



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 will use more adaptive coping skills.
2. Students with higher playfulness tendencies will have lower levels of anxiety and higher GPAs.
3. Students with higher playfulness tendencies will report higher leisure engagement.
4. Students higher leisure engagement will have higher GPAs.

METHODOLOGY

Mixed methods, cross sectional, and qualitative approach. Here we present only the quantitative results.

Measures

- Demographic Questionnaire
- Adult Coping Inventory (ACI; Hollas, 2023)
- Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI; Beck et al., 1988)
- Adult Playfulness Trait Scale (APTS; Shen et al., 2014)
- Leisure Engagement & Frequency Inventory (LEFI; Frydman, 2023)
- Intrinsic Leisure Motivation Scale (ILMS; Weissinger & Bandalos, 1995)
- Internal consistency coefficients are satisfactory

108 health professions graduate students; majority were female, Caucasian, and single

Procedure



RESULTS

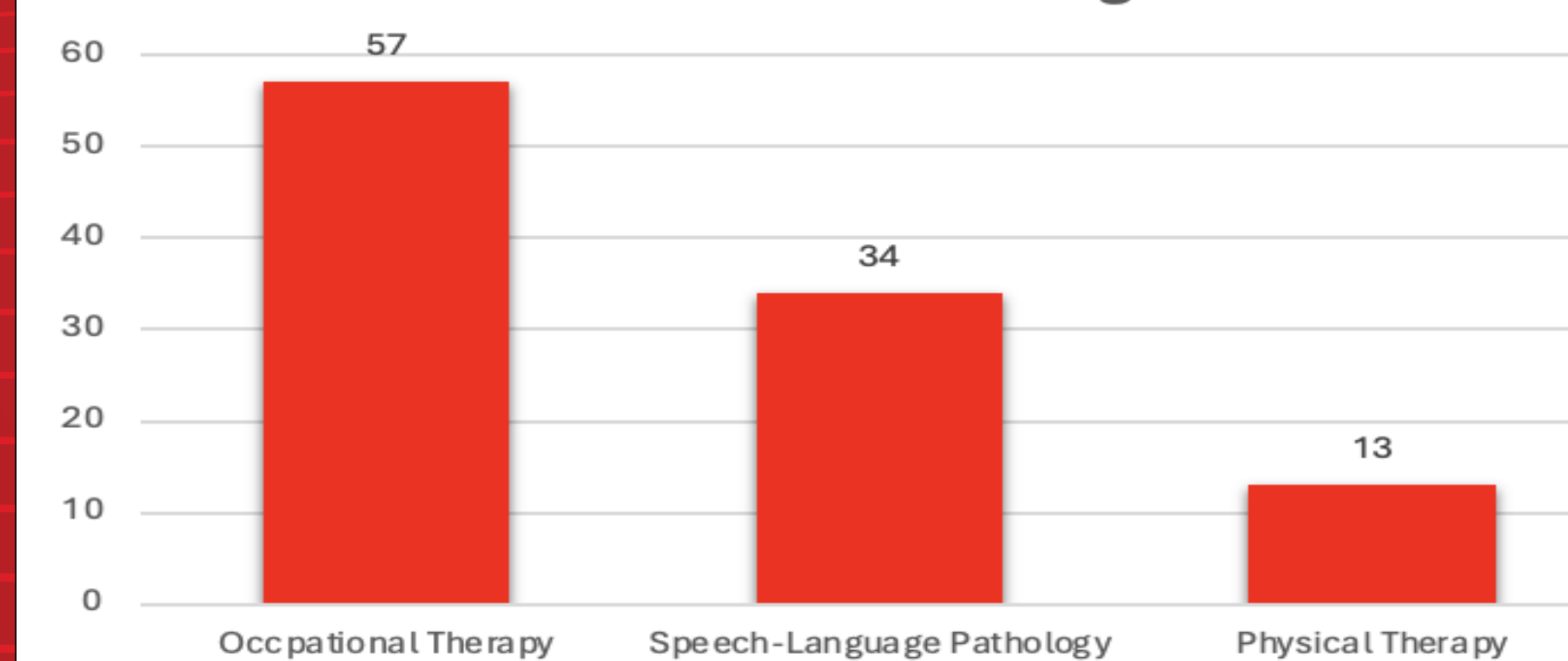


Figure 1: Health Profession Programs Student Distribution

Table 1: Student Factors: Correlation Analysis Summary

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---------------------------------------|-------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---|
| 1. Grade Point Average (GPA) | - | | | | | | |
| 2. Adult Playfulness Trait Scale | -.148 | - | | | | | |
| 3. Leisure Engagement Scale | .137 | -.406** | - | | | | |
| 4. Leisure Frequency Scale | -.053 | .349** | -.463** | - | | | |
| 5. Beck Anxiety Inventory | .226* | -.263* | .031 | -.092 | - | | |
| 6. Intrinsic Leisure Motivation Scale | -.183 | .537** | -.297** | .341** | -.291** | - | |
| 7. Adult Coping Inventory | .019 | -.307** | .476** | -.422** | -.038 | -.355** | - |

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

- Although academic performance did not associate with playfulness or leisure, we found that playful students were less likely to use coping skills and engage more in leisure activities.
- Students who had higher academic performance reported higher levels of anxiety.

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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REFERENCES

