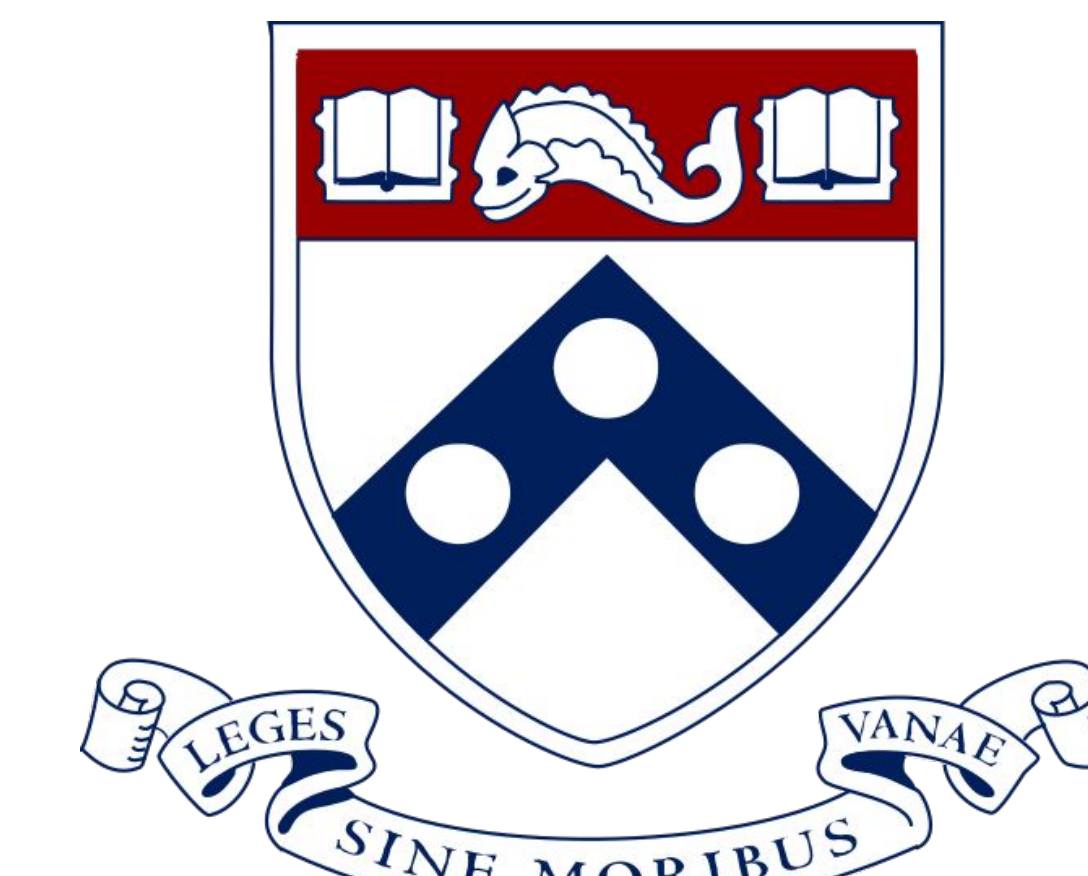
