



Examining the Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on University Students' Life and their Use of Substances: A Pilot Study



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INTRODUCTION

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, many students reported using different kinds of substances to cope with loneliness, depression, anxiety, stress, and all uncertainties.
- The purpose of the study is to examine prevalence of various types of substances, and associations between challenges during the pandemic, physical and mental health, emotional well-being, and substance use.

METHODS

- An ongoing cross-sectional study collecting information regarding student challenges experienced during the pandemic, different types of current substances, and their physical health, mental health, and emotional well-being.
- 82 MU students (77% female students, 40% Black/37% White) completed the survey so far.
- Reduction in income, job loss, graduation delays, unable to afford a balanced diet, unpaid rent), different types of current substances (tobacco, alcohol, opioids, and marijuana), and their physical health (exercise), mental health (anxiety and depression), and emotional well-being (life satisfaction and COVID-19 phobia).

RESULTS

Table 1: Sample Characteristics (N = 82)

Variable	n (%)
Gender	
Female	63(77)
Male	19(23)
Race	
Asian or Pacific Islander	17(21)
Black or AA	33(40)
Hispanic or Latino	2(2)
White (Non-Hispanic)	30(37)
Degree	
Undergraduate	28(34)
Master (MA/MSc)	40(49)
PhD	14(17)
Opioid Use	
Yes	14(17)
No	68(83)
Alcohol Use	
Yes	47(57)
No	35(43)
Non-combusted tobacco	
Yes	10(12)
No	72(88)
Combustible tobacco	
Yes	11(13)
No	71(87)
Marijuana Use	
Yes	22(27)
No	60(73)
Binge eating	
Yes	55(67)
No	27(33)
Sedentary lifestyle	
Yes	75(91)
No	7(9)
Physical activity	
Yes	76(93)
No	6(7)

t	Opioids (N/Y) (Mean)		Alcohol (Mean)		SNCT (Mean)		SCT (Mean)		Marijuana (Mean)		Binge (Mean)		Sedentary (Mean)		Physical (Mean)	
Depression	7.18	6.21	6.46	7.43	7.15	6.0	7.08	6.54	6.83	7.50	5.63	7.69	2.14	7.46	2.50	7.37
	0.66		-0.87		0.63		0.32		-0.49		-1.80		-5.06***		-4.62***	
Anxiety	6.44	3.57	4.91	6.72	6.26	3.70	6.23	4.18	5.78	6.41	5.96	5.95	1.71	6.35	2.00	6.26
	2.43*		-1.63		1.95		1.55		-0.50		0.01		-5.13***		-3.06*	
Life satisfaction	23.0	24.71	22.66	23.85	23.0	25.8	23.19	24.27	23.67	22.45	23.67	23.18	21.86	23.48	20.5	23.57
	-0.82		-0.73		-1.14		-0.45		0.67		0.28		-0.35		-0.61	
COVID Phobia	15.76	18.00	15.26	16.80	15.4	21.5	15.32	21.45	15.58	17.68	15.07	16.67	16.71	16.09	16.17	16.14
	-1.08		-1.19		-3.3**		-3.64**		-1.34		-1.31		0.27		0.01	
Opioid knowledge	6.56	7.50	6.23	7.09	6.67	7.1	6.76	6.45	7.03	5.86	7.59	6.29	5.29	6.85	4.83	6.86
	-0.89		-1.13		-0.32		0.22		1.28		1.67		-0.92		-1.11	

t	Afford (N/Y)		Diet (N/Y)		Market (N/Y)		Fuel (N/Y)		Rent (N/Y)		Job (N/Y)		Income (N/Y)		Grad delay (N/Y)	
Depression	6.59	8.30	6.25	8.55	7.23	6.35	7.09	5.7	7.25	6.17	6.88	7.53	6.92	7.16	6.8	7.29
	-1.16		-1.89		-0.65		-0.65		0.74		-0.37		-0.21		-0.32	
Anxiety	5.92	6.05	5.62	6.63	6.56	4.05	6.38	2.80	6.38	4.44	5.83	6.41	5.92	6.00	6.18	5.38
	-0.09		-0.85		2.16*		2.41*		1.36		-0.36		-0.07		0.64	
Life satisfaction	25.13	17.80	25.71	18.52	24.48	19.80	24.01	18.50	24.64	18.72	24.46	19.06	25.86	19.19	24.93	19.50
	3.72***		4.29***		2.22*		1.58		2.81*		2.47*		4.36***		3.03**	
COVID Phobia	15.77	17.30	15.36	17.74	15.56	17.95	16.01	17.10	16.20	15.94	15.83	17.35	15.78	16.74	15.55	17.58
	-0.99		-1.73		-1.73		-0.53		0.17		-0.73		-0.73		-1.46	
Opioid knowledge	6.69	6.80	6.67	6.81	6.84	6.35	6.72	6.70	6.83	6.33	6.77	6.53	6.67	6.81	6.95	6.17
	-0.13		-0.18		0.54		0.02		0.53		0.25		-0.18		0.95	

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

- Results show there is a significant increase in the use of different substances during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Students faced several challenges during the pandemic that were associated with increased use of substances and mental health problems such as anxiety and depressive symptoms.
- The increase in the use of different substances during the pandemic showed that more alternative coping mechanisms should be put in place to help students when faced with situations that could pose stress to students like the COVID-19 pandemic.

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