

Abstract

Assessing the Prevalence of Chemical Sensitivities to Fragranced Products Among Undergraduate Students & Its Impact on Educational Experiences

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There has been movement towards inclusionary practices in the education system by reducing barriers to learning. One such barrier is students' sensitivities to chemicals from fragranced products. The lack of regulation of chemicals emitted from fragranced products exclude those with chemical sensitivities. Research regarding the impact of chemical sensitivity on college students and their educational experiences is sparse. UCLA's Center for the Study of Women disseminated a survey in 2018 to undergraduates to evaluate the need for fragrance-free policies on-campus. Approximately 665 students were surveyed and ranged in age from 18-29 years. The analysis relied on a mixed-methods approach to gauge the prevalence of symptoms after chemical exposure to fragranced products and ascertain students' narratives on the impact of fragranced products on their educational experiences. The results indicate 60% of participants had a physical reaction including headaches, shortness of breath, or a rash after being exposed to fragranced products. Additionally, 41% noted their reactions to fragranced products impacted their ability to concentrate on studying and taking exams. Respondents indicated they were willing to change their use of fragranced products (49% of commenters). However, many comments demonstrated participant concern for the accessibility of fragrance-free products due to cost and the inevitability of encountering fragranced products. Our results indicate college students are differentially impacted by chemical sensitivities and thus present an avenue to establish equity for school health and further reduce barriers to learning.

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