



**The National Center on
Addiction and Substance Abuse
at Columbia University**



Substance Abuse, Mental Health and Engaged Learning:

Summary of Findings from CASA's Focus Groups and National Survey

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Substance Abuse, Mental Health and Engaged Learning: Summary of Findings from CASA's Focus Groups and National Survey

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Key Objective

- Provide the BTTP project qualitative and quantitative data on college students of links between:
 - Engaged learning
 - Mental health
 - Substance use and abuse



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Methods

- Six focus groups
- A nationally representative survey



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The Focus Groups

- Inform construction of national survey
- Add depth to quantitative findings
- 3 male, 3 female
- New York, Chicago, Dallas
- June 2004



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Engaged Learning

- Active student participation in the educational process where students feel connected to the subject matter and derive meaning from their experience
- Includes classes, contact with professors, educational activities outside classroom



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Key Findings: Student Engagement

- Class Structure:
 - More lectures in early grades and in larger schools
 - More discussion in later grades and in smaller schools
- Opportunities for Engagement:
 - Available and considered valuable
 - Many students do not take advantage



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Student Engagement

- Relationships with Faculty:
 - Comfort discussing academic/personal issues varies by student/professor
- Extracurricular Activities:
 - Ways to have fun, meet people, explore interests and as “resume builders”
 - Many students over-involved



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Stress

- Students overwhelmed by commitments
- Key sources of stress:
 - Lack of money, academic workload, social pressures
- Key stress relievers:
 - “Partying” (including using alcohol and drugs), sports, exercise, sleep, video/computer games, going home



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Mental Health

- Depression, Eating Disorders, ADHD common
- Cutting, Bipolar Disorder, OCD less common
- Counseling available at most schools
- Stigma attached to seeking counseling



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Suicide

- Most students aware of suicides/attempted suicides on campus
- Some students feel cases “hushed up”



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Smoking

- Highly prevalent
- Anti-smoking policies not well enforced
- Reasons for initiation: peer pressure, stress relief, depression, weight control, alleviate boredom, socializing



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Alcohol Use

- Highly prevalent
- Free alcohol at social events, sometimes with faculty
- Some schools sell alcohol at games or in campus bar
- School alcohol policies not well enforced
- Reasons for drinking: peer pressure, stress relief, socializing



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Illicit Drug Use

- Marijuana highly prevalent--almost as common as alcohol
- Cocaine used by “*rich students*,” by those who are “*stressed out*” or controlling weight--more common in cities
- Heroin use less common--used by students “*with problems*”
- Methamphetamines increasing in popularity, club drugs decreasing



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Prescription Drug Misuse

- Students knowledgeable about brand names
- Safer than illicit drugs
- Widely available
- Students share or sell their prescription medications, some fake symptoms, some get them from coaches/trainers



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Poly-substance Abusers

- More family problems
- Less interest in academics



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The “Typical” Substance User

- No clear profile
- Highly prevalent among all types of students, all levels of social and academic success, all levels of engagement
- Exception is “*hard-core abusers*” --seen as having more emotional and/or family-related problems



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Making Connections

- Link between mental health, particularly depression, and substance abuse
- Less clarity on link with engaged learning:
 - *“I know plenty of people who are prominent on campus, involved in everything, and they have a serious problem.”*
 - *“If you’re involved in what you’re studying, that will bring satisfaction and you won’t really want to do drugs...”*



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The National Survey

- Help fill gap in available data
- National representation
- 2000 students
- Telephone interviews
- November 2004 – January 2005



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Sample Characteristics

- 56% female, 44% male
- 74% white, 10% black, 7% Hispanic, 6% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native; 6% mixed race
- 61% single, 31% long-term relationship, 7% engaged/married, 1% separated/divorced
- 6% “far left,” 31% “liberal,” 31% moderate, 24% conservative, 4% “far right”



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Sample Characteristics

- 26% freshmen, 21% sophomores, 23% juniors, 30% seniors
- 63% public; 37% private
- 69% large (over 5,000 students)
- 56% dormitories, 33% off-campus housing
- 12% members of fraternity/sorority



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Key Findings:

Less Student Engagement in College

- Compared to high school, students report spending proportionately:
 - Less time in extracurricular or service activities
 - About the same amount of time in political activities
 - More time working and in social activities



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Examples of Engaged Learning

- A course or other educational experience in which they:
 - Experienced service learning as a key component
 - Felt that their input was truly valued
 - Worked closely with faculty on a project or internship where input was valued
 - Were inspired or had a significant change in perspective
 - Were motivated to make an active contribution to a larger goal or purpose



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Students Report High Levels of Certain Engaged Learning Experiences...

