



The Effects of COVID-19 on Mental Health and Behavior

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Abstract

This study explored the effects of COVID-19 on the mental health and behaviors of the Pine Manor College community. A survey was sent out in the fall and spring. Although few significant differences were found, people felt safer leaving home in the spring. Females and students were more adversely impacted. The study partially supported our hypothesis that the pandemic created feelings of anxiety and uncertainty among the PMC community.

Introduction

The current COVID-19 pandemic has impacted many people via social distance, social isolation, frequent hand washing and most importantly, wearing a mask to protect yourself and those around you. There is loneliness and lack of social connectivity (Best et al., 2020) which can affect resilience (Smith et. al., 2008), along with a fear of the vaccine (Karlsson et., al 2020).

This study will look at factors that influence mental health issues and other feelings/behaviors in PMC community members as they experience the coronavirus pandemic. Specifically, we expect an increase in COVID cases will lead to increased anxiety and stress, and that individuals with fewer support person and lower levels of resilience will experience higher feelings of stress, anxiety, a sense of less safety, and isolation.

Method

Participants

Participants included faculty, staff, and students of Pine Manor College (PMC). The fall survey included 14 students, 17 staff, 16 faculty members (n = 47). The spring survey included 17 students, 12 staff, 17 faculty members (n = 46).

Materials

Participants answered online SurveyMonkey surveys about their feelings and behaviors related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Both surveys included the 6-item Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2008).

Procedure

An online survey and consent form were sent out to the participants at the end of the fall semester via email. Participants had several weeks to complete the survey. In the spring semester the PMC community was sent a follow-up survey asking about similar feelings related to the pandemic and given a similar amount of time to answer the survey.

Results

Time 1 vs. Time 2

No significant differences were found. One question was marginally significant, with people feeling safer to leave their house in the spring (M = 3.22) than the fall (M = 2.75), t (91) = -1.95, p = .055 (see Table 1 for means).

Table 1: Mean Scores for Questions by Time of Survey

Question	Fall	Spring
Worry about getting COVID	3.98	3.74
Worry about family getting COVID	4.26	4.04
Feel safe leaving house*	2.74	3.22
COVID-19 has impacted my ability to focus	3.49	3.33
My sleep patterns have changed	3.45	3.54
I feel lonely and/or isolated	3.38	3.50
I feel sad	3.74	3.78
I feel overwhelmed	3.48	3.41
I have a good support network	3.98	4.00
Change my daily routine/habits.	4.45	4.24
It is difficult reaching out for help/support	2.66	2.96
I have control over my life	3.28	3.57
Able to accomplish goals	3.28	3.48
Resilience score	21.10	19.46

Note. *Marginal significance, p = .055. Maximum resilience score = 30, higher scores indicated higher resilience. All other questions were scored on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale.

Gender Differences

Questions were analyzed by gender. Table 2 presents the results by male and female gender only because only one person indicated they were nonbinary, and four others did not answer the question. In general, males seemed to be less negatively impacted by the pandemic than females in the fall survey, although sample sizes were not equal. In the spring survey, there was only one significant gender difference with males indicating they were more able to accomplish their goals (M = 4.00) than females (M = 3.33), t (43) = -2.25, p = .030.

Table 2: Mean Scores for Fall Questions by Gender

Question	Females	Males
Feel safe leaving house*	2.65	3.44
I feel lonely and/or isolated*	3.71	2.89
I feel sad ***	4.03	2.78
I feel overwhelmed **	3.91	2.78
I have control over my life*	3.12	4.11

Note. *p<.05;**p<.01;***p<.001. n= 34 females, 9 males,

Differences by Group

The questions were also analyzed by group status. No significant differences were found for any of the spring questions. In the fall, four questions were significant. Staff and faculty were combined into one group (n = 33), and compared to the students (n = 14). See Table 3 for means.

Table 3: Mean Scores for Fall Questions by Group

Question	Students	Faculty/Staff
Feel safe leaving house*	3.29	2.52
COVID-19 impacted focus*	4.07	3.24
My sleep patterns have changed*	4.07	3.18
Able to accomplish the goals*	2.71	3.52

Note. *p<.05

Discussion

We focused on the effects of COVID-19 on mental health and behaviors. There were few significant differences. However, individuals felt safer to leave their homes in the spring, rather than the fall. This could be due to the change of US administration and president, and availability of the vaccine.

Females were more negatively impacted by the pandemic in comparison to males. This can be a direct result from women losing their jobs due to taking care of their children when schools were shut down, pregnancy/ high risk exposure, and not being able to have the proper resources to balance family duties while maintaining a job.

The faculty felt more concerned with leaving the house due to covid. This might be due to covid having more complications on the older population rather than the younger student population. However, students seemed more isolated and sadder when compared to the faculty and staff since their social lives were severely impacted and they had to go from being active and socializing to taking proper safety measures and being home or secluded from being around others as much as possible. This research would be helpful to understand how the current pandemic is especially impacting college students.