



2023 Middle Eastern Student Wellbeing Survey

CHAPTER 1: Students & Stress

Research carried out by TGM Research

January 2023

Introduction



Background

Universities around the world partner with Studiosity to grow student success at scale, via 24/7 formative writing feedback, discussion about core skills, and peer-to-peer connection.

For seven years, Studiosity has commissioned an annual Student Wellbeing Survey with Australia's university students (via research partner YouthInsight), for three years with the UK's university students (via RedBrick), and for two years with Canada's university students (via Angus Reid).

In late 2022, Studiosity expanded its services in the Middle East region, adding a few pilot partnerships at local UAE universities to its existing partnerships.

TGM Research was commissioned by Studiosity to help better understand local students in the region.



Research objectives

This study aims to explore university students' general attitudes, needs, and behavior in the Middle East, to better understand the landscape around students' general wellbeing as it relates to their studies.

This report's focus is specifically university students in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

The specific objectives of the study were:

- to measure levels of stress and its causes related to studying;
- to understand students' time management;
- to recognize universities' current level of support and potential areas for improvement;
- to understand the level of confidence in practical skills needed at university (eg. avoiding plagiarism, preparing references, etc.);
- to understand the relevance of English communication and writing skills;
- to understand students' perceptions of academic integrity.



Methodology & Sample

Studiosity produced the questions for this survey, and TGM Research gathered the responses from university students in UAE and KSA via an online survey.

The survey ran from December 21st, 2022, to January 19th, 2023, and gained a total of 1,054 responses [523 respondents from UAE and 531 respondents from KSA].

All responses were gathered from university students aged 18 to 40 years old who speak English and consisted of a mix of both domestic (33% for UAE and 40% for KSA) and international (67% for UAE and 60% for KSA) students.

Data has been weighted to match a nationally representative profile of students by gender.

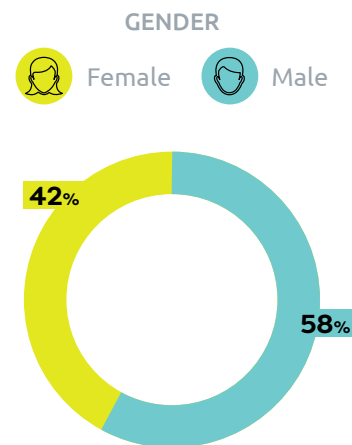
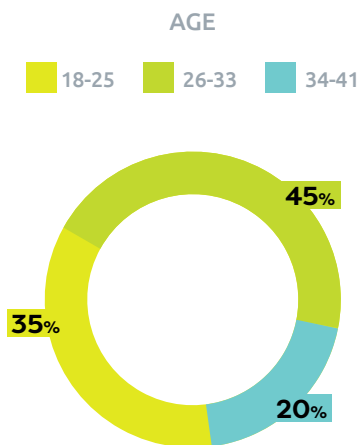
Study findings

Student profiles - UAE



Demographics

The majority of the respondents were males aged 26-33 years old (28%) followed by males aged 18-25 years old (18%) and females aged 18 – 33 years old (17% for 16-25 years old and 16% for 26-33 years old). The 34-40 year old age group recorded the lowest number of students.



Enrolment

Among the respondents, only 30% are currently studying and 70% just finished their studies in 2022. Of those that have just completed their studies in 2022, 60% completed postgraduate studies and 40% were undergraduates.

80% of the students were enrolled at a local university in the UAE and 20% of them study at an international university. Among the local students, 41% studied at 19 different universities in Abu Dhabi, and 37% of the students were enrolled at 42 different universities in Dubai. Fujairah was the region with the lowest number

of respondents with only 1% enrolled at 2 different universities there.

Among the 88 local universities in UAE, respondents to this survey were mostly enrolled at Abu Dhabi University, followed by Al Ain University, Khalifa University of Science and Technology and the University of Sharjah.



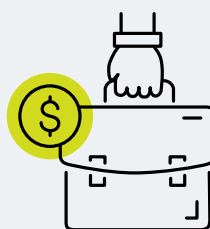
of respondents were full time students, and almost half of them were studying via a mix of both on-campus and remote study modes.

