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## Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on CHHS Students

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The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on CHHS Students

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### Abstract

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic has impacted students in various ways. Students around the world / in the U.S have been impacted in financial, emotional, mental, and physical ways as COVID-19 continues to change the way the world is navigated. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the feelings and vulnerabilities of students at the College of Health and Human Services (CHHS) building during the 2020 Pandemic. In order to succeed in school, students need to feel financially stable, physically stable and mentally stable. While many students have struggled with this balance in the past, the effect of COVID-19 has worsened these concerns, especially for those who experience increased exposure through their profession or jobs. Other researchers have reported that the impact of the pandemic on student life includes worsening mental and physical health. However, this research is limited and warrants further investigation on the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on students and their wellbeing. To this end, an anonymous survey was sent to Western Michigan University (WMU) students within the CHHS building. A sample of students was gathered through email recruitment. The survey was distributed to students in undergraduate and graduate programs to assess and request information about their mental and physical health. The questionnaire was aimed to identify contributing factors to health such as financial stress or stress from exposure to the virus. Questions included students' academic, financial, mental health and physical concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only with this data contribute to discovery on how to make students more successful, but a proposition of a mental health texting service to support and bring awareness to these issues will be created in collaboration with public health students.

*Keywords:* COVID, ONLINE, SCHOOL, PANDEMIC, STUDENTS, HEALTH

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## Introduction

The wellness of college students is impacted by many factors, including ongoing current events in the world. When the Covid-19 virus hit the United States, students all across the nation were expected to adapt quickly. Much of this adaptation came in the form of continuing education online. These students, who already face everyday stressors, continue to learn, and navigate school during this ongoing pandemic. The burden of this pandemic on students' needs warrants further exploration so that students can be supported better with these changing times. Some burdens might have existed before and some may be increased or added due to the nature of taking classes online. This paper will highlight current research and background on this topic, the purpose and methods of the research study, results of the research along with a discussion. The purpose of this study was to describe and evaluate the burden of the COVID-19 pandemic and what it has caused on the student population of the CHHS regarding their academic, social, mental, economic, and physical wellbeing. The focus was on the CHHS population because to see if the pandemic has disproportionately affected individuals who worked in certain areas, such as healthcare. A literature review was also conducted in order to analyze what research and data was already done and where gaps were in the research.

## Background of Literature

The purpose behind this proposal was to directly investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic had affected students in the CHHS program at WMU. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have documented the long term and short-term effects that COVID-19 has had on Americans. Researchers have discovered that in addition to direct consequences, such as death and illness, the pandemic has deeply affected individuals (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2020). From financial difficulties (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020) to mental

health suffering, to substance abuse, the pandemic has created an extensive number of difficulties on most individuals (Czeisler et al., 2020). Along with these, other consequences that researchers have found that are indirectly caused by the pandemic are food insecurity (Schanzenbach & Pitts, 2020) and isolation from others and peers (Span, 2020).

Although most have not gone unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic, college students face a unique situation (Grubic et al., 2020). There are gaps in research on the effects that COVID-19 has on the college student population. Among the few studies that have been done, it has been found that college students have been suffering from a significant increase in depression and anxiety both directly and indirectly caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Grubic et al., 2020). Historically, college students have been susceptible to higher rates of housing and food insecurity (Bruening, 2017) as well as struggling with mental health (Lueng, et al., 2020). Due to this, it is imperative that a formal assessment of college students is done to see if COVID-19 pandemic affects this population similar to how it has affected the nation as a whole.

Specifically, for WMU and the CHHS it was previously unknown to any extent what kind of burdens students were facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic due to the lack of a formal assessment. Students with specific majors, such as nursing or occupational therapy, may have been put at more of a risk of being exposed to COVID-19 due to program required clinicals and field work. Students within CHHS, including the nursing program, had voiced concerns about the effects that COVID-19 is having on their ability to work and study. Furthermore, they had expressed worry about what quarantining means for them for finances and completing required schoolwork within the hospital setting. Therefore, it was essential that additional research was done in order to inform the faculty of WMU about potential burdens and concerns of students.

## **Methods**

### **Participant Recruitment**

The anonymous questionnaire was sent to students via email to recruit participants within the CHHS building. This survey was approved by the International Review Board and CHHS personnel to send to students, and can be seen in Appendix A. This survey was sent out via email communication for a two-week period, with a reminder email being set up one week into this duration.

