

Risking It All: How Stress Influences Risky Behavior among College Students

The purpose of this study was to determine whether stress levels affect risky behaviors among college students on the Georgia Southern Campus (Statesboro). Researchers hypothesized that unmitigated stress would increase risky behaviors among college students. Previous research substantiated high stress levels and risky behavior among college students, gaps in the literature exist that study the interplay among these variables (Vaidya & Mulgaonkar, 2007). Research designed conducted was quantitative, cross-sectional, non-experimental study (n=173). Modified, previously established instruments measured stress, risky behaviors, and demographic information. Stress level and risky behavior scores were calculated and placed into low, moderate, high, and very high groupings. The majority of participants were seniors (43.9%). Overall mean stress score was 38.91, indicating high stress levels among students. Over 25% of participants admitted getting wound up when tired and have trouble calming down. Overall mean risky behaviors were reported at 5.9, indicating moderate levels of risky behavior, with students ages 21-23 reporting the highest levels. One-way ANOVA analyses indicated significant differences in stress levels by Major ($p=0.045$) and race ($p=0.006$). Results from this study suggest that high stress levels among college students contribute to students participating in risky behaviors such as heavy drinking, unprotected sex, or drug use. Recommendations include university level public health initiatives to lower stress levels, with an emphasis on overall wellness and peer-to-peer guidance. With prevention and intervention, risky behaviors among college students could be ameliorated.