Study circumstances



The most common courses students were enrolled in are Business at 33%

followed by STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics) at 28% and Medicine at 9% where 64% of the students who participated in this survey record distinction and high distinction grades (above 75% grade), and only 1% of the students reported failing.



90% of all the respondents are currently working

as most of the respondents (70%) finished their studies in 2022. Of those in employment now, 40% work on a full-time basis.



67% of the respondents were international students

and 71% of the international students are carers of a child or other family member. The majority - 93% - of the international students were working in some capacity, either casually, part-time or full-time.

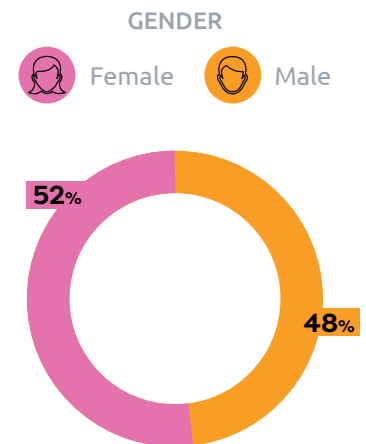
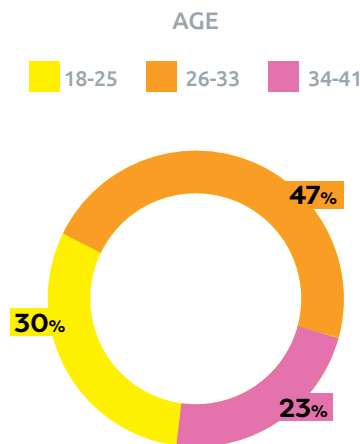
Demographics

The majority of the respondents were females aged 26-33 years old (25%) followed by males aged 26-33 years old (22%) and females aged 18 – 25 years old (18%). Males aged 18-25 years old and females aged 34-41 years old recorded the lowest number of responses at 12% and 9% respectively.

Enrolment

Among the participants, 40% are currently studying and 60% finished their studies in 2022. Of those that have just completed their studies in 2022, 61% completed a postgraduate degree, and 39% completed their undergraduate studies.

89% of the students were enrolled at a local university in KSA and 11% of them study with overseas institutions. Among the local students, 54% were enrolled at 17 different universities in Riyadh, and 20% of were enrolled at 17 different universities in Jeddah. For smaller areas such as Al Kharj, Buraydah, Ha'il, Najran, Qatif, Sakakah and Yanbu there was only 1 recorded response for each.



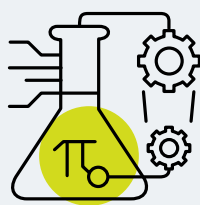
Among the 69 local universities in KSA, King Saud University recorded the highest number of students in this survey, followed by King Abdulaziz University, Princess Nora bint Abdul Rahman University and Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University.



76%

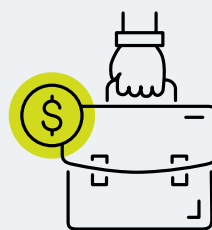
of the respondents were full time students and almost half of them (46%) studied in a mix of both on-campus and remote study modes.

Study circumstances



The most common courses students were enrolled in are STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics) at 27%

Followed by Business (19%) and Medicine (13%). 61% of the students who participated in this survey reported distinction and high distinction grades (above 75% grade), and only 2% of the students reported failing.



87% of all the respondents are currently working

as more than half of the respondents (60%) finished their studies in 2022, 32% of them are now working on a full-time basis.



60% of the respondents are international students

and 80% of the international students are carers of a child or other family members. The majority - 94% - of the international students were working in some capacity, either casually, part-time or full-time.

