

COVID-19 and Mental Health Survey

Lance Masserant, Tanya Karen Rodrigues, Taniya Dutta, Parama Ray, Zoey, Nebula,  
Cassandra Rhoades, Sharay Trotter, and Sparkles B

The Evergreen State College, USA

## **Abstract**

The COVID-19 Mental Health Group sent out a psychological survey to all participants in the symposium to collect quantitative and qualitative data on each student's subjective experience of the pandemic. We examined psychological distress and wellbeing over the past year, using an adaptation of predesigned questionnaires mixed with our own questions tailored to this program.

After collecting our data, we analyzed and synthesized what we learned, and presented the information in PowerPoint format. The purpose of our inquiry was to examine the similarities and differences between the experiences from our three participating countries with respect to COVID-19, and its impacts on our individual mental health and wellbeing.

This information highlighted the ways in which we can collectively improve our mental health and wellbeing, and we hope that it helped to inspire students to improve their self care, and improve their mental health in solidarity with one another.

## Personal Reflections

I'd like to start by saying that this was a very fulfilling project to work on and complete, particularly because of the international and cross cultural component. I served as the facilitator for our group, and I think this is the first time that I've stepped into this type of leadership role. Our group was relatively inactive for about half of the quarter, and part of this time Cassandra acted as the facilitator. Eventually, she decided that she did not have the time for the extra work, which is very understandable given that she is also a mom, so I volunteered to fill her position.

Once Tanya suggested the idea that we conduct a survey, I began actively planning meetings so that we could accomplish everything that we needed to do on time. The majority of our meetings focused on completing our project, but occasionally we would get sidetracked talking about other things, which was honestly the best part of our intercultural exchange. I really enjoyed getting to know everyone in our group, and I loved the tidbits here and there that I learned about Indian and Chinese culture.

Most of my learning came from the from the form, rather than the content. I learned a lot about how to effectively lead and organize a group of people to accomplish a task, and about how to coordinate between very different time zones. I was honesty surprised at my ability to bring people together for the sake of a shared goal, and it was very gratifying to see it though to the end.

## **Introduction :**

### Psychological Distress

According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology (2014), psychological distress is defined as “a set of painful mental and physical symptoms that are associated with normal fluctuations of mood in most people”.

It is also defined as “a state of emotional suffering associated with stressors and demands that are difficult to cope with in daily life” (Arvidsdotter et al, 2015).

### COVID-19

With over six million confirmed cases worldwide and overall, 350,000 deaths between Feb and May 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as an associate degree unexampled health care crisis. Increasing work demands on health care professionals cause psychological stress. The previous pandemics involving quarantine have emphasized that healthcare workers might develop indications of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, insomnia, and substance use disorders. As the spread and burden of the pandemic varied by geographic regions, with overwhelming numbers of severe cases in some places, and only sporadic transmission with few in others suggesting that the psychological burden also varies across regions With an elevated rate of infection and deaths, COVID-19 can cause many psychological problems including stress, anxiety, depression, fear (Arslan, Yıldırım, Tanhan, et al., 2020), and possibly burnout to stop such psychological problems, it's important to know the factors that are related to individuals' experience of stress and burnout in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Literature Review :

Research Author	Research Findings
Qiu et al (2020)	In a nationwide survey using electronic self report measures in China during the COVID-19 epidemic (N=52,730), researchers found that 35% of the respondents experienced psychological distress; with 29.29% reporting mild to moderate distress and 5.14% reporting severe psychological distress. Qiu et al also suggested that higher scores of distress among young adults (18-30 year olds) could be attributed to their ability to research and retain information relating to COVID-19 from online sources such as social media, which could trigger stress. People seeking higher education are also susceptible to distress due to their self-awareness pertaining to their health.
Breslau et al (2020)	In a longitudinal study in the US to measure psychological distress using Kessler-6 in the COVID-19 pandemic (N=2,555), Breslau found that similar amounts of people had experienced severe distress in the 30 day period of the pandemic, compared to the number of people who had experienced severe distress over the entire one year prior to the pandemic. Researchers suggested that individuals under 60 years may experience more distress due to financial stressors. Those with a prior psychiatric condition were found to be a vulnerable group for distress in this period.
Holingue et al (2020)	In a study of psychological distress (PD) among those without a preexisting psychiatric condition (N=9,687), 15% experienced 2 symptoms of PD for at least 3 days over the last week, whereas 13% experienced 3 or more symptoms of PD over the

