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Barriers to Mental Health Service Access among Women at a Large Public University

Auburn Beebe
Portland State University

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Barriers to Mental Health Service Access Among Women at a Large Public University

Auburn Beebe and David Fischer

Department of Psychology, Portland State University

Abstract

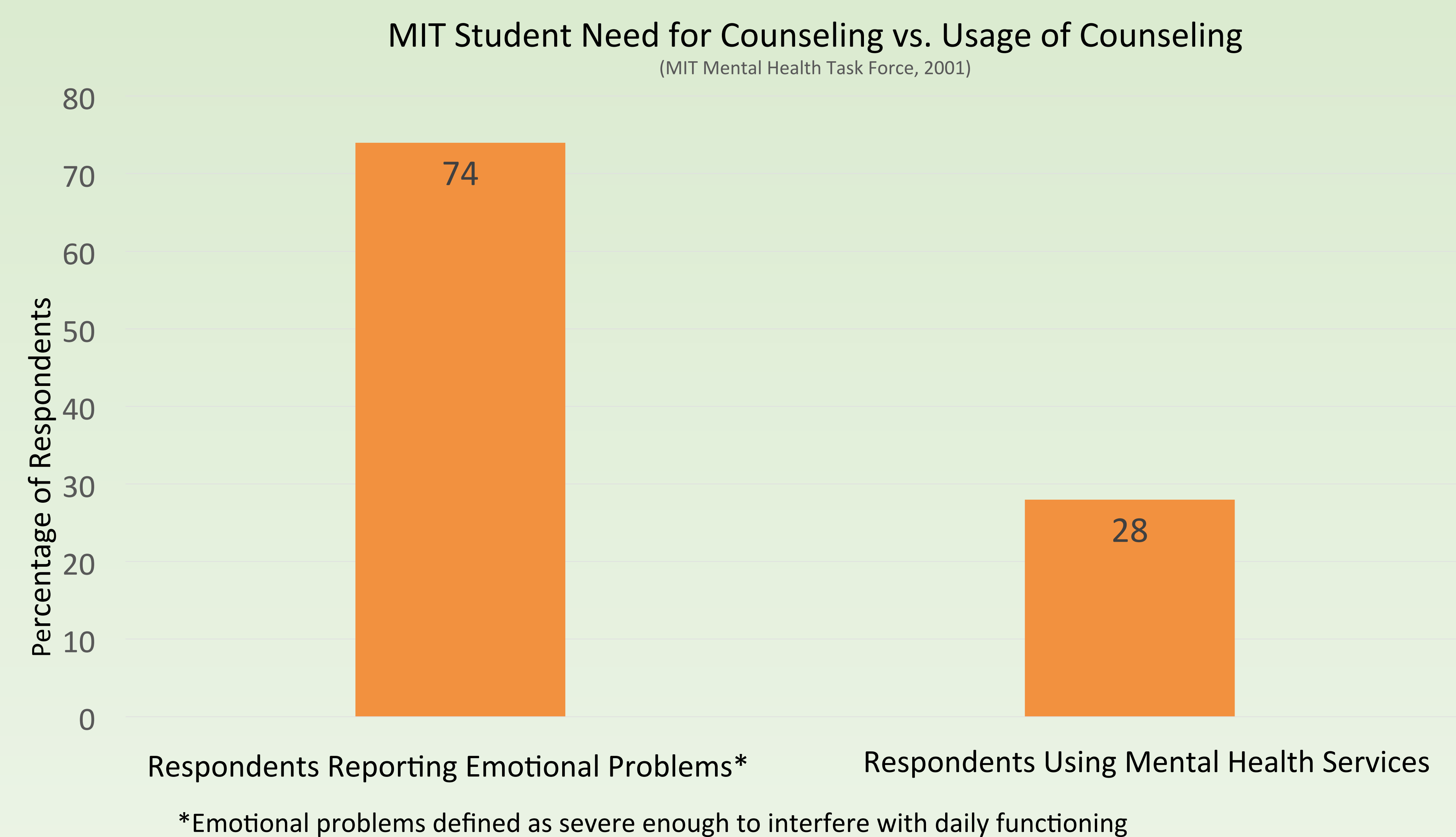
- College students are dealing with serious mental health issues, and represent an important population to access when providing mental health services^{1,2}.
- In particular, college women show a significant need for mental health services^{3,4}.
- Though most universities provide free mental health counseling services, many students are unaware or reluctant to use those services^{2,5}.
- Many factors contribute to this reluctance such as lack of knowledge about services and perceived stigma^{5,6}.
- This study seeks to add to the existing body of literature on college student mental health by identifying barriers to mental health service access at a large public university, while uniquely focusing on the special mental health needs of collegiate women.

Guiding Questions & Methods

- This study will be guided by six main research questions:
 1. At what rate do students use on-campus counseling services at Portland State?
 2. Is there a disparity between the number of students who feel they could benefit from using on-campus counseling services and the number who actually access the services?
 3. What barriers prevent students from accessing on-campus counseling services?
 4. Is there a gender disparity in the rates that men and women feel they could benefit from on-campus counseling services?
 5. Is there a gender disparity in the rates that men and women actually use on-campus counseling services?
 6. Do students prefer seeking counseling services off-campus over on-campus?
- The study will use an anonymous, online survey tool to assess perceived need for services, usage of services, and barriers to use.

