

A Comparison of Living Arrangements and Mental Health in University Students

Jessica K. Miceli, Peter R. Reuter, M.D., PhD

Florida Gulf Coast University, Marieb College of Human Health & Services, Fort Myers, FL, USA

Introduction

There has been previous research dedicated to the correlation between living arrangements and mental health, however, effects of living arrangements and mental health in university students have seldom been researched. Some freshmen in college get to experience life as an adult for the first time: living without their parents, providing for themselves, and holding full responsibility for their well-being. Through previous research of separation of children from their parents, there is a positive correlation between worsened mental health and neuroticism in both parents and their children, including heightened emotions of anxiety and worry. There have also been studies that have shown that parental-child relationships worsen due to the increased distance. The results of our study can be used to assist students in choosing housing or living arrangements that best accommodate their current mental health situation. As a result of this decision, students could have more motivation and exhibit higher levels of happiness in their daily lives.

Objectives

To determine if there is an association between living arrangements and mental health in university students.

Methods

We collected data using an anonymous survey from Spring 2018-Spring 2019 at a regional university in southwest Florida. A diverse range of students from different colleges across campus were invited to participate. The data was taken from questions concerning the student's current living arrangements on campus (on-campus, off-campus, etc.) and their mental health, based on questions about depression and suicide.

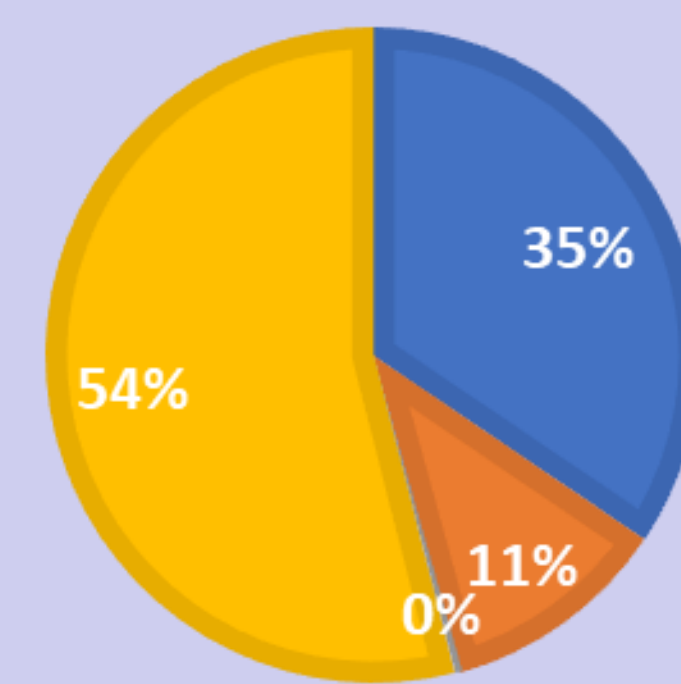
Study Population

We received 667 responses overall. We had to exclude 105 responses because respondents were younger than 18, older than 25, did not provide an age, were graduate students or did not provide information on their living arrangements.

Results

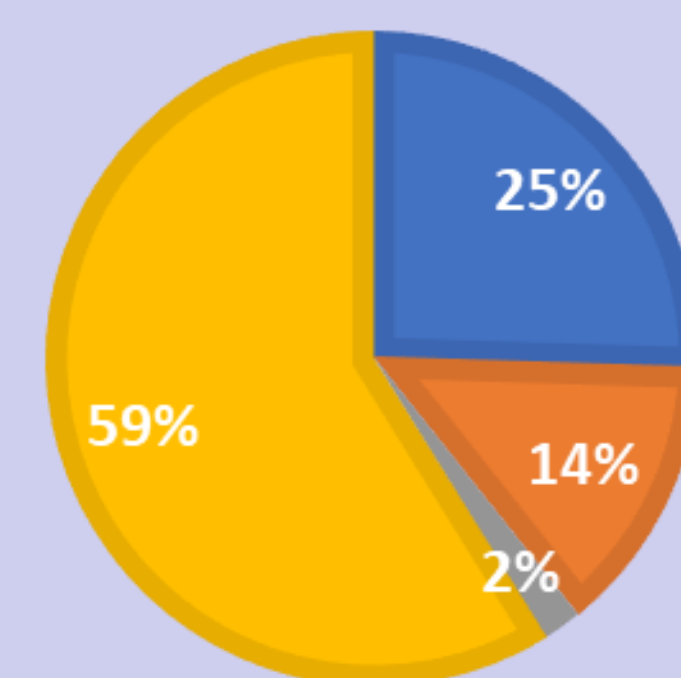
ON CAMPUS

■ Sad/Hopeless: ■ Suicidal Thoughts:
■ Suicide Attempted: ■ Other:



