Insights into the Psychological Strains of University Life: A Study of Albanian Students

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Abstract

During university years, mental health and behavioural challenges become more prevalent. The unique lifestyle of students often exposes them to increased levels of anxiety, depression, and social isolation. Additionally, mental well-being is closely linked to factors such as anxiety, stress, and adjustments to new lifestyle habits, particularly in the crucial transition period of the first year at university.

A longitudinal study was conducted among students enrolled at universities in Albania. Descriptive statistics were used to show the difference between gender, levels of education and age. A sample of 594 students participated in the study completing the battery of questionnaires. Psychological instruments and exposure measurements were considered.

Research has confirmed the challenges faced by students during their university years, revealing a correlation between insufficient financial support and a rise in symptoms of depression and anxiety. The findings underscore the impact of lifestyle changes on the manifestation of clinically significant psychological symptoms. It suggests that enhancing financial support and providing additional resources could alleviate psychological distress among university students.

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Introduction

The college or university years are a crucial developmental period, where students transition from late adolescence to adulthood (Arnett, 2015). For students, university years are positioned during a key developmental transition toward adulthood (Sussman & Arnett, 2014). This represents a period that involves taking on greater responsibilities and exploring identity within a new social context, which may not necessarily be stable (Auerbach et al. 2018). Life as a university student can be filled with unpredictability, including continuous changes in social groups and life choices related to academic life that can cause greater stress and decrease social support, which are contributing factors to mental health problems (Slavich & Auerbach, 2018).

In the last decade, there has been an increase in mental health issues among college and university students experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression (Pinder-Amaker & Bell 2012). Globally, about 31% of students tested positive for a mental health disorder in 2018 (Auerbach et al. 2018). Furthermore, studies have shown and argued that treatment for these issues present in students is difficult. Despite the efforts of mental health specialists, many students have insufficient information about mental health and do not consider specialized treatment necessary. Students generally believe that symptoms of depression and anxiety are typical college stress and do not see treatment as necessary (Eisenberg et al. 2007). But of course, there are students who consider mental health services necessary in their situation, but there are times when they are sceptical about the effectiveness of mental health care (Mowbray et al. 2006).

In recent years, digital mental health interventions have also been applied, services offered through online platforms, which provide the opportunity for treatment for university and college students, thus bypassing many barriers to traditional mental health services, including stigma and time (Kass et al. 2017). But researchers have continuously analysed how effective these interventions are through online platforms. Thus, in 2013, a systematic review of technology-based mental health service interventions revealed that these interventions aim to improve symptoms of certain mental health problems. Nevertheless, researchers at this time recommended more studies and data to confirm the effectiveness of technology use in providing this service (Farrer et al. 2013).

Moreover, another study in 2014, regarding the provision of mental health services through technology to university students, found that these interventions may be effective in improving depression, anxiety, and stress in students (Davies et al. 2014). An analysis and systematic summary in 2018 found that receiving mental health services through technology may have small to moderate effects on a range of mental health conditions (Harrer et al. 2019). Studies have shown that mental disorders during university years are also associated with long-term negative outcomes in later adulthood,

including ongoing emotional and physical health problems, dysfunctional personal or social relationships, and problems in the job market (Scott et al. 2016). These can be translated into long-term problems influenced by mental health issues during college years, as these years constitute a critical period for the onset of a wide range of mental disorders (Ibrahim et al. 2013).

Additionally, scientific investigations have shown that mental disorders can contribute to dropping out of university. Previous studies have shown that students with mental disorders are twice as likely to drop out of school without receiving a diploma (Kessler et al. 1995). In line with this finding, between 15% and 23% of students with mental health disorders suggest that they have a negative impact on academic performance (Kernan & Wheat, 2008).

The prevalence of mental health problems among university and college students remains an urgent and pressing issue. In 2018, the World Health Organization reported that approximately one-third of first-year students from 19 universities surveyed (13,948 respondents) in eight countries (Australia, Belgium, Germany, Mexico, Ireland, South Africa, Spain, and the United States) had positive data for at least one common DSM-IV anxiety, mood, or substance use disorder (Auerbach et al., 2018). Similar results were found in another international study of 12 countries; in Europe (Albania, Germany, Italy, Kosovo, Switzerland) Asia (Malaysia, Oman, South Korea, Taiwan), Latin America and North America (Brazil, United States) and Australia where the survey found that 48% of students presented clinically significant depressive symptoms (Backhaus et al. 2020).

Efforts to alleviate mental health problems involve supporting students generally on campus, such as health centres equipped to provide mental health support to ensure the well-being of these students. This may include counselling sessions and organized activities (Xiao et al. 2017).

As well, the psychological challenges encountered by university students in Albania are increasingly recognized, particularly highlighting academic stress, social pressures, and financial constraints, all of which contribute to heightened levels of anxiety and depression among students (Da Molin et al, 2018). Understanding and addressing these difficulties are crucial for promoting the mental well-being of students and ensuring their academic success. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the prevalence rates of mental health disorders among college and university students, and how do these disorders impact academic performance and long-term outcomes. Moreover, given the increasing recognition of mental health issues among college and university students, we hypothesize that a significant proportion of students experience clinically significant symptoms of anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders. We further hypothesize that these mental health challenges negatively affect academic performance and lifestyle and may contribute to long-term adverse outcomes in later adulthood. In this context, exposure measurements would involve assessing the extent and nature of stressors such as social expectations, family support, financial constraints, daily habits, free time, living in a community and other factors that contribute to heightened levels of anxiety and depression among students. By quantifying and understanding these exposures, this paper can effectively evaluate the impact on students' mental well-being and academic performance, thereby informing interventions aimed at alleviating these stressors and promoting positive outcomes.

Methodology

The study has been conducted by a colourful team of researchers at different universities in Albania (Wisdom University College, University of Tirana, LOGOS University College, University of Medicine, etc.). The study took the Ethical Committee Approval from Ministry of Education. The investigation has been conducted online by all the team of researchers. Data was codified according to Ethical Committee Guidelines, and confidentiality was guaranteed. Every student was invited to read the Informed Consent Form and was free to withdraw every moment from the study. For every participant information regarding age, sex, nationality, family background, community living, and exposure habits was collected.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

There could participate at the study people enrolled in a university, adults, with ability to fluently read and comprehend English and Albanian, because questionnaires were presented in one of these languages.

Assessment phase

Participants were recruited between April 2021 to March 2022, via online with google form compilation of the battery. It was used a convenience sample, based on the possibility to contact students from the easiest way through their lecturers. Time to complete the whole battery was of 25 minutes.

Measures

The battery included socio-demographic information, parents' education, parent job engagement, field of study, standardized BDI-ll for the construct of depression, Perceived Stress scale and SF-12 to measure mental and physical health. Moreover, other exposure measurements investigated the engagement in the living community, individual and family income, life in rent houses in Tirana, inclusion to groups or associations, peers' relations, alcohol and smoking habits, and physical activities. Perceived Stress Scale is a questionnaire of 14 items that measure stress level. It is presented in a Likert scale from the minimum (0) to a maximum (4) (Cohen et al. 1983). Moreover, Beck Depression Inventory is a questionnaire that measure depressive symptoms in clinical and non-clinical population. It has 21 items, presented in a 4 Likert scale from 0 to 3. Short Form (SF-12) of quality of life, consisted in 12 items, with higher scores that indicated better mental and physical health. Questions regarding daily lifestyle included alcohol and smoking habits, in the present and in the last months.

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics were calculated to investigate levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among students. Data was collected through google form and analysed by the team of researchers. 36 tables were created that illustrated the main results of the study. For each table two graphics were exposed that illustrated English and Albanian language sample. For

a clear exposure of participants data, a database was created in Statistica 10.

Results

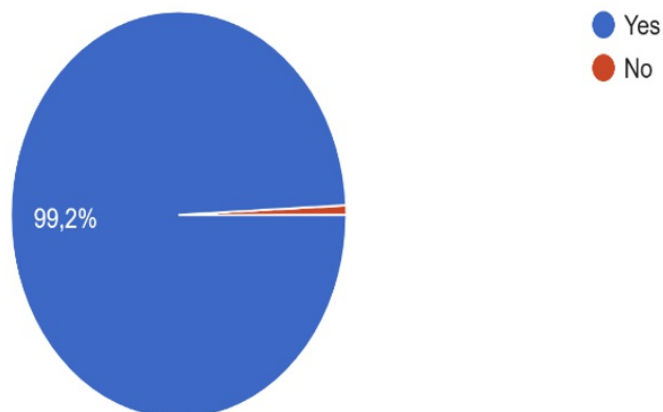### 1.1. Je dakord të marrësh pjesë?
461 risposte

- Po
- Jo

99,6%
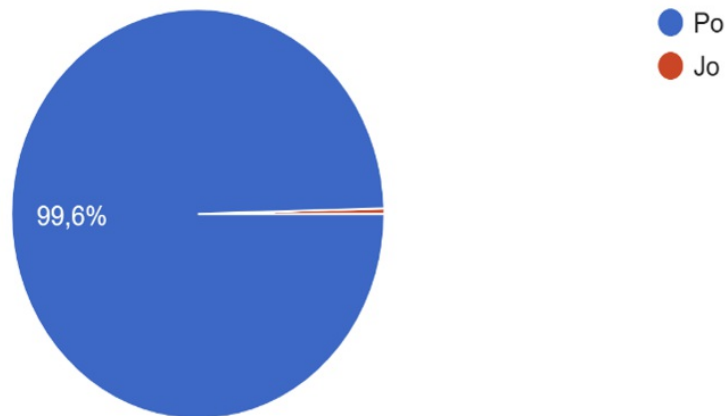
1

Dear students, this survey will provide valuable information about students' health, well-being, and possible factors that might influence this. The surv...ase select your choice below. Agree to participate?
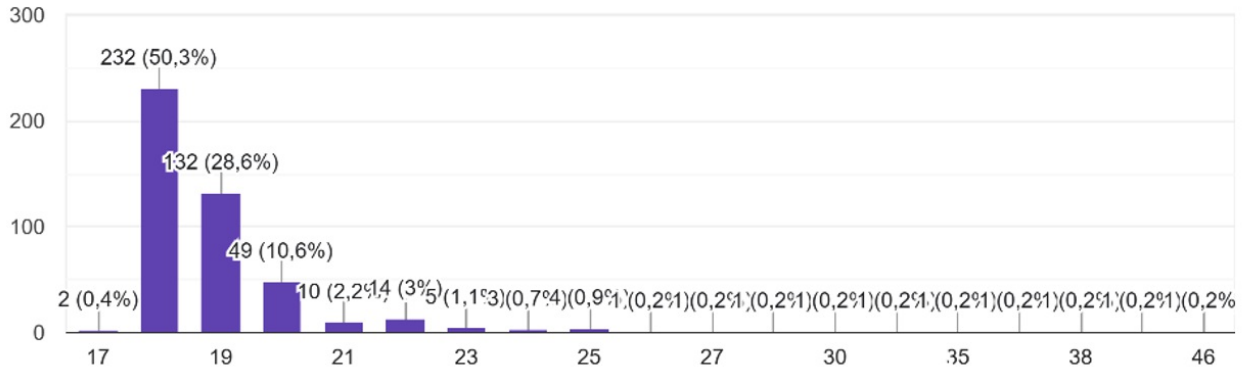133 risposte

- Yes
- No

99,2%

Table 1[ab]. Table 1 describes the total number of participants. There were 594 participants from the University of Tirana, LOGOS University College,

Wisdom University College, and other universities in Tirana. 99.6% of the participants agreed to participate in the study.