	<p>same period. Researchers found that using social media to look up information or to post about COVID-19, reporting that the pandemic had caused major changes to their personal life, and having the perception that the COVID-19 virus was a threat to national economy, or the individual's personal health or finance; were all risk factors for psychological distress.</p>
Ramasubramanian et al (2020)	<p>Researcher found that from a total sample of 2.317 participants from the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, 20.2% experienced mild to moderate stress and 2.7% experienced severe stress. The odds of having distress were higher in the age group of 25-34 year olds as compared to &gt;55 year olds.</p>
Verdery et al (2020)	<p>In an attempt to estimate the reach of bereavement per each COVID-19 death, researchers developed a COVID-19 bereavement multiplier using microsimulation-based estimates of kinship networks in the USA. Each COVID-19 death has been estimated to be felt by an average of nine surviving Americans. They further estimated that if the death count reached 190.000, then these COVID-19 deaths would be felt by a further 1.7 million surviving Americans in the form of bereavement.</p>
WHO (2021)	<p>There have been a total of 584,700 COVID-19 deaths in the USA, confirmed reported to the World Health Organization as of 25th May 2021 (beginning from 3rd January 2020). In India, there have been 307,231 COVID-19 deaths confirmed and in China there have been 4,875 deaths, reported to WHO.</p>

**Rationale :**

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in unprecedented research worldwide. The impact on research in progress in the course of the pandemic, the importance, and challenges of real-time pandemic research are all highlighted by this pandemic. Among the far reaching effects of COVID-19, psychological distress has been a well documented consequence in the countries of China, India and the United States of America (Qiu et al, 2020; Breslau et al, 2020;Holingue et al, 2020; Ramasubramanian et al, 2020). Among the risk factors researched, young adults, those who are in higher education degrees, and those who are adept at using online resources such as social media are likely to be in the vulnerable group for experiencing higher levels of psychological distress, among other vulnerable groups. Thus, there is significance in studying the responses of university age students, which meet all the above risk factors for psychological distress, and to learn more about the strategies used by this target group of individuals to cope with the challenges that have arisen due to COVID-19..

**Objectives :**

1. To study university students from China, USA and India and measure to see if they were experiencing symptoms associated with psychological distress.
2. To measure the effect of bereavement in this population
3. To understand the coping strategies used by individuals of this population

**Hypothesis : Uni student-distress-mild moderate**

H<sub>1</sub> : There will be a significant number of students reporting higher levels of symptoms associated with psychological distress in the university students from China, USA and India.

## **Methodology :**

Design = Mixed methodology

Sample (N) = 56 university students from China, India and the USA.

Chinese participants = 21

American participants = 9

Indian participants = 26

Sampling Method = Purposive non-probability sampling

Inclusion Criteria = Participants of the International Symposium, while being a student of either Evergreen State College, Wuyi University or Amity University Mumbai.

Exclusion Criteria = Individuals who are not active participants of the International Symposium

Tools = A survey created containing a total of 7 items; 5 items with rating scale responses and 2 items with open-ended questions.

Procedure = The tools were given to the participants in a Word document due to the pandemic. Hence, the data was gathered by making use of online surveys. The scoring was done separately for the 3 countries. The data was analysed later statistically using Google Sheets software. To ensure confidentiality of results, the participant's name was eliminated from the final database, before data entry.

Ethical Considerations = Informed consent was taken. Confidentiality of all participant responses were ensured. Research data was stored securely.

Scoring = 1- Never, 2- Occasionally, 3- Sometimes, 4- Most of the time, 5- All of the time

Analysis = Descriptive frequency analysis for quantitative survey items.  
Qualitative thematic analysis for open ended questions.

**Limitations :**

- A study's shortcomings are its defects or weaknesses that may arise from resource unavailability, limited sample size, flawed methodology etc. Every research of all possible factors are completely quintessential or inclusive. The limitation for present study is discussed below which is due to time constraints and limited resources.
- The study has been conducted during the Covid-19 period because of which online survey methods had to be used.
- The sample size N=56, is considerably small. More comprehensive data must be collected from both the sectors to better understand the hardships and struggles faced by them