### Background

Major life transitions occur during the freshman year of undergraduate education. One of these transitions that freshmen experience is the kind of decision-making they engage in as it relates to their daily life functions. Freshmen make a variety of decisions when it comes to whether or not to engage in health-risk behaviors. This study is significant because it is critical to demonstrate the impact of social support systems on decision-making. Given the increase in health-risk behaviors in college freshmen, this research may have implications for parents and families of college freshmen. The results of this study may indicate that strong parental and family supports may leave a lasting impact on college freshmen and also on their development of decision-making skills necessary for disengaging in health-risk behavior.

### Purpose

To explore the relationship between decision-making, health-risk behaviors and social support systems among college freshmen.

### Method

A cross-sectional correlational design explored the relationships between decision-making, health-risk behaviors and social support systems in college freshmen. Online questionnaires were completed through a web-based online survey. A convenience sample of 200 freshmen participated from a local university.

### Results

Findings include positive decision-making was associated with a decrease in health risk behavior, and negative decision-making was associated with an increase in health risk behavior. The secondary and tertiary hypotheses were tested using linear regression and multiple regression analyses. Family support and social support was found to be significant predictors of positive decision-making and negative decision-making. Hence, social context played a significant role that impacted freshmen decision-making. Also, the effect of family support on positive decision-making was the same for male and female college freshmen and was statistically significant.

Correspondingly, regression analysis results found that family support predicted negative decision-making in female college freshmen. Together, these findings extend the evidence that adolescence involves a period of developing decision-making processes which may help explain health-risk behavior, and more specifically, findings demonstrate a synergistic impact of social support systems on decision-making in college freshmen.

### Conclusion

Findings extend the evidence that adolescence involves a period of developing decision-making processes which may help explain health-risk behavior and demonstrate a synergistic impact of social support systems on decision-making hence focusing efforts on strengthening decision-making in this subset of students.

### Implications for Research and Practice

Overall, findings from this study support the need to identify and implement interventions that may be developed to improve freshmen’s decision-making skills and to enhance their ability to exercise mature control over their own behavior, leading to better early college experiences. Integrated care team models, comprised of nursing professionals, especially nurse practitioners along with mental health professionals and health promotion educators have been shown to be effective in improving college students’ physical, psychological and emotional health. Ultimately, nurse practitioners have the unique opportunity to develop evidence-based practice guidelines to improve freshmen’s decision-making and coping skills while engaging in simultaneous collaborative care. The overall benefit could potentially reduce freshmen health-risk behavior thereby achieving positive health outcomes and successful educational outcomes that, in turn may result in improved undergraduate retention rates. This research, while making an important contribution to the literature, contributes to the health of college freshmen by highlighting key social support systems, hence focusing efforts on strengthening decision-making and coping skills in this subset of students.