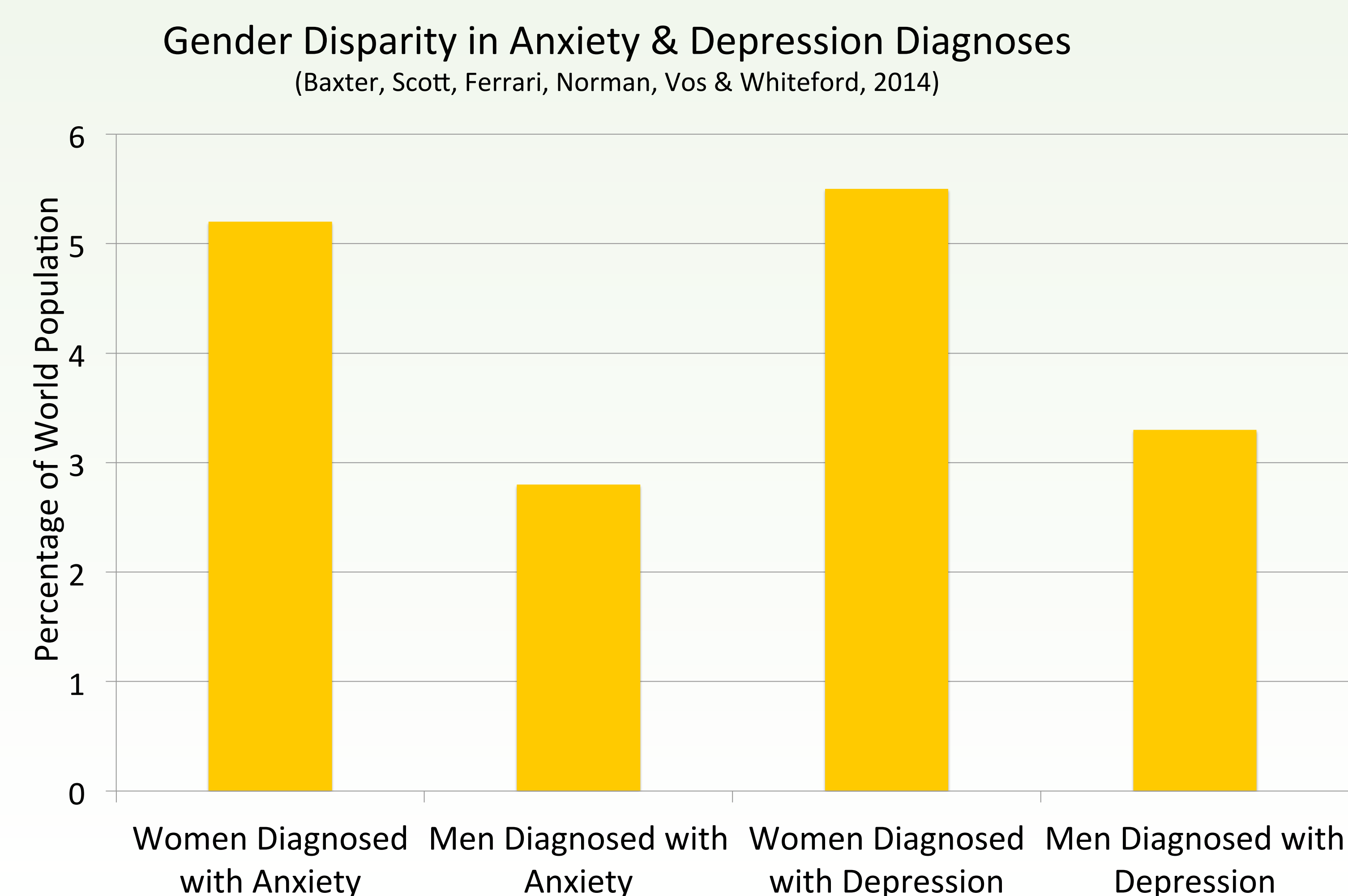
Supporting Research

- The American College Health Association (2011) found that in a sample of over 100,000 U.S. college students, **31.1% reported feeling “so depressed it was difficult to function”** in the last 12 months and **50.6% reported “overwhelming anxiety”** at some point in the last 12 months¹.
- The MIT Mental Health Task Force found similar results, while also measuring the percentage of students who accessed on-campus counseling services²:



A Focus on Women

- Research shows that women are diagnosed with depression and anxiety at nearly twice the rate as men⁷. This disparity is even wider in the 14-25 y/o age group⁸.
- Due to this, it is imperative that barriers to counseling-seeking are identified for this group and steps are taken to eliminate those barriers.



Sources

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Looking Ahead

- After securing IRB approval, data collection will begin.
- Next, the data will be analyzed to determine if there are gender disparities in counseling-seeking and what barriers might be preventing women from utilizing on-campus counseling services.
- Finally, this data will be made available and can inform efforts to increase accessibility of on-campus counseling services for those who need them.

Contact

Auburn Beebe, undergraduate researcher: Abee2@pdx.edu

David Fischer, faculty mentor: Fischer8@pdx.edu