

Student Health and Well-being in the Pacific: Findings from a diverse regional population

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Abstract

The mental health challenges among college students are a rising global concern. Systematic monitoring of student health can inform campus services, identify students at risk and understand changing trends and stressors in young people. The University of South Pacific is ideally placed to provide this data across a geographically, culturally and contextually diverse population. The present study aims to provide an initial assessment and investigation of student health and well-being in the Pacific Island Countries. The study uses standardized measures to explore mental health and subjective wellbeing, physical health and diet behaviors, and sources of academic stress. A total of 2229 students completed a survey from 13 regional campuses. The findings suggest Pacific students are physically active, low on alcohol and tobacco use, and relatively high on subjective wellbeing. However, there are indicators of concern around health knowledge, high levels of academic performance anxiety and clear signs of psychological distress in some Pacific students. There was also a significant concealment of personal distress suggesting more needs to be done to normalize the discussion of emotional suffering, not simply providing counselling support. This is the first large scale Pacific student survey and highlights the potential for regular monitoring of health and wellbeing among Pacific students. The findings are discussed in terms of avenues for future research and using an evidence-based approach to strengthening university-based support services.

Keywords: Health; Mental Health; Pacific Islands; University Students; Wellbeing

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