- 88% frequently or occasionally felt input valued by faculty
- 71% frequently or occasionally inspired or significant change in perspective from class; 58% from extracurricular activity
- 54% frequently or occasionally had educational experience that motivated them to make active contribution to larger goal/purpose



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And Low Levels of Others

- 66% rarely or never had course with service learning
- 64% rarely or never worked closely with faculty on research project, independent study or internship and felt input valued
- 47% rarely or never sought educational experience involving greater personal responsibility



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Engaged Learning Likelier at Private and Smaller Schools

- Students at private and smaller schools likelier to report engaged learning experiences (e.g., working closely with faculty, being inspired by an educational experience, feeling involvement was valued)



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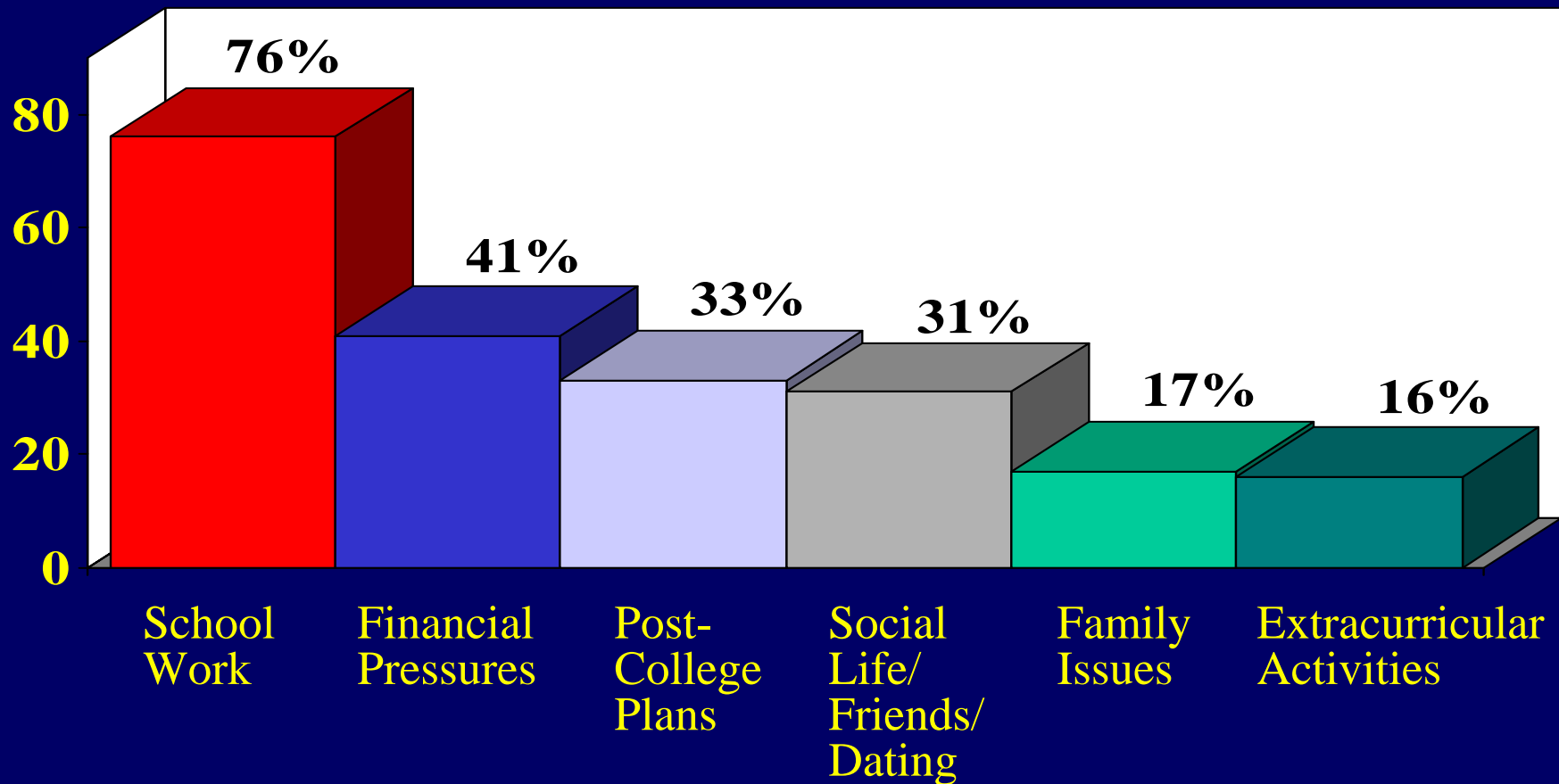
Stress, Feeling Overwhelmed and Mental Exhaustion

