
In Finland, there are nearly 300,000 undergraduate students studying at academic universities and universities of applied sciences. They are expected to carry out their studies efficiently and independently, while, at the same time, as young adults, they are facing major psychosocial changes in their lives. These processes of change call for individual resources, and affect both physical and mental health. To gain knowledge about health and related behaviours among students, nationwide health surveys were initiated in 2000, and since then, have been repeated in 2004, 2008 and 2012.

Material and methods

The Finnish Student Health Surveys are targeted at Finnish undergraduate students aged 35 and under. The first two surveys covered academic universities only, but in 2008 and 2012, universities of applied sciences (or ‘polytechnics’) were included as well. The health survey is a postal questionnaire (also online since 2008) study with 3 reminders (5 in 2012) after the initial round.

The aim of these nationwide surveys is to regularly gather information about students’ physical, mental and social health and well-being, health behaviours and relevant factors, study-related issues, and finances and subsistence during studies. Another aim is to explore the use of health services and opinions about their quality. The basic question sets have been the same for all years. Each survey has also contained sections on varying special themes, many of which are linked to the concept of study ability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Response rate (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>5 000</td>
<td>63</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>5 000</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>10 000</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>10 000</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Examples of special themes:

- Electronic health services
- Internet use
- Gambling
- Travelling
- Harassment, bullying
- Study burnout, study engagement
- Sexual health
- Asthma, atopic diseases
- Physical activity

Results and significance

Summary results have been published in 2001, 2005, 2009 and 2013. (www.fshs.fi)

The Finnish Student Health Surveys provide valuable information that enables us to further develop student health services and study communities, and to promote their co-operation. The results have been utilised by health services, universities and student associations, both for scientific research and practical initiatives. The study ability model and the instrument for measuring study burnout are examples of practical tools developed on the basis of the survey results.
Student life – is it all about fun and partying or loneliness and intense studying? Are students more like web-surfing nerds or physically active athletes? How are university students doing?

The Finnish Student Health Survey was conducted for the fourth time in 2012. The results of the survey will answer these and many other questions. The survey covers a range of factors related to university students’ health and wellness, health behaviours and study ability, such as social relationships, studying, subsistence and working. The nationwide questionnaire survey has been carried out at four-year intervals since 2000, and this report gives an overview of the developments and trends over the past 12 years.

There is no uniform student life and culture. Health-related behaviours vary individually. Mental stress and problems in life management emerge as major challenges potentially threatening university students’ health, and also as issues for which they wish to receive support.