Mental health disorders are a risk to students’ study abilities. According to research, every fourth young adult suffers from a mental health disorder and half of them from significantly declined functioning. The study aims to investigate university students’ mental health problems and stress in the 2000s in comparison to the 1960s and 1970s.

**Methods**

The material derives from University Student Health Surveys 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012 and 2016 (N=5,000 per survey). The prevalence of mental health problems is assessed with GHQ-12 and stress is measured with the mental health screen designed for this particular life phase. The comparison materials include an epidemiological study from the 1960s (N=284, psychiatric interview method, Alanen & al. 1967, Vauhkonen & al. 1971) and a 5-year follow-up questionnaire study from the 1970s (N=12,548, Saari & Majander 1985).

**Results**

In the 1960s, 23% of first-year students suffered from mental health disorders (men 19%, women 28%). In the 2000s, the percentage varies 22–27% (men 13-21%, women 23-30%).

In the 1960s, the corresponding percentages for third-year students are 29% (men 25%, women 34%) and in the 2000s 22–28% for second-fourth -year students. (Fig. 1)

Stress factors include, e.g., getting a hold of studies, public performances, future outlook and feeling of insufficiency.

In the 1970s, at the start of studies the mean stress scores were 1.2 points but in the 2000s 1.6–2.0.

In the 1970s the mean stress scores were 1.5 points for fifth-year students and in the 2000s 1.9–2.9 points for fifth-seventh-year students. (Fig. 2)

**Conclusion**

The prevalence of mental health disorders has not significantly changed in 50 years, but the stress experienced has increased. Several social and study-related factors contribute to the situation. Health care services and universities should increasingly provide support for students as mental health problems can significantly hamper their studies.