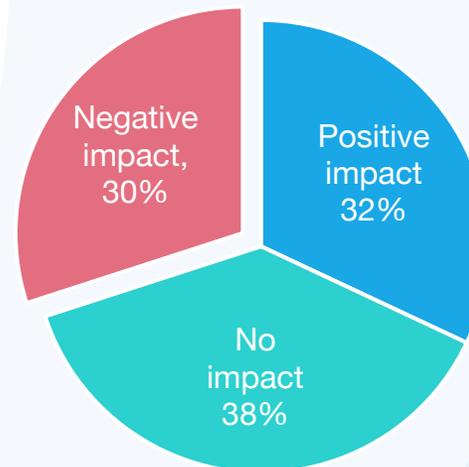
Student-parents who receive financial aid are more likely to report that being a student has a negative impact on their mental and emotional health compared with student-parents who do not receive financial aid (43% vs. 30%).

How has the experience of being a student affected your mental or emotional health?

Financial Aid Recipients



Non-Recipients



Variations by Receipt of Financial Aid

When you are in the school year/semester/quarter, how often do you face the following challenges on a scale of 1 (“never”) to 10 (“all the time”)?

(Percent of respondents reporting 8 or higher)

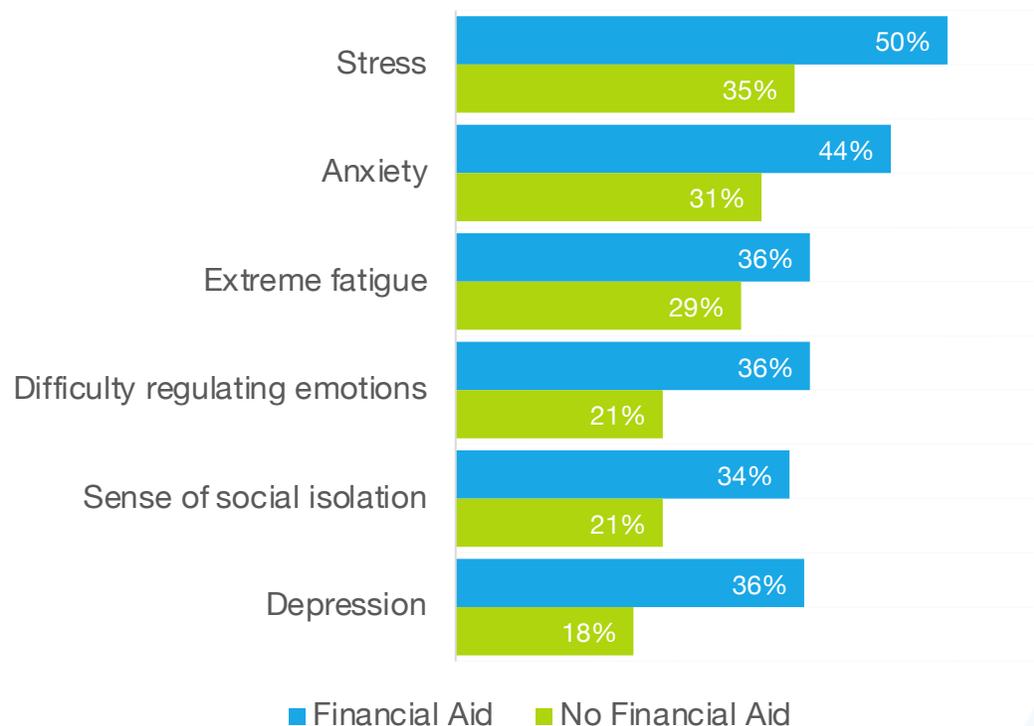


- Student-parents receiving financial aid are more likely to struggle with financial challenges, lack time and essential resources, and experience stress than student-parents who do not receive aid.

Variations by Receipt of Financial Aid

How often have you experienced the following during your time as a college student on a scale of 1 (“never”) to 10 (“all the time”)

(Percent of respondents reporting 8 or higher)