- 88% say stress is a moderately large or very big problem
- One-third feel overwhelmed
- 52% have felt mentally exhausted
- Feeling stressed, overwhelmed, mentally exhausted likelier among students reporting more frequent engaged learning experiences



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Sources of Stress





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Depression and Other Mental Health Problems Common Among Students

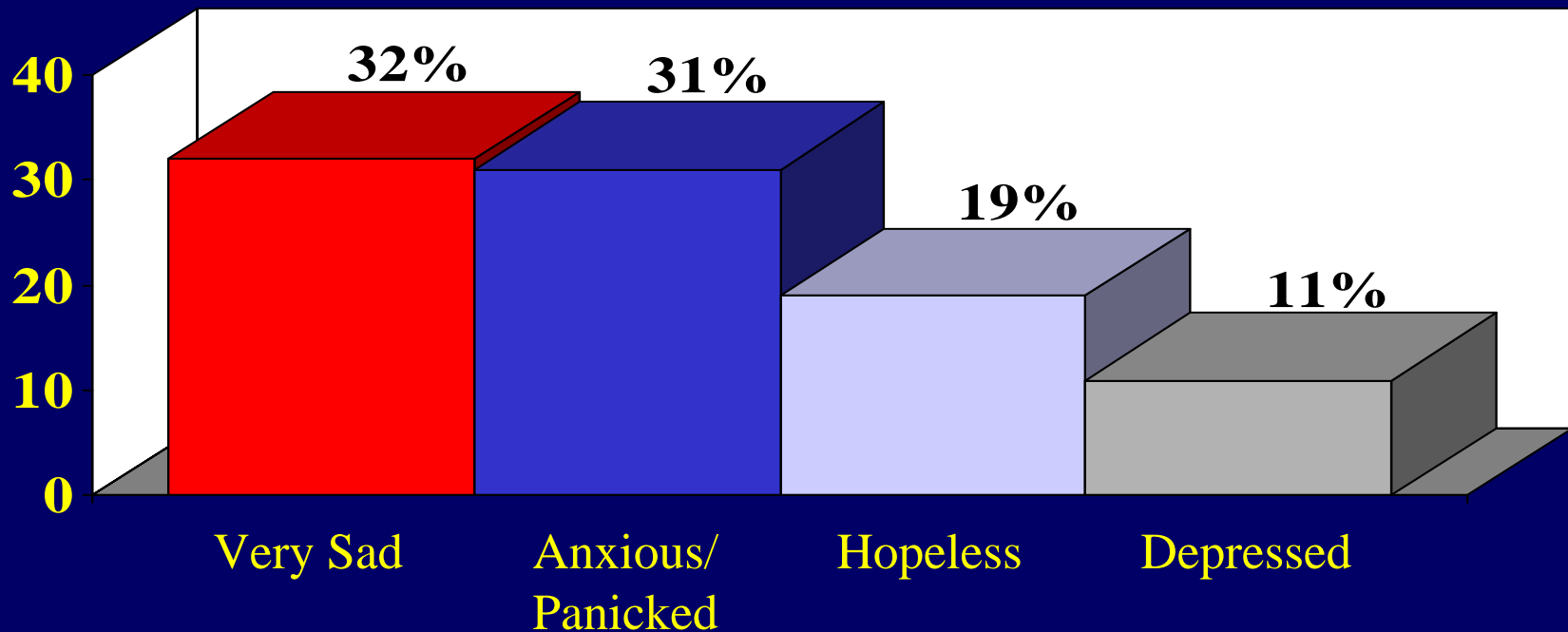
- 42% say depression problem on campus
- 92% believe mental health services accessible
- 50% think there is stigma to seeking help
- 60% say stigma might prevent student from seeking help



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Many Report Depressive and Anxiety Symptoms

