

# When Home is the Only Environment: Health Outcomes for Emerging Adults after COVID-19 Lockdown

Nyx Crushong

## Abstract

*Recent research on the impacts of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic have surfaced worldwide as the pandemic continues toward a second year. Numerous countries and societies reported widespread moderate to extremely severe symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress, as well as negative social and financial outcomes. College students are known to be an at-risk population for these mental health conditions from pre-pandemic research. Current studies show that college students are experiencing severe symptoms of depression and anxiety while facing ongoing academic pressures amidst the massive disruption caused by the pandemic. Although many students reported increased difficulty with completing coursework remotely, little research has explored the ongoing effects of having returned to that home environment. This study is designed to focus on the students' perceived parental relationships, and current physical and mental health outcomes.*

Recent research on the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic reports negative psychological impacts across populations worldwide. Numerous countries and societies reported widespread moderate to extremely severe symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress, as well as negative social and financial outcomes (Agarwal et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2021; Newby et al., 2020; Qi et al., 2021; Ramiz et al., 2021; Shillington et al., 2021; Zamarripa et al., 2021). A division of the research on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic investigates the innumerable challenges faced by the college student population

during this time of uncertainty. Symptoms of anxiety and depression were reported by college students in many countries (Boutros & Marchak, 2021; Ferreira et al., 2021; Islam et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2021; Omary, 2021; Soltan et al., 2021), including the United States (Ro et al., 2021). Multiple studies investigated student populations and identified increased duration of screen time and substance-related coping behaviors (Charles et al., 2020; Gattamora et al., 2021; Gómez-Galán et al., 2020; Ferreira et al., 2021) since the onset of the pandemic.

In a survey of students in the United States, almost half reported negative

relationships among family members, which especially influenced the difficulty of completing coursework at home after college campuses closed (Lee et al., 2021). Although current research suggests that the student's home environment during government-imposed lockdowns created challenges for many, little research has explored the ongoing effects of returning to that home environment. To continue the investigation on the ramifications of COVID-19, this study focused on the potential relationship between students' perceived home environment, beginning in March 2020 (lockdown) to present, and current physical and mental health outcomes.

### Methods

The measures employed in this study were carefully selected to represent several domains of emerging adulthood. We explored participants' perception of social reciprocity (Wintre et al., 1995) and support (Furman & Buhrmester, 2009) to define the relationship of the participant with their parent(s). Social reciprocity refers to a relationship in which individuals perceive and respect one another as general equals, and support refers to the mutual exchange of care-giving behaviors between the participant and their parent(s). Then, we determined how many known stressors (Holmes & Rahe, 1967) the participant experienced since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Thereafter, our focus shifted to the current physical and mental health outcomes for the participant. We evaluated the perceived stress (Cohen et al., 1983), depression (Kroenke et al., 2001), affect (or mood; Watson et al., 1988), and coping behaviors to measure the mental health of the participant. A scale to report somatic symptoms, such as stomach and chest pain (Kroenke et al., 2002), was included in this

study to evaluate the physical health of the participant.

### Results

Data was collected via Qualtrics online survey software from student participants between 18 and 25 years of age and are enrolled at one of two participating universities in Pennsylvania. Data collection began on March 31, 2022, and is ongoing at this time. Preliminary results from the first 50 participants demonstrated promising outcomes. Perceived parental support correlated significantly with perceived parental reciprocity ( $r = .39$ ), suggesting that high levels of perceived parental support are reported with high levels of perceived parental reciprocity. In support of the existing literature, a significant positive correlation between physical health and depression ( $r = .35$ ) appeared within these preliminary analyses. We strive to access more participants before data collection ends to see if these correlations exist in a larger sample.

### Conclusion

The societies to which we return as COVID-19 restrictions lift are forever changed by the trials endured worldwide in the past two years. Students returning to campus after extended periods at home may be experiencing higher levels of anxiety, depression, and stress than before COVID-19 began in 2020. This investigation explored student perceptions of their home environment and their current health outcomes to identify other impactful domains on student life. In order to best serve students attending college and university, it is imperative that we identify and understand the circumstances surrounding their current physical and mental health conditions. The results of this study may provide future direction for

faculty and administrators looking to improve resources available for students.

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