



# Psychological Responses Experienced by Undergraduate Students as a Consequence of the COVID-19 Pandemic

## Studente S\*

Regent's University London, United Kingdom

\*Corresponding author: Sylvie Studente, Regent's University London, United Kingdom,  
Email: sylvie.studente@regents.ac.uk

### Opinion

Volume 6 Issue 3

Received Date: August 10, 2021

Published Date: August 17, 2021

DOI: 10.23880/pprij-16000288

## Opinion

The Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been far reaching, with countries worldwide introducing measures to restrict social congregation. The public were advised to work from home where possible and to limit travel [1]. Social restrictions included the closure of schools and universities, as well as many physical premises of employment. As well as closing their physical locations, universities moved to remote teaching to continue providing education to students. However, much of the body of research within the area provides evidence of detrimental impacts upon this vital and necessary strategy upon the psychological well-being of students.

Among the commonly reported psychological responses to the pandemic are increased levels of anxiety, stress, and depression [2]. The number of people reported to experience anxiety disorder in the UK during the pandemic has doubled [3]. These findings are not mutually exclusive to the UK, similar trends have been reported worldwide [4], for example, Germany [5], France [6], Bangladesh [7], China [8], Poland [9], and Spain [10] amongst other countries. Across all reports, it has been widely acknowledged that social restrictions have been causal of psychological impacts [11,12].

The focus of this opinion article is upon the psychological responses of university students, as a consequence of mitigation strategies undertaken by academic institutions due to the pandemic. Studies in the area have reported that although some students have responded to changes in educational strategies with resilience [13], many have reported detrimental impacts to their mental health [14]. It is likely that the closure of university campuses has led to feelings of uncertainty and anxiety for many students [15].

Specifically, research has widely reported that students have struggled to maintain motivation and engagement following the transition to remote learning [16]. Another commonly reported consequence is a decline in academic performance [17]. Across the globe, worldwide trends have consistently reported the increase in psychological responses of; increased stress levels, anxiety, and depression amongst university students [18,19]. Interestingly, the correlation between increased anxiety, and declining academic performance is noted [20].

These reported trends are not specific to the UK, a number of worldwide studies have also reported similar trends at international institutions [21-23]. All the studies mentioned here report a significant increase in depression and anxiety levels experienced by undergraduate students as the pandemic progressed. The study undertaken by Debowska, et al. correlates these increases in anxiety and depression with social isolation and lack of integration due to remote learning and campus closures. Research further purports that these aspects have also exacerbated pre-existing mental health conditions amongst university students [24]. Additionally, levels of anxiety have been reported to have increased for students who have had little to no prior experience with distance learning [25], and for those experiencing equipment problems such as reliable internet access, availability of webcams and/or computers [26]. Added to these challenges is the case of international students who have faced increased levels of stress in returning to their home countries and continue their university studies online [27].

Across the board, students have reported feeling socially isolated from peers and lecturers [28]. The impact of the

pandemic has been greatly felt by first year students, many whom feel that they have missed out on the experience of being able to form bonds and establish new friendships with classmates as well as the overall 'university experience'. It is these reductions in social interaction coupled with feelings of loneliness which are associated with declines in student mental health [29,30]. These reports are not surprising given that critical social dimensions for student's psychological wellbeing include interaction, friendship, social support, and co-studying. Social isolation can lead to elevated anxiety and symptoms of depression [31,32]. which also has a knock-on effect on academic performance. This is as when students are socially engaged with peers, they are more likely to be motivated with their studies [33].

The research reported on within this article highlights the urgent need for strategies to support students' psychological well-being, considering this several recommendations are made:

- Establish methods of social contact amongst students such; as chatbots, virtual check ins etc.
- Reduce the disruption to learning as far as possible by providing programme details, likely return dates etc.
- Provision of mental health and support services.
- Outreach to students who require extra support in their studies.
- Implementing online programmes to promote the mental wellbeing of students.
- Provide opportunities for students to connect with their peers.

In the forthcoming edited collection "The Impact of Covid-19 on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education", available via Nova Science Publishers, international scholars offer numerous strategies in supporting students during these challenging times: <https://novapublishers.com/shop/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-teaching-and-learning-in-higher-education/>