### **Sample and Setting**

The sample included active students at the CHHS who participated in online schooling. To be eligible for the study the students were required to be 18 years of age and enrolled in a program at CHHS.

### **Funding**

There is no federal, state, local, or university funding for this proposal.

### **Informed Consent**

Participants for this survey were voluntary and were informed they could terminate the survey at any point when completing it. An IRB approved consent form and the inclusion criteria were available before the participant had access to the electronic survey. The consent outlined the protection of the anonymity of the results and that no identifiable information would be shared.

### **Design**

To analyze the responses of participants, a descriptive design was used. In order to do this appropriately, the researchers came to a consensus on the overall themes and patterns the data expressed following collection. These themes and patterns then were grouped into certain categories and exported into visual representations, such as tables and bar graphs.

## **Research Procedures**

### **Data Collection**

To collect data for this study, a survey was prepared and distributed. The electronic software Qualtrics was used to create this survey and the questions within it. Anonymous data was collected from this survey and anonymity was ensured by the electronic software turning off IP addresses to those who participated. The beginning of the survey consisted of a summary, risks to taking the survey, consent, and contact information. At the end of the survey, there was a list of community resources and their contact information attached. The series of questions within the survey included the participants program of study, race and ethnicity, quarantine from COVID-19, exposure to COVID-19, food availability, economic stress, mental health, and access to healthcare and services. Using sliding Likert scales and open-ended questions, both qualitative and quantitative data was collected.

### **Instrumentation**

The researchers utilized the Qualtrics system as a resource to create, send and analyze the survey. A series of questions was included that asked the participants about their program of study, race and ethnicity, quarantine from COVID-19, exposure to COVID-19, food availability, economic stress, mental health, and access to healthcare and services. There were 41 questions total consisting of Likert scales and open-ended questions. This allowed the researchers to determine and come to a consensus about the participants overall emotions and feelings surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Multiple responses to questions of “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” reflected a higher significance to the question(s). The scales and open-ended responses used were given to each participant in the same manner and most questions are reproducible in



another setting at WMU. However, some questions were specific to CHHS students and would not be appropriate for students in enrolled in other majors at WMU.

## **Results**

### **Quantitative Data**

After the two-week period of the survey, results were gathered from Qualtrics and arranged into graphical representations in order to convey the data. These representations were then compiled into a PowerPoint presentation to be able to share with faculty and other groups. To begin the analysis portion, the demographics of the participants were broken down and categorized. These results can be seen in Appendix B. Overall, there were 102 students that completed the survey. The results showed that most students that completed the survey were undergraduate nursing students. A vast majority of participants (n=65) were employed at the time of survey completion, while almost three quarters were also considered frontline workers (n=46). It was also found that almost half of participants were exposed to COVID-19 and had to quarantine at least one time.

When matching the data within similar groups, it was found that there were several different areas of student concern. Among these concerns were mental health, physical health, isolation from peers, studying difficulties and difficulties paying for necessities. The breakdown of these statistics can be seen in Appendix C. Other concerns that were frequently noted were concerns with academic wellbeing and online schooling. Stressors related to being a student were compiled into several different areas of concern. These included having too many assignments with not enough time to complete them, lack of communication from professors, worry of graduating with inadequate experience, and feeling guilty for quarantining and missing school

clinical or other events. These themes were substantial for researchers, given many of the participants were going into the healthcare field.

A main pattern within the results from the survey was financial difficulties. Data showed that 47.3% of students (n=44) had difficulties in paying for rent, food, gas, rent, healthcare. Within these statistics, 20 participants or 21.5% of students had hardship paying solely for food. Of the students who had difficulties of paying for essentials, 22 students stated that they were unable to quarantine due to the financial stress not working during that period would create. Along with financial concerns of students, one of the most striking themes that was gathered from the results was that surrounding mental health. It was found that 81.80% (n=83) students answered “Somewhat Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to question 32, as seen in Appendix C. However, although most students were concerned with their mental health, data also revealed that only 32.30% (n=33) students had spoken to a mental health provider or utilized mental health services.

### **Qualitative Data**

The open-ended responses and qualitative data were also compiled based on similar topics found from the student responses. These findings also supported the conclusion that students were struggling financially. One quote that demonstrates this matter is from a student stating “I had to quit my job due to the stress of online school, so I don't have an income and I got denied unemployment”. Along with this quote, students additionally stated that they were worried about things such as staying the nursing program due to financial insecurities, not being able to work due to online school struggles, and not having enough money to afford basic needs.

