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## Psychological Strategies for the Academic Success of College Students: Lessons Learned from the COVID-19 Pandemic

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### Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic represented a major destabilizing event that disrupted politics, culture, and society at the global level. At the same time, the crisis's aggregate impact generated specific types of disruption that affected various sectors. The pandemic required university leaders to proactively respond to the crisis by protecting their organizations, students, and stakeholders. The pandemic has far-reaching effects on students in the education arena. Black and brown students have been severely affected due to many suffering from a lack of sufficient resources in the areas of academics, economics, and physical and mental health. In the field of higher education, College students' mental status influences their academics.

This paper will address these broader themes by examining two key issues. First, the paper provides an overview of the Covid-19 pandemic's impact on university planning, education, and student support services delivery. Secondly, the paper will analyze the theme of university student resilience in the context of a few key determinants. Finally, the paper will identify the recommendations that can ensure a university's ability to address its students' aggregate needs during the pandemic's continual aftermath.

**Keywords:** Psychological strategies, Resilience, COVID – 19, Academic success, Universities.

### Introduction

#### Covid-19's Institutional Impact on Universities

Before the pandemic, an alarming number of students struggled with feelings of helplessness, depression, and thoughts of suicide. Suicide rates have increased since the pandemic. These stressors may result in long-term consequences for their psychophysiological health and academic achievements.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, college students' psychological distress rates, including symptoms of depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders, have increased. A survey of research literature that examined the Covid-19 pandemic in universities at the institutional level explored this issue from multiple perspectives. The first group of sources provided a retrospective analysis that identified the actual strategies that various institutions utilized during the pandemic and its resulting lockdowns. The researchers cited examples of cases in which a university's approach achieved positive outcomes (Mseleku, Z., 2020; Müller, et al., 2021)

#### Approaches Utilized During the Initial Covid Crisis

A review of varied university response strategies utilized during the Covid-19 pandemic yielded the following observations. First, the complex and disruptive nature of the pandemic resulted in effects that destabilized the holistic dimensions of an institution's operations (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021; Raaper & Brown, 2020). At one level, the crisis required schools to restructure their approach to education as institutions canceled in-person classes and transitioned towards remote-based instructional methodologies (Karalis & Raikou, 2020; Mseleku, 2020). Secondly, university leaders and decision-makers recognized the need for delivering various types of support to their learners. These findings indicated that remote-

based learning models tend to generate mixed types of effects for students (Moawad, 2020; Müller et al., 2021). These methodologies can benefit specific types of learners even as they tend to contribute to an individual's feeling of social isolation. The lockdown's destabilizing effects thus detracted from the essential variables of the campus community (Rashid & Yadav, 2020; Raaper & Brown, 2020).

A third theme deriving from these assessments refers to the trend among universities to cultivate innovative response strategies that sought to navigate the immediate-term conditions stemming from the pandemic. At the educational level, individual instructors, their affiliated departments, and entire universities developed andragogical strategies that sought to leverage the benefits associated with remote-based instruction while also compensating for its social drawbacks (Müller et al., 2021; Sim et al., 2021). Additional findings, however, referred to the effort by institutional decision-makers to implement strategies that would contribute to their students' social support (Rahiem, 2021; Saleh & Mujahiddin, 2020). Scholars also recognized the extreme mental health risks that derived from the lockdown's unusual conditions (Bountress et al., 2022; Praghlapati, 2020). These insights, coupled with the recommendations published by the U.S. Surgeon General's Office (2021) guided the intervention and support services provided to students experiencing symptoms related to extreme forms of stress, anxiety, or depression (Hagedorn et al., 2022; Labrague et al., 2021). Many of the outreaches implemented by universities defined these threats as conditions that tended to impact university students before the crisis but that also tended to manifest in more extreme ways during the lockdowns (Bountress et al., 2022; Malik & Javed, 2021).

