

“Grateful and Devastating at the Same Time”: Perceived Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic Among First-Year College Students from Marginalized Groups



Sleep & Psychosocial Adjustment Lab

Jocelyn Maeyama

Faculty advisors: Royette T. Dubar, Ph.D. and Nicole K. Watkins, Ph.D.

WESLEYAN
UNIVERSITY

Introduction

- Marginalized students face unique challenges in adjusting to college life (Syed 2010) and have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Czeisler 2010).
- Few studies have examined the subjective experiences of emerging adults attending college from socio-demographic minority groups during the pandemic.
- These results are a part of a larger study following socio-demographic minority college students from the Class of 2024 throughout their four years in university.
- The goal of the present study was to explore the perceived impact of the COVID-19 pandemic among first-year university students who identify as a member of at least one socio-demographic group (e.g., race-ethnicity, sexuality, religion, income).

Participants

- **N** = 32 first-year university students at Wesleyan who identified as a member of at least one socio-demographic minority group
- **Age:** $M = 19.98$, $SD = 1.28$
 - **Racial-ethnic minority:** 63%
 - **First-generation:** 44%
 - **Religious minority:** 25%
 - **LGBTQ+:** 53%
 - **Low-income:** 41%
 - **3+ minority identities:** 45%

Analysis

- Narrative responses to interview questions were transcribed by Zoom software then corrected manually.
- Narrative responses to the following question were analyzed for emergent themes: “Can you tell me two words that describe your thoughts and feelings about the impact of COVID-19 on your life personally? Please explain why you chose each word.”

Discussion

- Although one quarter of participants reported minimal or no impact of the pandemic on their lives, for many students, the pandemic led to feelings of fear, worry, loneliness, and a general feeling of being “trapped.”
- Notably, there was also evidence of resilience and the ability to glean positive meaning from a period of unprecedented stress.

Results

Theme	Description	%
Shock, sadness, and fear about the scope of the pandemic	Participants expressed shock over the infection and death rates of the pandemic, disappointment in management and social responsibility surrounding COVID-19, fear of contracting COVID-19, dealing with contracting COVID-19, and how pervasive the pandemic was on all areas of their lives.	71.9%
Public health regulations limited movement	The pandemic caused stress over traveling home for international students; feelings of being trapped, bored, and isolated; and high schools to close before the end of senior year.	56.3%
Positive experiences	Participants engaged in introspection, personal growth, and positive summer experiences. They also strengthened their interpersonal relationships with friends and family.	37.5%
Pandemic induced challenges to mental health	COVID-19 exacerbated previous interpersonal struggles or mental health issues and took a toll on participants' mental health. Some participants also feared sounding ungrateful or felt guilty for mourning their lost experiences.	34.4%
Uncertainty about the future	The pandemic limited participants' abilities to plan for the future.	31.3%
Pandemic impact was minimal	Participants describe college as being relatively normal or did not know anyone who contracted COVID-19.	25.0%
Other	Codes that did not fit into the above six themes including changing perspectives of COVID-19 over time, guilt over not attending political marches, etc.	40.6%

References

- Czeisler, M. É., Lane, R. I., Petrosky, E., Wiley, J. F., Christensen, A., Njai, R., ... & Rajaratnam, S. M. (2020). Mental health, substance use, and suicidal ideation during the COVID-19 pandemic—United States, June 24–30, 2020. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 69(32), 1049
- Syed, M. (2010). Memorable everyday events in college: Narratives of the intersection of ethnicity and academia. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 3(1), 56.