



# Money concerns are damaging the mental health of students

**Katherine Donnelly**

**THE mental health of one in three university students is showing cause for concern – and money worries may be part of the problem, groundbreaking new research has revealed.**

The psychological well-being of students is lower than the average person, or other 18 to 26-year-olds. Researchers say more work needs to be done to understand the reasons, but point to a possible link with high levels of financial strain.

One in three students run out of money on a regular basis, according to the survey of 3,500 undergraduate and taught masters students in the country's seven universities.

Researchers point to the broader social mix on today's campuses, with growing numbers of students entering third-level from less well-off backgrounds.

While university students are drawn from more educated and wealthy backgrounds than average, a substantial 30pc are the first in their family to attend college.

## Devastating

Union of Students in Ireland president Peter Mannion said the report showed that the psychological well-being of 30,000 students in Irish universities was being adversely affected by their experience of college.

"One-third of all university students regularly run out of money and no doubt this is having a devastating effect on their mental health."

He said the student grants system was flawed and "obviously failing students. The recent changes to the maintenance grant, coupled with the rise in the registration fee, will add further stress."

Mr Mannion said Education Minister Batt O'Keeffe should give careful examination to proposals to re-introduce fees in some form.

Previous research has shown that students living away from home suffer more financial stress. Other possible factors highlighted for further exploration in light of the study are stressful accommodation situations and the transition to the more unstructured college environment from the regimented second-level education system.

Researchers say that further work is necessary to examine the nature of student financing in Ireland and interventions that could be developed to ensure that severe psychological strain due to financial factors is reduced.

The team used an internationally recognised tool, the WHO-5, to measure psychological well-being and found that one in three students fell below 13 on the scale. A score below 13 is indicative of a risk to psychological health.

The student study was carried out by University College Dublin's Geary Institute for the Irish Universities Association and the Higher Education Authority.

A report based on the findings of the survey, which was conducted in 2008, is due to be published soon and a follow-up survey has been undertaken this year.

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## **In college and out of money**

- ❶ **One-in-three run out of money on regular basis**
- ❷ **30% are first in their family to attend college**
- ❸ **One-in-six applicants to third-level this year over 23**
- ❹ **Most interested in their course of study**
- ❺ **70% satisfied with their college**
- ❻ **Most university students don't hold significant debt**
- ❼ **Long-term earnings expectations are much higher among men**
- ❽ **37% want to study to Masters level**
- ❾ **Further 22% want to continue to PhD level**

