

Mental health and stress are reasons for undergraduates stopping coursework, according to new Gallup-Lumina study

Findings suggest mental health issues more common in young adults, potentially impacting overall enrollment rates.

WASHINGTON, DC – March 23, 2023 - About 3 in 5 undergraduates cited personal mental health as a reason they considered stopping their coursework in the last six months, according to a new study by Gallup and Lumina Foundation. The report, [**Stressed out and Stopping Out: The Mental Health Crisis in Higher Education**](#), highlights the mental health and emotional stress struggles students face in higher education.

The survey found that 41% of students currently enrolled in an education after high school say they have considered stopping out in the past six months. Of all factors, emotional stress ranked highest for undergraduate students (69%), followed by personal mental health reasons (59%). Both items far exceeded the next most selected reasons, including program cost (36%) and difficulty of coursework (27%).

The prevalence of emotional stress varied for gender and socioeconomic backgrounds. Female students are significantly more likely than male students to say they frequently experience emotional stress (47% vs. 30%). Additionally, about half (49%) of students who say their family was poor and often struggled to pay monthly bills experienced emotional stress, compared to 38% of students from more financially secure backgrounds.

Emotional and mental well-being are also major considerations for young adults who decide to forgo higher education entirely. Adults aged 18 to 24 are particularly likely to say emotional stress (77%) and mental health (73%) are important reasons for not enrolling in post-high school education, ranking higher than the need to work (72%) and on par with inflation's impact on affordability (79%). This suggests rising incidence of mental health issues among young adults and the role that may play in overall declining enrollment rates.

“Though COVID-19 undoubtedly added to the stress facing U.S. college students, it only exacerbated a longer-term trend among teens and young adults,” said Stephanie Marken, Gallup executive director for education. “Students are no less likely than they were in 2021 to have considered stopping their coursework. These results underscore the urgency of this issue by highlighting the extent to which issues related to mental health dominate students’ reasons for potentially stopping out.”

“It is abundantly clear from these data that current and future students are struggling with mental health and stress, said Courtney Brown, Lumina’s vice president for impact and planning. “More institutions need to provide mental health services as part of essential resources to ensure that students can succeed. Schools should also understand their students’ stress points and provide services such as childcare, housing, and food to help alleviate the stress and keep their students on a path to success.”

About Lumina Foundation

Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation in Indianapolis committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all. We envision a system that is easy to navigate, delivers fair results, and meets the nation's need for talent through a broad range of credentials. Our goal is to prepare people for informed citizenship and success in a global economy.

About Gallup

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students, and citizens than any other organization in the world.