

Mental Health Issues During Online Learning Towards Students Throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The COVID-19 pandemic has affected individuals worldwide, in many ways. Through tragedy, death, and isolation, many high school and college students have faced some obstacles along the way. This includes the instant shift from in-person learning to online learning due to the U.S. implementing quarantine and shutdowns as early as March 12, 2020 (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2020). For some students, during this time, whether preparing for college or already enrolled, attempting to take advantage of the situation to get improved grades and excel academically was as the course schedules were more manageable or easier to navigate. For others, online learning was not useful nor beneficial for their academic success and was quite detrimental to them.

One key component overlooked in online learning was the decrease in access to deal with mental health issues. For students, separating school from life was challenging. Especially when students take their courses online from home, the environment varies based on individual circumstances. According to a study conducted by Wang et al. (2020), evidence suggests that there was an increase in the level of stress and depression among the public. However, there is still insufficient documentation regarding the mental health of college students in the United States. In their research, they analyzed survey results from Texas A&M college students in the spring semester of 2020. They found that “48.14% showed a moderate-to-severe level of depression, 38.48% showed a mild-to-severe level of anxiety, and 18.04% had suicidal thoughts in the 2 weeks preceding the survey” (Wang et al., 2020). It is evident that many students experienced elevated levels of depression or depressive thoughts. Furthermore, they also found gender and classification had significant results with the correlation between depression and anxiety. According to their findings they have found, “female respondents reported higher scores, while respondents in a higher classification reported lower scores on PHQ-9 and GAD-7” (Wang et al. 2020). Additionally, the majority of participants (71.26%) indicated that their stress/anxiety levels had increased during the pandemic. Only 43.25% indicated that they could cope adequately with the stress related to the current situation” (Wang et al., 2020).

Even though most of the pandemic has subsided, there is still an impact left over for past and incoming college students. In a different study, conducted by Hu et al. (2022), they wanted to investigate the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on college students in the US (Northern Michigan) two years later. For their study, they conducted a self-report survey of students at a public university in Northern Michigan, and found that together two years later, students' fear levels doubled, and consistently, their happiness decreased to one-half of the previous level” (Hu et al., 2022). They also found that “alarmingly, among n=151 students, 95.7% experienced moderate to severe mood disorders, including anxiety, depression, hostility, interpersonal sensitivity, and sleep problems” (Hu et al., 2022). However, they did not find that gender played a role in mood disorders (Hu et al., 2022). Furthermore, the pandemic had not only affected many college students' mental health but also impacted their education. They found that “Respondents' education was severely affected by the pandemic, averaging a score of 7.6 on a scale of 10 when asked how much their learning quality was affected” (Hu et al., 2022). Not only has the pandemic impacted emotional stress, but also the level of education, even two years later from the start.

While many other articles also show that there was a psychological impact on college students in the United States, it is also particularly important to note that this observational study still needs to be conducted not only for college students in the United States but also of international students in universities all over the world. Even more so, researchers should

examine specifically how the COVID-19 pandemic affected those with various levels of socioeconomic status, ethnicities, cultural backgrounds, and response to different affirmative action plans from different governments.

People from diverse backgrounds have different experiences and different responses to stressors, especially something as grave as a pandemic. While these studies have limitations, it is important to try and expand these studies to fully develop the differences and degrees of anxiety, depression, fear, etc., college students felt at the beginning, middle, and towards the end of the pandemic, at least for those who believe it has ended.

For me, I was a high school student during the pandemic, and I was unable to go back to school (in-person) until my senior year of high school. I was very much isolated and felt uncomfortable going back to school at this time, especially after many students in my public high school had not participated in taking the COVID-19 vaccination. I had been left with PTSD and anxiety, even more so, when I had lost my grandfather at the beginning of the quarantine to the disease. It was an emotional turmoil to continue my education, both online and in-person, especially as time went on. I was motivated at first to do my best with my courses, but it was hard to do so with all the challenges my family was facing. Then, having to go back to school, it was hard to be the person I was two years prior, a very social and interactive student. Through time, it gradually improved, and I had to relearn how to adapt to the social environment at school.

During my first year of college, there were still many cases of COVID-19 occurring, which made me skeptical. However I found ways to cope with the aftermath of the pandemic. Having adapted to the environment during my senior year of high school, it was easier to maneuver through my first year of college. This experience was much different from that of those who were college students during the pandemic, and even more so for those graduating during this time. Nonetheless, being a student during the pandemic was a difficult time for all college students. From the shift to online learning, to adapting to new environments, and dealing with the impact of mental health, the COVID-19 pandemic presented numerous challenges that have yet to be fully studied. However, it has also provided insights into how we can adapt to the struggles of any epidemic or pandemic.

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