

BACKGROUND

Depression and anxiety impact the lives of many college students in the United States. One study showed pharmacy students are affected at higher rates than medical students.¹ Another found that as many as one in four pharmacy students experienced clinically significant depression and anxiety, with symptoms ranging from moderate to severe.²

OBJECTIVES

- Examine the incidence of depression and anxiety among students at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) School of Pharmacy and School of Business to determine whether a difference exists between healthcare and non-healthcare majors.
- Recognize the potential impact of each degree program on students' mental health.
- Pinpoint stages in each curriculum that correlate with the highest initiation rate of antidepressants and antianxiety medications.

METHODS

Study Design

- Qualitative 38-question survey requesting demographic information, mental health status, resource utilization, and perceptions of SIUE support.

Study Population

- First through fourth-year (P1-P4) SIUE pharmacy students and business students enrolled in Bachelors or Masters degree programs.

Study Measures: Dependent Variables

- Primary Outcome: rate at which students are treated for depression and/or anxiety following degree program enrollment and participation.

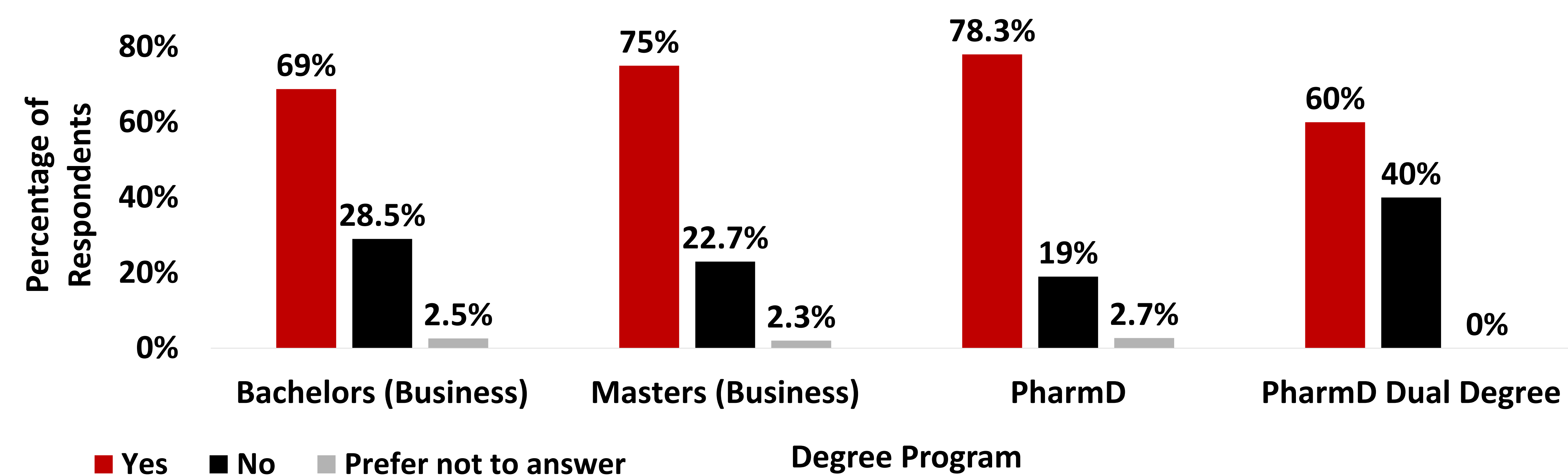
- Secondary Outcomes: impact of curriculum on mental health, when medication initiation most often occurs.

Study Measures: Independent Variables

- Age, gender identity, year in degree program.