Frequently or Occasionally Felt Symptoms in the Past Year





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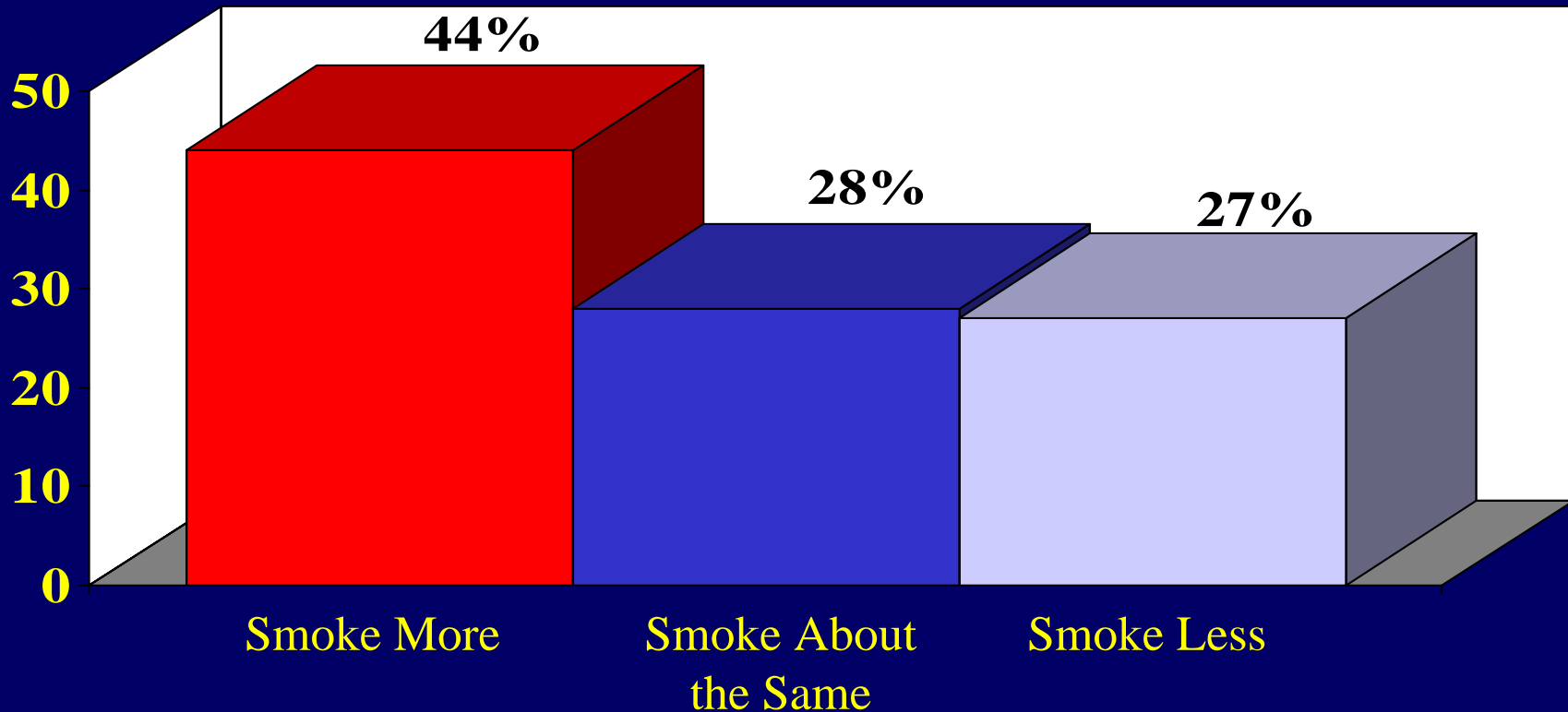
Clinical Mental Health Disorders

- 12% diagnosed with depression
- 6% diagnosed with anxiety disorder
- 2% diagnosed with an eating disorder
- 6% receiving therapy
- 7% taking prescribed medications



