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## First Generation Female College Students' Health, Stress and Alcohol Use

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# MELISSA SOSA (Nursing)

## First Generation Female College Students' Health, Stress and Alcohol Use

*Sponsor: Kathy Hutchinson (Nursing)*

Going to college can be a stressful time for many adolescents/emerging adults. For some, this may be the first time they are living on their own, caring for themselves, and managing their time without the direct supervision of parents. Guided by social-ecological theory, this study examined family influences of stress, well-being, and alcohol use among female undergraduate college students, and compared the experiences of first-generation college women (FirstGens) with those whose parents attended college. We hypothesized FirstGens might not experience the same level of anticipatory guidance from parents that could ease the transition to college. This cross-sectional study examined family background, FirstGen status, general health, stress, and alcohol use in female students at the University of Rhode Island and SUNY Binghamton. Data about the fall 2020 semester were collected via an anonymous online survey.

Results demonstrated that FirstGens reported lower levels of overall health ( $p = .018$ ) compared to others; 54% rated their health as poor or fair. FirstGens also reported higher levels of stress related to managing money ( $p = .004$ ) and family relationships ( $p = .001$ ), with no differences reported for academics, roommate issues, and COVID-related stress. However, FirstGens were less likely to report that parents provided them with alcohol for their dorm or apartment compared to peers with college-educated parents (8.4% vs. 17.4%;  $p = .02$ ). They were also less likely to reside in a sorority or off-campus apartment ( $p = .003$ ). FirstGens also reported drinking and binge drinking on fewer days than peers ( $p = .001$ ,  $p = .04$ , respectively). Female FirstGen college students may have different early college experiences and challenges compared to peers with college-educated parents. Some differences may be protective (e.g., less alcohol use) while others may be important stressors to consider when designing health promotion programs for college students.