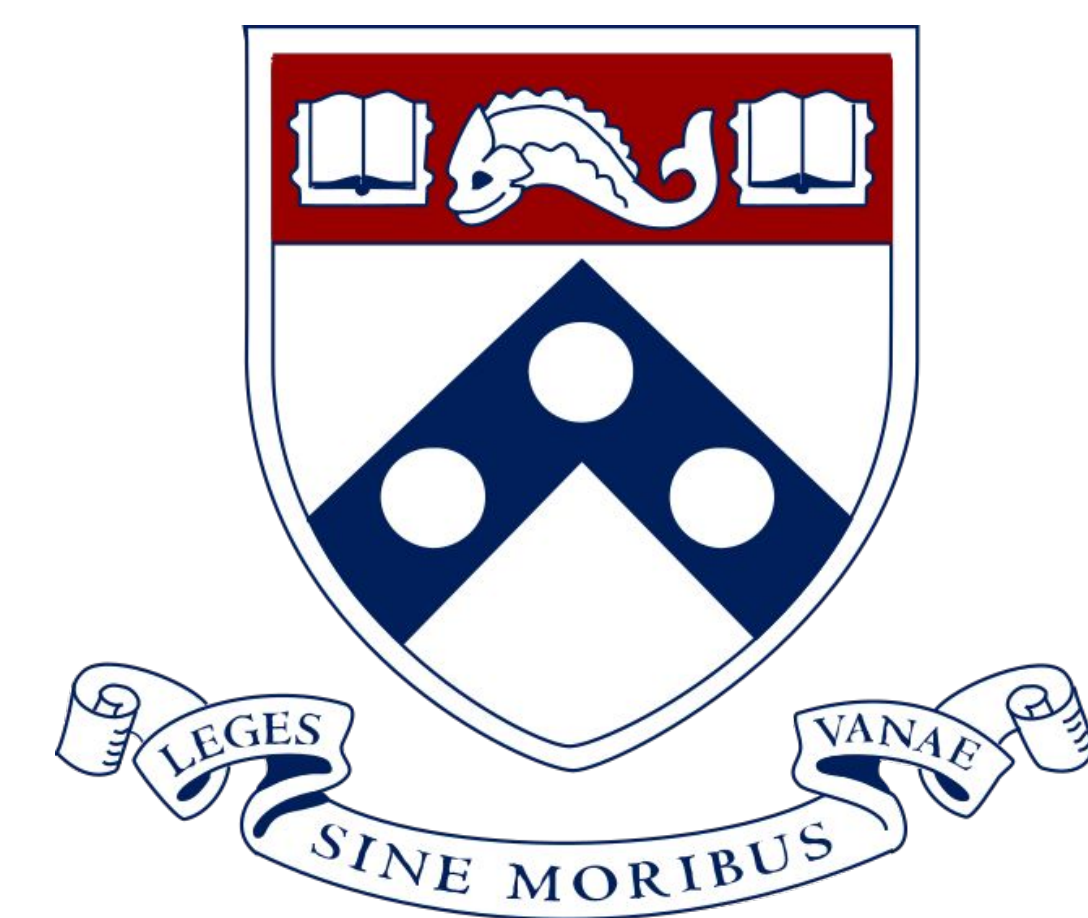