Sa vjeç je?
461 risposte

1.1. How old are you
133 risposte
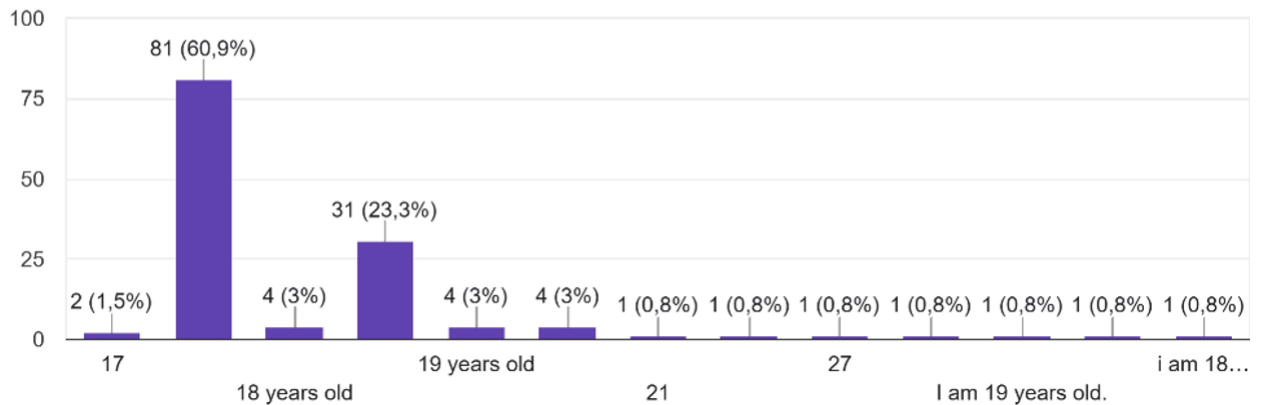
Table 2^{ab}. The range of the participants is 18-46 years old. Most participants are of 18, 19 and 20 years old. Respectively, 52% of the participants are 18 years old, 29% are 19 years old and 12% are 20 years old.
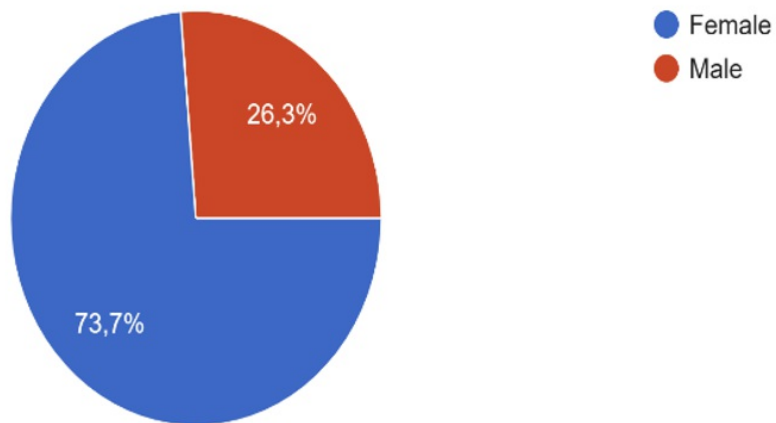
Çfarë gjinie i përket?
461 risposte

● Femër
● Mashkull

13%

Qeios, CC-BY 4.0 · Article, August 19, 2024

87%
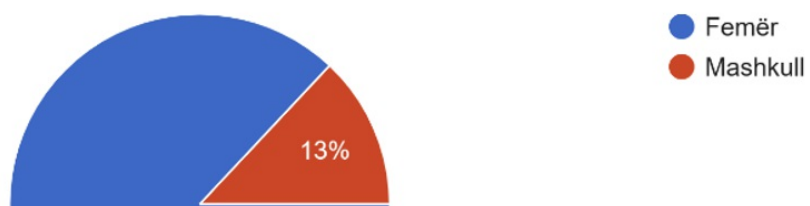
1.2. What is your sex
133 risposte

- ● Female
- ● Male

26,3%

73,7%

Table 3^{ab}. 83% of the participants belong to female sex and 17% belong to men sex.
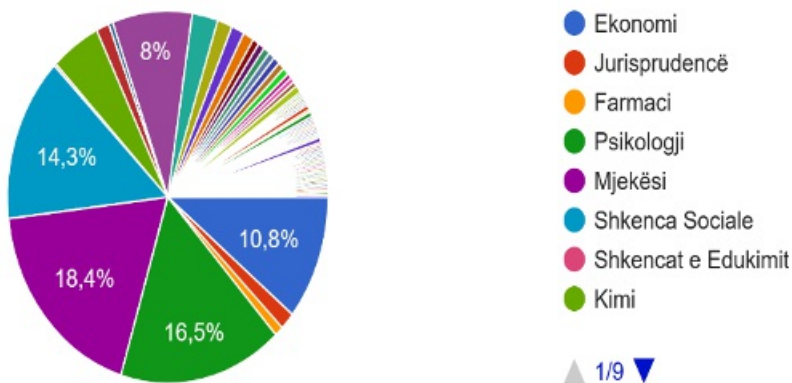
1.3. What is your nationality?
133 risposte

	80 (60,2%)							
2 (1,5%)	29 (21,8%)	1 (0,8%)	1 (0,8%)	1 (0,8%)	1 (0,8%)	5 (3,8%)	12 (9%)	1 (0,8%)
ALBANIA	Albania	Albanian	Albanian & Canadian	Greek nationality	I am albanian	Italian and Albanian	albania	albanian	cninese
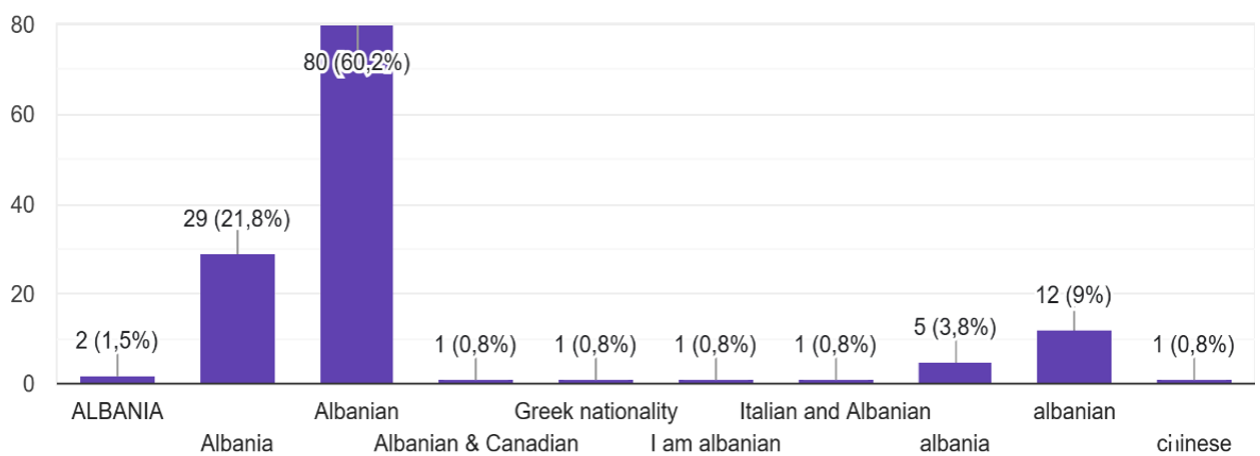
Table 4. 99.2% of the participants are of Albanian nationality.

Table 4. 99.2% of the participants are of Albanian nationality.

Në çfarë fakulteti je regjistruar?
461 risposte

Legend:
- Ekonomi
- Jurisprudencë
- Farmaci
- Psikologji
- Mjekësi
- Shkenca Sociale
- Shkencat e Edukimit
- Kimi

1/9

1.4. What is your field of study? In which program are you enrolled?
133 risposte

Legend:
- Bussiness and Economics
- Law
- Pharmacy
- Medicine
- Health Science
- Social Science
- Chemistry
- Physics

1/2
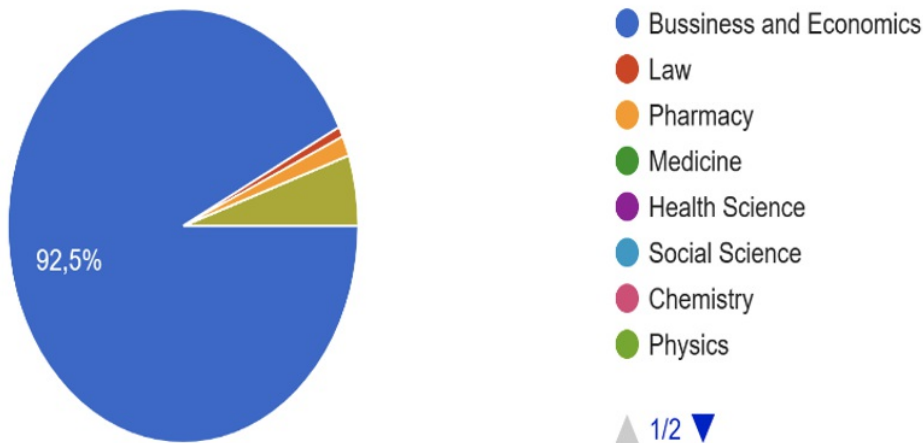
Table 5ab. Most represented fields of study were from students of Medicine (9.2%), Psychology (9.2%), 7,15% Social sciences, 51.25% Business and Economics. The other ones were from Education 4%, Nursing 4%, Chemistry 2.5%, other 15.10% of the 594 participants.

Çfarë pune bëjnë prindërit e tu

6
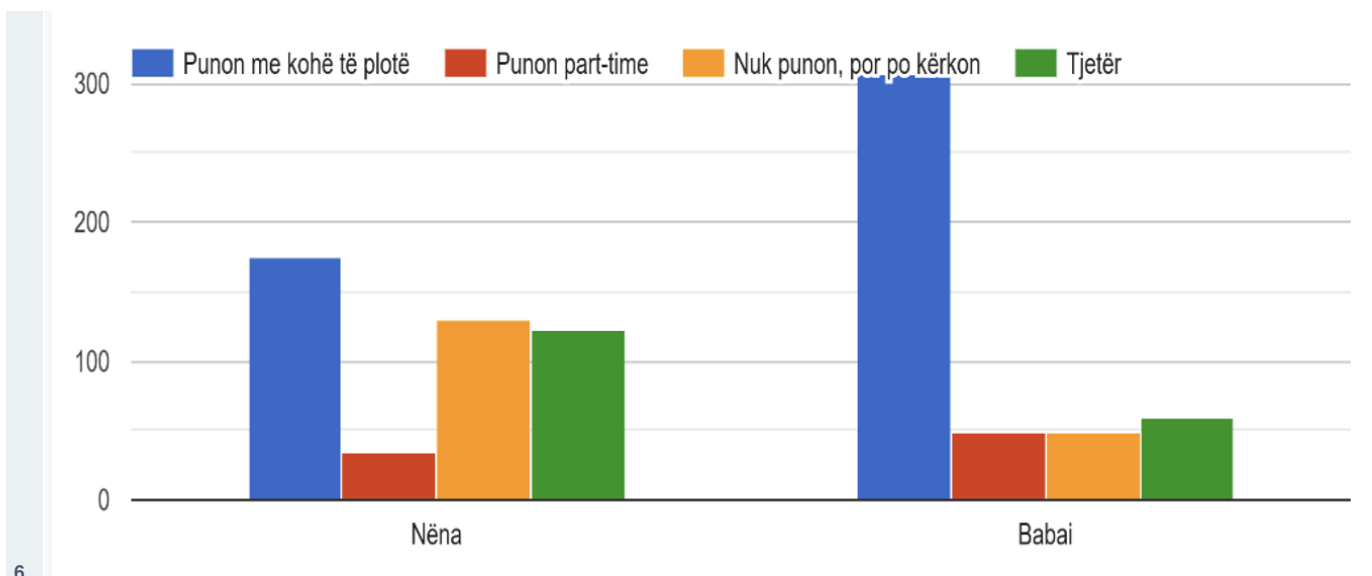
1.6. Which best describes the employment of your father and mother?
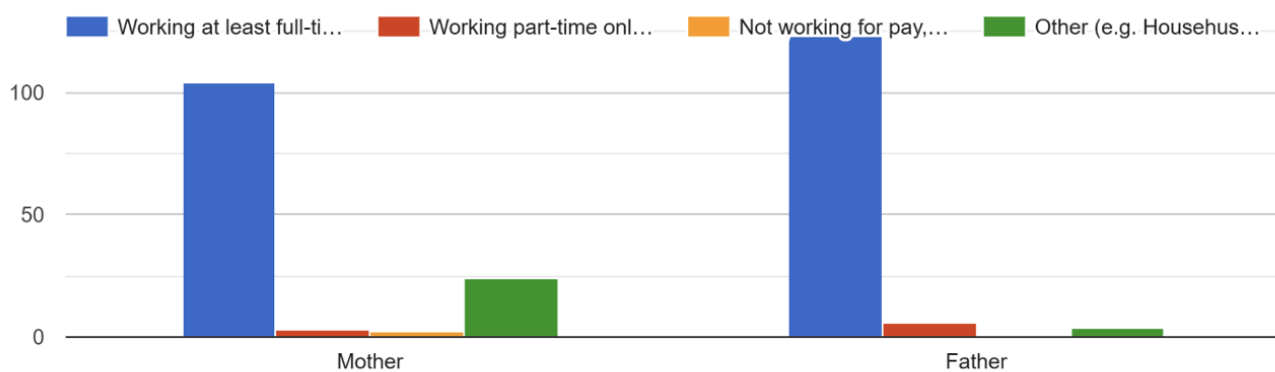

Table 6[ab]. 73.92% of the respondents affirmed that their fathers are working full time, (431/594). The results for mother employment assure that almost 50% are working full time (299/594). Moreover, 60/594 of the fathers work part-time, 50/594 are not working but are looking for. Same for mothers, but with less percentage of employment regarding part-time job (39/594), a relevant part is looking for (142/594).