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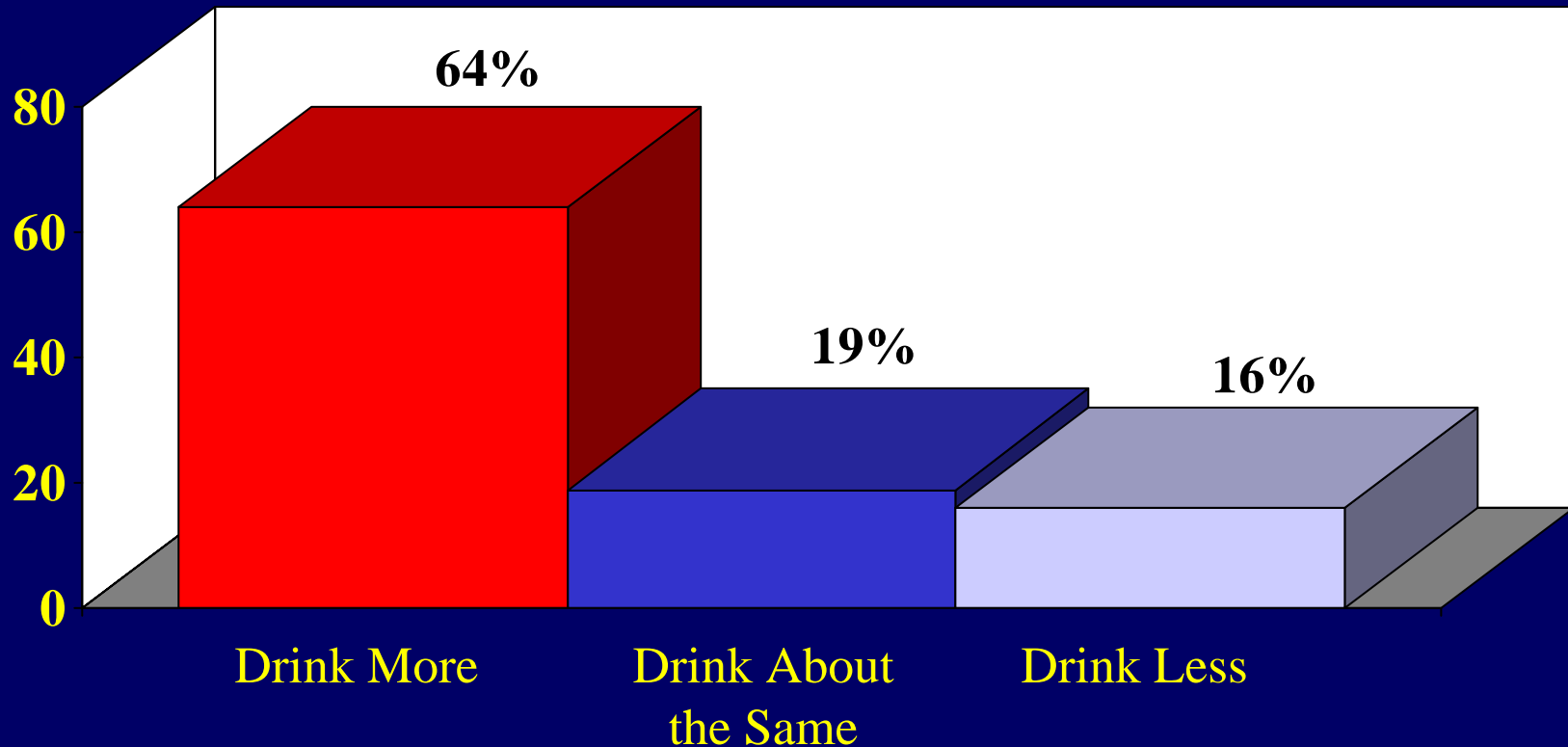
Smoking More Widespread in College Than in High School





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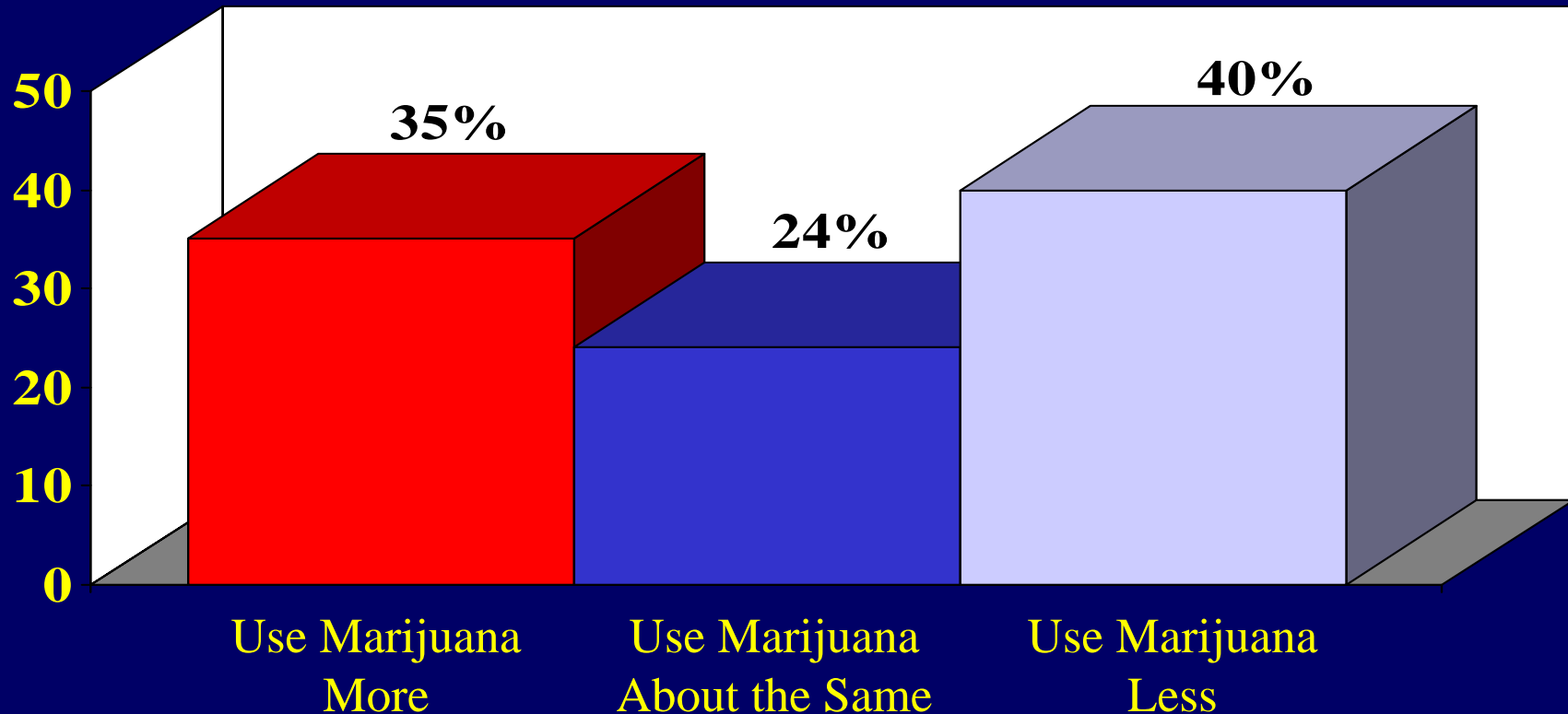
Drinking More Widespread in College Than in High School