### Exemplary Strategies

Discussions of university responses to the Covid-19 pandemic referenced the exemplary approaches that some institutions utilized. Exemplary approaches can be defined as methodologies that not only successfully addressed the immediate-term challenges created by the crisis but that additionally represented potentially effective longer-term strategies. Various scholars recommended programs that enabled students to establish new and emerging patterns of community in response to the pandemic's destabilizing effects (Rashid & Yadav, 2020; Raaper and Brown, 2020). These methodologies encouraged students to rely on remote and hybrid approaches to communication with one another before they were able to leave the restricted quarantine established during the lockdown. Other analysts (Saleh & Mujahiddin, 2020) additionally viewed university-directed programs as effective methodologies that promoted community engagement across the campus (Raaper & Brown 2020; Saleh & Mujahiddin, 2020). Additional assessments analyzed various student engagement and counseling strategies and suggested ways of promoting mental health and encouraging individuals and populations to cope with the crisis (Rahiem 2021; Yıldırım & Tanrıverdi, 2021). This view posits resiliency as a variable that can counter the isolating effects of social isolation and attendant depression (Malik & Javed, 2021; Yıldırım & Tanrıverdi, 2021). Several authors recommended the application of strengths-based intervention as a method that enabled individuals to

recognize and utilize their latent strengths (Brewer et al., 2019; Dunston et al., 2022).

### Lingering Effects

Discussions of the lingering effects that will continue to impact universities identify the following trends. First, these future impacts will likely affect institutions in complex ways. Schools will continue to rely on remote and hybrid-based approaches to instruction even as they transition towards traditional andragogical strategies (Moawad et al., 2020; Triyason et al., 2020). Universities will also need to address and reconcile the longer-term financial challenges that will affect their strategic and operational approaches (El Masri & Sabzalieva, 2020; Ramlo, 2021). Finally, institutions will need to carefully manage the ongoing mental health challenges that impact their students (Duncan, 2022; Labrague et al., 2021). At the same time, research indicates that the crisis's impact exasperated the behavioral and mental health factors among vulnerable college students (Bountress et al., 2022; Maia & Dias, 2020). Based on these assessments, universities should view mental health outreaches as crucial programs that address many of the risks that impact their students' well-being (Bountress *et al.*, 2022; Duncan, 2022).

### Future-Term Strategies

A review of related research identifies the recommended best practices that can benefit universities as these organizations address the ongoing challenges deriving from the pandemic's complex and long-ranging impacts. These recommendations begin with a recognition of multidimensional planning strategies as an optimal approach (El Masri & Sabzalieva, 2020; Raaper & Brown, 2020). Exemplary models include strategies that seek to address the challenges impacting universities at the organizational level and those that will continue to personally affect their students. The provision, marketing, and delivery of mental health services represent a critical approach as it will address the psychological and behavioral risks of the target client base while improving the school's image and reputation among its students (Mseleku, 2020; Praghlapati, 2020).

The task of developing and implementing an effective line of mental health services begins with a university's institutional commitment to making these decisions. Scholars noted that university decision-makers operate in a third-tier sector that operates between the dimensions of policymaking and private business (El Masri & Sabzalieva, 2020; Müller et al., 2021). Their strategies, accordingly, focus on delivering social goods that mirror aspects of political decision-making even as they utilize their efforts to contribute to a school's image. The cultivation of evidence-based and manageable outreaches can thus promote the variables of mental health within the organization. Finally, an informed perspective of varying student demographic needs can help schools ensure that their outreaches appeal to diverse individuals within their campus community (Aucejo et al., 2020; Ramlo, 2021).

### Covid-19 Impacts on University Students

#### University Student Stress and the Covid-19 Pandemic

One of the pandemic's primary effects, notable among diverse university students, relates to the population's increased tendency towards various negative mental health