## References

1. Mervosh S, Lu D, Swales V (2020) See Which States and Cities Have Told Residents to Stay at Home. The New York Times.
2. Rajkumar R (2020) COVID-19 and mental health: a review of the existing literature. *Asian Journal of Psychiatry* 52: 102066.
3. Kwong A, Pearson R, Adams M, Northstone K (2020) Mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic in two longitudinal UK population cohorts. *Psychiatry and Clinical Psychology*.
4. Xiong J, Lipsitz O, Nasri F, Lui L, Gill H, et al. (2020) Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on mental health in the general population: a systematic review. *Journal of Affective Disorders* 277: 55-64.
5. B auerle A, Teufel M, Musche V (2020) Increased generalized anxiety, depression, and distress during the COVID-19 pandemic: a cross-sectional study in Germany. *Journal of Public Health* 42(4): 672-678.
6. Husky M, Kovess-Masfety V, Swendsen J (2020) Stress and anxiety among university students in France during Covid-19 mandatory confinement. *Comprehensive Psychiatry* 102: 152191.
7. Islam M, Barna S, Raihan H, Khan M, Hossain M (2020) Depression and anxiety among university students during the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh: a web-based cross-sectional survey. *PLoS One* 15(8): e0238162.
8. He Wang Z, Yang H, Yang Y, Liu D, Li Z, et al. (2020) Prevalence of anxiety and depression symptom, and the demands for psychological knowledge and interventions in college students during COVID-19 epidemic: A large cross-sectional study. *Journal of Affective Disorders* 275: 188-193.
9. Wang Z, Yang H, Yang Y, Liu D, Li Z, et al. (2020) Prevalence of anxiety and depression symptom, and the demands for psychological knowledge and interventions in college students during COVID-19 epidemic: A large cross-sectional study. *Journal of Affective Disorders* 275: 188-193.
10. Ozamiz-Etxebarria N, Dosil-Santamaria M, Picaza-Gorrochategui M, Idoiaga-Mondragon N (2020) Levels of stress, anxiety and depression in the first phase of the COVID-19 outbreak in a sample collected in northern Spain *Cad. Sa de P blica* 36(4): e00054020.
11. Marques G, Drissi N, Torre Diez I, Abajo B, Ouhbi S (2021) Impact of COVID-19 on the psychological health of university students in Spain and their attitudes towards mobile mental health solutions. *International Journal of Medical Informatics* 147: 104369.
12. Brooks S, Webster R, Smith L, Woodland S, Wessely N, et al. (2020) The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence. *Lancet* 395(10227): 912-920.
13. Kelley S (2020) Students face pandemic disruption with resilience.
14. Nania, T, Dellafiore, F & Caruso, R (2020) Risk and protective factors for psychological distress among

- Italian university students during the COVID-19 pandemic: The beneficial role of health engagement. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 67(1): 102-103.
15. Padron I, Fraga I, Vieitez L, Montes C, Romero E (2021) A study on the psychological wound of COVID-19 in university students. *Frontiers in Psychology*.
  16. Perets E, Chabeda D, Gong A, Huang X, Fung T, et al. (2020) Impact of the emergency transition to remote teaching on student engagement in a non-STEM undergraduate chemistry course in the time of COVID-19. *Journal of Chemical Education* 97(9): 2439-2447.
  17. Mudenda S, Zulu A, Phiri M, Ngazimbi M, Mufwambi W, et al. (2020) Impact of coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) on university students: a global health and education problem. *Aquademia* 4(2): ep20026.
  18. Liu Y, Kuo R, Shih S (2020) COVID-19: The first documented coronavirus pandemic in history. *Biomedical Journal* 43(4): 328-333.
  19. Rajab M, Alkattan K (2020) Challenges to online medication education during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Cureus* 12(7): e8966.
  20. Bledsoe T, Baskin J (2014) Recognising student fear: the elephant in the classroom. *College Teaching* 62(1): 32-41.
  21. Fruehwirth J, Biswas S, Perreira K (2021) The Covid-19 pandemic and mental health of first-year college students: Examining the effect of Covid-19 stressors using longitudinal data. *PLoS ONE* 16(3): e0247999.
  22. Faisal R, Jobe M, Ahmed O, Sharkar T (2021) Mental health status, anxiety and depression levels of Bangladeshi university students during COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Mental Health & Addiction*, 1-16.
  23. Debowska A, Horeczy B, Boduszek D, Dolinski D (2020) A repeated cross-sectional survey assessing university students' stress, depression, anxiety, and suicidality in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland. *Psychological Medicine* 1-4.
  24. Studente S, Ellis S, Desai B (2021) The effect of mitigation strategies on university student's mental health and wellbeing: a review of preliminary studies. In: Studente S, Ellis S, Desai B (Eds.), *The Impact of COVID-19 of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. Nova Science; New York.
  25. Piotrowski, King Chula (2020) COVID-19 pandemic: challenges and implications for higher education. *Education* 141(2): 61-66.
  26. Bolatov A, Seisembekov T, Askarova A, Baikanova R, Smailova D, et al. (2020) Online-learning due to COVID-19 improved mental health among medical students. *Medical Science Educator* 31: 183-192.
  27. Lai A, Lee L, Wang M, Feng Y, Lai T, et al. (2020) Mental Health Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on International University Students, Related Stressors, and Coping Strategies. *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 11: 584240.
  28. Boda Z, Elmer T, Vörös, A, & Stadtfeld, C (2020) Short-term and long-term effects of a social network intervention on friendships among university students. *Scientific Reports* 10(1): 2889.
  29. Elmer T, Mepham K, Stadtfeld C (2020) Students under lockdown: Comparisons of students' social networks and mental health before and during the COVID-19 crisis in Switzerland. *PLoS ONE* 15(7): e0236337.
  30. Tambag H, Turan Z, Tolun S, Can R (2018) Perceived social support and depression levels of women in the postpartum period in Hatay. *Nigerian Journal of Clinical Practice* 21(11): 1525-1530.
  31. Hortulanus R, Machielse A, Meeuwesen L (2006) *Social Isolation in Modern Society*. London, Routledge.
  32. Chaturvedi K, Vishwakarma D, Sing N (2020) COVID-19 and its impact on education, social life, and mental health of students: a survey. *Children and Youth Services Review* 121: 105866.
  33. Furrer C, Skinner E (2003) Sense of relatedness as a factor in children's academic engagement and performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 95(1): 148-163.

