

## ABSTRACT

The mental health concerns of college students nationwide have increased in recent years, with students reporting increased anxiety. Existing studies primarily focus on mental health symptoms, neglecting positive mental health factors. We recruited 108 participants from entry-level health professions programs for an online survey, exploring how positive factors (playfulness tendencies, coping skills, and leisure participation) and negative factors (anxiety levels) affect academic performance. Significant positive correlations were found between the students' GPA and anxiety levels, and between their playfulness tendencies and leisure engagement. A negative correlation was found between their playfulness tendencies and anxiety levels, and between playfulness tendencies and coping skills. However, no significant correlations were found between GPA and playfulness, coping skills, or leisure participation. Playful students may rely less on external coping skills and engage more in leisure activities. Future research should investigate these factors' impact on academic performance and guide the development of supportive academic advisement for graduate health professions students.

## INTRODUCTION

Many students exhibit mental health concerns, including stress, anxiety, and depression (ACHA, 2019). Adult playfulness refers to the capacity to seek enjoyment and maintain a positive outlook even in challenging situations, showcasing resilience (Paulk et al., 2022). Kim et al. (2021) illustrate how engaging in leisure activities, as emphasized by Magnuson and Barnett (2013), can enhance students' academic performance. Dunston et al. (2020) found that participating in leisure-time physical activities boosts resilience among college students, leading to positive outcomes like higher GPAs and improved mental health.

There is a gap in understanding positive mental health factors for health professions graduate students, as existing literature predominantly explores negative aspects and focuses on undergraduate students. Research should bridge this gap by examining how anxiety levels, adult playfulness tendencies, and coping strategies relate to academic performance.

**Aim:** To examine associations between positive mental health factors (playfulness, leisure engagement, coping strategies) and negative factors (anxiety) with academic performance.

### Hypotheses:

1. Students with higher playfulness tendencies

## CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- Adult playfulness, a personality trait, elicits positive feedback on external stimuli (Proyer et al., 2015).
- Playful students may rely less on external coping skills, as this trait is inherently part of their disposition.
- Playful individuals engage in more leisure activities, leading to less anxiety, better mental health, and better academic performance (Kim et al., 2021).
- Limitations include not having a diverse population.
- Future research should use a wider sample of graduate students, including longitudinal studies.
- Implications for higher education: informed by findings, development of student advisement and support services of health professions students.

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