

Wellness Brief: Wellness Survey 2012

Introduction

Although most of us would like to express complete confidence in ourselves, our physical appearance, and our individual talents- many of us are not able to do so. The University of Missouri's Annual Wellness Survey was established in 2005 to inquire about student's use of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs. In more recent years questions pertaining to nutrition, self-esteem, and sexual behavior were added to determine what strategies and programs would be most effective for students on our campus. The Wellness Survey reveals several interesting concepts regarding men, women, and body image that should motivate us toward developing prevention and educational programs to address issues such as eating disorders, low-self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and overall wellness. Results from this year's Wellness Survey are based on responses from 749 (n=749) undergraduate students at the University of Missouri during fall of 2012.

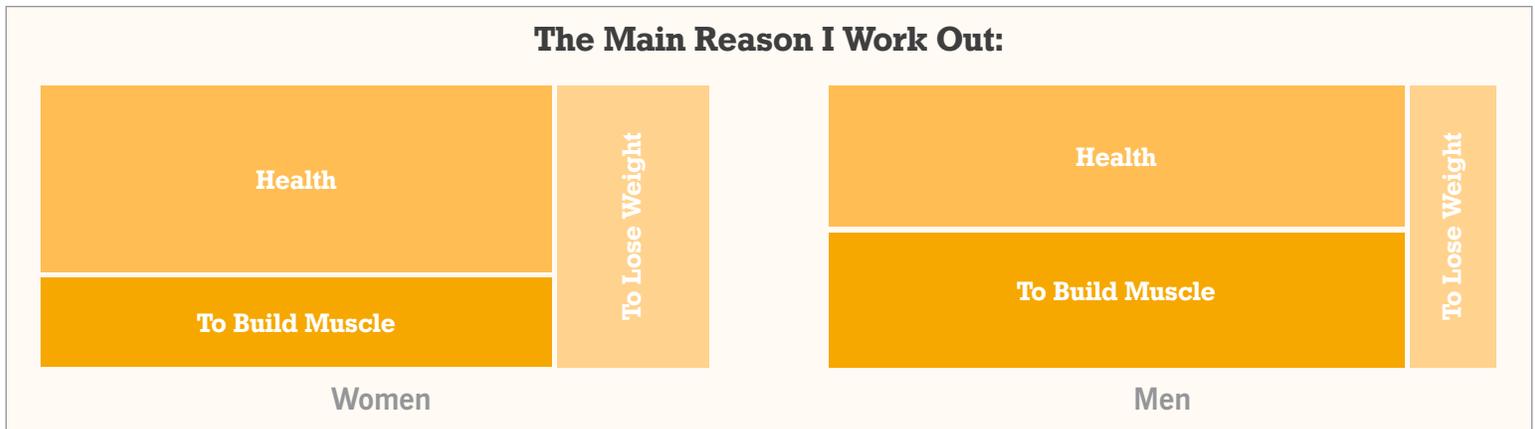


Discussion

Self-esteem and body are issues reported by many college students. These issues manifest themselves in a variety of ways that can be detrimental to students physically, mentally and emotionally.

Among Missouri college students, women were twice as likely to be afraid of gaining 3 pounds (78% of women as opposed to 31% of men). 38% of college women said that their weight is more important than other things in their life. Four in five women surveyed replied that they felt bad or guilty when eating certain foods as opposed to less than three in four men. This could be related to why women are almost twice as likely to worry about body weight and shape compared to men. When asked about the reason for exercise, 54% of women answered "to lose weight" compared to 27% of men who are much more likely to work out to build muscle (60%). Women are also almost twice as likely to avoid working out due to intimidation and self-consciousness. According to the

Wellness Survey, women were more than twice as likely to report -the media-as a negative influence (72% women as opposed to 32% men). Literature confirms the media's negative influence on the prevalence of eating disorders among both men and women. The National Eating Disorder Association lists "Cultural pressures that glorify 'thinness' or muscularity and place value on obtaining the 'perfect body'" under contributing factors to eating disorders (n.d.).The prevalence of self-image issues among women does not dismiss the fact that eating disorders among men are increasing. The National Eating Disorder Association reveals that 10 million men will suffer from eating disorders in their lifetime; males face certain risk factors that make them susceptible such as the media's portrayal of muscularity (2012). While it is important to understand causes of these problems among both male and female college students, distributing resources effectively remains the biggest challenge as it relates to self-esteem and body image issues.



Summary

The differential trends between men and women revealed in this survey give an accurate depiction of how the media (including culture), family, and friends directly influence body image and self-esteem. Family and friends are the two most positive enforcers of a person's body image for both males and females. Women rely more on friends (69%) than men (56%) to sustain a positive body image. The opportunities to bring encouragement, build self-esteem, and serve as a resource of hope for others are obviously necessary and invaluable tools for a large majority of students. The University of Missouri has several programs designed for this type of support including the Wellness Resource Center, Student Health Center, Counseling Center, Women's Center, LGBTQ Resource Center, and Multicultural Center. Unfortunately, 34% or one in three students do not utilize the resources

or are even aware of them. As professionals, student leaders, health care providers, and program coordinators we should be working to promote resources for students across campuses and continue building awareness about the seriousness and commonality of self-esteem, body image, and eating disorder issues.

Resources:

NEDA. (2013). *Get the facts on eating disorders*. Retrieved from: <http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/get-facts-eating-disorders>
Wellness Resource Center Wellness Survey. (2012).

Harrison K, Cantor J. *The relationship between media consumption and eating disorders*. *J Commun.* 1997;47:40-67.
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2792687/#b19-pch08287>

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