

NMU Healthy Minds Survey – Spring 2021

Executive Summary

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The mental health of college students and the impacts of mental wellness on student success, retention, and graduation continue to be significant focus areas in higher education literature and discourse. A number of our previous *Supporting Student Success* messages have centered on mental health topics, and we continue to look for ways to better understand and meet the mental health needs of our campus community. Today, we'd like to share a few important highlights from our most recent Healthy Minds Study (HMS) that can help inform our work moving forward.

The HMS is a web-based, national study that allows us to assess the mental wellness, attitudes, and behaviors of our students, compare against national benchmarks, and identify areas of opportunity for meeting our students' needs. We conducted the HMS on our campus in the spring of 2021. Approximately 1,440 NMU students responded with about 90% of respondents being undergraduate students and 10% being graduate students.

A few compelling data points from the study, include:

- 70% of respondents had a perceived need for help for “emotional or mental health problems” in the previous 12 months.
- 81% of respondents indicated a current need (at the time of the survey) for help with “emotional or mental health problems.”
- 40% of respondents said they suffered “academic impairment from mental health” issues on 6 or more days in the previous 4 weeks. This is 13 percentage points higher than the national average.

In short, the data above suggest that our students experience mental health challenges that impact their ability to be successful at the university if not addressed, and our students recognize that they could use help in addressing their challenges. At the same time, the study also revealed the following:

Only 3% of respondents agreed with the statement, “I would think less of someone who has received mental health treatment.”

- Yet, 44% of respondents agreed with the statement, “Most people would think less of someone who has received mental health treatment.”

Earlier this week, we shared these final two data points with our students in a separate communication. It's important to note how these results reveal a significant disconnect in our students' (and potentially our) attitudes and beliefs about support and potential judgment. According to the HMS, **97% of our students wouldn't think less of someone who receives support, but nearly half are afraid that others aren't so understanding.** How might these perceptions of judgment impact our students when they feel that they, or a friend or loved one, need help? Think of the myriad negative outcomes that might be mitigated or avoided altogether if we helped more students move beyond the fear of judgment.

The vast majority of us are not trained mental health experts nor should we try to be. However, we can all play an important role in recognizing that our students face significant challenges for which they need support, encouraging our students to seek this support, and helping to further destigmatize doing so. We can help to create a campus culture where students see their own lack of negative judgment reflected in others and embrace seeking help as normal and admirable. In doing so, we can take an important step toward creating a thriving university community.