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Marijuana Use Less Widespread in College than in High School





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Commonly Cited Reasons for Substance Use

- Relaxation/stress reduction most commonly cited reasons for:
 - Smoking (38%)
 - Drinking (40%)
 - Drug use (39%)



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Parents Matter

- 70% say parents' expectations influence whether or how much they smoke, drink or use drugs
- Those who are more influenced by parents' expectations smoke, drink, binge drink and use marijuana less than other students



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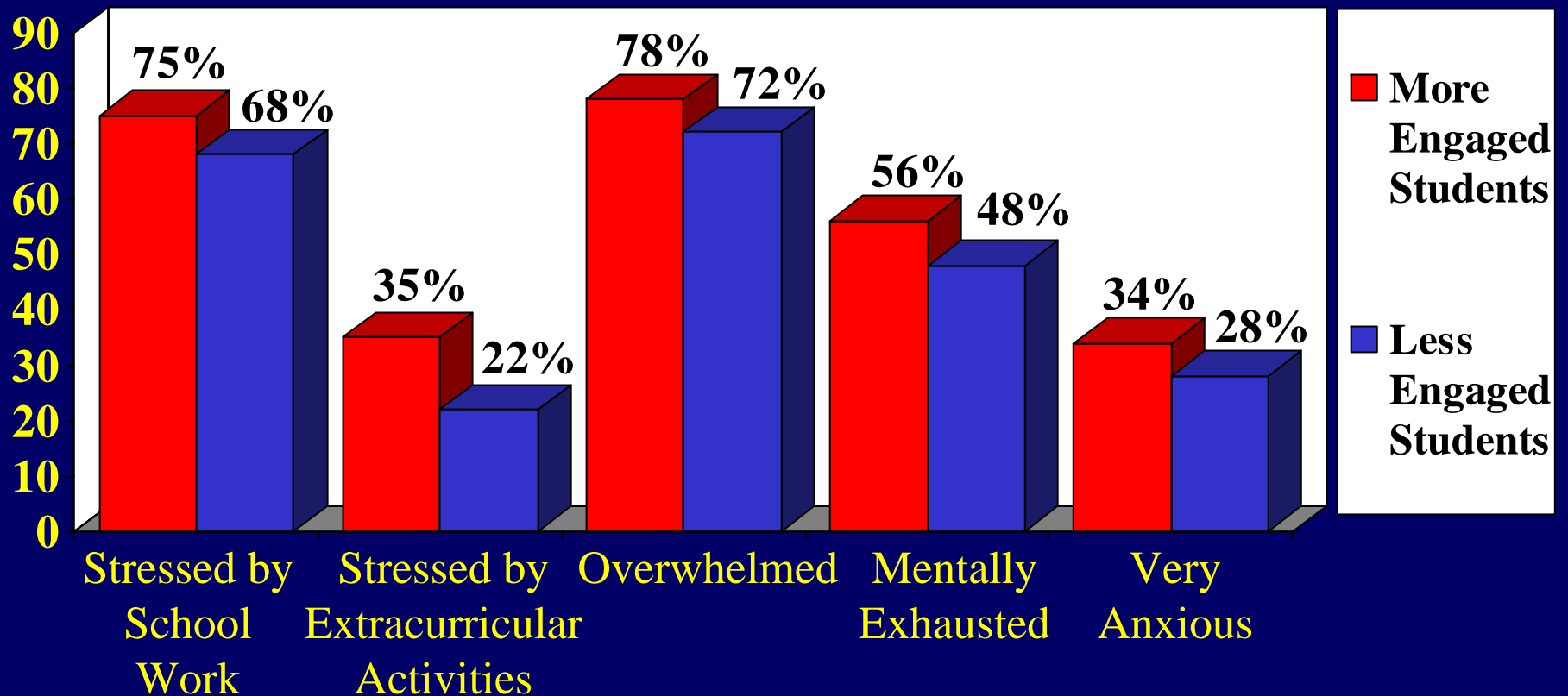
Mental Health Problems Linked to Substance Use and Abuse