# COVID Stress, Loss, and Expressive Writing

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## INTRODUCTION

- 18-24 year olds are most psychologically distressed during the pandemic.
- We characterized major COVID-related stressors to understand their effects on social and emotional well-being.
- We tested two competing interventions we hoped would help alleviate distress.
  - Expressive Writing (EW) is a low-intensity intervention effective in helping people process stress, trauma, and loss.
  - Control Writing focused on current positive experiences (e.g. favorite class).

## METHODS

### Participants

- N=117 Penn undergraduates

### Procedure

- 15-min writing session for 3 days.
- 2-week follow-up.

### Measures

- PANAS, BDI, and COVID Perceived Stress Scale were examined.
- Loss themes were coded from EW essays.
- Linguistic analyses done on all essays.

## RESULTS

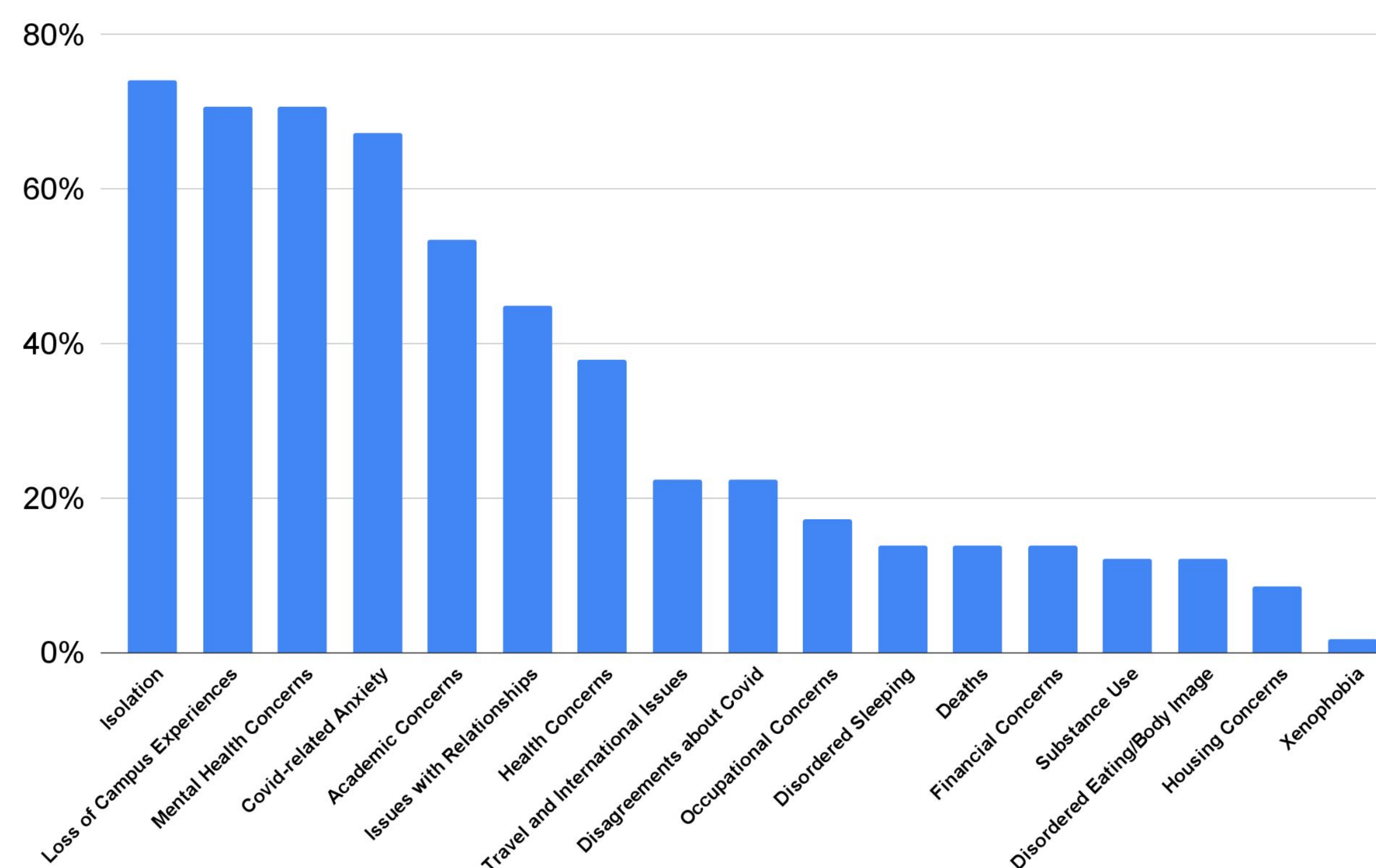
### Primary Outcome Measures

- Interaction between COVID StressHiLo and condition was significant ( $F=7.366, p=.008$ ).

