

## Introduction & Abstract

College courses require extensive hours of studying outside of the classroom which can cause extremely high levels of stress in college students. Most college students have a job(s) and other commitments that compete for their time. Due to these busy schedules, there is little time for activities that decrease stress levels, like self-care (Martin, 2021). Self-care is especially important when one is going through a stressful and busy time, but that is when people usually make less time for it (Martin, 2021). There are still people who do not know what self-care is and there are many who do not practice it routinely (Martin, 2021). This study examines the effects of self-care practices on stress levels in college students. In this study, students who were encouraged to implement self-care practices were compared to students who were not, and how their stress levels changed throughout the semester were measured. Survey responses were collected from students in different PAL courses, including BIO 121, MATH 12, MATH 29, and MATH 32. When compared to a control group, students in treatment groups who did not previously practice self care indicated experiencing decreased levels of stress.

## Methods

In this study, we defined any activity that sparked joy to be considered self-care, and what “sparked joy” was determined by each student individually. The study was conducted in six PAL sections at CSU Sacramento, specifically for Molecular Cell Biology (BIO 121), Algebra for College Students (Math 12), Precalculus (Math 29), and Calculus III (Math 32) PAL sections. To measure students' reduction in stress levels via self-care habits, we administered two initial surveys at the beginning of the semester. The first was to understand their starting stress levels, and the second to assess any self-care habits they already had. After the initial surveys were administered, the PAL facilitators conducted weekly 5-minute conversations about ways to implement self-care and their own personal self-care habits. Out of the six participating class sections, three acted as the control group (“Group B”), and the other three acted as the experimental group (“Group A”). The classes that acted as controls took both the initial and the weekly quizzes, however their PAL facilitator did not hold the weekly conversations about self-care. Importantly, the control groups were not encouraged nor discouraged to practice self-care, but were simply asked to complete the survey. In the last week of our study, students took a final survey which was made up of the exact same questions as the initial survey.