- Feeling stressed, overwhelmed, mentally exhausted, sad, depressed, anxious or having a clinical disorder strongly linked to higher rates of smoking and drug use
- Clinical mental health problems more common in those who don't drink



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Engaged Students Are More Stressed





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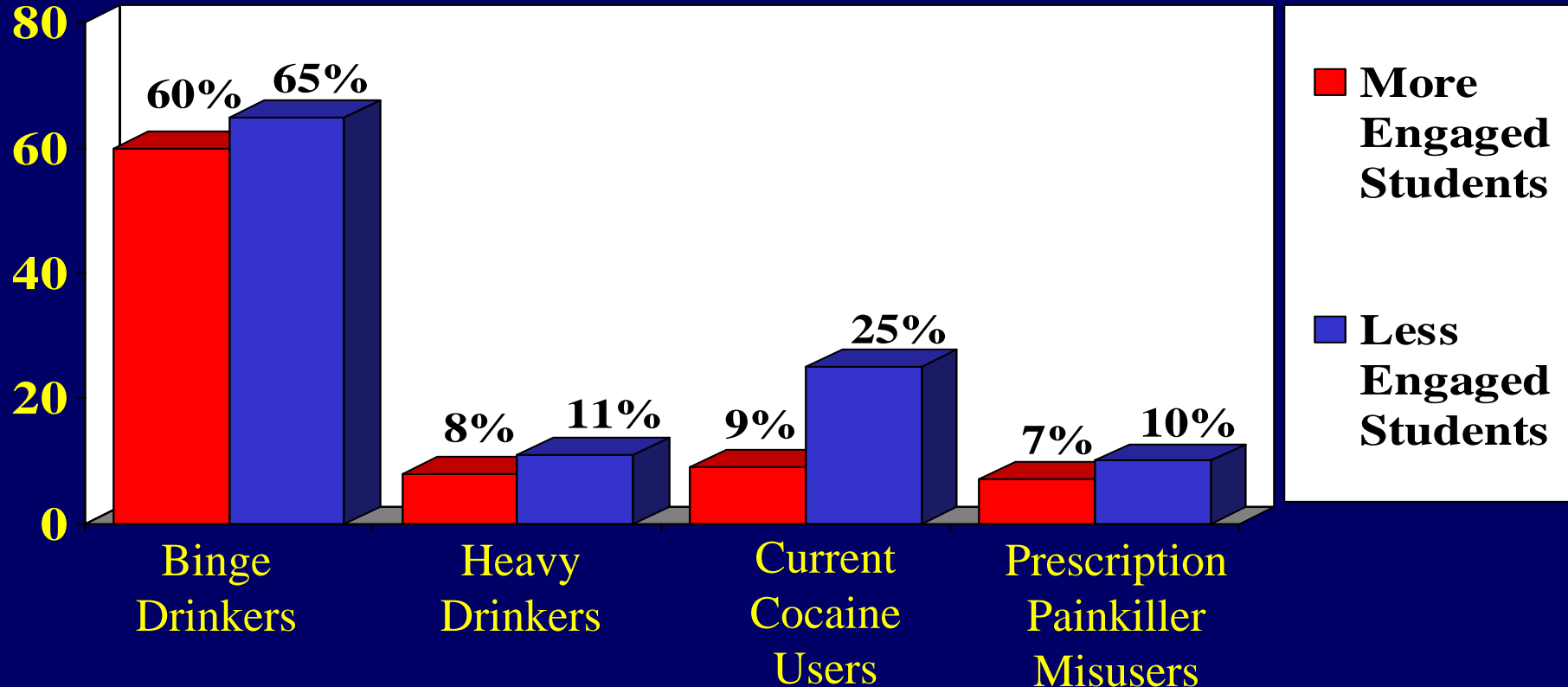
Student Engagement Not Linked to Clinical Disorders

