

4-1-2015

# A Comparison of Stress Levels Between Traditional and Non-Traditional Students

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## Recommended Citation

Duhame, Taylor, "A Comparison of Stress Levels Between Traditional and Non-Traditional Students" (2015). *Posters*. 14.  
[http://digitalcommons.mtech.edu/stdt\\_rsch\\_day\\_2013/14](http://digitalcommons.mtech.edu/stdt_rsch_day_2013/14)

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# A COMPARISON OF STRESS LEVELS BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine whether a traditional college student (ages 18-24) vs. a non-traditional student (ages 25 and over) described more stress in their lives based on different variables in their environment. Two research questions were used: R1- Is there a difference in stress levels based on traditional and non-traditional status. R2- What variables appear to affect the stress levels of traditional and non-traditional students? Some of these different variables include: status as a student, number of jobs worked, number of children, extracurricular activities such as sports or hobbies, and the amount of time students had to see friends. Forty four undergraduate students (N=44) at Montana Tech University and Highlands College of Montana Tech University completed a questionnaire consisting of closed ended questions. When looking at stress levels between my sample of twenty six traditional students and eighteen non-traditional students, non-traditional students seemed to be more stressed out than their traditional counterpart with the non-traditional students having a mean of 2.83 and the traditional student having a mean of 2.77

## BACKGROUND

Recent research has suggested that work stressors may play a greater role than personal or academic stressors for non-traditional students (Giancola, Grawitch, & Borchert, 2009). A lack of financial skills can result in withdrawal from higher education pursuits for older students because of their additional financial burdens (Hart, 2003). Hafner, Stock, & Oberst (2015) claimed that perceived stress decreased, and that perceived control time increased after 23 undergraduate students attended a time management training program. They concluded that time management may be beneficial for undergraduate college students' well-being. Non-traditional students bring different expectations for the college experience and were less involved in various college social activities. Non-traditional students experienced differing levels of motivation, campus involvement, and participation in social activities from their traditional counterparts which related to time management issues and lead to differing levels of stress and methods of coping between the two groups of students (Forbus, Mehta, & Newbold (2011). Another study indicated that the top three concerns of undergraduate college students were academic performance, pressure to succeed, and post graduate plans (Beiter, Nash, McCrady, Rhoades, Linscomb, Clarah, & Sammut, 2014). Demographically, the most stressed, anxious, and depressed students were transfers, upperclassmen, and those living off-campus (Beiter et al., 2014).

## METHODS

The purpose of this study was to determine whether a traditional student or a non-traditional student described more stress in their lives. Forty four students attending Montana Tech University and Highlands College of Montana Tech University completed a voluntary survey. Students provided their consent to participate following institutional review board guidelines, and researchers were not present during the distribution and collection of all surveys. The University of Montana Institutional Review Board procedures were followed protecting human subjects by obtaining IRB approval. All respondents were 18 years or older and could stop the survey at any time if they felt uncomfortable. The only disadvantage to the participants was the time constraint to complete the survey.

## RESULTS

Descriptive data (Table 1) for dependent and independent variables included means and standard deviations. Dependent variables stress levels in college students. Independent variables included, status as a student, number of jobs, number of children, engagement in sports or hobbies, and time to see friends.

Table 1 Descriptive Data Frequencies with Differences for Traditional Non-Traditional Students

Variable	Entire Sample (n=44)		Traditional (n=26)		Non-Traditional (n=18)	
	(M)	(S)	(M)	(S)	(M)	(S)
Dependent Variables						
Stress Levels	2.79	.878	2.77	.951	2.83	.786
Independent Variables						
Status:						
Full Time	(40)	90.9%		23		17
Part Time	(4)	9.1%		3		1
Job:						
No Job	(27)	47.7%		12		9
One Job	(20)	45.5%		11		9
Two Or More Jobs	(3)	6.8%		3		0
Children:						
Yes Children	(20)	45.5%		8		12
No Children	(24)	54.4%		18		6
Sports Or Hobbies:						
Yes	(31)	70.5%		20		11
No	(13)	29.5%		6		7
Time To See Friends:						
Yes	(34)	77.3%		22		12
No	(10)	22.7%		4		6
Type Of Student:						
Traditional	(26)	59.1%				
Non-Traditional	(18)	40.9%				

## CONCLUSION

The entire sample (n=44) consisted of (n=26) traditional students with a percentage of 59.1% and (n=18) non-traditional students with a percentage of 40.9%. When looking at stress levels between twenty six traditional students and eighteen non-traditional students, non-traditional students seemed to be more stressed than their traditional counterpart with the non-traditional students having a mean of 2.83 and the traditional student having a mean of 2.77. The majority of the sample were full time students (n=40) with a percentage of 90.9% while only (n= 4) students were part time with a percentage of 9.1%. The employment average was nearly an equal division between with 47.7% of the sample having no job (n=21) and 45.5% having one job (n=20). A percentage of 6.8 had two or more jobs (n=3). When looking at the number of children, there was also a nearly equal division. A percentage of 45.5 said they did have children (n=20), while 54.4% said they did not have children (n=24). The majority participated in a sport or had hobbies (n=31) with a percentage of 70.5%, compared with non-traditional students (n=13) with a percentage of 29.5%. When looking at the amount of time the participant had to see friends when considering all of the other variables in their lives, 77.3% still had time for friends (n=34), and 22.7% reported that they did not have time to see friends when considering the variables (n=10).

## FUTURE STUDIES

Some recommendations that could further help analyze this study would be to possibly analyze this study within two different schools. Another way to analyze this study is to split the sample and have one group take the survey while in a calm environment and have the other take the survey in a stressful environment and see if the results change. I also feel as this sample size was a limitation, thereby limiting the scope of this study. I would like to conduct a study in the future with a larger sample.

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