

Female and financially stretched students most likely to be affected by COVID-19 stress

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A new study examining COVID-19 stress among Irish college students, conducted by the School of Psychology at Trinity College Dublin, has shown that certain sociodemographic groups were more likely to

experience COVID-19-related stress.

Students who identified as female, along with students experiencing chronic illness, financial concerns and higher levels of general [psychological distress](#) were shown to experience greater [stress](#) related to COVID-19.

The research, conducted by Madhav Bhargav, Ph.D. candidate, and Dr. Lorraine Swords, Assistant Professor in Child & Adolescent Psychology, has recently been published in the *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine*. The study was based on a cross-sectional survey of 321 [college students](#) primarily recruited from universities in Ireland and was conducted during February and March of 2021.

Prior to the pandemic, the [mental health](#) of college students was already identified as a significant and growing area of concern and some studies have shown that students' anxiety and depression symptoms increased in the early months of the pandemic, when compared with previous terms. Other research has suggested that psychological distress and mental health problems during the COVID-19 pandemic might be more pronounced among certain sociodemographic groups.

This new research furthers our understanding of COVID-19 stress experienced by Irish students by identifying the sociodemographic groups most affected.

Overall students expressed moderate levels of general psychological distress and average levels of COVID-19 related stress. The study also provided insight into which categories of college students may be at higher risk for experiencing poorer mental health, in the form of COVID-related stress, during the global pandemic. These were those who identified as female, those with [chronic illness](#), monetary concerns, and higher levels of general psychological distress.

This work, according to the authors, will help inform [support services](#) how best to moderate the trajectory from acute stress to more significant negative mental health outcomes in college students. The researchers recommend monitoring [student](#) mental health in the aftermath of the pandemic to account for the long-term effects of COVID-19.

According to the authors, online remote activities and services could be implemented by third level institutions to provide support to students that help address concerns related to the pandemic.

Author of the paper Madhav Bhargav said:

"Our study suggests that the prevalence of mental health concerns among college students has been significant during the pandemic. This stress can increase disparities between and within population groups such as those with low income or those with ongoing mental and physical health issues. These [mental health problems](#) may continue to linger as the pandemic's impact progresses and other stressors (such as economic crisis) emerge."

"While [education institutions](#) should aim to develop teaching pedagogies and support-service provision that are accessible and inclusive for all students, specific student groups may be in particular need at this time. This should be considered by universities when planning and delivering [mental health services](#) now and in the months ahead in order to extenuate some of the negative effects experienced."

Dr. Lorraine Swords added:

"As the world adjusts to living with COVID-19 and restrictions begin to ease, it is important to be mindful that some individuals' psychological wellbeing can continue to be negatively impacted in the aftermath."

The paper, titled "Risk factors for COVID-19-related stress among college-going students," was published online in the *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine*.

More information: Madhav Bhargav and Lorraine Swords, Risk factors for COVID-19-related stress among college-going students, *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine* (2022).

[www.cambridge.org/core/journal ... A80CB9D3B6D9#article](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journal.../A80CB9D3B6D9#article)

Provided by Trinity College Dublin

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