Çfarë niveli arsimor kanë prindërit e tu?
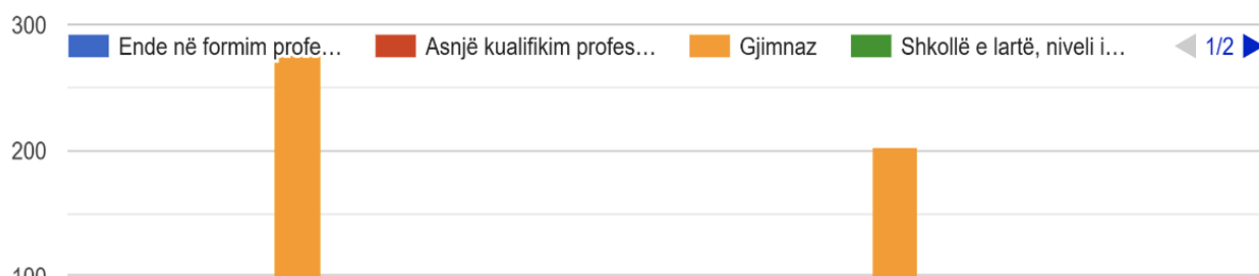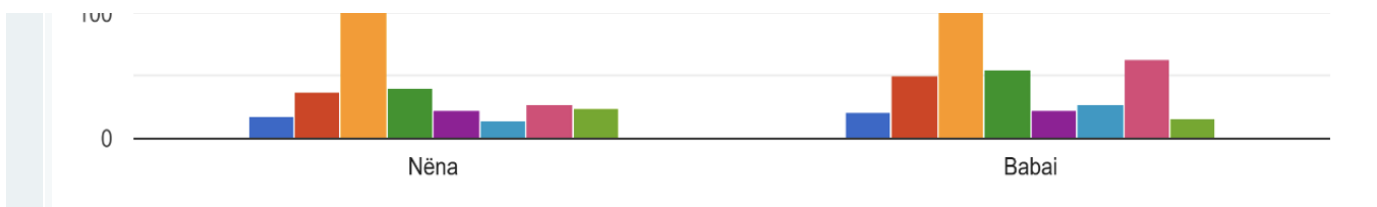
7

1.5. What is the highest level of education completed by your father and mother?
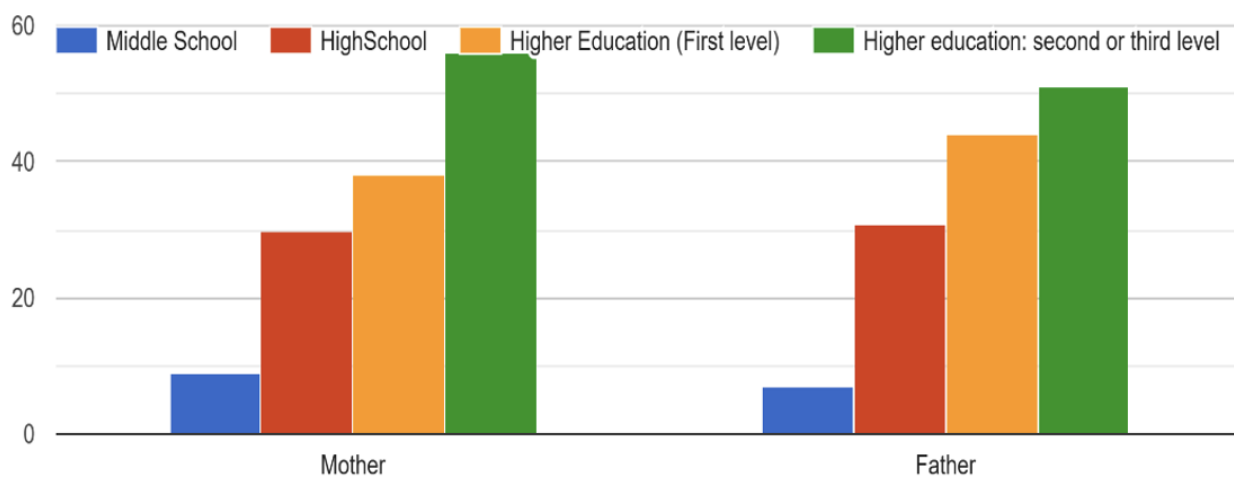
Table 7ab. Fathers have higher education (Second and PhD studies, 17%), 40% have higher education (first level), 35/594 have a high school degree. Meanwhile for mothers 14.8% have second or third level of studies, 52.69% have higher education degree of first level. 60/594 have a high school diploma.
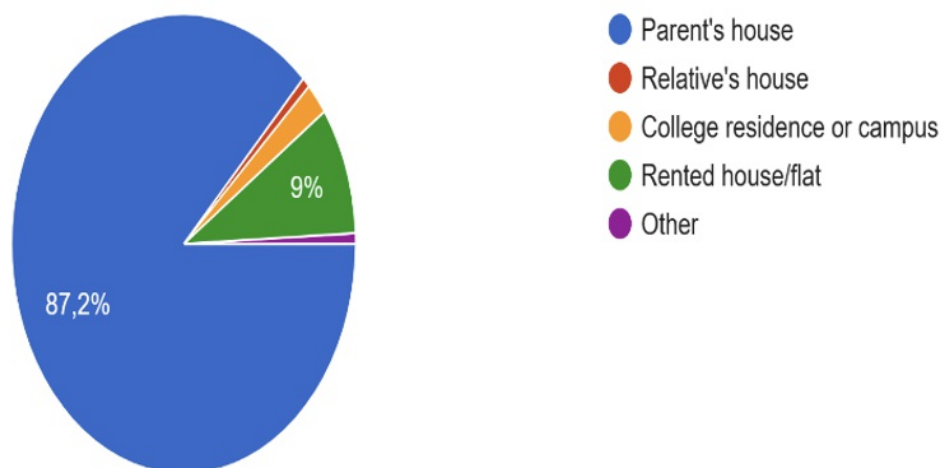
Ku jeton gjatë kohës së studimeve
461 risposte

- Te shtëpia e prindërve
- Në shtëpi të disa kushërinjve
- Në Qytet Studenti ose në kampuse të ngjashme
- Me qera
- Tjetër

8

1.7. Where do you live during term time?
133 risposte

- Parent's house
- Relative's house
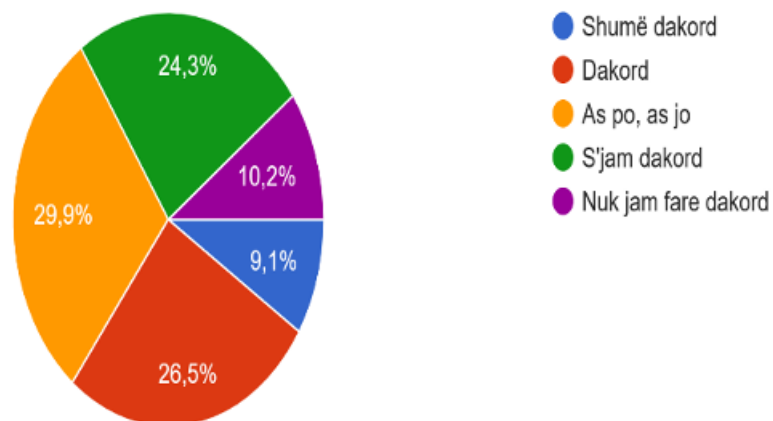- College residence or campus
- Rented house/flat
- Other

87,2%

9%

Table 8[ab]. 54.21% of students live at parents' house, 41% are on rent and 5% live at university campus or similar.

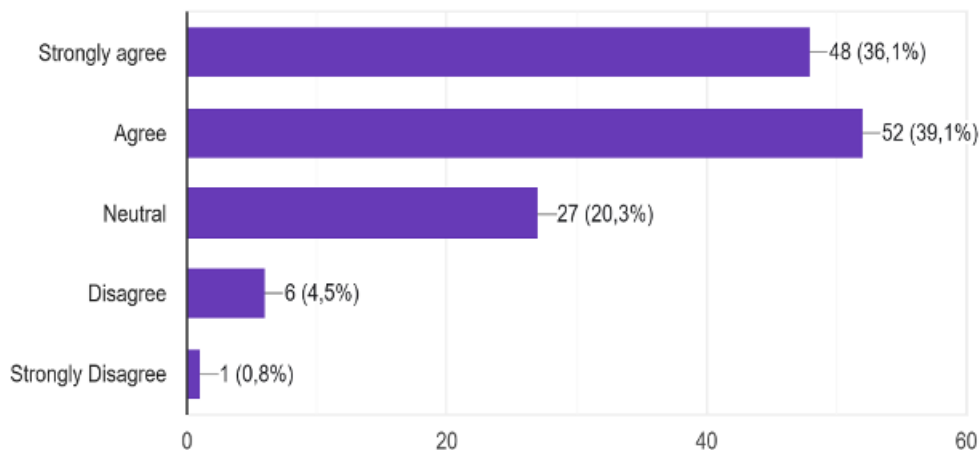## Sa je dakord me shprehjen: "Unë kam të ardhura të mjaftueshme për të mbuluar shpenzimet mujore".
461 risposte

- Shumë dakord
- Dakord
- As po, as jo
- S'jam dakord
- Nuk jam fare dakord

24,3%
29,9%
10,2%
9,1%
26,5%

9

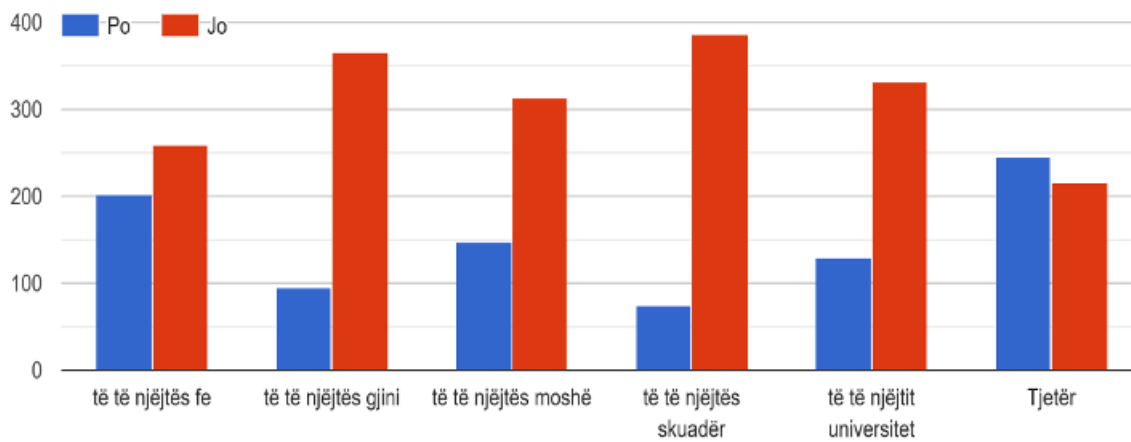1.8. To what extent do you agree with the statement, I have sufficient income in order to cover my

monthly costs?
133 risposte

Table 9^ab. there were 594 answers to the question "I have sufficient income to cover monthly costs". 33.35% agree with the statement, 25.1% are reluctant to choose side, 14.4% don't agree, and 5.5% don't agree at all.
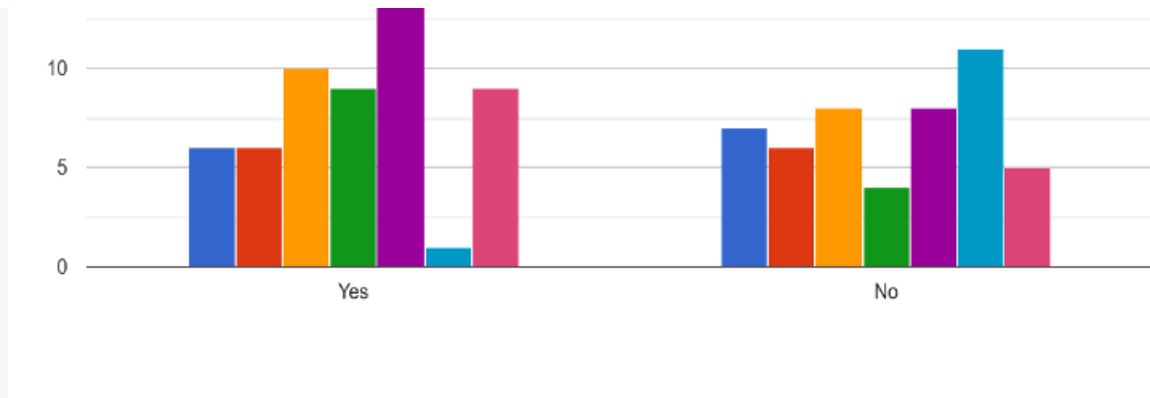

Për sa i përket rrethit tim shoqëror, ata janë:

2.3. If YES, are the members of your group similar to each other with regard to:


10

Table 10^{ab}. Questions regarding group of peers included religion, gender, age, sports, university, political organization, etc. Regarding religion there were 207/594 respondents that share the same religion, in a laic country, but still with 4 coexisting religions. Their peer group is diversified, usually they tend to have mix groups (61.1%). They groups don't have the same age but is diversified too (61.4%). They are fond of sports and follow different teams (66.32%). They come from different universities (56.9%). Lastly, they share common opinion about political matters in almost 40.74% of the cases. In total, 64.7 of them doesn't belong to any clubs, groups, or associations (sports group, hobby groups, cultural societies, religious groups, political groups).