## Results

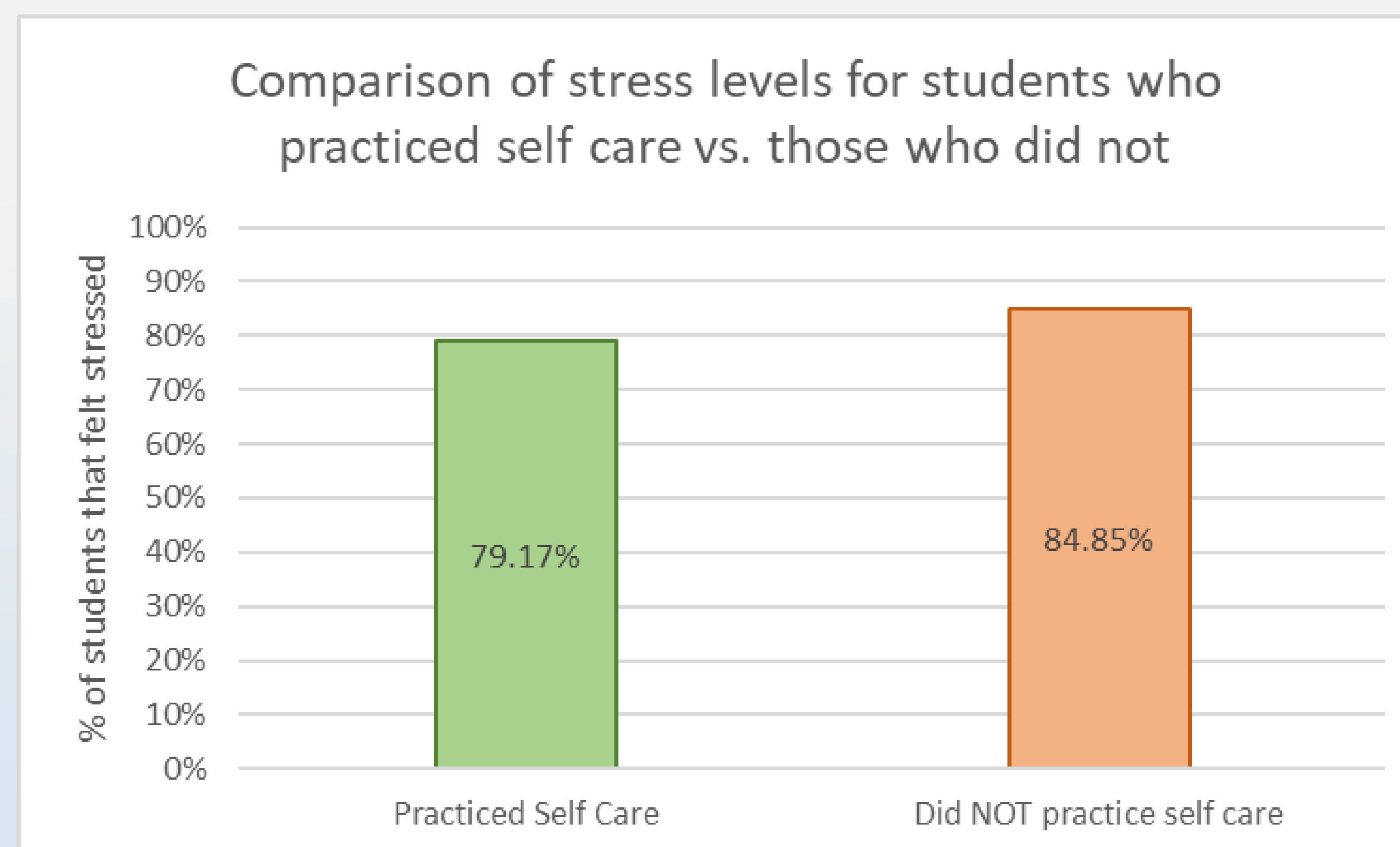


Figure 1. Bar graph showing the comparison of stress levels for students who practiced self care vs. those who did not. Of the students who practiced self care (n=96), 79.17% felt stressed. Of the students who did not practice self care (n=33), 84.85% felt stressed. (Students that felt “fairly stressed” to “very stressed” were counted as students who felt “stressed”)

## References

- Altinyelken, H. K., Hoek, L., & Jiang, L. (2019). Improving the psychosocial wellbeing of international students: The relevance of mindfulness. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 48(4), 524–536. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2019.1600189>
- Daly, B. D., & Gardner, R. A. (2020). A case study exploration into the benefits of teaching self-care to school psychology graduate students. *Contemporary School Psychology*, 26(1), 78–89. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-020-00328-3>
- Lynch, S., Gander, M.-L., Nahar, A., Kohls, N., & Walach, H. (2018). Mindfulness-based coping with University Life: A Randomized Wait-list controlled study. *SAGE Open*, 8(1), 215824401875837. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018758379>
- MARTIN, E. M. (2021). College Student Self-Care: A Journey, Not a Destination. *College Student Journal*, 55(2), 208–218.
- Ménard, A. D., Soucie, K., Jaffri, S., Houser, C., & Cavallo-Medved, D. (2021). Concordance (or discordance) between students and staff/faculty perceptions of student stress in science. *The Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.5206/cjsotlracea.2021.1.10810>

## Conclusion

Our results indicate when students practice self-care, they tend to feel slightly less stressed than those who do not practice self care. It is well documented that students experience elevated stress levels, so it is beneficial to see that self-care can aid with that. This information could provide insight to students and potentially influence what they decide to dedicate their time to. As with every study, this one has limitations. Notably, our data was collected over the course of nine weeks and our results come from a small sample of the student population of Sacramento State University (n=32,293). In addition, our surveys did not receive enough responses for us to conduct a reliable chi-squared test. This led to a lot of the data from our surveys going unused. It also altered our plan for data analysis and resulted in our inability to determine the significance of our data. Because of this change, we were unable to analyze differences between the control and experimental groups as planned. Additional testing should be done over a longer period of time and with a larger sample size for more accurate results. The larger sample size should also eliminate the problem we had in obtaining enough responses to conduct a chi-squared test. We would also recommend conducting this survey by asking less questions, administering only one type of survey (instead of 3), and ensuring that the questions are easy to understand by utilizing the opinions of a focus group. It is also possible that self-care itself did not affect students' stress levels, but that their stress levels were unusually high or low due to other factors. For example, if a student had multiple exams in one week and practiced self care, they might still feel stressed, even if the self-care did help reduce their stress levels. These potential effects can be explored further by conducting more research.

## Acknowledgements

Our deepest gratitude goes toward the faculty that supported us through our research project, especially Dr. Krauel who assisted us in the project and provided constructive feedback from start to finish.

We also would like to thank and acknowledge our students in these PAL courses for participating in our study and helping us develop this data through their active and consistent contributions.