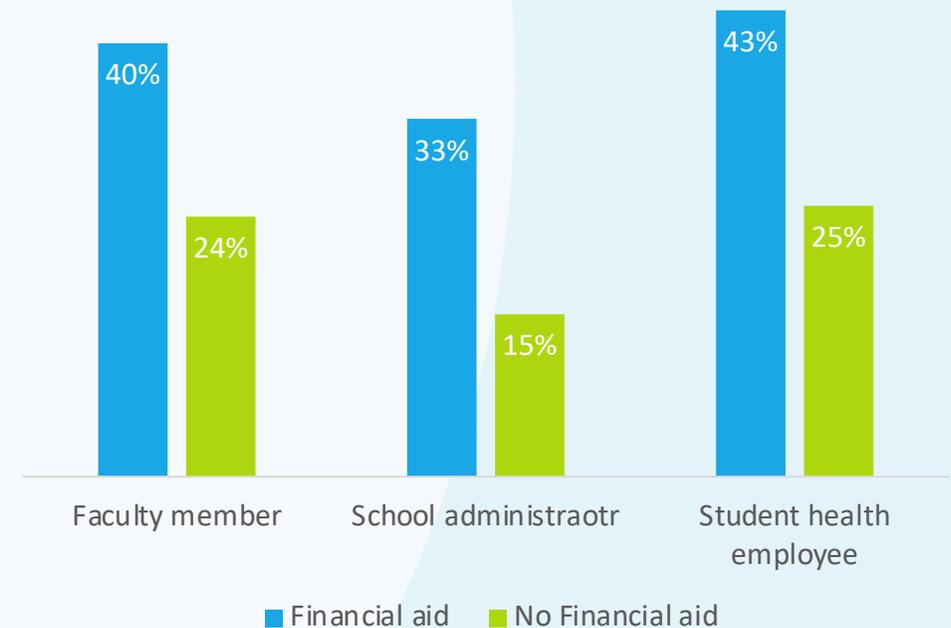


- Student-parents receiving financial aid are more likely than those not receiving aid to experience symptoms associated with depression and anxiety.

Variations by Receipt of Financial Aid

- Student-parents that receive aid are more likely than those who do not to seek out help with issues relating to emotional and mental wellbeing.
- Despite their help-seeking behavior, parents receiving aid are at greater risk for adverse outcomes. Compared to parents who do not receive aid, parents receiving financial aid are
 - **More than twice as likely to consider dropping out (50% vs. 22%)**
 - **More than three times as likely to seriously consider suicide (26% vs. 8%)**

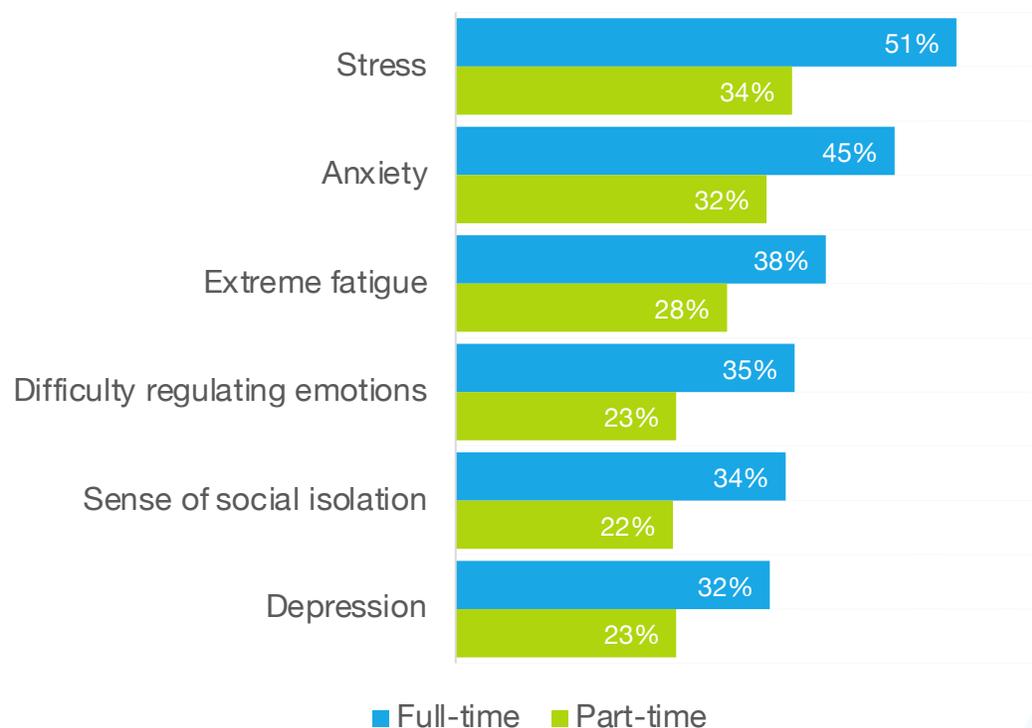
Have you ever requested help with issues of emotional or mental wellbeing from any of the following members of your college?