Nëse të duhen lekë urgjent, a ka njerëz jashtë familjes tek të cilët mund të mbështetesh e të të jepnin lekët?

461 risposte

- patjetër
- me shumë mundësi
- nuk e di
- ndoshta jo
- as që bëhet fjalë
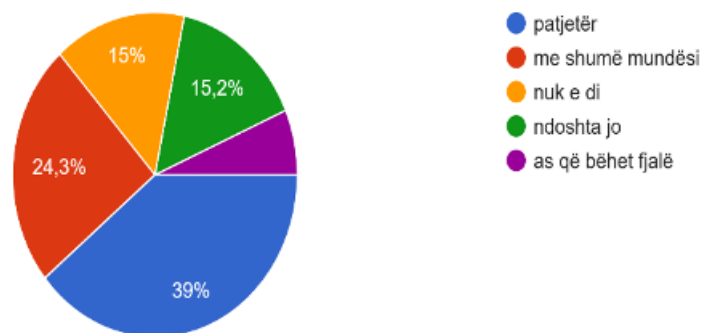
2.5. If you suddenly needed to borrow a small amount of money, are there people beyond your immediate household and close relatives to whom y... would be willing and able to provide this money?
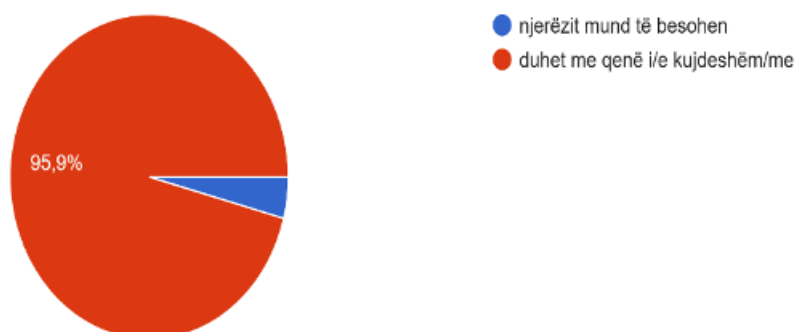
133 risposte

- Definitely
- Probably
- Unsure
- Probably not
- Definitely not
- Disagree strongly
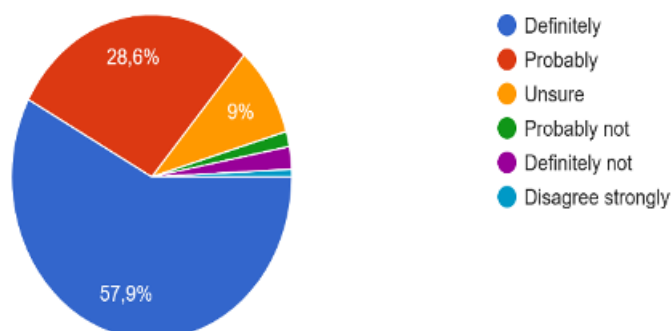
Table 11ab. 43% of students think they definitively have someone who can help them in case of emergency, 24. 8% think families can help them, 31.7% are unsure about this help, and 0.5 affirmed that this is not possible.

Mendon se tek pjesa më e madhe e njerëzve duhet patur besim, apo duhet përherë me qenë i rezervuar?
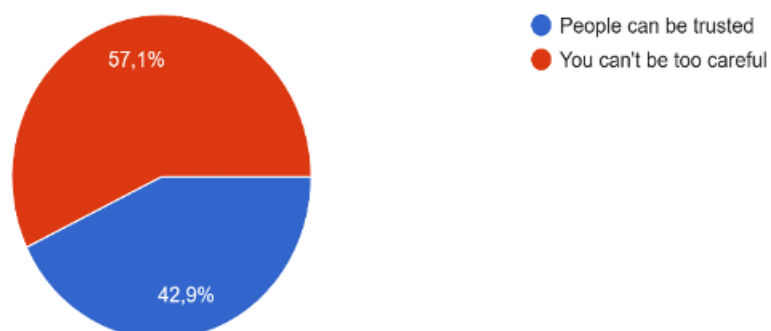461 risposte

- njerëzit mund të besohen
- duhet me qenë i/e kujdeshëm/me

95,9%

12

2.6. Would you say that most people at your University can be trusted or that you cannot be too careful in dealing with people?
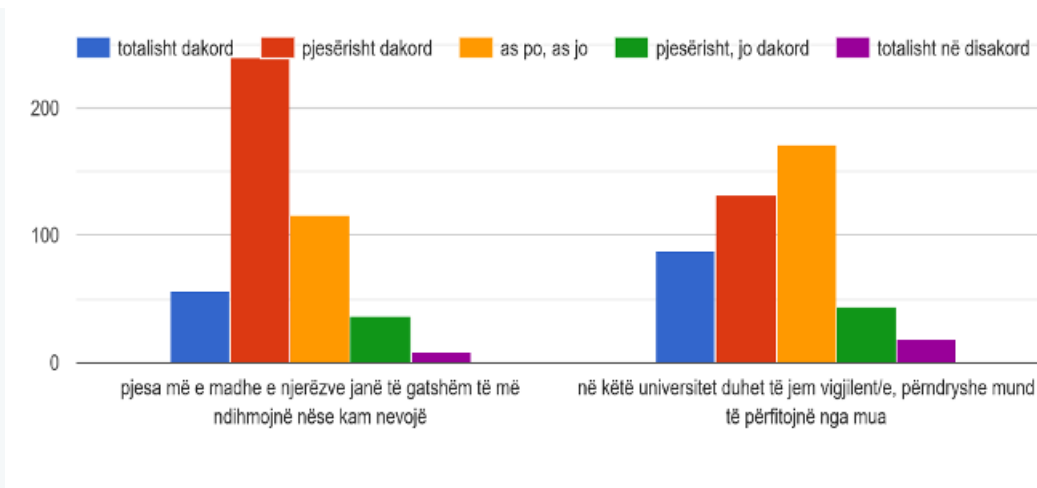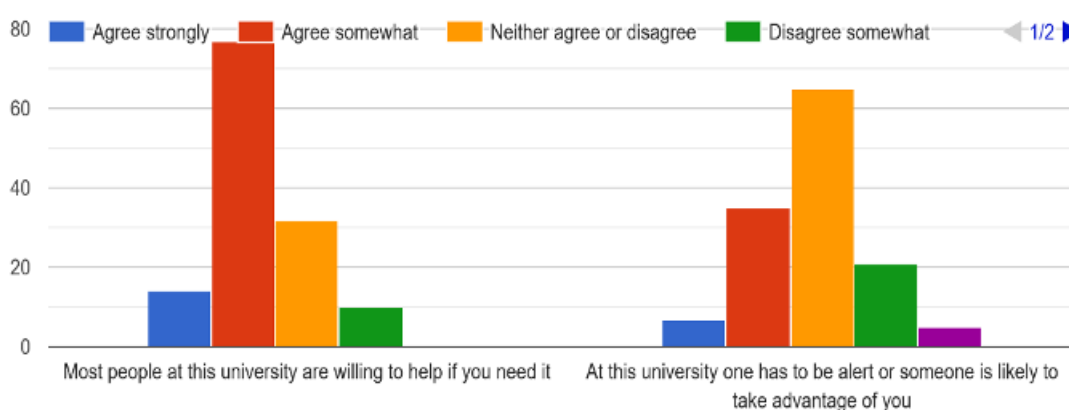133 risposte

- People can be trusted
- You can't be too careful

57,1%

42,9%

Table 12ab. 86.4% of students think they should be careful in front of people, only 13.6% of them think people could be trusted.

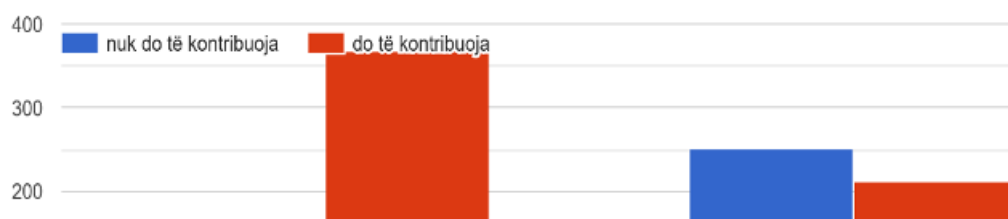### Në përgjithësi, je dakord apo jo me pohimet e mëposhtme

2.7. In general, do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Table 13ab. 13% of the students strongly agree that people at university can help them in case of need, 55% of them agree with this statement. 23.5% are neutral, and just 8.5 don't agree with the statement.
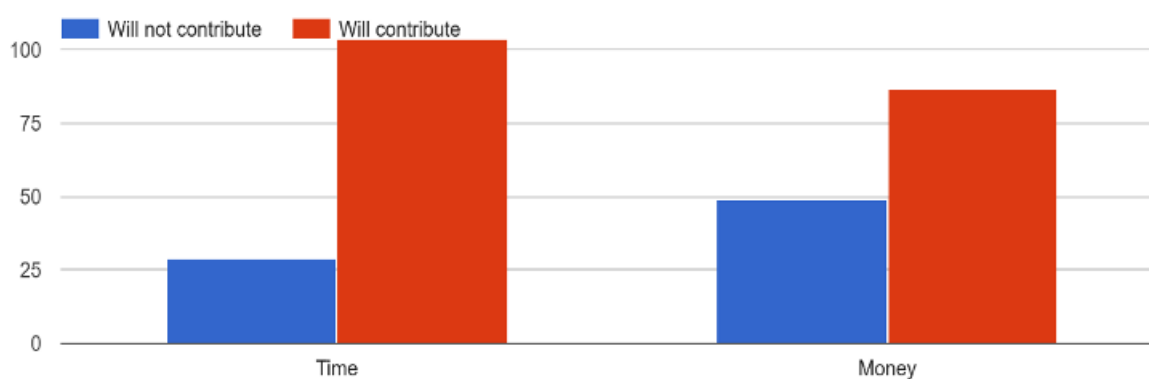
14

2.8. If a community project does not directly benefit you but has benefits for many others in the neighborhood, would you contribute time or money to the project?

Table 14[ab]. They affirm that if there is a community project, who they are not directly beneficiaries, they still will contribute to time (79.1%) and money (48.8%).

Në vitin e fundit, ti ose familja jote, a keni marrë pjesë në aktivitete të përbashkëta ose në punë në favor të komunitetit, lagjes, etj?

461 risposte
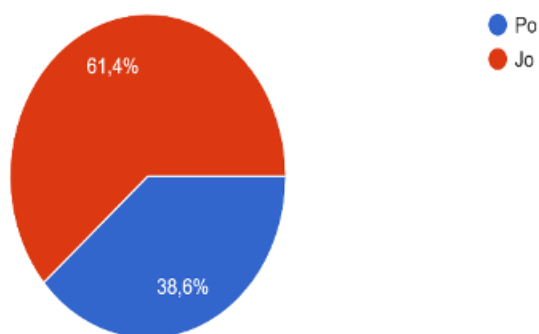
15

2.12. In the past 12 months, did you or any one in your household participate in any communal activities, in which people came together to do some work for the benefit of the community?
133 risposte
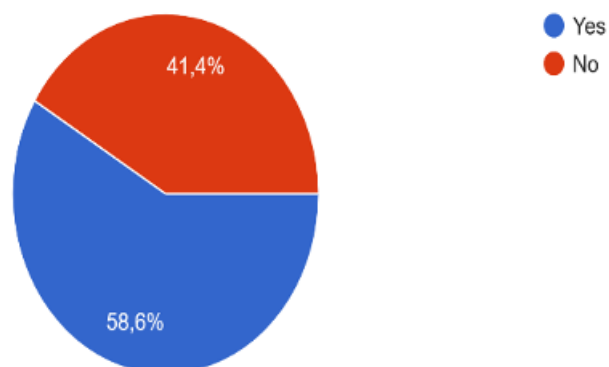
Table 15. in support of the previous question, in the last year only 43.5 of them participated in common projects in favour of the community.