- No links found between student engagement and:
 - Clinical levels of mental health problems such as depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders
 - Being in treatment
 - On medication for a psychological or emotional problem



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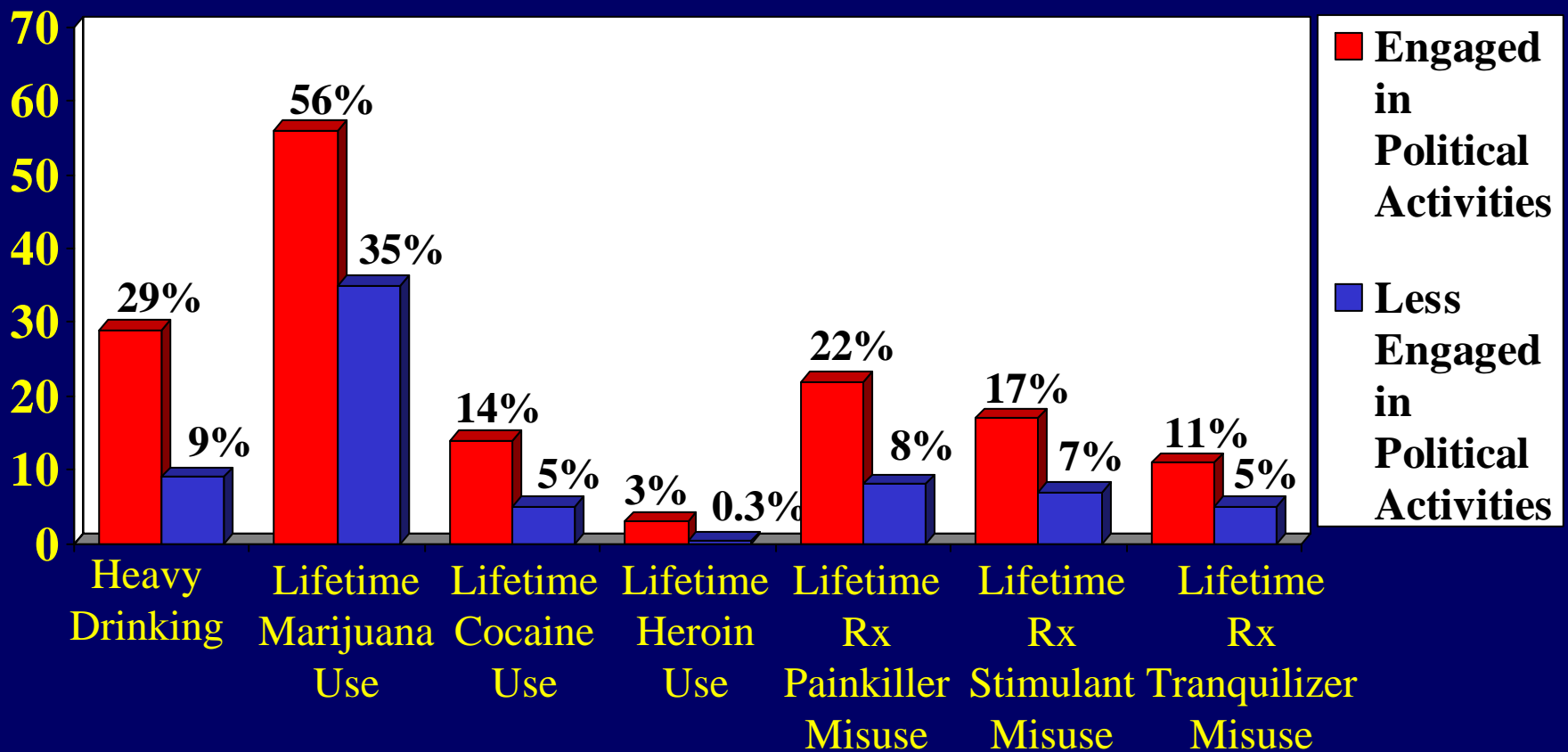
Most Forms of Student Engagement Linked to Less Substance Use





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Engagement in Political Activities Linked to More Substance Use





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Concluding Thoughts and Next Steps

- Engaged learning linked to less substance use:
 - Enhancing engaged learning may reduce substance use
- Engaged learning linked to more student stress:
 - Must address stress when enhancing engaged learning
- Engaged learning not linked to clinical disorders:
 - More research needed to assess link to mental health
- Longer-term research needed to determine causality



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