Open ended response questions allowed researchers to get insight into why the statistics for contrasting mental health were so vastly different. In question 35, students input their reasons

for not seeking help for mental health. Quotes included “Doesn’t seem as important as school. (I know it is, but I feel I neglect my health while in school due to the overwhelming stress and workload)”, “I know a lot of people aren't taking new clients and I am too overwhelmed to even think about trying to find someone especially when I am more concerned about finding a job”, “I feel like I don’t have time... and I’m a little afraid of what it might look for me to seek help.”, and “I think both time and the mental effort of reaching out make me not seek any professional care. I am honestly burnt out and need to focus my energy on school.” The numerical values, along with student narratives, yielded results that were significant to not only the researchers, but also to faculty at WMU.

Overall, the data collected showed the CHHS students had a range of concerns and within several different areas. Due to this, the researchers quickly assembled the anonymous data and results and compiled a PowerPoint presentation. This was then presented and shared easily and quickly.

### **Dissemination of Data**

With the information and data that was gathered from the survey, it was apparent that the concerns and needs of students needed to be addressed. The information was presented to several diverse groups including the faculty of the nursing program at WMU, director of CHHS, and a nonprofit group at WMU. The main reason for doing this was to make staff of WMU aware of the difficulties that students were facing. However, along with this, it is important that these needs were further addressed. Due to the results of the survey focusing heavily on student concerns and the burden that the pandemic was creating, it was important that a program was being prepared to help students navigate through the pandemic. To do this, researchers connected

with the individuals within the public health sector at WMU, as well as the CHHS Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in order to collaborate and develop a plan.

### **Discussion**

The results of this study supported the research that was already conducted in other settings on the increased burden from the Covid-19 pandemic. The researchers predicted that the results of the survey would be similar to existing findings. After dissemination of the findings to multiple groups throughout the college, researchers collaborated with groups within the University in order to develop a program that would support the students after the findings indicated a significant burden in multiple areas of financial, mental, emotional and physical health. After collaboration with the college of Public Health and the office of Diversity Equity and Inclusion at WMU, the group was able to produce a sustainable, long term plan. This plan was aimed to help connect students with resources already available within WMU, as well as Kalamazoo.

The basis of this program will begin in the summer of 2021 and will consist of a messaging system that will create both text messages and emails that will be sent out to students periodically. Within these messages will be various resources and services that are available campus wide that are eligible for all students to use. These communications will also contain positive, uplifting messages, in hopes of increasing student's overall wellbeing. Use of this system, will ideally continue throughout the school year to encourage students to utilize their resources and better their college experience at WMU during the pandemic.

In addition to this messaging system the public health students also have a goal of implementation of a committee to connect and help the students. Throughout discussion of the results, there was a realization that there were many local programs that could improve students'

lives throughout campus, however there was a lack of awareness of these programs. In order to solve this gap, one recommendation that could help is the creation of a committee at the CHHS that consists of both students and professors. This committee would serve as liaisons between students and these resources, as well as help guide these students to resources that may benefit them. It is hoped that this committee would help students in their academic, mental, social, financial, and economic situations.

As well as this committee, a creation of a universal web page that is accessible on the main Western Michigan University webpage that consists of all the local resources available to students and their contact information. By having a one stop webpage, it may solve the issue of students losing the resource and service information within a single email or an eLearning site post. It would be the desire that all these programs continue well into the future, as well as post COVID-19 pandemic. If continued as recommended, this survey could become a regular longitudinal assessment. However, in order to get a more accurate representation of the entirety of CHHS, it is important that a larger sample size is obtained in future assessments. In addition to this, it is essential that as this assessment is continued into the future that results remain accessible to faculty and other students. In doing this, it allows students concerns to be addressed in not only their academic lives, but also their overall wellbeing.

One of the barriers that researchers experienced was to protect the student's identity after asking questions about student's program of study, race and ethnicity and other demographic information that could be identifiable. Researchers came to the agreement to not share, analyze or publish the results in this area due to the low response rate and specific questions. There was a risk of students being identified and so this information was not analyzed.