Nëse do të kishte në lagje një problem me furnizimin me ujë, mendon se banorët do të bashkëpunonin mes tyre për ta zgjidhur?
461 risposte

16
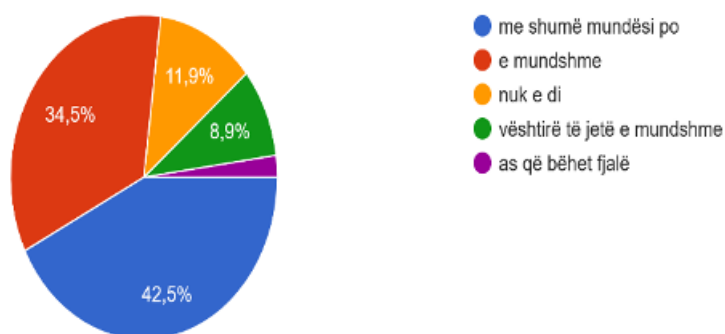
2.13. If there was a water supply problem in this community. How likely is it that people will cooperate to try to solve the problem?
133 risposte

52,6%

30,1%

Somewhat unlikely
Very unlikely

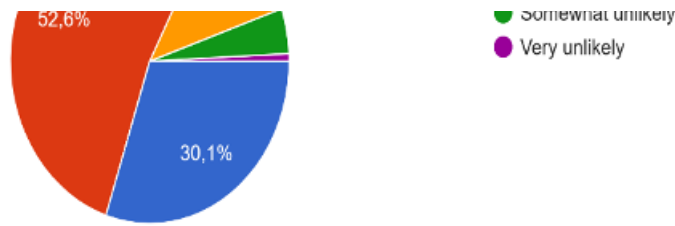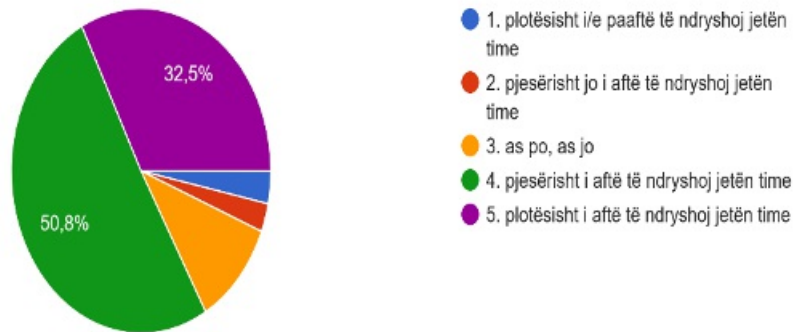**Table 16**[ab]**.** Regarding to cooperation between people at their community (ex. water supply), 39.3% agree they cooperate, 38% probably and 11.2% don't know.

Mendon se ke aftësinë të marrësh vendime të rëndësishme për jetën tënde? Vlerëso veten nga 1(minimalja) në 5 (maksimalja)

461 risposte

32,5%

50,8%

- 1. plotësisht i/e paaftë të ndryshoj jetën time
- 2. pjesërisht jo i aftë të ndryshoj jetën time
- 3. as po, as jo
- 4. pjesërisht i aftë të ndryshoj jetën time
- 5. plotësisht i aftë të ndryshoj jetën time

17

2.14. Do you feel that you have the power to make important decisions that change the course of your life?

133 risposte

55,6%

6%

13,5%

21,8%

- Totally unable to change life
- Mostly unable to change life
- Neither able nor unable
- Mostly able to change life
- Totally able to change life
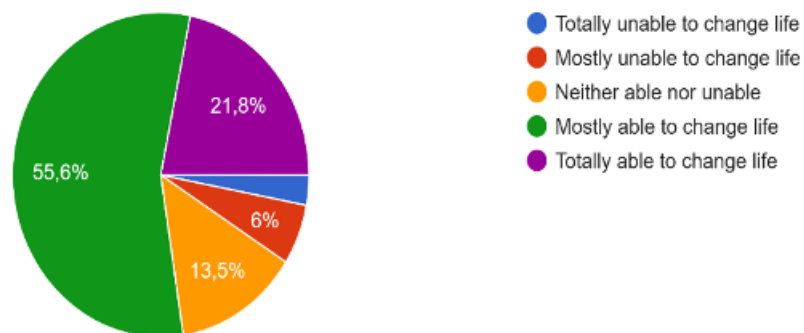
Table 17[ab]**.** Referring to the abilities to make personal decisions, students think that 50.8% of them are partially able to change their lives, 29.5% are fully able to change their lives, 13.5% neither yes nor no to changing their lives, and 6% think they are partially unable to change their lives.

18

Në përgjithësi, shëndeti yt është:
461 risposte

- i shkëlqyer
- shumë i mirë
- i mirë
- çka
- delikat

3.1. In general, would you say your health is:
133 risposte

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

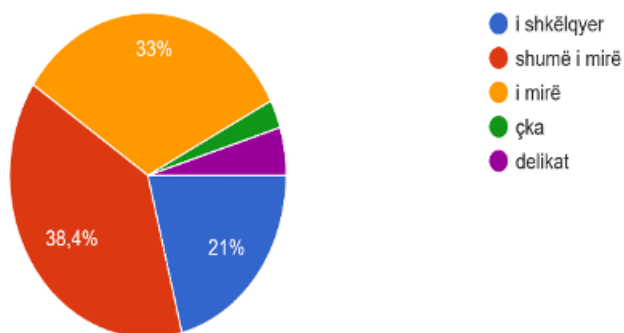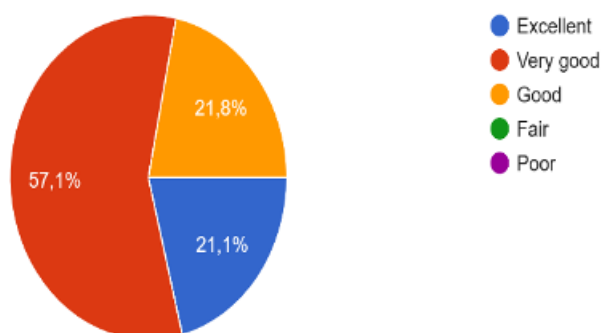**Table 18^ab.** 42.2% of students have very good health, 30.3% have good health, 21% have health issues related to schooling, and 6.5% have various health issues.

Shëndeti yt aktualisht të pengon në aktivitete si psh:

xhiro me bicikletë, të spostoj një tryezë, të pastroj shtëpinë ■ të ngjis shkallët

19

3.2. The following items are about activities you might do during a typical day. Does your health now limit you in these activities? If so, how much?
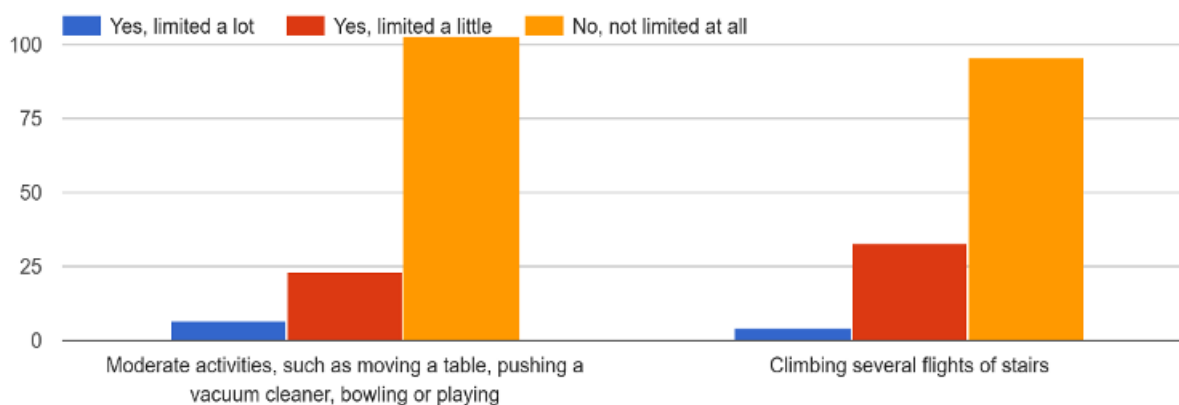
Table 19ab. Following the previous question few students are limited from health issues 200/594 (33.3%), 17.7% partially are limited in daily activities, and 50% are not limited at all.
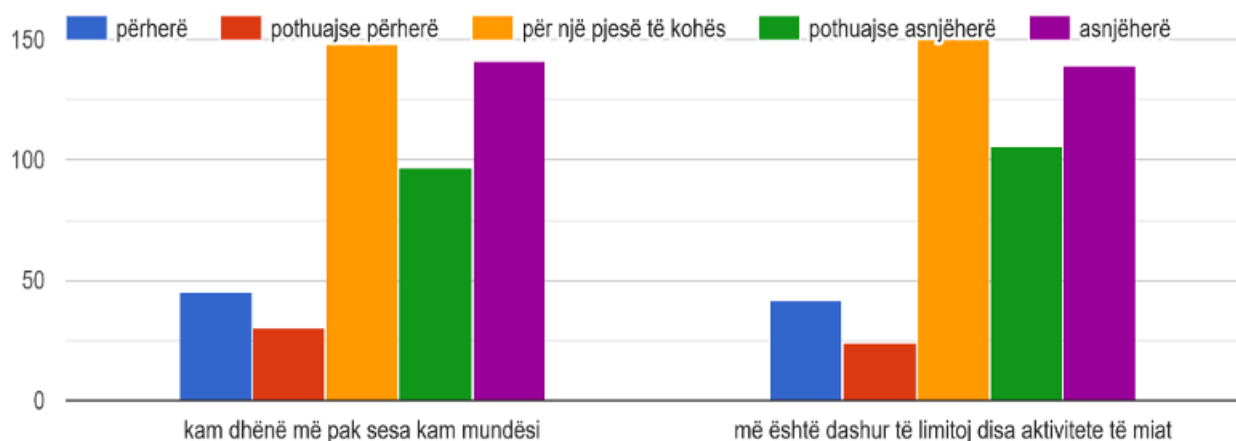
20

3.3. During the past 4 weeks, have you had any of the following problems with your work or other regular daily activities because of your physical health?
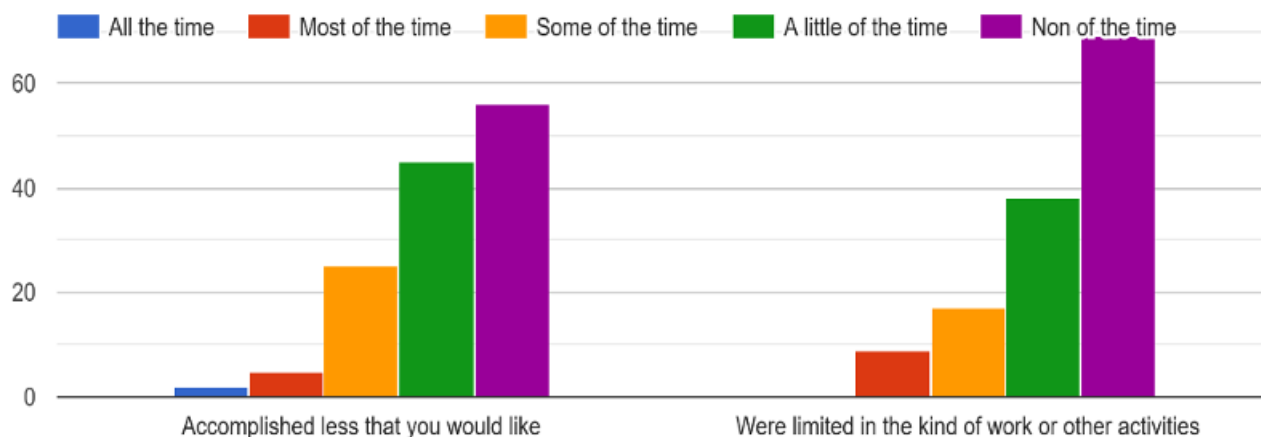
Table 20ᵃᵇ. Most of them never had problems at work related to physical health (34.5%), few of them had a little bit of problems (23.5%), some of them had problems some of the time (29.4%), and just 20.6% had physical health problems all the time.

Në 4 javët e fundit, për shkak të gjendjes emocionale ke patur probleme në punë e në jetën e përditshme dhe...

21

3.4. During the past 4 weeks, have you had any of the following problems with your work or other regular daily activities because of any emotional problems (such as feeling depressed or anxious)?