Variations Between Full-Time and Part-Time Students

How often have you experienced the following during your time as a college student on a scale of 1 (“never”) to 10 (“all the time”)

(Percent of respondents reporting 8 or higher)



- Full-time student-parents report higher rates of symptoms associated with stress and depression than part-time student-parents.
- Compared to part-time students, full-time students are more likely to report that:
 - Being a parent has had a negative effect on their academic performance (31% vs. 23%)
 - Being a student has a negative impact on their mental or emotional health (43% vs. 33%)

A man with a full beard and a light blue button-down shirt is sitting at a desk. He is holding a baby in his arms. The baby is wearing a white patterned sleeveless top and holding a pink piece of paper. The man is holding a black pen over an open notebook on the desk. There are sticky notes on the notebook. To the right, there is a pen holder with various colored pens and markers. A laptop is partially visible on the left side of the desk. The background is dark, suggesting an office or home workspace.

Interest in Resources

Desired Support and Resources

Student-parent participants in bulletin board discussions suggested a variety of forms of support they would ideally like to be made available to them:

- Lists of contacts and services
- Scholarships or financial aid for student-parents
- More (affordable) childcare services on campus
- Suggestions for managing parenting and class stress
- Free on-campus counseling for mental health
- A marriage and family specialist
- Events/ways to meet and socialize with other student-parents
- Bring-your-child-to-school days
- For college to provide social workers that can check on your wellbeing
- Workshops or sessions for student-parents



“More childcare. Schools have full medical facilities, restaurants, gyms, theaters, etc., but childcare is somehow overlooked. There is a small facility at my school, but the waitlist is a couple of years long. There's clearly a need for it.”

female student parent

“They should have programs to help us with childcare especially during finals/midterms week. I think this would have help me focus more on my studies so that I don't need to wait until my husband gets home to start focusing on my school.”

female student parent

“I definitely think that support groups, access to specialists, and help lines would greatly benefit student parents.”

female student parent

Desired Resources

More than a third of student-parents express high interest in a variety of supportive resources and activities, including:

- Daycare facilities
- Social activities, such as events for student-parents, college events to which they would be welcome to bring their children, and online platforms or forums for discussions with other student-parents
- Suggestions for dealing with stress and anxiety
- Information on available counseling and therapy

Desired Support and Resources

When asked which forms of support would be most helpful, three types stand out: help with childcare, with social connection, and with managing stress and anxiety.

Which of the following types of resources would be most helpful for student-parents with respect to emotional and mental support? Select up to 3.

Daycare facilities	43%
Suggestions for dealing with stress and anxiety	43%
Social activities	43%
Online meetings or platforms for student parents	40%
Information on counseling or therapy services	35%
Crisis hotline	24%



“The two big things I can think of are more and flexible childcare, and groups designed for parents so we don't have to feel left out of the community.”

female student parent

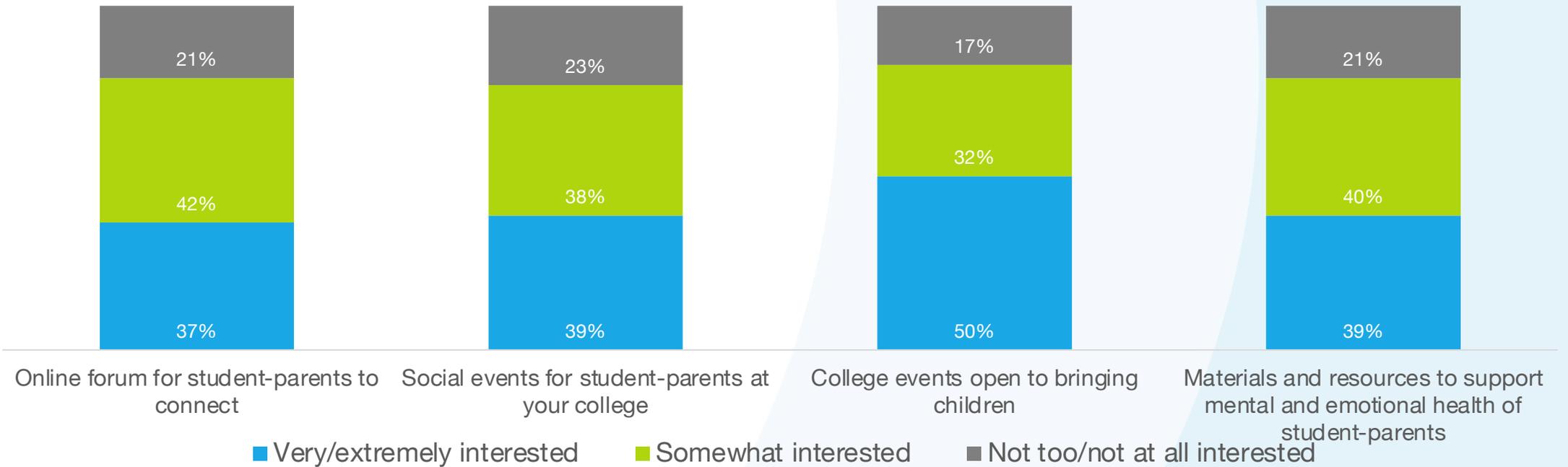
“Actually giving the students information on how the college can help with things. It seems a lot of it just gets hidden away on their website expecting you to find it if you need it but when you're balancing a thousand things you may never notice it.”

male student parent

Nearly 4 in 10 student-parents indicate high interest in a range of resources.

