

# Le Chéile:

**Well-being of students  
in colleges of further  
education in Ireland**

**2019**



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## Well-being of students in colleges of further education in Ireland

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This short report presents the findings of a study carried out between 2016 and 2018 in Colleges of Further Education in Ireland. Colleges of Further education offer a variety of full-time and part-time courses at a wide range of levels on the National Framework of Qualifications.

Of particular interest to the authors of this report is the fact that much less research has been conducted with students attending these Colleges than with students attending institutes of technology or universities. This means that

much less is known about the well-being of students attending these colleges. Yet, evidence from similar colleges in other countries suggests that their students may have higher levels of chronic illness and disability and may, therefore, be at greater risk of lower levels of well-being.

In addition to gathering data on well-being of the general population of students in Colleges of Further Education the study had a particular emphasis on students who have chronic health conditions and this report is designed to provide feedback to the Colleges in relation to our findings.

### Research aims:

- To explore the relationship between chronic health conditions and well-being in young adults
- To explore the relationship between stigma and chronic health conditions



# How we collected the data

All the questionnaires were completed anonymously online using a specialist survey platform. In some cases information about the survey was sent electronically by College staff to students inviting them to participate. Other students were recruited via posters, flyers and social media. Throughout this report we have rounded all figures to the nearest whole number. More detailed information is available from the authors.



## Demographic information:

A total of 288 students from 28 Colleges of Further Education participated. Only students aged between 18 and 25 were eligible. Colleges with more than 20 participating students are shown below:



College Name	Number of participants
College of Further Education, Dundrum	81
Grange Community College	23
Ballyfermot College of Further Education	28
Coláiste Ide College of Further Education	33
Killester College of Further Education	20
Pearse College of Further Education, Crumlin	25
17 other Colleges:	78
<b>Total:</b>	<b>288</b>



The gender, ethnic group and living arrangements of the participants is shown below:



Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	128	44%
Female	154	54%
Other	6	2%

## Ethnicity breakdown:



Ethnicity	N	Percentage
White	272	94%
Black or Black Irish	8	3%
Asian or Asian Irish	2	1%
Other (including mixed background)	6	2%

Participants were equally divided between rural and urban backgrounds with the vast majority (85%) living at home with their parents/guardians. Half of students were in part-time employment.

## Employment Status:



Employment status	N	Percentage
Full-time	22	8%
Part-time	148	51%
Not employed	118	41%

Among students who indicated that they had a chronic health condition, mental health conditions were the most common, particularly anxiety and depression. Among those with a chronic physical health condition, asthma was the most common. The below table presents details of the kinds of conditions reported.

# Physical vs. Mental Chronic Conditions

N=123

## Chronic physical health conditions



Asthma	33	27%
Chronic Pain	12	10%
Epilepsy	5	4%
Arthritis	7	6%
Autoimmune Disease	7	6%
Anorexia Nervosa	6	5%
Diabetes	6	5%
Heart Diseases	1	1%
Obesity	5	4%

## Chronic mental health conditions



Depression	53	43%
Anxiety Disorders	65	53%
Schizophrenia	2	2%
Autism	8	7%
ADHD	5	4%
Bipolar Affective Disorders	6	5%
Other	17	14%

Among the participants who reported that they had a chronic health condition, 86% said that it had been formally diagnosed by a health professional.

# General health, social functioning and social support:

Participants completed a series of questionnaires related to their social support, general health and well-being.

General health was measured using a sub-set of 5 items from the Short Form Health Survey (SF-36). A person with a low score on this survey believes that their general health is poor and likely to get worse, a person with a high score believes that their health is very good.

Students with chronic health conditions rated their general health status as significantly lower than their peers.

## General Health Results

### Chronic Health condition

N=123

47

Mean score on SF-36

### No Chronic Health Condition

N=165

70

Mean score on SF-36



# Social Functioning

Social functioning was measured using 2 items from the Short Form Health Survey (SF-36). A person with a low score feels that their emotional and physical problems restricts their social interactions with family, friends, and significant other persons in their lives. A person with a high score feels no such restrictions.