Table 21[ab]. 3.5% in the last month have had problems at work all the time and accomplished less than they would like, following emotional issues, 11% had problems most of t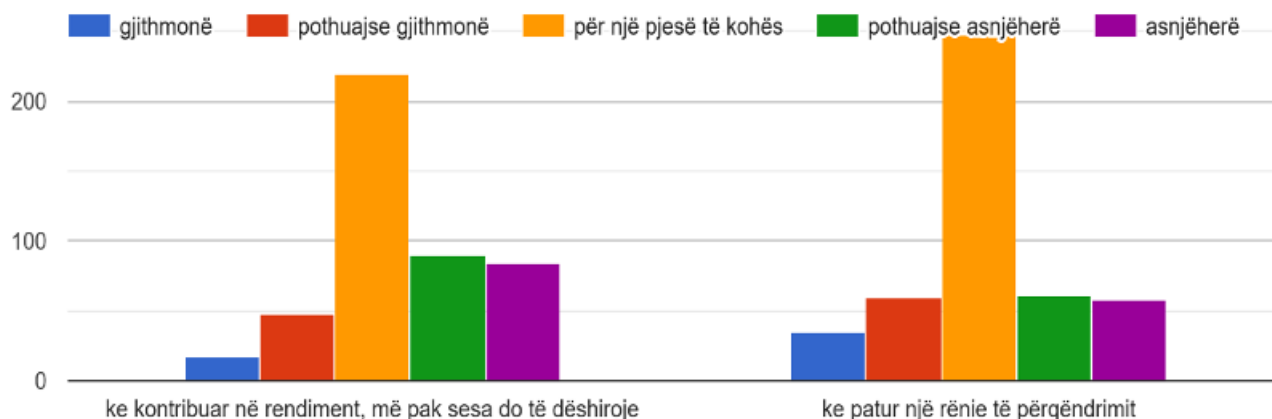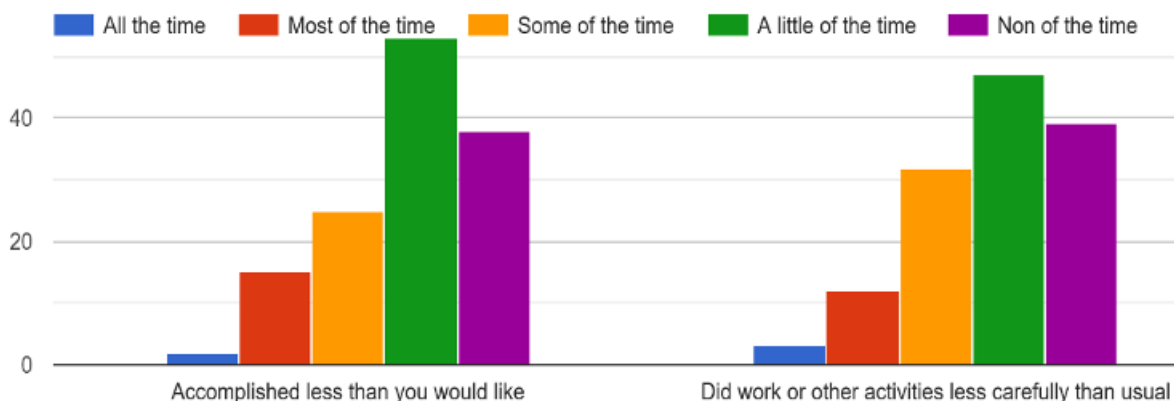he time, 58.3% accomplished what they desired, 23.9% accomplished with no influence from emotional problems, and 20.7% accomplished their duties without interference from emotional problems such as anxiety or depression. In the last month 6.4% had a decrease all the time in focus or attention, 11.9% had a decrease most of the time, 46.8% did the work less carefully than usual in the last month, 18.5% had a decrease a little bit of the time, 16.5% had no loss of attention in the last month because of emotional problems.

Në 4 javët e fundit, në çfarë mase, një dhimbje fizike të ka penguar në jetën e përditshme?

461 risposte

- aspak
- shumë pak
- pakëz
- së tepërmi
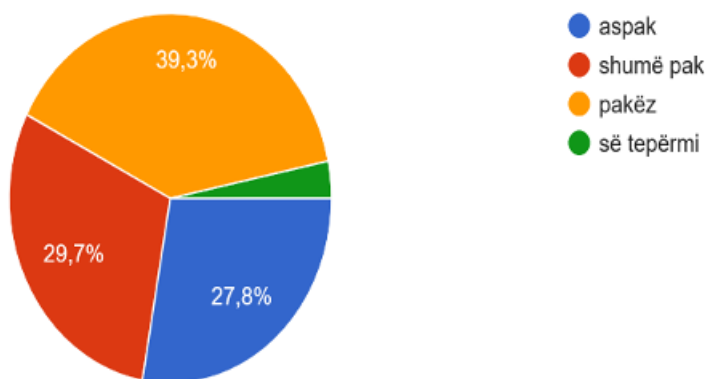
22

3.5. During the past 4 weeks, how much did pain interfere with your normal work (including both work outside the home and housework)?

133 risposte

- Not at all
- A little bit
- Moderately
- Quite a bit
- Extremely
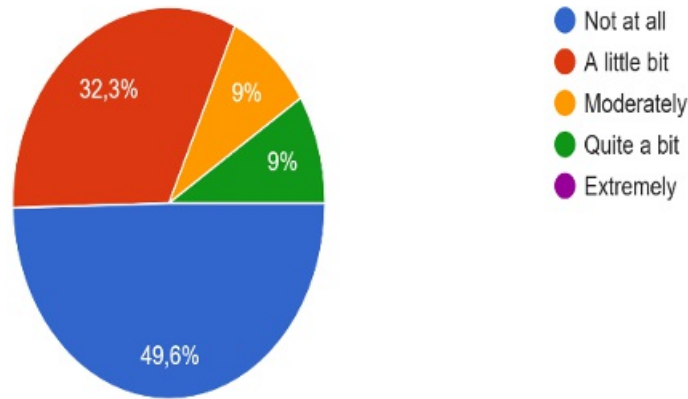
Table 22ab. 31.9% of the respondents expressed that they have no pain at all, 30.4% feel a little physical pain, 29.6% feel very little physical pain, 8.1% feel too much physical pain, and 0% feel a lot of pain.

Në 4 javët e fundit je ndjerë:
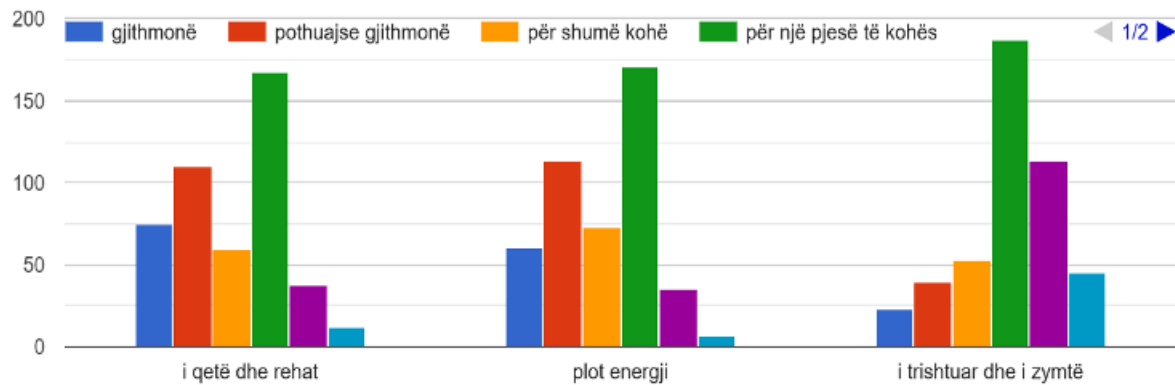
23

3.6. These questions are about how you feel and how things have been with you during the past 4 weeks. For each question, please give the one ans...g. How much of the time during the past 4 weeks?
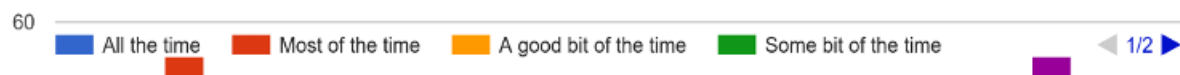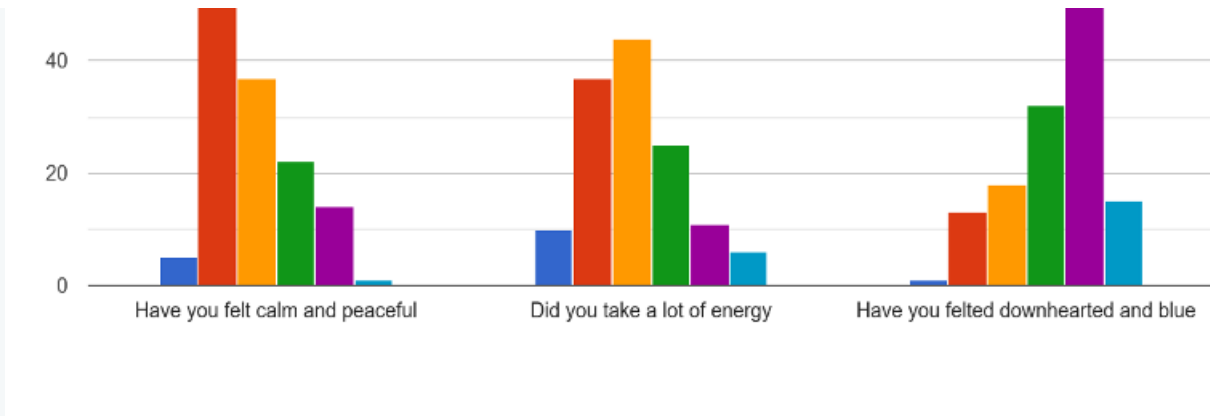
Table 23ab. 13.13% have felt calm and peaceful in the last month all the time, 27% most of the time, 16.4% for a good bit of the time, 31.8% for some bit of the time, 9% almost never and 2% never. Regarding if they took a lot of energy in the last month, 11.9% answered all the time, 25.5% most of the time, 19.5% a good bit of the time, 32.9% some bit of the time, 7.5% almost never, and 2% never. If they felt downhearted or blue in the last month, the respondents answered all the time in 4% of the cases, most of the time (8.7%), a good bit of the time (11.9%), some bit of the time (36.8%), almost never (28.6%), and never (10%).

Në 4 javët e fundit a kanë ndërhyrë shëndeti fizik dhe gjendja emocionale në jetën tënde të përditshme me familjen, punën dhe shoqërinë
461 risposte

- gjithmonë
- pothuajse gjithmonë
- për shumë kohë
- për një pjesë të kohës
- pothuajse asnjëherë
- asnjëherë
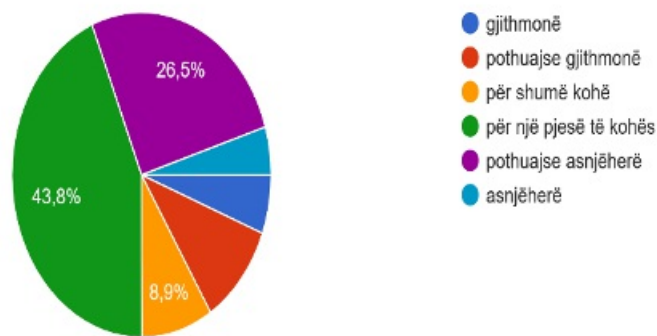
3.7. During the past 4 weeks, how much of the time has your physical health or emotional problems interfered with your social activities (like visiting with friends, relatives, etc.)?
133 risposte

- All the time
- Most of the time
- A good bit of the time
- Some bit of the time
- A little bit of the time
- Non of the time
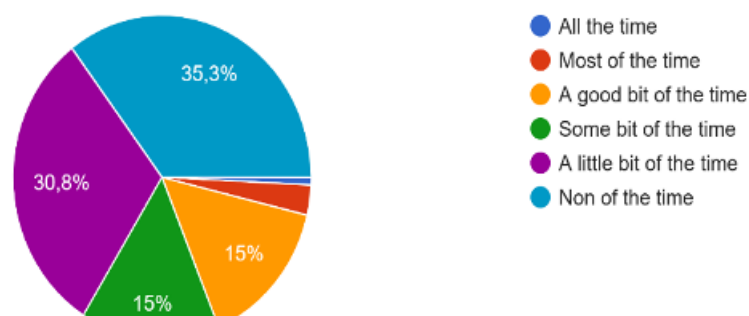
Table 24^{ab}. During last 4 weeks, the students answered regarding the interference of emotional problems or physical health with their social activities, 36.7% for some time, 26.8% almost nowhere, 9.5% most of the time, 27% are divided between answers like nowhere and almost always.

A pi duhan?
461 risposte

- Po
- Me raste
- Jo

83,3%
10%
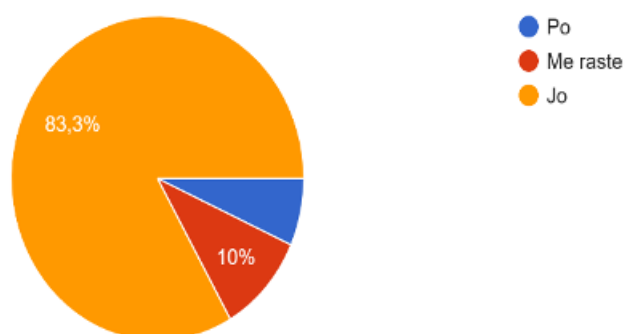
6.1. Do you smoke?
131 risposte

- Yes
- Yes, occasionally
- No

77,9%
9,9%
12,2%
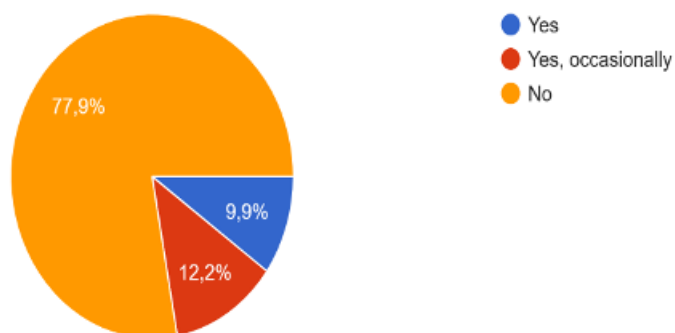
Table 25^{ab}. 81.6% of the respondents stated that they do not smoke, 10.3% consume tobacco occasionally, while 8.1% of them are smokers.