Q. How often do you feel stressed by studying?

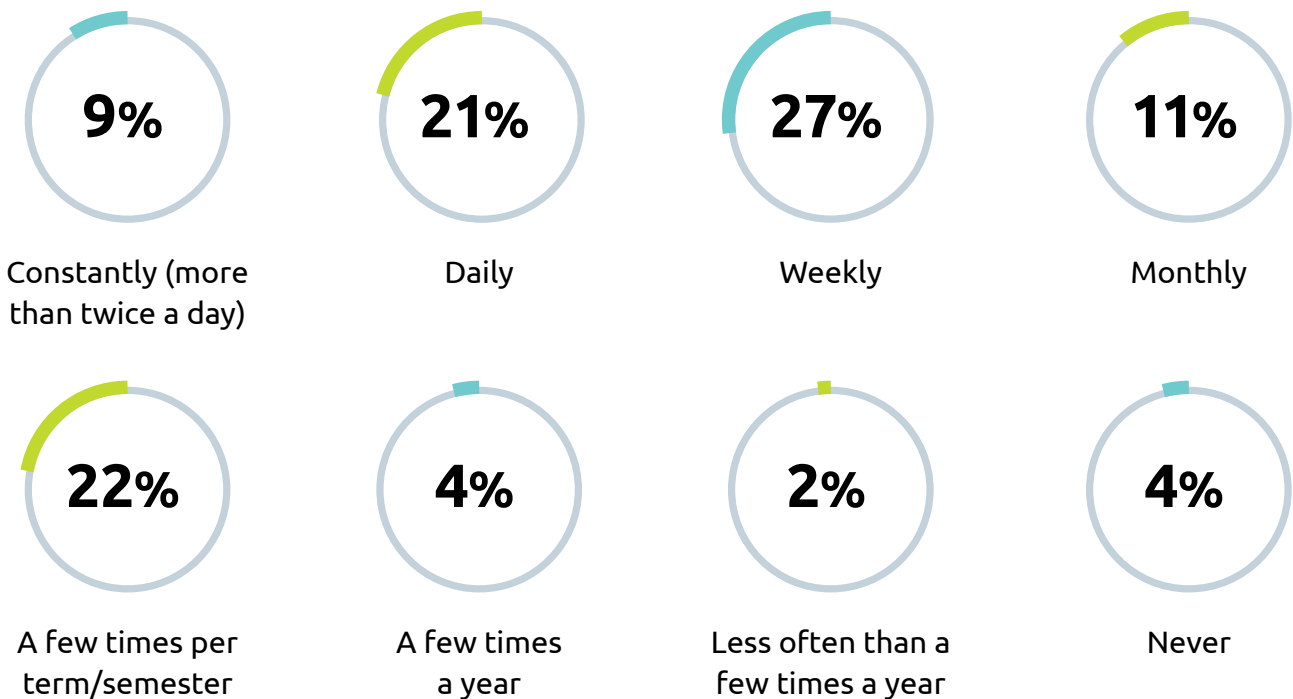
Nearly a third (30%) of UAE students say they feel stressed by studying at least once a day, and the majority (57%) at least once a week. One-fifth (22%) of students feel stress several times per semester.

The results vary by age, student status, and whether they are international or domestic students. The frequency of daily stress increases with age, with 27% of students in

the 18-25 age group feeling stressed at least once a day vs. 33% in the 34-41 age group. Full-time students more often feel stressed daily and constantly compared to part-time students (35% vs. 22%). The latter, in turn, are more often stressed a few times per term/semester. In addition, international students more often feel stressed by studying daily than their domestic counterparts (24% vs. 16%).



FREQUENCY OF FEELING STRESSED



Q. Out of the following options, what makes you feel the most stressed about studying?

The causes of stress vary across gender, age, level of study, and enrolment status. One prevalent factor affecting the majority (54%) is the challenge of balancing work or social commitments with studies concurrently. This issue tends to affect women more than men, with an 11-percentage-point difference. Another significant cause of stress, reported by 46% of respondents, is the workload itself. Notably, younger students (58% in the 18-25 age group versus 39% in the 26-33 age group) are more commonly affected by this factor. Both of these leading causes of stress are related to time management skills.

When asked to elaborate, some students gave more detail around their organizational skills:

