

ONA VIRUS SARS-CoV-2 PANDEMIC AND ITS NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON COLLEGE STUDENTS PSYCHOSOMATIC EQUILIBRIUM

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Abstract

This short term digitally distributed longitudinal study evaluated impacts of the Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 (Covid-19) pandemic on college students from Southern California. A total number of three hundred and eighteen [n=318] individuals were included in the study of which 154 or 48% were females, n=161 or 51% males and n=3 or 0.1% were individuals who refused to provide that information. The study was based on two separate data sets collected four months apart (Dec. 2020 and April 2021) from students of which n= 154 and n=164 were 1st and 2nd cohort respectfully. From all individuals surveyed n=253 or 80% were 26 years of age or younger at the time. Troubling pattern observed was a decline in overall satisfaction and wellbeing in all parameters analyzed. Some of the most concerning were an increase in stress from 74% to 77% while abilities to perform simple tasks declined from 67% to 55% from the first to the second cohort of students surveyed in that order. Such results, which were measured in two separate instances and only four months, apart suggest that distressed psychosomatic equilibriums need to be urgently addressed if we are to come out of the pandemic with physically and emotionally healthy population of young adults.

Key Words: COVID-19; Stress; Sleep, Wellbeing; Physical inactivity

Introduction

Psychosomatic equilibrium, which we all aim towards, is now out of balance by the effects of the pandemic prompted by Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 (Covid-19) that started mid-March 2020 in California by “the shelter in place order”. Since the pandemic started entire world introduced protocols that slightly varied from place to place and within the state of California from city to city, but there was always a clearly stated protocol to follow. Even though, these parameters varied slightly rigid public environments were global reality. Recent vaccination efforts in Southern California resulted in a slow yet sure return of a semi-normal public sphere now obviously seen as outside seating in local restaurants is allowed without masks while seated, walking on the streets is now commonly seen with and without masks on. Even gyms are now open with a rule that masks must be worn at all times unless a person is on cardio equipment and everyone is still to follow enforced 6ft social distance rule. However, as the rest of Southern California daily life is slowly heading towards semi-normal, pre-pandemic state of mind no traditional or face-to-face college courses were offered at the time the surveys were collected. Traditional courses are expected to commence in August - September for the upcoming fall semester of academic 2021. Potentially serious problems associated with drastic alterations in college students lifestyles and overall wellbeing has been reported earlier by researchers who pointed out that modifications in daily lives may have theoretically serious consequences (Peper, et al. 2021, Jelaca et al., 2020; Verhavert et al., 2020; Jelaca et al., 2017; Toker and Melamed, 2017; Jelaca et al., 2016).

Method of Work

This study was conducted as two separate events four months apart (December 2020 – April 202), both were conducted via digital questionnaires given to college students who were enrolled in a Remote Instruction courses at a college in Southern California. The questionnaires were distributed and collected digitally four months apart via Google Forms to the first [n=154] and the second [n=164] cohort. The data

was collected in real time, as the responders finished their survey; the data was automatically recorded into the Google Form. In the research survey disclaimer, every single participant was informed that the survey will be anonymous and those who did not accept the disclaimer were automatically disqualified and were unable to proceed with the survey. Google Forms is a software selected for the collection of the responses and the Google Sheet was used for statistical analysis of the final findings.

Results of the research

In this, longitudinal digitally distributed self-reported study consisting of two separate surveys first distributed in December 2020 and the second in April 2021. Three hundred and eighteen (n=318) is a total number of individuals pooled in first and the second groups combined, n= 154 and n= 161 were females and males respectfully, while n=3 individuals refused to report their sex. Overwhelming majority of responders or n=254 or 80% were at the time 26 years of age or younger (see below, Table 1). Increase in stress levels were reported by a total of n= 240 individuals or 75%. The first cohort reported increase in stress in n=114 (74%) and the second n=126 (78%), while weight gain was reported by 98 and 124 or 70% of all individuals surveyed from first and second cohort in that order. Edema or water retention a.k.a. swelling was reported by 30%, sugar intake increased by 43%, performing simple tasks was reported to be harder than normal by 61% while 48% across both cohorts reported that it is harder to socialize in person than it was before Covid19 (see below, Table 2).

