

Generation C(ovid) Heads to College: The COVID Pandemic and the Transition to College



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Introduction & Aims

- The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the lives of adolescents at critical transitions to adulthood.
- Some students finishing high school also experienced the loss of milestone events such as graduation, all while applying to college.
- Evidence indicates that over the last two years the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted adolescents in their education, mental health, and psychosocial development (Deng et al., 2021; Loades et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2020; Soria & Horgos, 2021).
- Previous work (e.g., on the Great Depression; Elder, 1974) demonstrates that monumental sociocultural disruption can shape outcomes and development of a generation who experience it as adolescents.
- This survey aims to understand how young people's experiences of COVID-19—and its challenges and lessons—relates to their transition to and time in college.

Methods & Sample

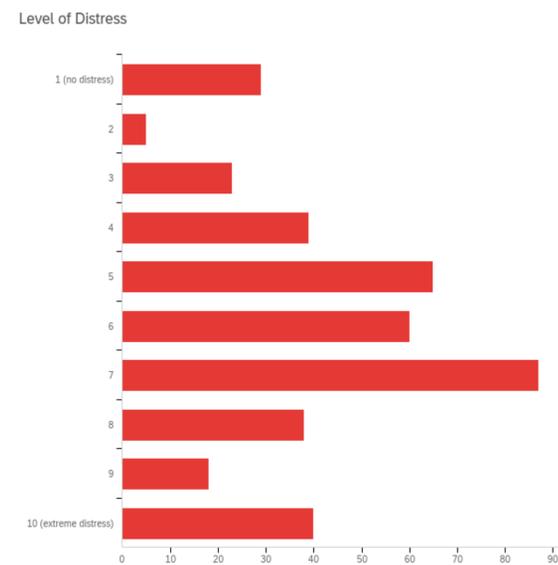
- The data from this part of the study comes from a national survey conducted in the Summer of 2022 and administered by Qualtrics. (N=404)
 - Students were asked about their college experience, educational goals, and plans after graduation.
 - Students were also asked about changes to their personal situation, mental health, and physical health as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Respondents ranged from first-year to senior year of college (34% first-year, 23% sophomore, 23% junior, and 15% senior) and included 46% first generation college students and 49% non-first generation college students. The gender and racial breakdown of survey respondents mirrors that of the national college population.

Mental Health

- Those who exercised only one day a week reported worse mental health than students who exercised more than once a week.
- Students within an income range of \$0-25,000 reported extreme distress almost 10% more than students in an income range of \$50,000-100,000.
- Students whose families did not get along reported higher distress than those whose families did.
- Students who could not take care of themselves reported higher distress.

Results

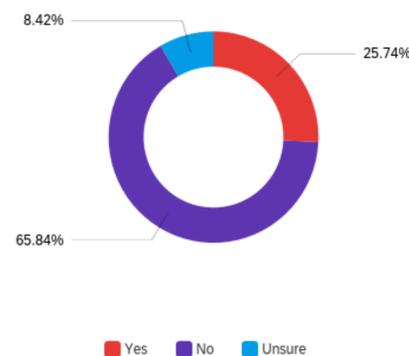
Overall, how much distress have you experienced related to COVID-19? (1 being the least, and 10 being the most?)



Academics

- Students who are not first-generation students were more likely to have a 3.33-4.0 GPA.
- Non-first-generation students were less likely to change their academic plans.
- First-generation students were less confident in their ability to achieve their desired level of education.
- Students with lower household incomes were more likely to change their plans due to COVID-19 than those with higher household incomes.

Have you changed your career goals as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?



Conclusions

- Household income seems to be a contributing factor of distress. Students with lower household incomes reported more financial and academic stress as a result of the pandemic than those with higher household incomes.
- Students who practiced self-care, including exercising regularly, were less likely to report bad mental health.
- Race does not appear to be a significant factor of distress as a result of COVID-19. Relatively high distress was reported, regardless of race.

Acknowledgments

- This survey is part of a larger multi-methods, multiple cohort, longitudinal research project that examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on college students and high school students that transitioned to college during the pandemic.
- The Co-PIs for the larger study include: Dr. Gabriel Velez and Dr. Jody Jessup-Anger in the College of Education, Dr. Erin Hoekstra in the College of Arts and Sciences, and Dr. Sam Nemanich in the College of Health Sciences.

References

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