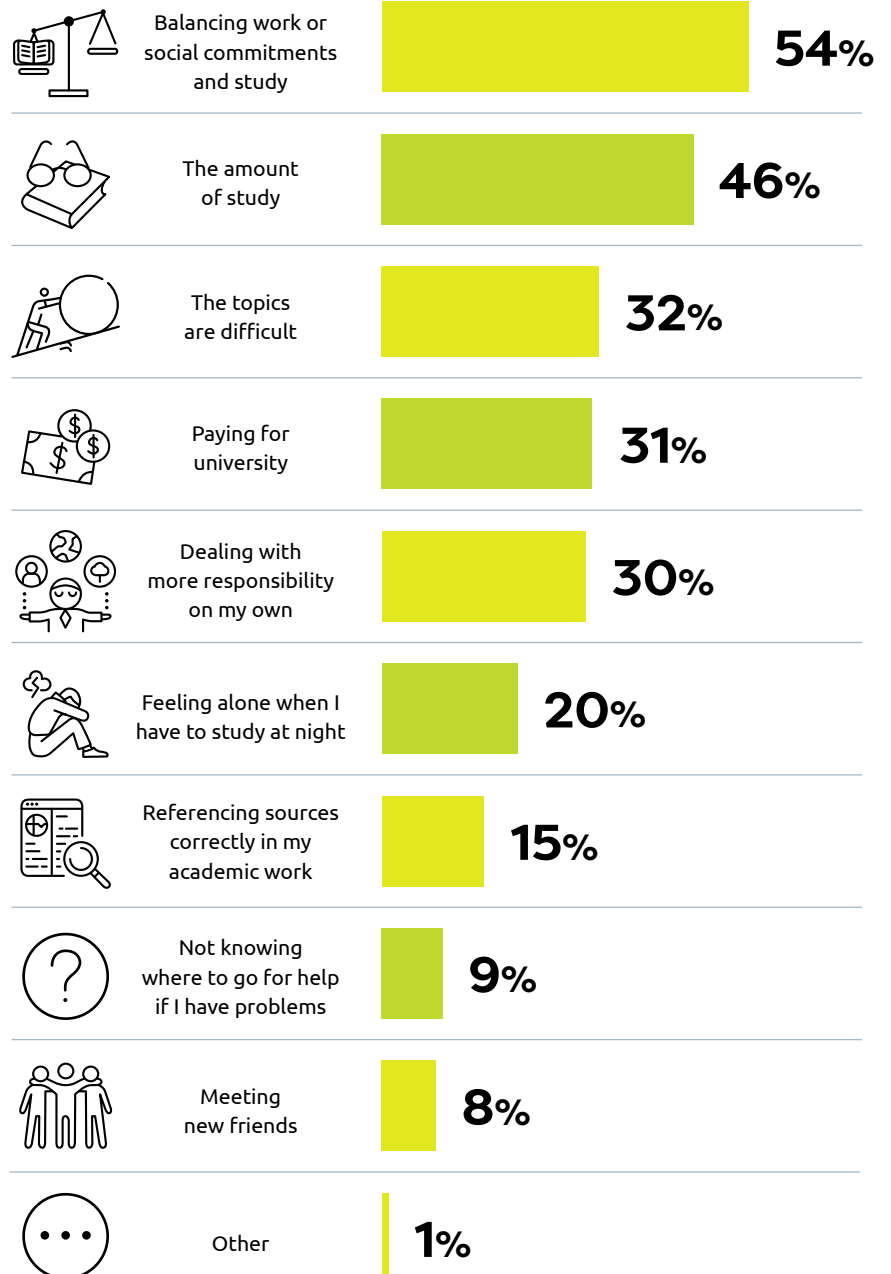
“Sometimes there are more commitments than the time I have,”

“I mostly get depressed by the time management, and tiredness.”

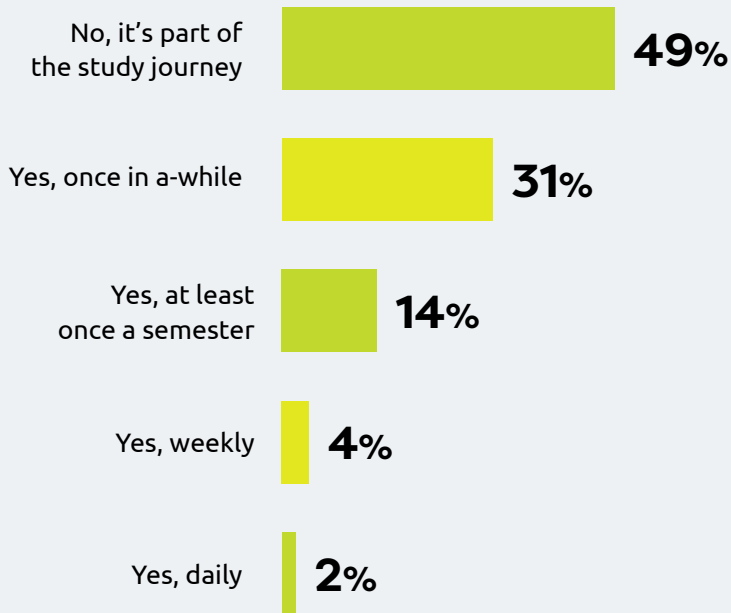
More reasons concern the difficulty of the topics (32%), dealing with more responsibilities (30%), payments for university (31%), and the feeling alone at moments of study at night (20%). One-sixth (15%) also struggle with academic skills, such as referencing sources correctly.