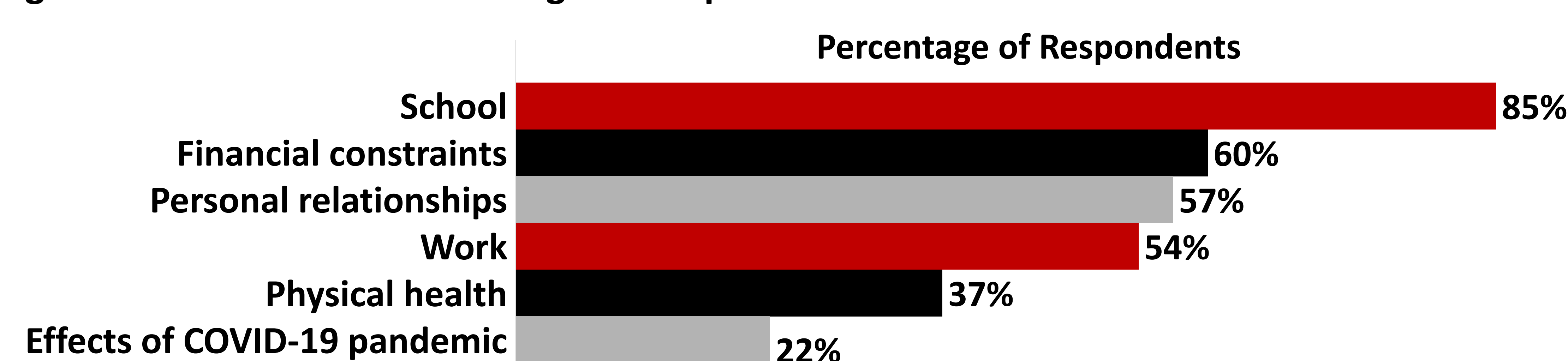
RESULTS

Figure 1: Rates of Depression and/or Anxiety



- Despite higher rates of depression and/or anxiety among all students, 30% reported taking antidepressant or antianxiety medication.
 - 47% of pharmacy students were taking medication.
 - 45% of PharmD students and 10% of PharmD dual degree students
 - 24% of business students were taking medication.
 - 27% of Bachelors degree students and 18% of Masters degree students
 - Thus, pharmacy students were almost twice as likely as business students to treat their depression and/or anxiety with medication, though most students elected not to use drug therapy.
- Of those taking medication, 49% initiated drug therapy after the start of their degree program.
 - Pharmacy students most frequently initiated medication during Fall of P2 year (38%).
 - Bachelors degree business students most frequently began medication during Fall of Freshman year (33%).
 - All Masters business students initiated medication prior to the start of their degree program.

Figure 2: Sources of Stress or Negative Impact on Mental Health



RESULTS

- Regardless of degree program, the vast majority of all students reported having depression and/or anxiety, and 85% felt school negatively impacted mental health.
- 27% of all students felt SIUE faculty and staff display empathy with regard to academic stressors.
- 61% of all students reported never using SIUE Counseling Services.
- 23% of pharmacy students regularly attended wellness events hosted by the School of Pharmacy.
 - Of those ever in attendance, 36% were confident the events were beneficial for mental health and well-being.

CONCLUSIONS

- Specific points in each curriculum – Fall of P2 year for pharmacy students and Fall of Freshman year for undergraduate business students – may be when SIUE should especially expend effort and resources to check on students, offer individualized counseling, and organize activities to maximize engagement and cultivate improved mental health and well-being.
- To lessen stigma, we must make mental health issues a regular part of the conversation and openly advocate for, develop, and advertise resources available for help.
- The more comfortable students are having open dialogue about mental health struggles, the more likely they may be to ask for and utilize help and encourage others to do the same. This could facilitate an important and beautiful trickle-down effect in the workplace for patients, customers, and colleagues alike.

REFERENCES

1. Fischbein R, Bonfine N. Pharmacy and Medical Students' Mental Health Symptoms, Experiences, Attitudes and Help-Seeking Behaviors. *Am J Pharm Educ.* 2019;83(10):7558. doi:10.5688/ajpe7558
2. Shangraw AM, Silvers J, Warholak T, Vadieli N. Prevalence of Anxiety and Depressive Symptoms Among Pharmacy Students. *Am J Pharm Educ.* 2021;85(2):8166. doi:10.5688/ajpe8166