

COVID-19 Specific Stressors and Their Effects on Undergraduate Academic Performance

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Undergraduate academic performance consistently proves to be one of the largest external stressors for college students year after year, and the addition of a deadly global pandemic only complicates this issue further. The devastating impact that COVID-19 has had on everyone's lives has already been shown to increase psychopathological symptoms in even the most steadfast people. This could be a result of COVID's rarity in terms of its reach over geography and time compared to other common sicknesses and epidemics. Compared to the influenza and the SARS epidemic, COVID-19 has a much larger global reach than a typical influenza season and has been around much longer than the SARS epidemic was. Additionally, previous research indicates that an array of psychopathologies, such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD, have an adverse effect on a student's academic performance. Further, it is possible the COVID specific stressors act similar to state and/or trait anxiety in many people. This state and trait anxiety has been shown to have differing effects on academic performance; state anxiety is linked to lower performance while trait anxiety is linked to higher performance. This study aimed to highlight how COVID-19 stressors acted in participants and to determine the relationship between said COVID-19 specific stressors and their impact on academic performance. More specifically, GPA was used to draw such conclusions with the aid of online-administered surveys consisting of psychopathology measures and questions about college life during the pandemic. These psychopathology measures included the State Trait Anxiety Inventory, the Beck Depression Inventory, a neuroticism measure, and a PTSD measure. The optional GPA questions gathered information from semesters both before and after COVID-19 appeared. This study hypothesized that overall GPA from more recent, COVID-19 centered semesters would be lower than previous, more "normal" semesters in students that showed higher state anxiety from COVID-19. Additionally, it was hypothesized that students with higher overall state anxiety would have larger drops in their semester GPAs than their less anxious cohorts.