It is worth noting that 1 in 10 students (9%) do not know where to turn for help if they have problems at university. They are more often females, younger people, and students at the lower study level.

CAUSES OF STRESS



Q. Do you think struggling with study when you're alone (after class or when you leave campus) makes you think about quitting your course?



Studying alone can be difficult for some people. Half of the students (51%) think about quitting their course while struggling with studying alone. These are more often 1st-year undergraduates and older students.

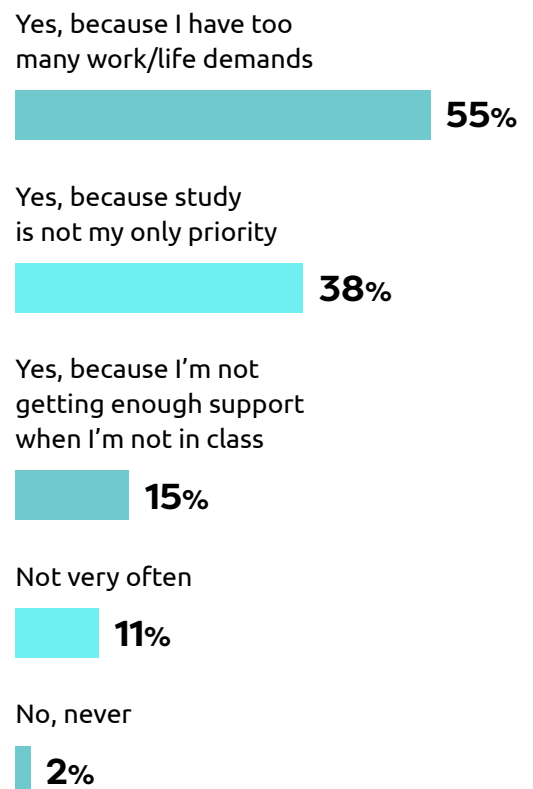
Around half of the respondents (49%) claim that struggling with studying while studying alone is simply a part of the study journey, and doesn't make them want to quit their course.

“When I find it difficult to understand or comprehend a certain course and there is nobody around to help with a better and clearer explanation on how to crack or decode it, I always feel like giving up.”

“I have to keep pushing no matter how hard it seems, because, in anything you are doing in this life, stress must be included if you want to achieve it.”

Q. Have you ever had to study all night to get through your workload?

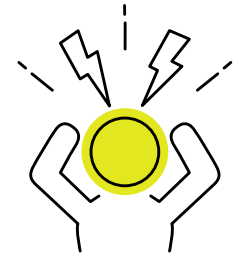
Only 2% of UAE students say that they have never had to study all night to get through their workload and 11% say that they do it but not very often. The majority (55%) admit doing it due to too many work/ life demands. The percentage increases for people aged 34-41 - almost two-thirds (60%) admit to it. 4 out of 10 students (38%) have had to study all night because study is not their only priority. One-sixth did it because they are not getting enough support outside of class.