### Thematic Analysis of EW Essays

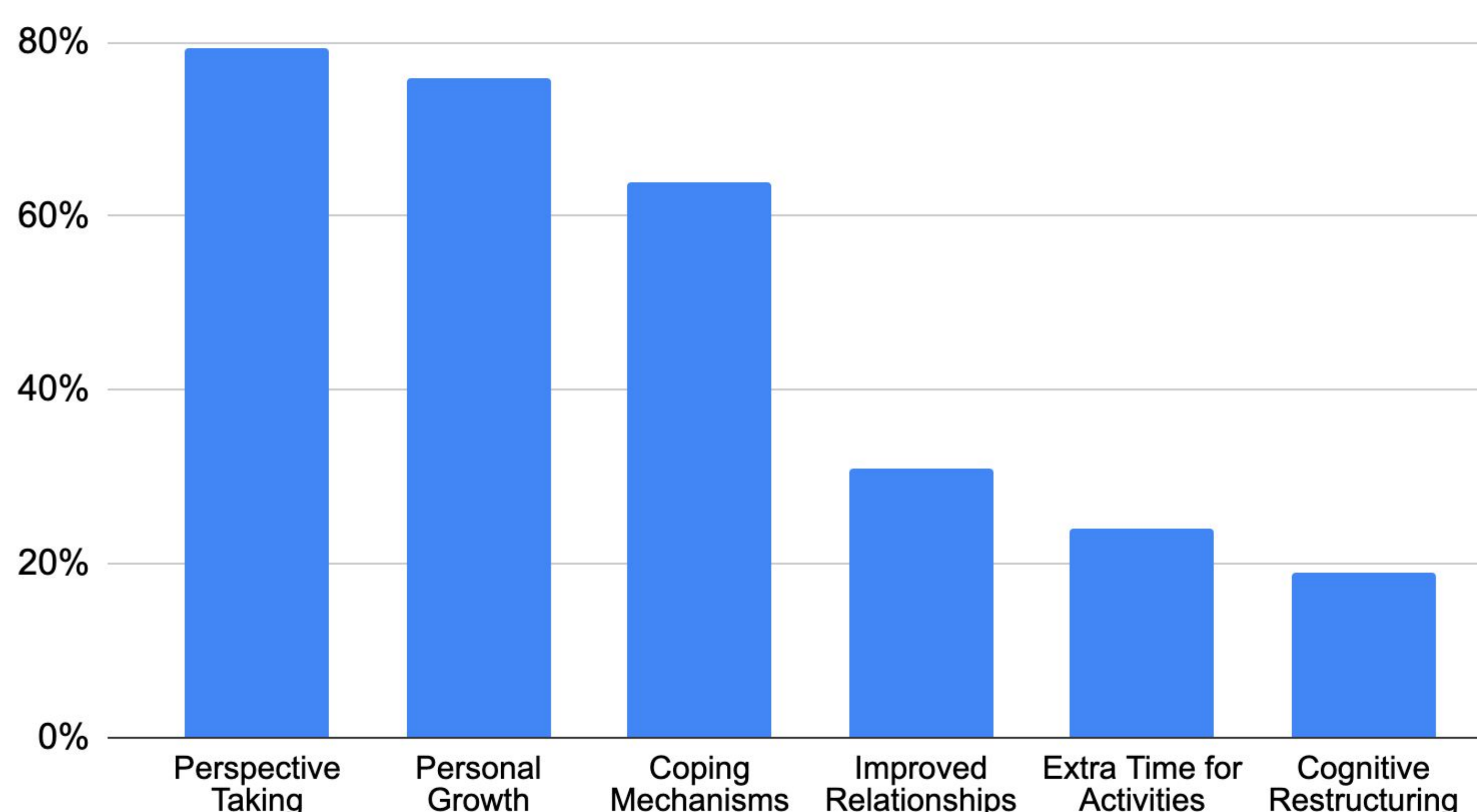
- 90% of participants wrote about positive themes in essays across three days.
- Positive tone and emotion in Essay 3 predicted reductions in BDI & COVID stress.

### Prevalence of Negative Themes



Both expressive writing and control writing interventions reduced COVID-related stress!