Table 1.

	<i>Cohort 1</i>	<i>Cohort 2</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Sex</i>			
<i>Males</i>	59	75	134
<i>Females</i>	95	86	181
<i>Prefer not to say</i>	0	3	3
<i>Total</i>	154	164	318
<i>Year of birth</i>			
<i>1970-Before</i>	1	1	2
<i>1971-1984</i>	10	5	15
<i>1985-1994</i>	29	19	48
<i>1995-After</i>	114	139	253
<i>Total</i>	154	164	318

Table 2.

	<i>Cohort 1</i>	<i>Cohort 2</i>	<i>Total (n=)</i>	<i>Total %</i>
<i>Stress Increased during Covid19</i>	114	126	240	75%
<i>Reported weight gained</i>	98	124	222	70%
<i>Reported edema</i>	55	41	96	30%
<i>Increase in sugar intake</i>	68	68	136	43%
<i>Harder to perform simple tasks</i>	103	90	193	61%
<i>Socialization in person is harder than before Covid19</i>	79	73	152	48%

Discussion

Even though the first survey was sent out in December of 2020 and the second in April 2021 the negative effects of pandemic on college students is evident as overall wellbeing reported was tracked and compared only to show undeniable decrease in overall wellbeing and morale among college students surveyed. Vast majority of those surveyed or 80% are young adults perceived to be at good health and readily working on their academic and future goals. An increase in stress levels were noted and reported to increase in just four months from 74% to 77% while abilities to perform simple tasks declined from 67% to 55% from the first to the second cohort of students surveyed in that order. Since a paper published by the authors of this topic by using the same questions, methodology and parameters was published a year ago in June 2020 a decrease in overall wellbeing is palatable (Peper, et al., 2021, Jelaca et al., 2020). The increasing negative growth in trends observed is reported among surveyed individuals. This paper focuses on tracking stress levels, abilities to perform simple tasks, weight gain, edema formation, dietary (specifically sugar) intake and

social lives all of which show increased dissatisfaction presented by higher percentage of students reporting it when compared to earlier published study (Jelaca et al., 2020). Weight gain was reported by 70% of individuals surveyed while in June of 2020, 73% reported it, which is the only measured parameter that shows a slight decrease. Edema was reported by higher percentage now or 30% versus 24.1% in June last year as well as did the consumption of refined sugar intake increased from 38% to 43%, both of which are proven to have negative effects on health (Jelaca et al., 2017; Jelaca et al. 2016). Successful completion of simple tasks remained around 40% of all surveyed, while ability to socialize in person was identified as harder to do by alarmingly high 48% of all surveyed in the current study.

Conclusion

This study is based on linear pattern of data collection based on previously assessed and published survey finds by the authors of this paper all in attempt to provide linear and easily followed unbalanced psychosomatic equilibrium presented by a decline in overall wellbeing among college students from Southern California. This pandemic highlighted the fact that change is unavoidable which we can see from the data collected only four months apart suggesting that we need to be prepared for aftermaths of the pandemic. Globally, governments as quickly as possible introduce, various protocols to avoid spreading or to confine the virus together with social distancing and facial masks was a tactic used to prevent over burdening medical facilities and confine the virus as much that is possible. However, even though these protocols were in place and generally did prevent the spread of the virus we believe that we are still not fully prepared for hidden upcoming health dangers. Probable future health dangers following the entire generation is presented in this paper by evaluating student self-reported data and we can clearly see that there is an urgent need to focus on preventing possible fast approaching disastrous physical and mental health crisis. Generations of humans are scared psychosomatically and this study presented alarming patterns stressing a decrease in wellbeing, and a steady, yet consistently observed increase in psychosomatic stress.

These two factors alone must be taken into consideration and cross-discipline efforts must be directed towards creating a healthy and supportive environment, not only for college students, but also for all age groups as the pandemic affected everyone. However, since college students are young healthy adults and these lifestyle changes had impacted this age group so drastically the question is begging to be asked what we to expect from older and not so healthy populations are. Medico-social global reality is being altered as this paper is being published and we need to be prepared to provide much needed support to all age groups and populations globally if we are to have healthy and thriving post-pandemic world.

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Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to report.

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