



# Research Brief

University of Aruba  
Student Health and Wellbeing  
2018

## RESULTS



# Introduction

This research brief presents the results of the UA Mental Health and Wellbeing Student Survey conducted in December 2018. The survey was administered among all students of the University of Aruba. Study results offer a baseline of the areas of student Mental Health, Wellbeing, Impediments to Academic Performance, and Perceptions of UA Student Wellness Services.

## The Study

It is the mission of the UA to help students succeed and flourish in their pursuit of higher education. Therefore, it is critical that the UA supports the mental health and wellbeing of its students. To this end, a study was initiated to offer a baseline of the current state of student mental health and wellbeing at the UA and how this impacts academic performance. In addition, the study looked at students' perception about the UA providing services for student mental health and wellbeing. This baseline is a milestone in the university's strategy for supporting student success. Yearly follow-up studies will be measured against this baseline.

## Respondents

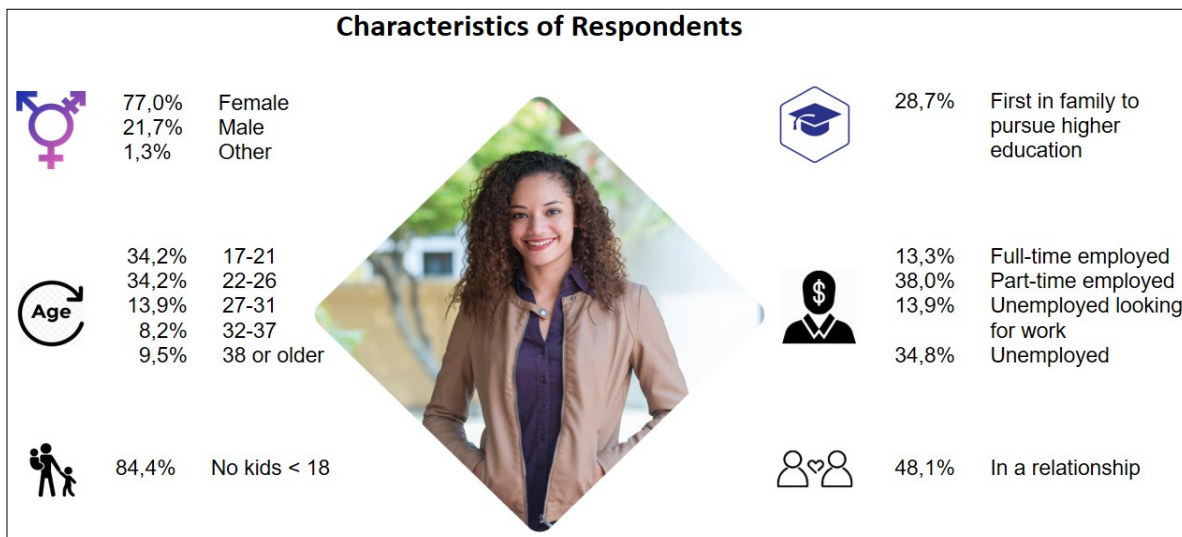
The data collection took place at the University of Aruba between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 2018. Of the

total 718 UA students, 185 responded yielding a response rate of 25,8%. Of these 185 respondents, 158 fully completed the survey yielding a 85,4% completion rate, which in effect means an overall 22% response rate. The complete data set was utilized for analysis<sup>1</sup>.

## Method

A validated instrument, known as the PERMA-Profilier, was used to assess wellbeing. The PERMA-Profilier measures five pillars of wellbeing: **P**ositive emotions, **E**ngagement, **R**elationship, **M**eaning, and **A**ccomplishment<sup>2</sup>.

Two components of the validated questionnaire ACHA-NCHA<sup>3</sup> were used to measure student mental health and impediments to academic performance. The study included additional questions to measure the perceptions of students about the University of Aruba providing Health and Wellbeing Services.



<sup>1</sup> There are fluctuating degrees of freedom in the results due to missing cases.

<sup>2</sup> Butler, J., & Kern, M. L. (2015). The PERMA-Profilier: A brief multidimensional measure of flourishing.