Sa cigare pi në ditë?
461 risposte

- Nuk pi
- Më pak se 20

25

12,6%

Më shumë se 20

86,3%

26
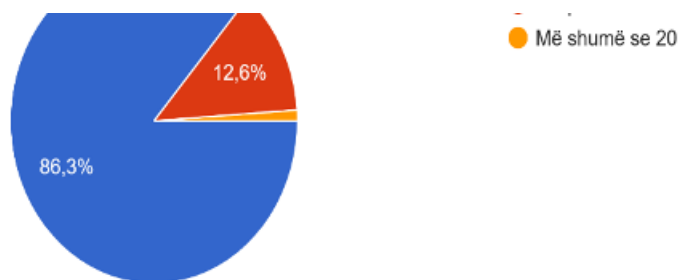
6.2. How many cigarettes do you usually smoke on average each day?

121 risposte

● Does not smoke cigarettes
● Fewer than 20
● 20 or more

19,8%

79,3%
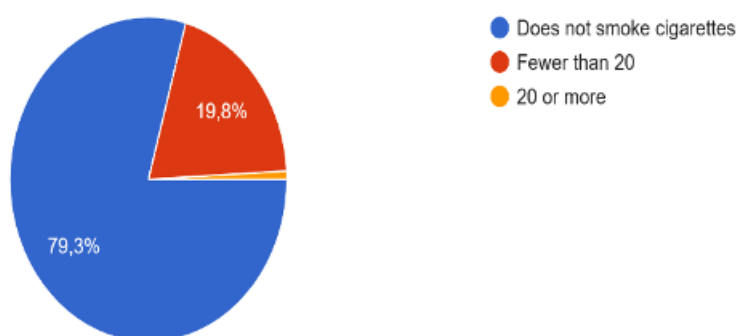
Table 26[ab]. 84.1% of our sample do not smoke cigarettes in a day, 13.5% smoke fewer than 20 cigarettes a day, and 2.4% smoke more than 20 cigarettes a day.

Në krahasim me dy vite më parë, a e ke reduktuar pirjen e duhanit?

461 risposte

● Po
● Jo
● Të thashë, që s'kam pirë

81,6%

8,2%

27
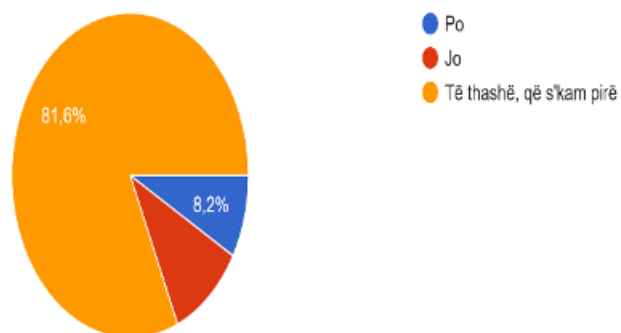
6.3. Compared with two years ago would you say you now have reduced smoking?

83 risposte
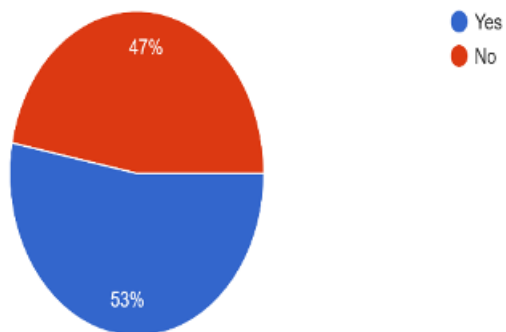
Table 27[ab]. 68.6% say they have never smoked, 16.6% have not reduced tobacco consumption, and 14.8% are reducing tobacco consumption.

Ke pirë gjithmonë duhan?
461 risposte

- Po, çdo ditë
- Me raste
- Jo

86,1%
8,9%
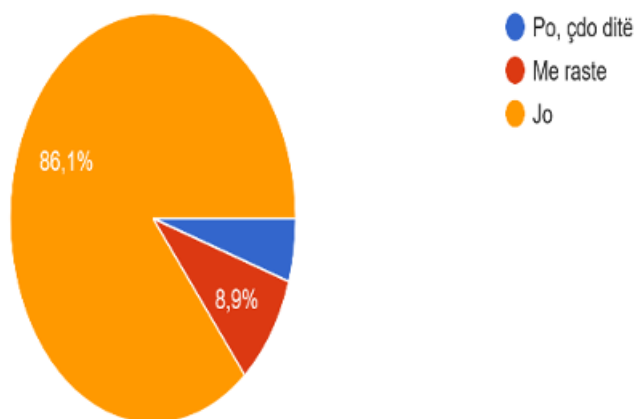
6.4. Have you ever smoked?
125 risposte

- Yes, daily
- Yes, occasionally
- No

49,6%
38,4%
12%

28
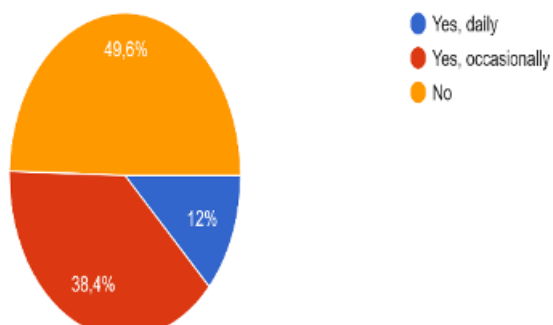
Table 28[ab]. 84.1% of the sample affirm that they have not always smoked tobacco, 15.5% of them have smoked tobacco occasionally, and 0.4% smoke tobacco every day.

Sa kohë ka kaluar që e ke lënë duhanin?
438 risposte

- më pak se dy vjet
- mbi dy vjet
- Të thashë më lart, që nuk e kam nisur ndonjëherë

90,9%

8%

29

6.5. How long ago did you stop smoking?
41 risposte

- Less than 2 years ago
- 2 yeas ago or more

39%

61%
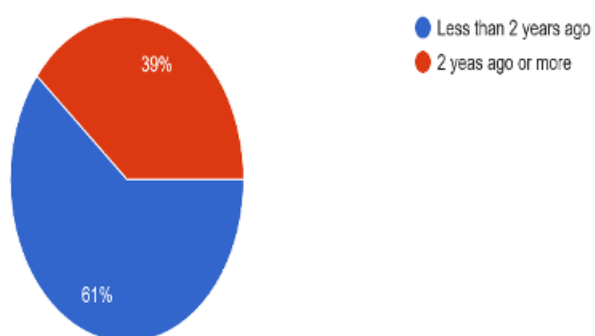
Table 29[ab]. 82.2% say they have never started smoking anywhere, 12.5% have spent less than two years avoiding tobacco, while 5.3% have avoided tobacco for over two years.

A pi alkool?

461 risposte

- asnjëherë
- 1 herë në muaj
- 2-4 herë në muaj
- 2-3 në javë
- mbi 3 herë në javë

26,2%

8,5%

63,1%
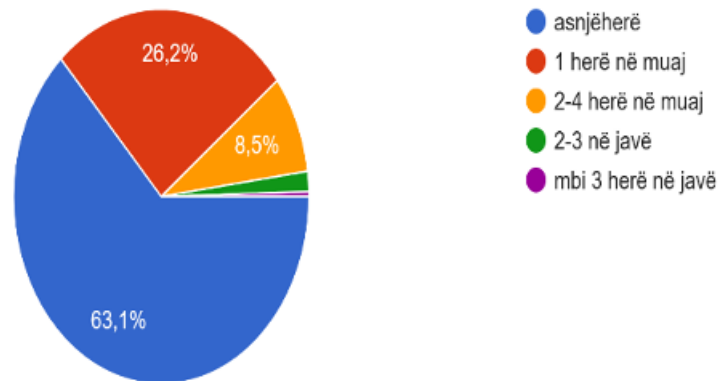
30

7.1. How often do you drink alcohol?
132 risposte

- Never
- Monthly or less
- 2-4 times a month
- 2-3 times a week
- 4 or more times a week

31,8%

38,6%

22,7%
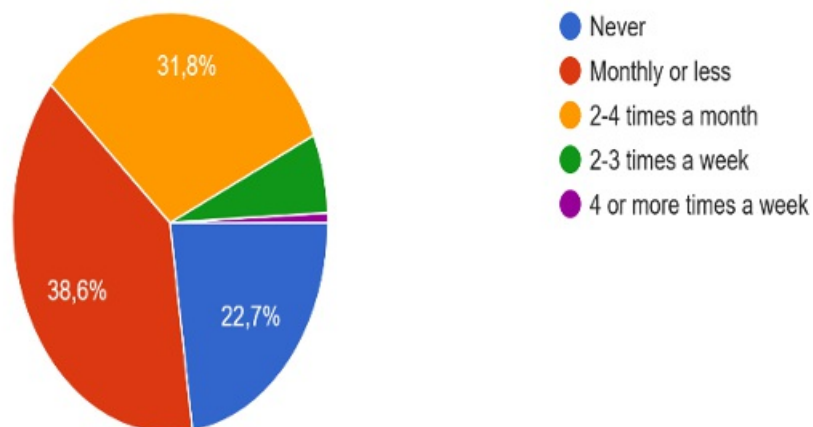
Table 30ab. 53.8% of the sample never drink alcohol, 28.6% drink alcohol once a month, while 17.6% drink alcohol two to four times a month.

Kur pi, sa pije alkoolike pi?
461 risposte

- 1-2
- 3-4
- 5-6
- 7-9
- mbi 9
- Të thashë pra, që nuk pi

62%

28,9%

31

7.2. How many standard drinks containing alcohol do you have on a typical day when drinking?

111 risposte

- ● 1 or 2
- ● 3 or 4
- ● 5 or 6
- ● 7 to 9
- ● 10 or more

16,2%

82%
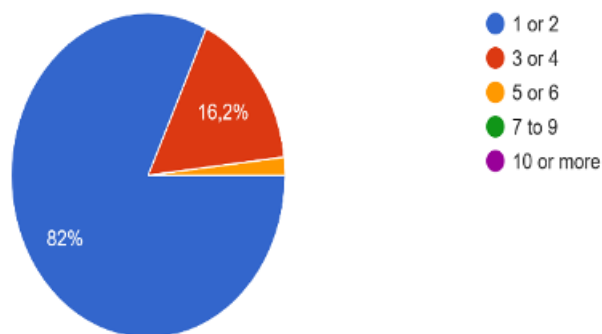
Table 31ab. 49.9% have stated that they do not drink at all, 38.4% of the sample said they drink one to two alcoholic beverages, while 3% drink three to four alcoholic beverages.

Sa herë të rastis të konsumosh më shumë se 5 pije alkoolike në një herë të vetme

461 risposte

- ● asnjëherë
- ● më pak se 1 herë në muaj
- ● 1 herë në muaj
- ● 1 herë në javë
- ● pothuajse përditë

8,9%

86,8%

32
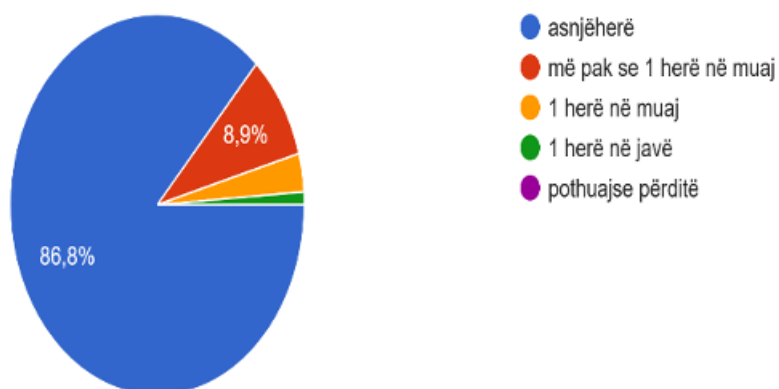
7.3. How often do you have six or more drinks on one occasion?

125 risposte
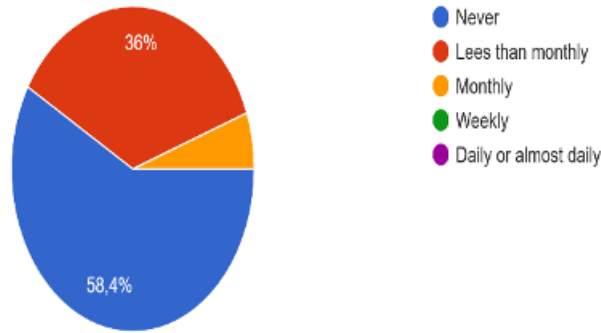
Table 32^{ab}. 80% of the sample admitted that they never consume five drinks in a single occasion, 14% do so less than once a month, and 6% do so once a week.

Imagjino një renditje nga 1 në 10 për statusin social të shqiptarëve. Ku do e vendosje veten?

