

# During COVID-19 pandemic, increased screen time correlates with mental distress

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Increased screen time among young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic correlated with a rise in pandemic-related distress, according to research led by investigators at the Saint James School of Medicine on the Caribbean island nation, Saint Vincent. The increase in time spent viewing entertainment on a screen both prior to and during the pandemic

was associated with a boost in anxiety scores. Students scored higher than non-students in pandemic-related distress. Surprisingly, the results showed no association of depression with screen time use, despite such associations having been found in previous research. The research will be presented at World Microbe Forum, taking place online June 20-24.

"This study highlights that the [pandemic](#) did not simply affect people physically, but emotionally and mentally, with various groups being impacted to a greater extent than others," said Michelle Wiciak, the presenting author on the research, M.D. candidate at Saint James School of Medicine. "It reiterates that there is an increased need for mental health support during disastrous times."

Nearly half of participants exhibited mild to moderate depression, with more than 70% ranging from mild to severe depression. Seventy percent of participants experienced mild to severe anxiety, and slightly more than 30% could potentially meet DSM-IV-TR criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Two hundred ninety-four responses were collected and validated based on the inclusion/exclusion criteria used in the surveys. Participants ranged from 18 to 28 years old.

Screen time use was not different between genders. Still, there were gender differences in average scores in [depression](#), anxiety and distress from COVID-19.

"The study is unique in having evaluated mental health status as a function of [screen time](#)," said Wiciak. The authors also collected data from multiple countries. "Since the pandemic shifted work and education to online, we wanted to gain more insight into that transition's impact. We did find unexpected results, potentially paving the way for future research and various protective factors, which can be vital in keeping a person healthy during tumultuous times," added Wiciak.

**More information:** [www.worldmicrobeforum.org/](http://www.worldmicrobeforum.org/)

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