<sup>3</sup> American College Health Association. (2015). *American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment*. Retrieved from [https://www.acha.org/documents/ncha/ACHA-NCHAI\\_all\\_sample.pdf](https://www.acha.org/documents/ncha/ACHA-NCHAI_all_sample.pdf)

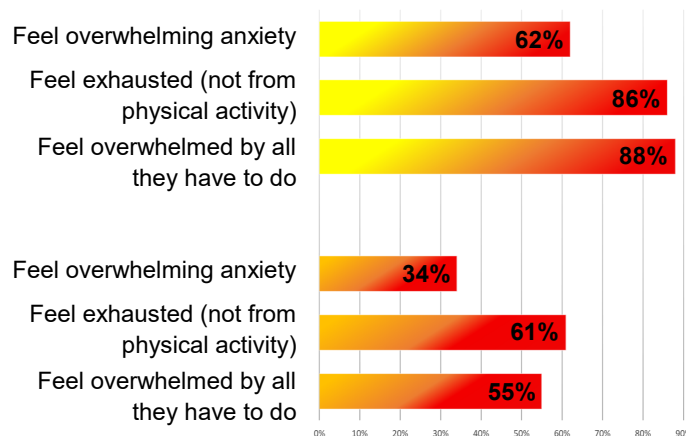
# Results

## STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

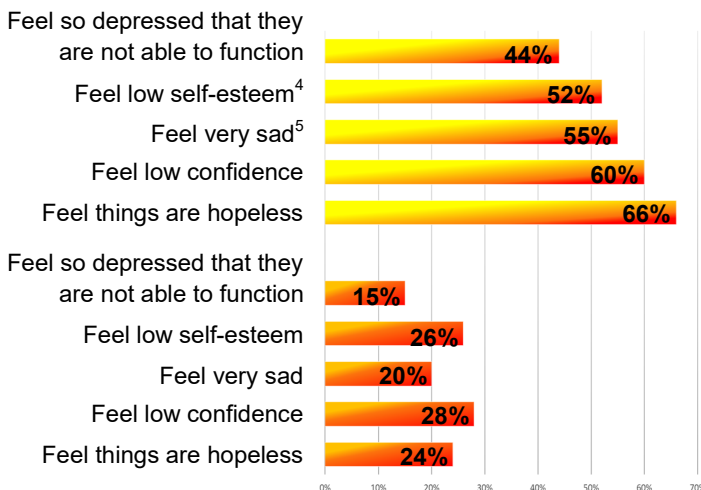
The survey measured four mental health areas: Stressed/Pressured, Depressed Mood, Self-harm/Suicide and Substance Abuse. Of these four areas, respondents reported higher levels of Stressed/Pressured and Depressed Mood.



### Stressed/Pressured (M = 3.3; N = 164)



### Depressed Mood (M=2.6; N=164)

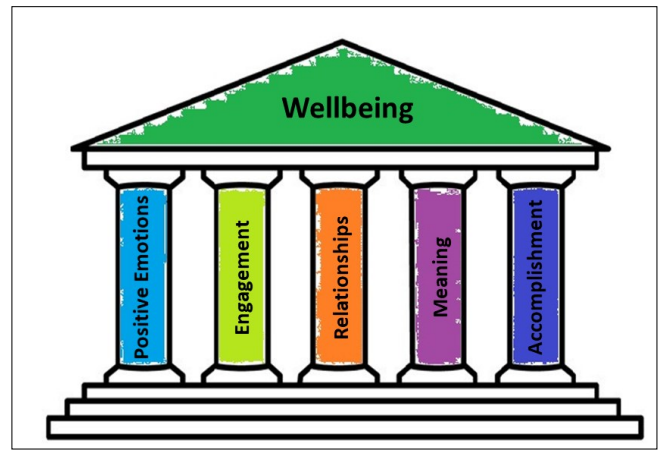


## WELLBEING

On the PERMA-Profilier, which utilizes a 10-point scale, respondents scored a 6.7 for **P**ositive emotions, a 7.0 for **E**ngagement, a 7.1 for **R**elationship, a 6.7 for **M**eaning, and a 6.9 for **A**ccomplishment. The UA overall well-

<sup>4</sup> Feel low self-esteem (N = 163)

<sup>5</sup> Feel very sad (N = 163)



being score on the PERMA-Profilier is a 6.8. These scores provide a baseline of the current state of wellbeing of UA students. At this moment there is no comparative data.

## ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

The top five impediments to students' academic performance all indicate stress related symptoms.



54%	Stress (N=160)
43%	Difficulty Concentrating (N=160)
41%	Anxiety (N=162)
39%	Sleep Difficulty (N=160)
33%	Internet/computer games/social media distractions (N=160)

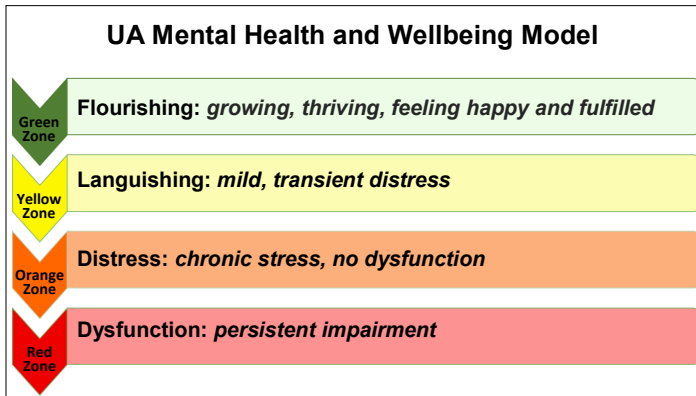
The impediments of difficulty concentrating, anxiety, sleep difficulty, internet/computer game/social media distractions are cognitive, emotional, physical or behavioral symptoms of stress.

## STUDENT WELLNESS SERVICES

Students believe that the UA should offer counseling and psychological services to students (84%, n=132). They indicate that they would make use of counseling and psychological services (55%, n=86). Half of the respondents (53%, n=83) are willing to pay an average of 50 Aruban Florins per session.

## Framework

The UA Mental Health and Wellbeing Model informed the survey design and served as an interpretive framework for the data. The model is based on a combination of positive psychology, the Preventive Stress Management Model and the Continuum Model of Abnormality. The UA Mental Health and Wellbeing Model categorizes mental health along a continuum of psychological states to represent four different zones.



**Flourishing** is a psychological state defined as experiencing no significant distress nor significant impairment in body, mind and spirit. The Green Zone is characterized by being able to cope with normal stresses of life, being able to work productively and fruitfully and being able to contribute to community.

**Languishing** is the psychological state defined as experiencing mild and transient distress or alterations in functioning that disappear soon after sources of stress are gone. This zone is characterized by feelings of being overwhelmed or overloaded and the ability to function sub optimally.

In the **Distress** state (Orange Zone), distress is more severe, persistent and there are alterations in functioning. This is the result of exposure to repeated or prolonged chronic stress.

**Dysfunction** is a state of distress and/or alterations in functioning that cause persistent impairment. This Red Zone is characterized by loss of autonomy.

## Discussion/Conclusion

This baseline study indicates that UA students' mental health and wellbeing fall in the Yellow Zone of Languishing. This means that there is a presence of mild, transient distress. Students often feel overwhelmed or overloaded and experience some difficulty with depressed mood.

The results also show that the experience of stress possesses the largest impediment to academic performance. This indication of stress is manifested as difficulty concentrating, anxiety, difficulty sleeping, and internet/social media/computer games distraction. Despite the presence of distress, its ramifications on academic functioning are not severe (e.g., not being able to focus in class). Students rarely indicate receiving a lower grade on an exam, important project, assignment, or in a course. Hence, students are able to function, however, they are not able to do so optimally.

Students indicated the need for counseling and psychological services and would make use of them if available. They indicated that they would even be willing to co-pay.

If there is no intervention, the distress indicated by the yellow zone can become persistent, more severe and even chronic. Repeated and prolonged exposure to stress will negatively affect student academic performance. Left unaddressed there is a risk that the state of mental health and wellbeing of students can slide from the Yellow Zone to the Orange Zone of Distress. This must be prevented.

In order to fulfill the UA mission of helping students succeed and flourish in their pursuit of Higher Education, it will be critical to introduce interventions that promote a shift towards the Green Zone of Flourishing.

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