461 risposte
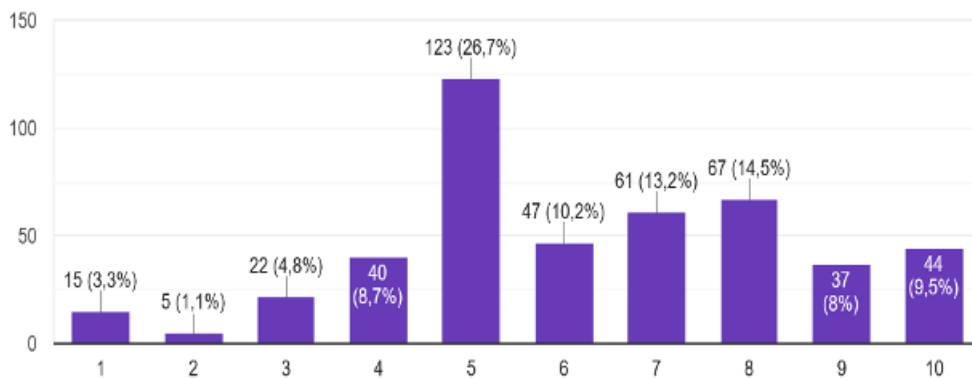
9. Think of a ladder with 10 steps. At step 10, are people who are the best off – those who have the most money, the most education, and the most resp...b. Where would you place yourself on this ladder?

133 risposte
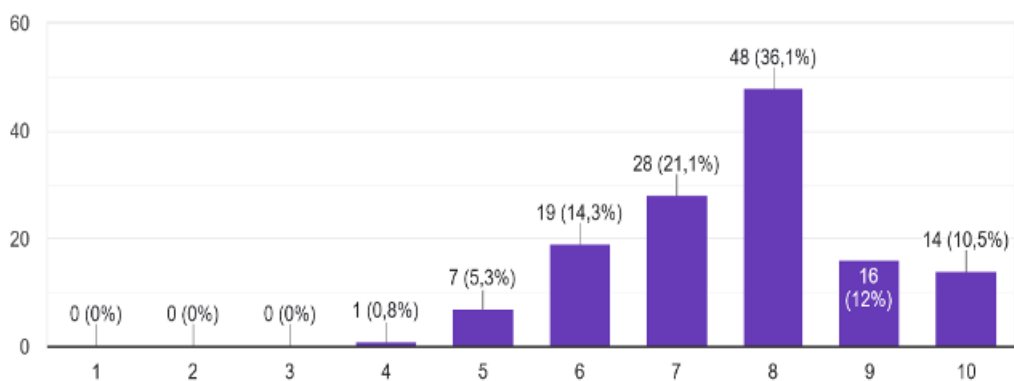
Table 33^{ab}. Regarding the social status of Albanians, considering education, financially gain, etc., in a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is the minimum and 10 the maximum, they rated Albanians 3.3% at level 1, 1.1% at level 2, 4.8% at level 3, 9.5% at level 4, 32% at level 5, 24.5% at level 6, 44.3% at level 7, 50.6% at level 8, 20% at level 9, and 20% at level 10.

Discussion

The study encompassed a diverse pool of participants hailing from prominent academic institutions in Tirana, such as the University of Tirana, LOGOS University College, Wisdom University College, and other local universities. An overwhelming majority, specifically 99.6% of these individuals, displayed a keen willingness to engage in the study, showcasing a strong interest and commitment to the research objectives. The main result of this study highlighted that a significant proportion of students experienced health issues specifically related to schooling, such as stress, fatigue, impacting their well-being. This outcome is supported by less than half of students (42.2%) of students rated their health as very good, indicating that a relevant part, experience low values of good health status. This finding is supported also by 33.3% of students who experience limitations in daily activities due to health issues. However, a significant majority, comprising 50% of respondents, do not experience any limitations at all, suggesting a relatively good overall health status, an outcome correlated probably also with their age group of young adults. Furthermore, 29.4% reported facing problems related to physical health intermittently, suggesting instabilities in their health status impacting work. 34.5%, reported never encountering problems at work related to physical health, indicating a relatively smooth experience in this regard. Moreover, the university lifestyle impact led to emotional issues, related with decreased productivity and attention difficulties. The findings revealed how students' emotions can change over time, showing moments of calmness, energy, and especially sadness. That's why we say mental health can be complicated, emphasizing the need to support students' emotional well-being in schools.

The participants in the study spanned a wide age range, from 18 to 46 years old. Particularly, most participants fell within the younger age brackets, with a significant portion aged 18, 19, and 20 years old. Specifically, 52% of the participants were 18 years old, 29% were 19 years old, and 12% were 20 years old, indicating a notable concentration of younger individuals within the participant demographics. It is indicated that 83% of the participants identified as female, while 17% identified as male. Findings illustrate a detailed picture of the participants' demographics, their parents' employment situations, and educational achievements. The distribution across fields of study among participants reveals a strong presence in Business and Economics, perhaps reflecting a significant interest or career orientation in these areas. The sizable representation in Medicine and Psychology shows an interestingly focus on healthcare and psychological sciences. Additionally, the diversity seen in Social Sciences and other fields underscores a broad range of academic interests among the participants. Moreover, employment status of participants' parents indicates a predominant trend of full-time employment, particularly among fathers. However, there's also a relevant presence of part-time work and active job seekers, suggesting a dynamic job market environment. The educational backgrounds of parents showcase a mix of

higher education levels, with a considerable percentage holding first-level higher education degrees, and probably educational diversity among parents influences the participants' own educational paths and career aspirations. Furthermore, a relevant number of students, approximately 54.21%, chose to reside with their parents, meanwhile 41% of students opt for independent living arrangements through renting accommodations. This outcome can illustrate the currently trend of housing in Tirana, who offer little opportunity from university campus, and students are forced to stay at parent's home to afford expenses. Even so, a considerable number opt for renting houses, with consequences letting less time for studying, and more time in students' jobs, to afford rent. This tendency is reflected also from financial perceptions, where there's a small percentage of students, 33.35%, that expressed confidence in their ability to cover monthly expenses. Therefore, uncertainty and financial strain could be serious factors for increasing mental health issues on students. Moreover, lifestyle habits exposure was measured exploring various dimensions within respondents' peer groups, including religious, age-related, sporting, educational, and political aspects. Despite being situated in a secular context with multiple religions, 207 out of 594 respondents shared identical religious beliefs within their peer circles. Interestingly, these peer groups were marked by diversity, with 61.1% comprising individuals from diverse backgrounds and 61.4% representing varied age groups. Moreover, a strong affinity for sports was evident, with 66.32% following different sports teams.

Even more, a significant willingness was found among respondents to contribute to community projects, even if they are not direct beneficiaries. An impressive 79.1% expressed readiness to dedicate their time to such activities, indicating a significant commitment to community involvement and service. Additionally, 48.8% stated they would contribute financially, highlighting a substantial willingness to support projects that benefit the broader community, even when they may not directly benefit personally. These findings underscore a sense of social responsibility and altruism among the surveyed individuals towards collective initiatives aimed at improving their communities. In contrast to the high willingness expressed to contribute to community projects, the actual participation rate in such endeavours over the past year was lower. Only 43.5% of respondents reported involvement in common projects that benefited the community, that shows a gap between intention and action, suggesting that while many individuals express a desire to contribute, a smaller proportion actively engage in community-focused initiatives.

When it comes to their abilities to make personal decisions and enact change in their lives, students' perceptions vary, but still there is a significant portion, 50.8%, that feels partially capable of effecting change and making decisions. On the other hand, a smaller but still significant 20.6% indicated experiencing physical health problems consistently throughout their work activities suggesting different degrees of impact physical health could have on youth. On a positive note, 58.3% were able to accomplish what they desired at work, despite emotional challenges. Nearly half of the respondents (46.8%) admitted to working less carefully than usual in the last month, possibly due to emotional challenges, 36.7% indicated that emotional problems interfered with their social activities some of the time. These findings suggest minor discomfort for different groups and indicate that youth could experience some physical and emotional pain in the daily life, although does not interfere into their usual tasks. No smoking is the trend among Albanian students, there is quite a majority of 81.6% that doesn't smoke, indicating a cultural non-smoking behaviour. But this outcome could be biased because most of the participants, as we exposed before, were women, a clear majority of 68.6%, who never smoked. On the other hand,

alcohol habit is still significant about the majority (53.8%) whose neve consumed alcohol, and on moderate basis, 38.4% reported moderate alcohol consumption. As we can observe, self-esteem of Albanian students on Albanian social status indicates a positive point of view on the proper social status with responses over the media in almost 70.4% of the sample.

To sum up, the discussion indeed highlights various mental health challenges experienced by students, including stress, fatigue, emotional issues impacting work performance, and fluctuating emotional states such as feelings of calmness, energy levels, and sadness or low mood. These findings are consistent with research indicating high prevalence rates of anxiety and depression symptoms among college and university students (Ibrahim et al., 2013; Auerbach et al., 2016). While it does not explicitly mention clinical diagnoses of anxiety and depression, it does provide evidence of mental health issues among students, supporting the hypothesis that mental health challenges could negatively affect academic performance and lifestyle. Moreover, previous research has shown that mental health challenges during college years can indeed have lasting effects on academic performance and may contribute to long-term adverse outcomes such as decreased earnings and poorer health outcomes in later adulthood (Eisenberg et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2018). While in our study, there is evidence of the negative effects of mental health difficulties on academic performance and lifestyle, it does not fully support the hypothesis regarding long-term adverse outcomes in later adulthood.

Strength and Limitations

There are some limits in this investigation, regarding principally the lack of standardized questionnaires. Therefore, researchers tried to fill this gap using the back translation for every questionnaire. Moreover, the whole battery was experimented in a pilot sample. After that, it was ready to be used for participants. Another limit of the study is its generalizability. It is a study who concerns many universities, but that do not represent all universities in Albania, but mostly from Tirana area. That said, regarding advantages, it is an investigation with a hot topic, and very useful for further studies concerning the correlation between university students and mental health issues, unfortunately, increasing year after year. Hence, several universities in European Union and world worldwide are trying to fulfil these necessities with offering different services for students, such as, psychological centres at university, offering rent flats with affordable rates, part time job within university for students, discount for bus tickets, cinemas and free time, sports centres and so more. This practice is recommended Albanian universities should follow. Regarding exposure measurement, it doesn't quantify the impact on mental well-being. While the study provides insights into the nature of stressors, it does not fully evaluate their impact on students' mental well-being and academic performance as hypothesized. Research has shown that exposure to stressors such as financial difficulties and lack of social support can indeed impact mental well-being and academic outcomes among students (Eisenberg et al., 2009; Storrie et al., 2010), therefore, further investigation is needed to assess the specific effects within this context. Moreover, the study's cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships or track longitudinal changes over time. Longitudinal studies or mixed-methods approaches could provide deeper insights into the dynamics and trends observed in this study. Despite these limitations, the study's strengths in data comprehensiveness, participant engagement, and thematic relevance contribute significantly to the

knowledge base and offer valuable directions for further research and practical interventions in relevant domains. Strengths of this study include its extensive and diverse participant pool, drawn from prominent academic institutions in Tirana. The high participation rate of 99.6% reflects a strong engagement and commitment among participants, ensuring a robust dataset for analysis. The study's focus on a wide age range, particularly the significant representation of younger individuals, provides a comprehensive understanding of various age groups' perspectives and experiences. Additionally, the study's exploration of demographics, educational backgrounds, family contexts, and social engagement offers a whole view of participants' lives, allowing for complete interpretations and insights into complex interrelationships. Overall, the study's strengths lie in its thoroughness, diversity of perspectives, and relevance to key themes in education, social dynamics, and well-being among young adults in Tirana.

Conclusions

Experiencing university life could be an exciting journey, but it also presents relevant challenges to students' mental health. Among the academic rigors, social pressures, and newfound independence, many students face with issues like depression, anxiety, and overwhelming stress. This paper tried to highlight these psychological issues and at the same time tried to prioritize mental health resources and support services. Findings highlight the prevalence of mental health problematics among students, such as stress, fatigue, and emotional issues, findings that are consistent with existing research that indicates high rates of anxiety and depression symptoms in college and university students. By raising a culture of openness and destigmatizing seeking help, Albanian universities can empower students to prioritize their mental well-being. Overall, the study's comprehensive exploration of demographics, interests, familial contexts, and social engagement provides valuable insights into the characteristics and perspectives of participants from prominent academic institutions in Tirana. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the study's themes and findings, offering implications for educational, social, and policy interventions aimed at supporting diverse student populations.

Statements and Declarations

Ethics statement

The present study received ethical approval by the Ethics Committee of Ministry of Education of Albania.

Author contributions

EB and JM conceived the idea of the study. EB and LM designed the study. JM, LM, SH, DA collected data at different universities. JM and EB worked on the tables and comments, SH contributed with the Ethical Approval, EK conducted the analyses and contributed on the database. JN wrote the first draft with the help of EK. All authors significantly participated in interpreting the results, revising the manuscript, and approved its final version.

Acknowledgments

Funding

Conflict of interests

There are no conflicts of interest.

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