Eve Hein
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Psychology
The Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on College Student Mental Health
Across Class Status
Faculty Mentor: Jeffrey Debies-Carl, Ph.D.,
Department of Psychology

The 2019 novel coronavirus disease, COVID-19 has spread rapidly throughout many countries and continues to unfold, producing a mental health crisis. Of the many people affected, college students might be disproportionately at risk as college is a relatively long and stressful period of life that presents risks of negative mental health (Hernández et al., 2021). Past research measuring resiliency, mental health, and class year has found significance in the impact of class year on mental health and resiliency (Wu et al., 2020). Consequently, this study investigated whether class year has similar effects on student mental health during the pandemic and whether that pattern is consistent across genders. To answer this question, an online survey was created and conducted through SurveyMonkey (N = 108; ages 18-21; 22 colleges/universities).

In addition to general demographic questions, the survey included two scales to measure positive mental health (Positive Mental Health Scale, PMHS) and negative mental health (Depression Anxiety Stress Scale, DASS). Two independent variables (gender and class year) were then analyzed to measure differences in the dependent variables: Positive Mental Health and Depression Anxiety Stress. SPSS27 was used to test whether gender, class year, and an interaction between them (gender*classyear) significantly correlated with DASS and PMHS by means of a two-way multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) and additional post-hoc testing (Fisher's Least Significant Difference). Utilizing Pillai's Trace, both gender ($F_{(2, 97)}$ = 17.376, $p < .000$; partial eta squared = .26) and classyear*gender $F_{(6, 196)}$ = 2.918, $p < .010$; partial eta squared = .082) were significant, while class year itself was not significant ($F_{(6, 196)}$ = 1.808, $p < .099$; partial eta squared = .052). It was found that gender and PMHS ($F_{(1, 98)}$ = 33.525, $p = .000$; partial eta squared = .255), gender and DASS ($F_{(1, 98)}$ = 25.256, $p = .000$; partial eta squared = .205) and classyear*gender and PMHS ($F_{(3, 98)}$ = 4.617, $p = .005$; partial eta squared = .124) were significant. However, classyear*gender and DASS ($F_{(3, 98)}$ = 2.142, $p = .100$; partial eta squared = .062) are not significant. In relation to gender, men ranked higher on the PMHS than women. On average, men scored 3.085 (std dev = .144) while women averaged 2.138 (std dev = .077). In relation to class year*gender the interaction was significant for all differences except for female and male juniors.

Overall, the results suggest that gender significantly impacts mental health with females more negatively impacted than males with variation dependent on class year. Findings suggest that significant interactions occur between gender, class year, and mental health that should be further explored with the intention to tailor college mental health education and interventions based on a multitude of factors (gender and class year).

References

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