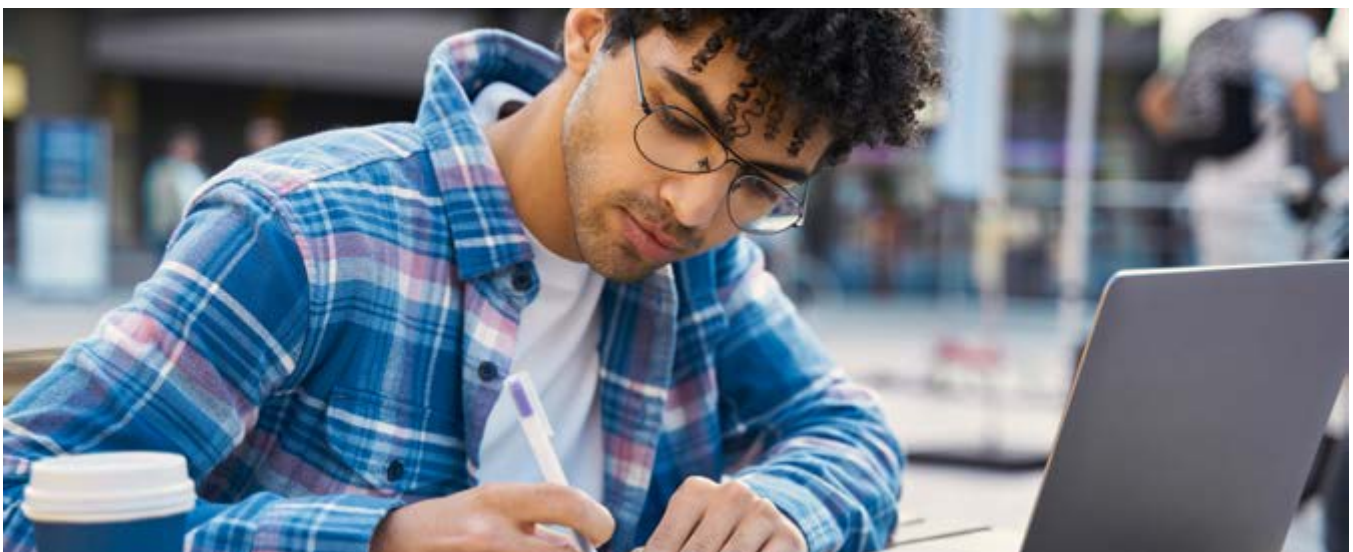
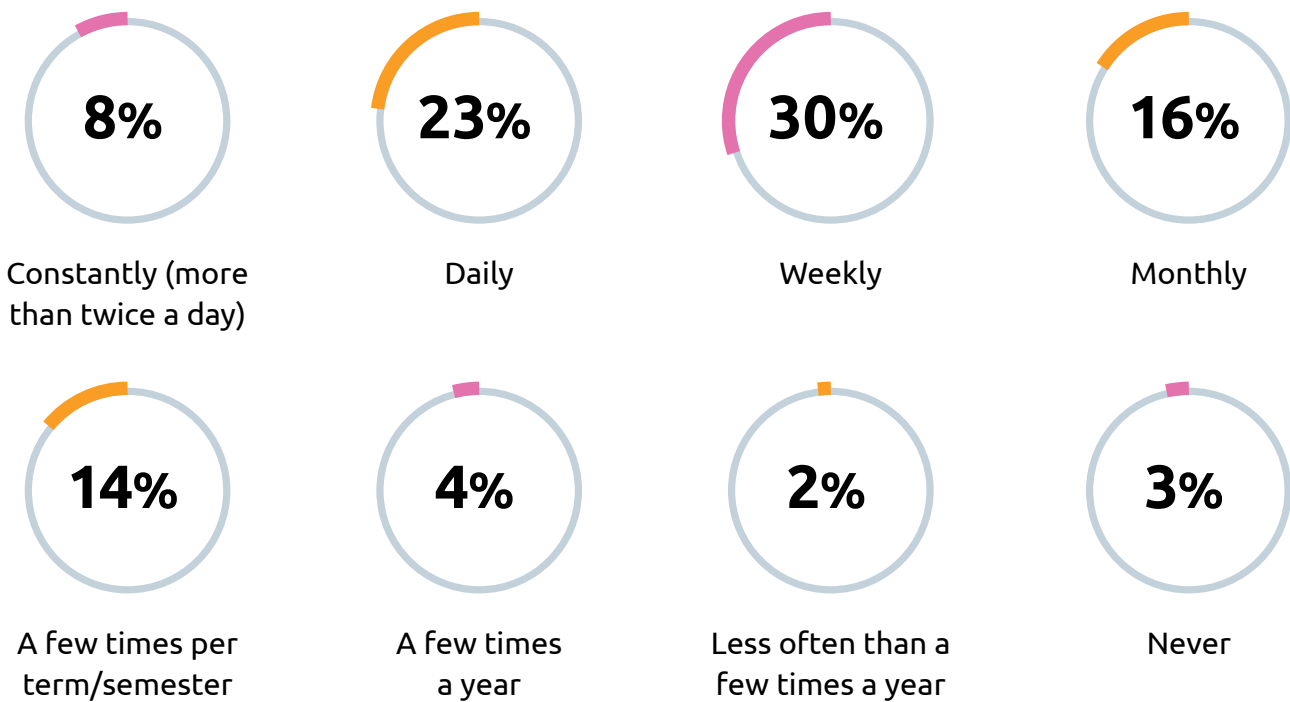
Q. How often do you feel stressed by studying?