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**Students with chronic health conditions reported significantly lower levels of social functioning than their physically healthy counterparts.**

**Chronic Health condition**

**N=123**

Mean

**51**

**No Chronic Health condition**

**N=165**

Mean

**78**



## Perceived Social Support Scale

A considerable amount of research evidence indicates that people reporting higher levels of social support have lower levels of psychological and physical symptoms than those who report lower levels of support. We measured participants' perceived social support using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support which measures support from family, friends and a significant other.

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**All participants reported generally high levels of perceived social support from all sources.**

# Self-stigma of psychological help seeking

Social stigma refers to negative responses directed towards individuals who have characteristics that are devalued by the society in which they live. For example, mental health conditions are devalued in many societies so individuals with these conditions may experience a range of negative responses from others. Most commonly these can include negative emotional reactions (such as anger), negative expectations (such as a belief that they are dangerous) that have no basis in reality and discrimination (being treated differently). Stigma can be a serious problem for people who have chronic health conditions, because awareness of stigma may result in people being less willing to look for help or to discontinue taking essential medication.

**Participants who reported high levels of self-stigma for psychological help-seeking had significantly lower levels of well-being and poorer general health when compared to those with lower scores.**

In this study participants were asked to complete a measure of self-stigma of help-seeking (Self-Stigma of Seeking Psychological Help Scale) to determine their willingness to seek help for stigmatized health problems.

The majority of participants scored within the mid-range of self-stigma of seeking help. There were no differences in self-stigma levels between individuals with a chronic illness and their healthy counterparts.



## Self-esteem:

Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES).

The vast majority of participants scored within the mid-range of self-esteem based on the RSES scale. Students with a chronic health condition had significantly lower levels of self-esteem than their healthy counterparts but that they were still within the mid-range of self-esteem levels.

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**Students with a chronic health condition had significantly lower levels of self-esteem than their healthy counterparts**

### | Self-esteem levels:

#### Chronic Health condition

16

Mean

N=123

#### No Chronic Health condition

20

Mean

N=165



## Alcohol Use:

The Alcohol Use Disorders Test (AUDIT) is a self-report questionnaire and was used to measure alcohol consumption.

Based on the AUDIT cut-off points, the mean score for participants was just inside the hazardous range of alcohol use (a score of between 8 and 15). Young people with chronic health conditions reported levels of alcohol consumption similar to those reported by their health peers.

### AUDIT score



## Depression, Anxiety, Stress: DASS

Depression, Stress and Anxiety levels were measured by the Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21).

Students who did not have a chronic health condition on average scored within the normal range for depression, anxiety and stress based on the DASS scoring criteria.

### DASS results:

Chronic Physical Health condition	Chronic Mental Health Condition	Both Physical & Mental Chronic Conditions	No Chronic Condition
N=34	N=51	N=38	N=165
Depression 9	Depression 22	Depression 23	Depression 8
Anxiety 10	Anxiety 18	Anxiety 20	Anxiety 7
Stress 11	Stress 23	Stress 25	Stress 9



## Limitations

The main limitation of our study is that the sample size is small. In particular it means that we cannot assume that the findings are representative of students attending Colleges of Further Education in Ireland.

## Conclusions

- This study is unique in its focus on the health and well-being of students in Colleges of Further Education in Ireland.
- Almost half of our participants had a chronic health condition and these students are not doing as well as their peers either physically or psychologically, suggesting that they may be in need of additional support.
- In common with other studies, our findings indicate that, on average, the students are drinking more alcohol than is healthy. Of additional concern is that alcohol consumption is similarly high among students with chronic health conditions, who may be putting themselves at greater risk than their healthy peers.
- All students had moderately high levels of self-stigma for seeking psychological help. This is a concern as there is lots of evidence to suggest that such stigma can reduce the chances of a person looking for help, when getting help early may be the best way to ensure a full recovery.

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