Interest in social events (especially ones at which children would be welcome) and social forums is equal to interest in material resources and information.

How interested would you be in...



Variations in Desired Resources

Older student-parents, those at 4-year institutions, and those receiving financial aid indicate particularly strong interest in potential forms of support.

- Older student-parents (age 30+) are significantly more likely to indicate high interest in social activities: 48% vs. 35% of younger student-parents.
- They are also more likely to indicate high interest in receiving materials to support emotional and mental health: 42% vs. 34% of younger student-parents.
- Female student-parents are significantly more likely to indicate high interest in provision of daycare facilities: 50% vs. 35% of male student-parents.
- Student-parents at 4-year institutions are significantly more likely to express high interest in social activities: 47% vs. 31% of those at 2-year institutions.
- They are also more likely to express high interest in receiving materials to support emotional and mental health: 43% vs. 28% of those at 2-year institutions.
- Student-parents receiving financial aid are significantly more likely to express high interest in receiving such materials: 44% vs. 34% of those not receiving financial aid.

As for how best to make information about resources available to student-parents, respondents most frequently said via e-mails from the college and through the college website.

Which of the following would be the best way to make information about such resources known to you? Select up to 3.	
Sent to you by e-mail from the college	49%
Through the college website	47%
Provided by your academic advisor	30%
Posting flyers around campus	28%
Posted or distributed at student health centers	25%
Posted or distributed at student unions or libraries	25%
Distributed at an event for student-parents	24%

Conclusions



- The student-parent population is distinguished from that of non-parent students in important ways: it is much older on average, more likely to be employed in addition to studying, and often less integrated into campus social life.
- Student-parents exhibit attitudinal differences, too -- being more likely to see positive aspects of school in spite of the demands and stresses involved.
- They typically deal with a range of challenges, stresses, and responsibilities and often feel overwhelmed by the competing demands of school, work, childcare, and household management on their time.
- They often have difficulty finding time for all their responsibilities and end up sacrificing sleep, self-care, and valued time with family. Many lack access to affordable daycare for their children and thus have to make other arrangements.
- Many experience an abiding sense of guilt for often having to prioritize coursework over family time.
- For some, their schools do not always seem welcoming or supportive of parenting students.

- In addition to the stress, many also feel a sense of social isolation, saying that, as parents, they do not feel as welcome at campus events, or simply that they lack the time to socialize.
- As a result, while the majority handle the stresses without adverse affects on their mental and emotional health, a large minority of student-parents – nearly 1 in 3 -- is far more challenged and experience adverse emotional and mental outcomes.
- Many experience negative emotional states – some persistently. And for many, the persistent stresses and worries lead to even more serious outcomes, such as anxiety attacks, and repeated ideation of dropping out or of suicide.
- Student-parents are thus significantly more likely to be at risk of serious mental health outcomes than non-parent students.

- This research suggests that a large minority of student-parents – around one-in-four to one-in-three – experience serious emotional and mental health issues, and that they experience these issues at a greater rate than non-parent students.
- These rates are greatest among female student-parents, as well as among non-White student-parents, those under age 30, and those receiving financial aid.
- The research also suggests a variety of ways in which colleges and universities could be more supportive of student-parents, including:
 - Working to make faculty sympathetic to the challenges of student-parents
 - Making sure student-parents receive information and resources of mental and emotional health and information on dealing with stress
 - Making efforts to be socially inclusive of student-parents
 - Offering affordable childcare services

- In sum, this research indicates strong interest in resources and information among nearly 4 in 10 student-parents nationally.
- It suggests that student-parents comprise a population with serious unmet needs for recognition and social inclusion, and for greater support of their mental and emotional health.
- The research further suggests a clear opportunity for the Jed Foundation to make a significant positive difference in the lives of student-parents and in their college experience.

About Fluent

Fluent is a consulting firm specializing in research that informs the development of public policy, educational programs, media and technology focused on children's and youth education, health and wellbeing. Fluent's work centers around three practice areas: thought leadership research, formative research and evaluation, and social impact assessment. We have applied rigorous and innovative research solutions in service of promoting children's access to and quality of education, and gender equality in the U.S. and in over 70 countries around the world.

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Crisis