



Assessing the Consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic on University Students

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Background

- The COVID-19 pandemic was declared a national emergency March 2020
- University student depression, anxiety, and feelings of loneliness increased regardless of gender or preexisting mental health conditions^{1,2}
- University students pose a significant risk of adopting lasting negative mental health symptoms from the pandemic due to the uncertainty of their academics, social lives, and future³

University Students as a Population of Interest

- The switch to virtual learning decreased student motivation, effort, and persistence in the classroom⁴
- Overreliance on screens for socialization had a negative effect on happiness⁵
- Student increase in anxiety and stress led to challenges in overall well-being⁶
- Gap in direct positive impact on university students

Students of Color as a Vulnerable Population

- Highly predisposed to external stressors
- At majority white schools, their buffer towards discrimination and positive classroom engagement is lower⁷
- Student specific stressors include microaggressions and lack of representation among faculty^{8,9}
- Combatting negative pandemic affect requires culturally competent interventions and studies focusing on the specific needs of people of color¹⁰

Research Questions

1. Was there a significant negative impact of COVID-19 on university students?
 - a. Did ethnicity impact negative effect?
 - b. Did financial aid status impact negative effect?
 - c. Did class year impact negative effect?
2. What were the specific ways that the effect of the pandemic is still felt by university students?

Contact

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Study 1 Participants

- N = 67
- White (n=33), Person of Color (n=25), Other (n=7), Decline to Answer (n=2)
- Freshman (n=48), Sophomores (n=16), Juniors (n=1), Seniors (n=2)
- Receives Financial Aid (n=21), Does Not Receive Financial Aid (n=38), Decline to Answer (n=8)
- All participants were from undergraduates enrolled in Wesleyan University

Study 1 Methods

Procedure:

- 55 item survey adapted from the Epidemic-Pandemic Impacts Inventory; four multiple choice sections, one short answer question
- Analyzed demographics on four subscales: academics, relationships, health, and positive change
- Univariate linear analysis on subscale and total summation
- Thematic analysis was run on short answer question

Study 1 Results

- Ethnicity and financial aid status did not affect total effect or subscale effect
- Class year was significantly related to total effect and academics, such that the lower one's class year the greater negative effect
- Short Answer resulted in three emergent themes
 - Need for More Resources
 - Frustration with the Administration
 - What Worked Well for Students

COVID-19 Total Effect on University Student's with Respect to Class Year: Frequencies, Means, Standard Deviation.

Regression Coefficients, Significance, 95% Confidence Interval

Subscale	Freshman (n=48) (M, SD)	Sophomores (n= 16) M, SD)	B	Sig	95% CI
Total Effect	21.79, 5.77	25.19, 5.71	-3.396	.045*	[-6.718, 0.074]

* relationship is significant

COVID-19 Impact on University Student's with Respect to Class Year: Frequencies, Means, Standard Deviation, Regression

Coefficients, Significance, 95% Confidence Interval

Subscale	Freshman (n=48) (M, SD)	Sophomores (n= 16) M, SD)	B	Sig	95% CI
Academics	5.31, 2.34	8.56, 3.30	-3.250	<.001*	[-4.749, -1.751]
Relationships	8.75, 2.98	8.75, 2.02	.000	1.00	[-1.602, 1.602]
Health	3.06, .810	3.00, .894	.063	.795	[-.417, .542]
Positive Change	4.67, 2.08	4.88, 2.50	-.208	.742	[-1.470, -1.053]

* relationship is significant

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Study 2 Participants

- N = 10
- White (n=3), Person of Color (n=7)
- Juniors (n=2), Seniors (n=8)
- Receives Financial Aid (n=4) Does Not Receive Financial Aid (n=2), Decline to Answer (n=4)
- All participants were students enrolled at Wesleyan University prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic

Study 2 Methods

Procedure:

- 15 item script adapted from the Study 1 questionnaire
- Four themes, one question on the lasting effects
- Semi-structured informal interviews
- Field notes were analyzed, and inductive coding was used to see if themes echoed Study 1 or were novel
- Wanted to encourage self-reflection as a possible tool for healing
 - Highlighting the experience of minority students

Study 2 Results

- Themes found in Study 1 were echoed
- *Need for Resources*
 - Lack of effective communication
 - Feelings of isolation due to few community activities
- *Frustration with Administration*
 - Some students were excluded in pandemic planning
 - Increase in policing
- *What Worked Well*
 - Professors being a source of comfort
 - Social responsibility increasing
- Novel themes emerged as well
 - Changes in social interaction due to the removal from Wesleyan

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Discussion

Study 1:

- Lack of significant findings could be due to a low internal validity
 - Relatively new inventory
 - Not created to focus on emerging adults
 - Specification error
 - Recall bias
- There was a significant relationship between class year and academics along with total effect
 - Induction period occurred during a pandemic
 - Sophomores had already adjusted to university life in the time of COVID-19
- For the short answer, the call for resources and frustration with administration can have negative implications on student well-being and university success

Study 2:

- In having nonrecorded interviews, this gave participants the opportunity to speak freely
- Future research can utilize audio recording and see if comparable themes emerge
- Although slightly impressionistic, these interviews delve deeper into the specific lived experiences of university students throughout the pandemic.

Strengths, Limitations, & Implications:

- Mixed methods format
- Highlighting students of color
- Lack of audio recording
- Using different participants for each study
- Student involvement in their university boosts student well-being
- Talking about adverse experiences promotes healing