The general level of feeling stress caused by studies is similar to the UAE results. Almost one-third of the KSA students (31%) feel stressed at least once a day and almost two-thirds (61%) once a week. In

the case of KSA students, there is not much variation between gender, age, and the level of study. Only international students seem to feel stressed daily more often than domestic students (27% vs. 18%).



FREQUENCY OF FEELING STRESSED



Q. Out of the following options, what makes you feel the most stressed about studying?

The causes of stress among KSA respondents in relation to studying also revolve around time management skills. Firstly, 40% of individuals face challenges in striking a balance between their work or social commitments and their studies. Notably, this difficulty tends to increase as the level of studies progresses.

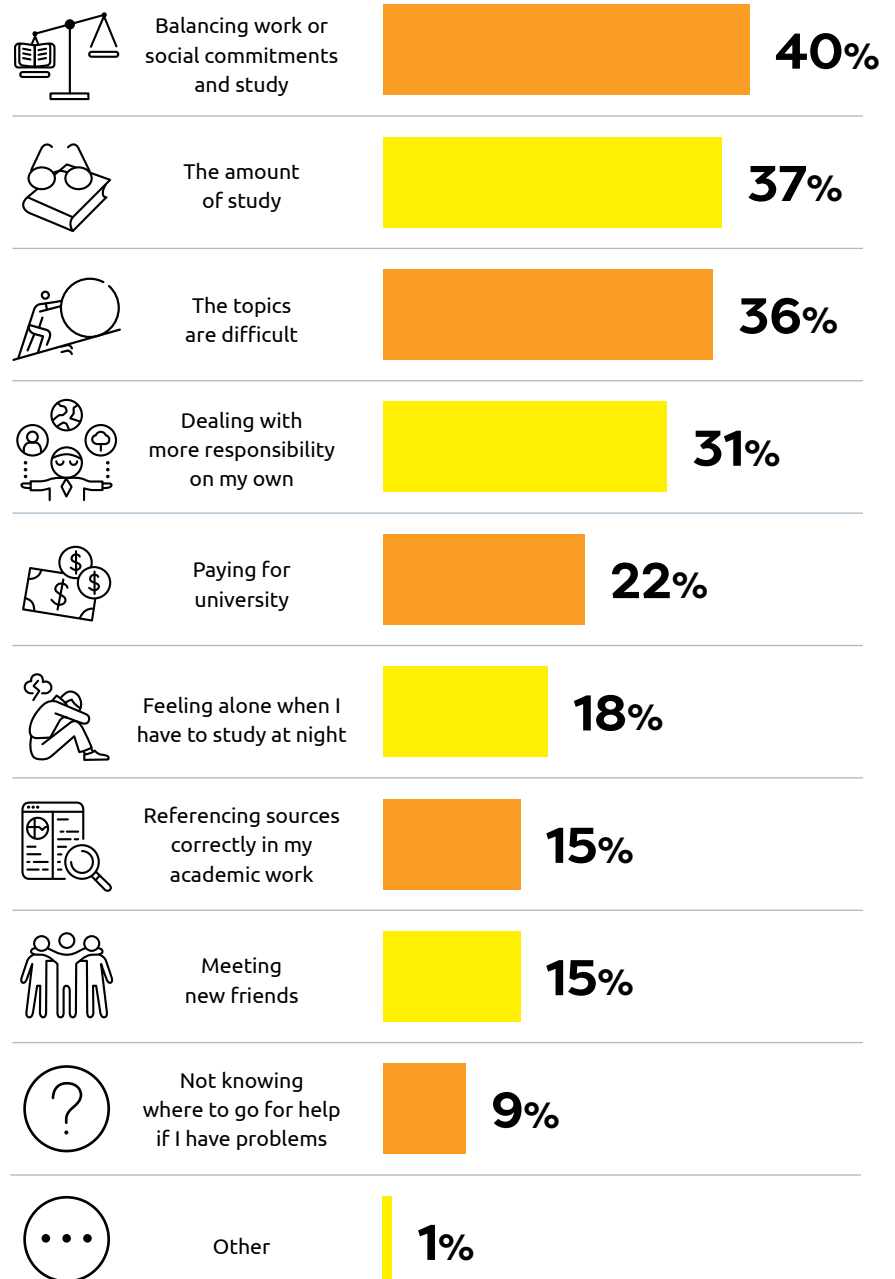
Secondly, 37% of respondents express that the workload itself causes them stress, while 36% attribute their stress to the complexity of the subjects they are studying.