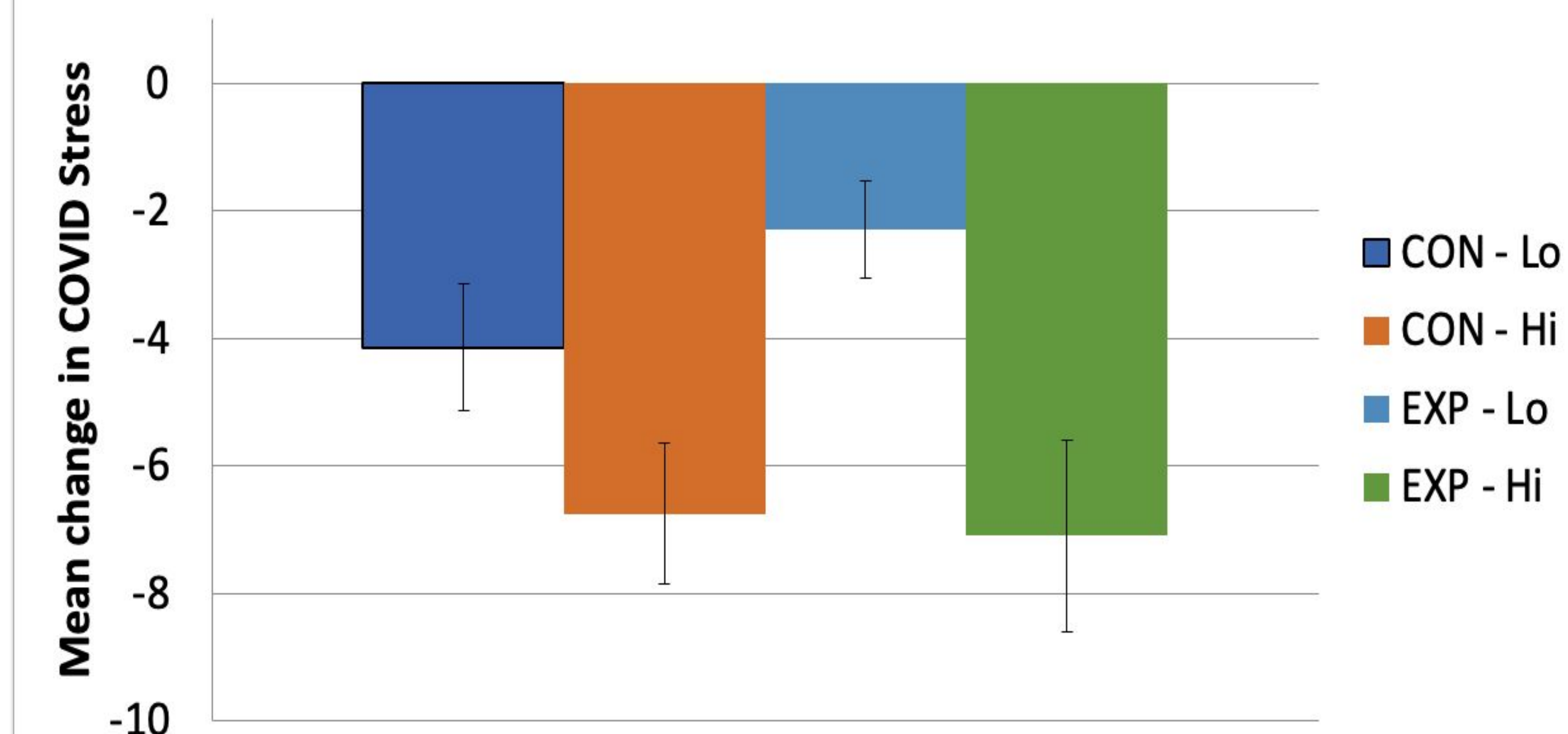
### Prevalence of Positive Macrothemes



"I didn't know that taking some time to reflect and write could be so helpful, but it definitely improved my mood -- so thank you for this study!"

Feedback from Our Participant

### Improvement in Covid Stress @ 2 Weeks by Condition and Baseline Stress



## DISCUSSION

- EW is most helpful for highly distressed individuals at baseline.
  - Generalized positive writing works better for people with lower levels of COVID-related stress at baseline.
- EW results contrary to prior findings and model of how EW typically works.
- Future studies could be done in post-COVID environment, utilize in-person interventions, and include two control groups (e.g. non-emotional and positive control).