



The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

High Altitudes, Healthy Attitudes: A Study on Wellbeing in Student Pilots

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Abstract

After the Covid pandemic, evidence has become available regarding a range of psychological issues that may affect professional pilots while performing their jobs. This has opened the question of the well-being of student pilots at the collegiate level. As future professionals entering the industry our objective is to evaluate the state of well-being of flight students.

Background

The subject of mental health in aviation is being studied in a new light, as pilots were discouraged to bring openness regarding this delicate subject. Fear of retaliatory practices and strict regulations do not provide a healthy environment for pilots to come forward with their personal issues or concerns.

As collegiate researchers, this raises the question of how early in a pilot's career do many of these emotional problems begin. The focus of this study is to explore if issues related to mental health are identified as early as when a student begins its collegiate endeavor, and if any trends are established with the purpose of minimizing potential emotional implications.

Introduction

The key factors impacting the mental health of university student pilots include the stress from academic and training demands, irregular sleep patterns, anxiety and performance, self-confidence influenced by the competitive environment, and the social support received from family and friends, which is crucial for mitigating feelings of isolation.

Additionally, direct feedback from students is essential for improving the training environment and reducing stress. Recent data shows that nearly 40% of adults in the U.S. reported symptoms of anxiety or depression in 2021, with a particularly strong impact on young adults. This context highlights the importance of addressing these factors to improve the mental well-being of student pilots.

Next Steps

Fall 2024

Spring 2025

-Administer a survey on a voluntary basis to student pilots from the University of Oklahoma and the Inter American University of Puerto Rico.	-Final Report -Share results with university students and faculty.
-Collect and analyze data.	-Present results at research conferences / forums.
-Propose potential remedies if needed.	-Develop guidelines on wellbeing and mental health for aviation students

Research Question

What are the key factors impacting the mental health of university student pilots?

Literature Review

Mental Health: Since college is a crucial developmental time for young adults, it is not surprising that there has been increased attention to mental health in the college-age population in research and outreach. For example, Abdu-Glass et al. (n.d.) found that half of the college students had a psychiatric disorder (e.g., depression, social anxiety, distress, eating disorders) in 2021, 73% of students experienced some mental health crisis, and almost one-third of college students reported feeling so depressed that they had trouble functioning. (Albelo et al., 2022).

Depression and Anxiety: Recent studies indicate that student pilots experience high rates of depression and anxiety, similar to other high-stress academic and professional environments. A 2023 study by Carter et al. reported that nearly 30% of student pilots showed symptoms of clinical anxiety, while 25% exhibited signs of depression (Carter et al., 2023).

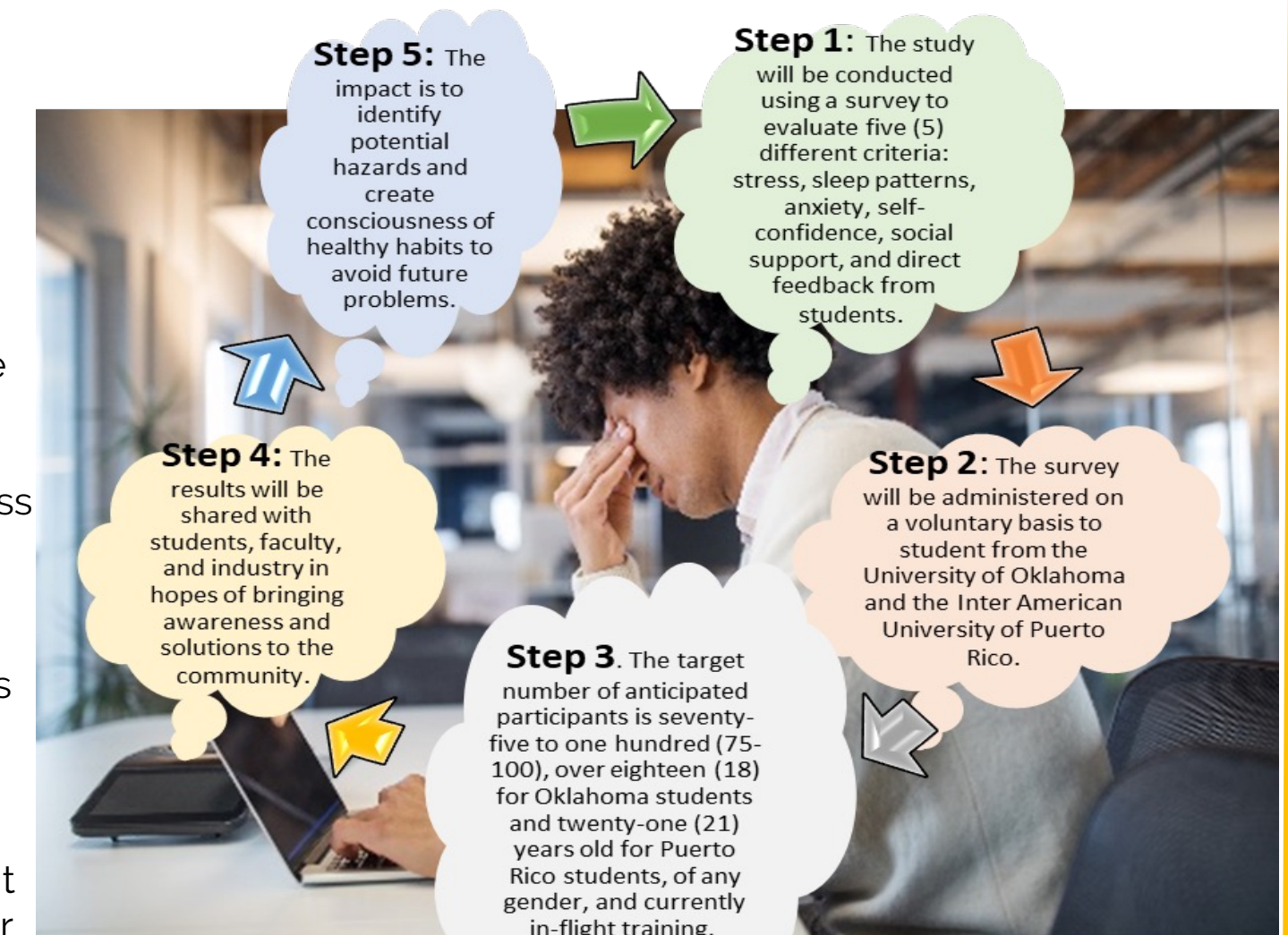
Burnout: The combination of rigorous training and academic demands can lead to burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Lee & Park, 2021).

Sleep patterns: A 2022 study by Hsiao et al. found that even moderate sleep restriction can lead to marked declines in cognitive performance and increased errors in flight simulations (Hsiao et al., 2022).

Self-confidence: A 2022 study by Roberts et al. found that self-confidence is closely linked to decision-making skills in flight training. High self-confidence can improve a pilot's ability to make quick and accurate decisions, which is critical in high-pressure situations (Roberts et al., 2022).

Social Support: Emotional support from family, friends, and peers is crucial for student pilots. A 2023 study by Chen and Liu found that emotional support helps alleviate stress and enhances overall well-being, contributing to *better performance and satisfaction with flight training* (Chen & Liu, 2023).

Methodology



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