Furthermore, 9% of KSA students, equivalent to one in ten respondents, feel uncertain about where to seek assistance when needed. Interestingly, this uncertainty is more prevalent among younger students (13% in the 18-25 age group versus 6% in the 26-33 age group) and domestic students compared to international students (15% versus 5%).

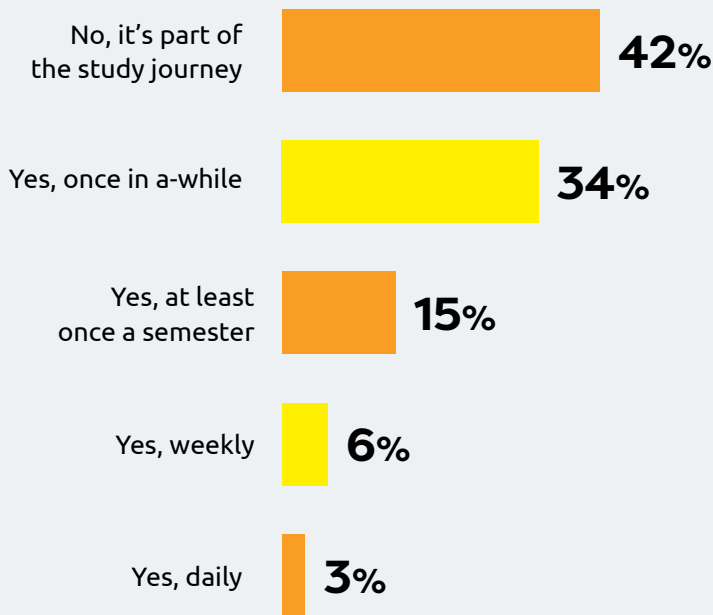
“The difficulty and severity of the curriculum.”

“It is tough to be alone in this journey.”

CAUSES OF STRESS



Q. Do you think struggling with study when you're alone (after class or when you leave campus) makes you think about quitting your course?



In comparison to UAE students, slightly more KSA students think about quitting their course when struggling with studying, but mostly just once in a while (34%). The thoughts of quitting increase with age - 38% of older students

(34-41) think about quitting once in a while compared to 30% of younger students (18-25). More international students think about it once in a while - 38% international vs 28% domestic students. Still, a large portion of respondents (42%) think it is just part of the study journey to struggle with study:

“Everything in life is hard, we just have to adapt and try our best.”



Q. Have you ever had to study all night to get through your workload?

Many KSA students experienced having to stay up all night to get through the workload - only 3% have never done it and 14% don't do it very often. There are two main reasons that 4 out of 10 students indicate. Firstly, study is not their only priority (42%), which suggests that the respondents have other responsibilities which are equally important. It is more common for male students (46% men vs 37% women) and older respondents. There are also significant differences between full-time (44%) and part-time (33%) students and international (48%) and domestic (32%) students. Secondly, respondents sometimes stay up all night to get through the workload due to too many work/ life demands (44%). One-sixth of the respondents (16%) said that the reason is not getting enough support outside of class, which is more common for men (19% male vs 13% female) and international students (18% international vs 12% domestic).

Yes, because study is not my only priority



Yes, because I have too many work/life demands



Yes, because I'm not getting enough support when I'm not in class



Not very often



No, never





Acknowledgments

Research report: Studiosity Australia and TGM Research

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studiosity.com