

Neurotic college students could benefit from health education

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College students are under a lot of stress, even more so lately due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on certain personality types, especially neurotic personalities, college health courses could help students develop

a more positive stress mindset, according to research from faculty at Binghamton University, State University of New York.

A research team including Binghamton University Health and Wellness Studies Lecturer Jennifer Wegmann sought to evaluate the impact of [health](#) education on the change of stress mindset and also to explore the role of personality in the change of stress mindset when there is a specific focus on improving individual health and well-being. Specifically, they sought to assess the relationship between each personality dimension (i.e., neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness) and stress mindset change over time.

"The findings surrounding specific personality dimensions were interesting," said Wegmann. "It appears that engaging in health education is beneficial in changing perceptions of stress for some students but not all—based on personality. For example, significant changes were elicited in students who scored high on the neuroticism scale but no significance was shown for students on the extroversion scale. Neurotic students tend to be worriers with high anxiety. The findings of this research show how focusing on their health, in general, can change these typically high-stressed students' beliefs about the stress they experience."

The researchers conducted an [online survey](#) with a group of 423 students taking a college health education course. They asked students to rate the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements. Analyzing the data, the researchers found that students with specific [personality types](#), especially neurotic students, were more likely to improve their stress mindset by engaging in health education.

Wegmann said the most interesting thing about these findings is that change in stress mindset was elicited not through focusing on stress and

changing mindsets specifically, but rather by students focusing on their overall health and wellness. Colleges may not have the faculty, space or funding to provide stress-specific courses, but this research shows there is another avenue to help students navigate their stress, Wegmann said.

"This is important for several reasons," said Wegmann. "First, helping students develop a more positive or enhancing stress [mindset](#) has been associated with improved mental health, increased performance and productivity. Second, general [health education](#) courses are available to large numbers of students. There typically are few, if any, stress-specific courses offered on college campuses,' and if they are offered, many are limited in [student](#) capacity."

Wegmann said that the next step is to work on discovering what approach will be helpful for all students.

"According to our research, this approach was not helpful for everyone," said Wegmann. "While these findings are providing novel and interesting information, as a [stress](#) researcher who works to help students become more productive and healthy, I want to know what other avenues will reach our students."

More information: Jennifer Wegmann et al, Health Education and Changing Stress Mindsets: The Moderating Role of Personality, *American Journal of Health Education* (2020). [DOI: 10.1080/19325037.2020.1767002](#)

Provided by Binghamton University

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