conditions. It is important to note that individuals with pre-existing mental health conditions are in greater need of behavioral health support as a result of the pandemic. College students with existing mental health disorders are even more at risk for exacerbation of mental illness due to the disruption caused by COVID-19. Researchers noted that varying groups of college students examined across varied global environments indicated a higher-than-average vulnerability to the effects of stress, depression, and anxiety (Malik & Javed, 2021; Praghlapati, 2020). In the context of this study, the author linked these trends to the unprecedented nature of the crisis and the tendency among many students to self-isolate as they followed various lockdown mandates. Labrague et al. (2021) similarly noted that these same practices greatly contribute to the risks of social isolation, loneliness, and depression (Bountress et al., 2022; Labrague et al., 2021). In both cases, the authors link their observations to the disruptions generated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Previous assessments, however, indicated that many of these same problems predated these events. Current findings demonstrated a high statistical likelihood of university students experiencing stress independent of the pandemic and resulting lockdowns. These combined assessments indicate that the crisis's influence on the population can be attributed to the events' role in exacerbating pre-existing risk factors (Asif et al. 2020; Hagedorn et al. 2022). According to this view, full-time college students viewed the lockdown requirements and the mandates' impact on their university policies as highly disruptive occurrences that transformed the nature of their perceived experience.

Other findings provide detailed assessments that further describe how specific variables impact student experiences of stress and other corresponding mental health risks. These studies both identified the rapid institutional transition from traditional classroom settings as an intrinsic stressor that severely impacted student stress and anxiety levels (Maia & Dias, 2020; Malik & Javed, 2020; Moawad, 2020). These themes indicated that the onset of social isolation generated through these developments as a factor that impacted reported rates of depression among the population. Other findings linked heightened risks for mental health disruptions to an increase in unhealthy lifestyle behaviors for university students (Bellet et al., 2020; Bountress et al., 2022).

Additional source's view stress among college students as a factor that tends to be moderated by several determinants (CCSE, 2022; Duncan, 2022). These findings indicated that full-time community college students were more likely to view the pandemic as a major disrupter to their lives than their surveyed part-time counterparts. Other reports likewise contended that university student experiences of Covid-19-related disruptions tended to be moderated by a variety of social and demographic-related variables (Aucejo et al., 2020; Bountress et al., 2022).

Discussions of the pandemic's impact on university students' mental health consistently refer to the concept of an individual's psychological resiliency (Hurley, 2020; Yıldırım & Tanrıverdi, 2021). This view defined resiliency as a person's internal latent strengths that enable them to manage their stress during times of crisis. The phenomenon's importance in the context of the pandemic's impact on college student mental health relates to its ability

to motivate affected individuals towards desired end-state goals (Poots & Cassidy, 2020; Rahiem, 2020). Theories that encourage individuals to cultivate their resiliency to various issues and challenges, apply strengths-based interventions as they work with various clients. On one level, these concepts identify resiliency as a personal factor that correlates with an individual's attitude and approach to various situations. Other concepts, however, indicate that an individual's resiliency tends to be contingent on available forms of social support. In their study, (Poots and Cassidy, 2020) indicated that surveyed college students demonstrated a higher level of personal resiliency in cases where they had access to varied forms of support made available to them by their school (Brewer et al. 2019; Yıldırım and Tanrıverdi, 2021).

### Recommendations

As universities address the future long-term impacts resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, their operational and strategic practices can benefit from the following solutions. A critical first step should include the approach of prioritizing student mental health. A university's implemented program should provide multiple tiers of service provision. These models should connect students to both online and on-campus resources while enabling them to select the specific type of assistance that pertains to their case and unique needs. Institutions should effectively market and advertise these available resources by utilizing multimedia-based strategies. At the clinical service level, schools can provide effective types of outreach by diversifying the type of services that they provide. Optimized support systems should deliver varied forms of care that address a student's multidimensional needs and that focus on the unique problems faced by individual demographics. Research also shows that having varied external resources to offer support helps in the reduction of stigmatization.

### Conclusion

Mental health is no less important than physical health. This must be reflected in our communication and prioritization of mental health. The COVID-19 pandemic altered students' experiences and the effect on their mental health has been overwhelming.

College students face unprecedented pressures and stressors in the face of the COVID -19 pandemic. Educational programs and services for dealing with behavioral health issues have been shown to facilitate feelings of empathy and tolerance. This is the moment to demand change through our voices and actions. Investing in the next generation is not optional. We need to offer support and care, not stigma and shame.

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