# College Students and COVID-19: Mental Health & Common Stressors

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## INTRODUCTION

- Natural disasters influence the mental health, support systems, and academic endeavors of college students (Elmer et al., 2020, Tahlil et al., 2008; Davis III et al., 2010, Wang et al., 2020, Gill et al., 2006).
- Disaster-exposed students have shown decreased GPA, difficulties with brain function, and sleep issues (Tahlil et al., 2008; Silva-Suarez et al., 2020).
- Displacement and having an impacted family member are risk factors for increased PTSD, stress, and depression symptoms, and sleep issues (Davis III et al., 2010; Fu et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2020, Coleman et al., 2008; Gill et al., 2006; Hirth et al., 2013).
- In March 2020, students were sent home from college campuses and commenced online learning.
- Recent studies on college students amid COVID-19 have reported higher rates of depression, anxiety, and loneliness (Elmer et al., 2020; Coughenour et al., 2020).
- To ensure colleges meet student needs amid disasters, it is critical to assess students' main stressors and mental health symptoms.

## RESEARCH AIMS

- How were college students' mental health and sense of purpose affected by COVID-19?

## METHODS

- Participants were students enrolled at 4-year colleges/universities or community colleges within the U.S.
- The study was conducted in April and May of 2020.
- Participants completed online surveys assessing mental health symptoms and a subset were interviewed about their COVID-19-related experiences.
- The survey encapsulated three categories of variables:
  - **Mental health symptoms**: stress (PSS; Cohen et al., 1973), COVID-19 stressors, depression (PHQ-7; Kroenke et al., 2001), anxiety (GAD-7; Spitzer et al., 2006).
  - **Risk factors**: demographics, life events (Linden, 1974).
  - **Protective factors:** coping (CAPS-SF; Roy et al., 2016), purpose (CPS; Bronk et al., 2018), social support (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988), institution trust (Price et al., 2013).

## DISCUSSION

- College students' COVID-19 stressors heavily centered on family wellbeing.
- Stress was the most frequently reported symptom.
- Females showed greater stress, depression, and anxiety than males.
- Longitudinal impacts of COVID-19 will be assessed with a second round of surveys and interviews in November.

Avg $N$ = 8.16


Figure 1. Number of Reported COVID-19 Stressors
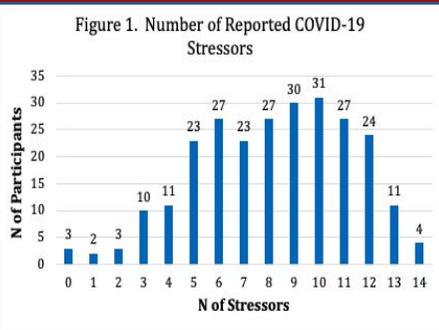
## Top 3 COVID-19 Stressors:

**1** **Susceptible family member may contract COVID-19 (94%).**

**2** **Family member may feel socially isolated (79%).**

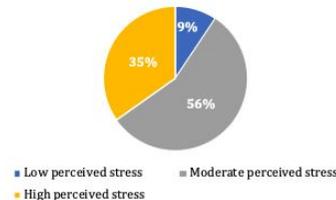**3** **I might contract COVID-19 (79%).**


Figure 2. Perceived Stress Severity
- Low perceived stress
- Moderate perceived stress
- High perceived stress


Figure 3. Anxiety Score Severity
- Minimal
- Mild
- Moderate
- Severe


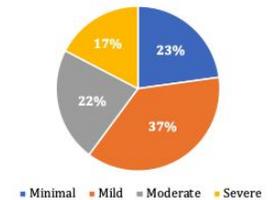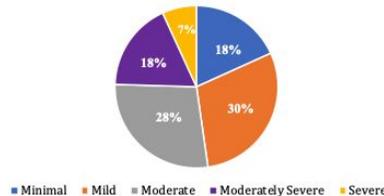Figure 4. Depression Score Severity
- Minimal
- Mild
- Moderate
- Moderately Severe
- Severe

Over half of college students endorsed moderate/high symptoms of **Stress** (91%) and **Depression** (53%).