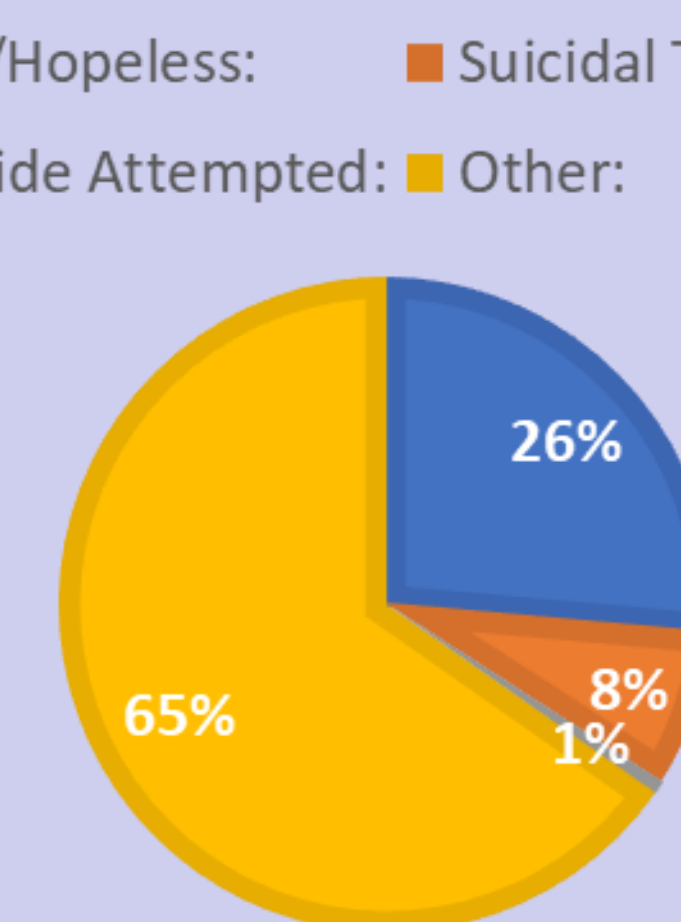
OFF CAMPUS ALONE

■ Sad/Hopeless: ■ Suicidal Thoughts:
■ Suicide Attempted: ■ Other:



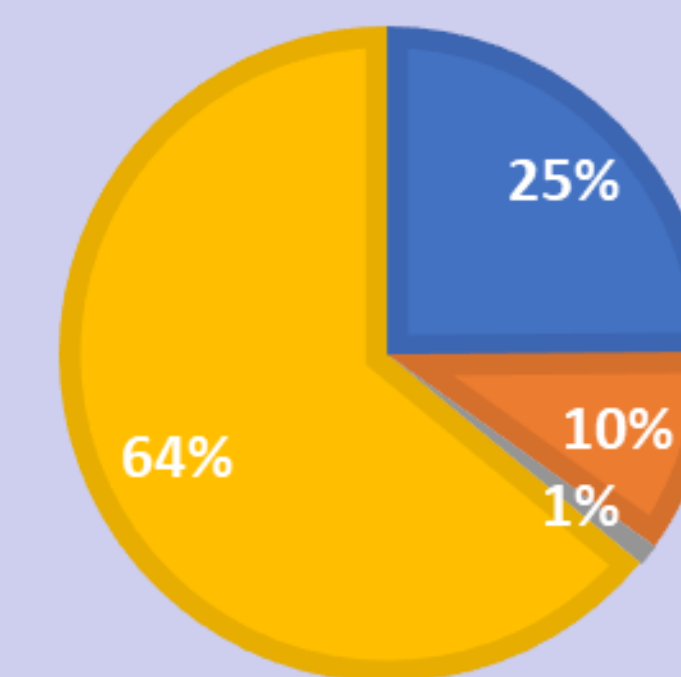
OFF CAMPUS WITH OTHERS

■ Sad/Hopeless: ■ Suicidal Thoughts:
■ Suicide Attempted: ■ Other:



AT HOME

■ Sad/Hopeless: ■ Suicidal Thoughts:
■ Suicide Attempted: ■ Other:



- The number of students living on campus who were surveyed amounted to 302 individuals.
- 104 individuals responded 'yes' to questions pertaining to sadness/hopelessness, 34 responded 'yes' to suicidal thoughts, and only 1 individual responded 'yes' to attempted suicide.

- The number of students who live off campus and alone amounted to 30 individuals.
- 13 of these individuals replied 'yes' to questions pertaining to sadness/hopelessness, 7 responded 'yes' to suicidal thoughts, and 1 individual responded 'yes' to attempted suicide.

- The number of students who live off campus with others amounted to 94 individuals.
- 38 individuals said 'yes' to feelings of sadness/hopelessness, 11 individuals responded 'yes' to suicidal thoughts, and 1 individual responded 'yes' to attempted suicide.

- The number of students who live at home amounted to 121 individuals.
- 47 of these students replied 'yes' to feelings of sadness/hopelessness, 19 individuals said 'yes' to suicidal thoughts, and 2 individuals said 'yes' to suicide attempted.

Discussion

Our study found that individuals who live off-campus on their own/alone report a higher occurrence of depression and suicidal tendencies compared to other living arrangements amongst university students. Students who lived on-campus consistently reported lower rates of sadness, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts. These results confirm previous studies on the mental effects of the separation of parents and their children. Limitations to our study were that not all possible living arrangements are included, and that student mental health is judged off three questions pertaining to feeling sad, having suicidal thoughts, and attempting suicide only.

Conclusions

Students living alone off-campus tend to be more depressed and have more suicidal thoughts than those with other living arrangements.

References

- Farabaugh A, Bitran S, Nyer M, Holt DJ, Pedrelli P, Shyu I, Hollon SD, Zisook S, Baer L, Busse W, Petersen TJ, Pender M, Tucker DD, Fava M. Depression and suicidal ideation in college students. *Psychopathology*. 2012;45(4):228-34. doi: 10.1159/000331598
- Pedrelli P, Nyer M, Yeung A, et al. College Students: Mental Health Problems and Treatment Considerations. *Acad Psychiatry*. 2015 Oct;39(5):503-11. doi: 10.1007/s40596-014-0205-9
- Sharp J, Theiler S. A Review of Psychological Distress Among University Students: Pervasiveness, Implications and Potential Points of Intervention. *Int J Adv Counselling* (2018) 40:193-212. doi: 10.1007/s10447-018-9321-7
- Simpson DB, Burnett D. Commuters Versus Residents: The Effects of Living Arrangement and Student Engagement on Academic Performance. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*. 2019 Nov;21(3):286-304. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1521025117707516>