**Limitations**

As with any study, there was various limitations that occurred during this survey. Not directly asking students about their school clinical exposure was a possible sample of data that was missed and considered when looking at the results. Another limitation to consider is that the pool of participants was a convenience sample, which could have led to potential selection bias and potential skewing of results. Finally, the survey yielded a low percentage of students compared to the overall number of students within CHHS, causing there not to be an overwhelming clear picture of the college.

**Conclusion**

The results that were found from this study showed significant concerns within the CHHS student population. This survey demonstrated many issues that are ongoing due to the nature of the pandemic still affecting student lives. The Covid-19 pandemic is still ongoing and even without the pandemic, there is a potential of burden that students face that needs to be addressed. In order to address these student concerns and support student needs, there is a need for future assessment within this college and potentially throughout the University. This survey would empower the University by granting the ability to regularly assess the wellbeing of students in a pandemic and out of a pandemic. After assessment, the University would be able to create and find interventions that can increase the overall wellbeing of their students and therefore increase their success. WMU has goals to help their students have a successful time at the University, and the only way to know how well that is working is through an assessment. This is especially true during the pandemic that has an effect on all student's lives.

## Appendix A

Directions: We ask that you answer every question to the best your ability.

Screening questions: Are you 18 years or older? Are you enrolled in a College of Health and Human Services program at Western Michigan University?

1. Are you an undergraduate or graduate student?
  - a. Graduate
  - b. Undergraduate

What is your major or program of study?

- a. Blindness and Low Vision
- b. Interdisciplinary Health
- c. Nursing
- d. Occupational Therapy
- e. Physical Therapy
- f. Physician Assistant
- g. Social Work
- h. Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences
- i. Decline to answer
- j. Other: Please indicate \_\_\_\_\_

2. How old are you?
  - a. 18-24 years
  - b. 25-30 years
  - c. 31-50 years
  - d. 50+ years
3. What is your race?
  - a. Black or African American
  - b. White
  - c. Native American or American Indian
  - d. Asian/Pacific Islander
  - e. Other
  - f. Prefer not to say
4. What is your ethnicity?
  - a. Hispanic or Latinx
  - b. Non-Hispanic
5. What is your current gender identity?
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
  - c. Trans male/Trans man
  - d. Trans female/Trans woman

- e. Genderqueer/Gender non-conforming
- f. Prefer to self-identify:

6. Are you an international student? (yes/no)

Now please answer some questions related to your current living situation:

7. How many people do you live with?

- a. 0
- b. 1-2
- c. 3-5
- d. >5

8. What is your relationship to your housemates?

- a. Family
- b. Friends
- c. Acquaintances

9. Have you had to quarantine due to COVID-19 potential exposure or diagnosis since September 2, 2020? (yes/no)

10. If you said no to the previous question, please answer the following questions:

I have difficulty paying for food.

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

11. I have difficulty paying for gas.

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

12. I have difficulty paying for rent or mortgage.

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

13. I have difficulty paying for healthcare.

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

14. What is your number one concern at this time in your life? Please describe:

15. If you answered yes to the previous question, how many times have you had to quarantine due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

- a. once



- b. 2 times
- c. 3 or more times

16. Due to being quarantined, I am unable to pay for food  
Strongly agree  
Agree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree
17. Due to being quarantined, I am unable to pay for gas.  
Strongly agree  
Agree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree
18. Due to being quarantined, I am unable to pay for my rent or mortgage.  
Strongly agree  
Agree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree
19. Due to being quarantined, I am unable to pay for my healthcare.  
Strongly agree  
Agree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree
20. Do you have a job? (yes/no)

If you said yes to the previous question, please answer the following:

21. Are you considered a frontline worker (such as food service, work in a grocery store, work in a hospital or clinic, emergency services, etc.)? (yes/no)
22. Do you work in healthcare? (yes or no)
23. I feel as though my job exposes/exposed me to COVID-19  
Strongly agree  
Somewhat agree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree
24. Have you felt like you should quarantine from your job due to COVID-19 exposure/positive test/presumptive positive test? (yes/no)
25. If you said yes to the previous question, please answer the following question.  
I am unable to quarantine from my job due to financial concerns.  
Strongly agree  
Somewhat agree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree

In the remainder of this survey, we would like you to think about your concerns and feelings about the COVID-19 pandemic in the last 2 weeks. For questions \_\_\_ thru \_\_\_, the questions address your concerns.

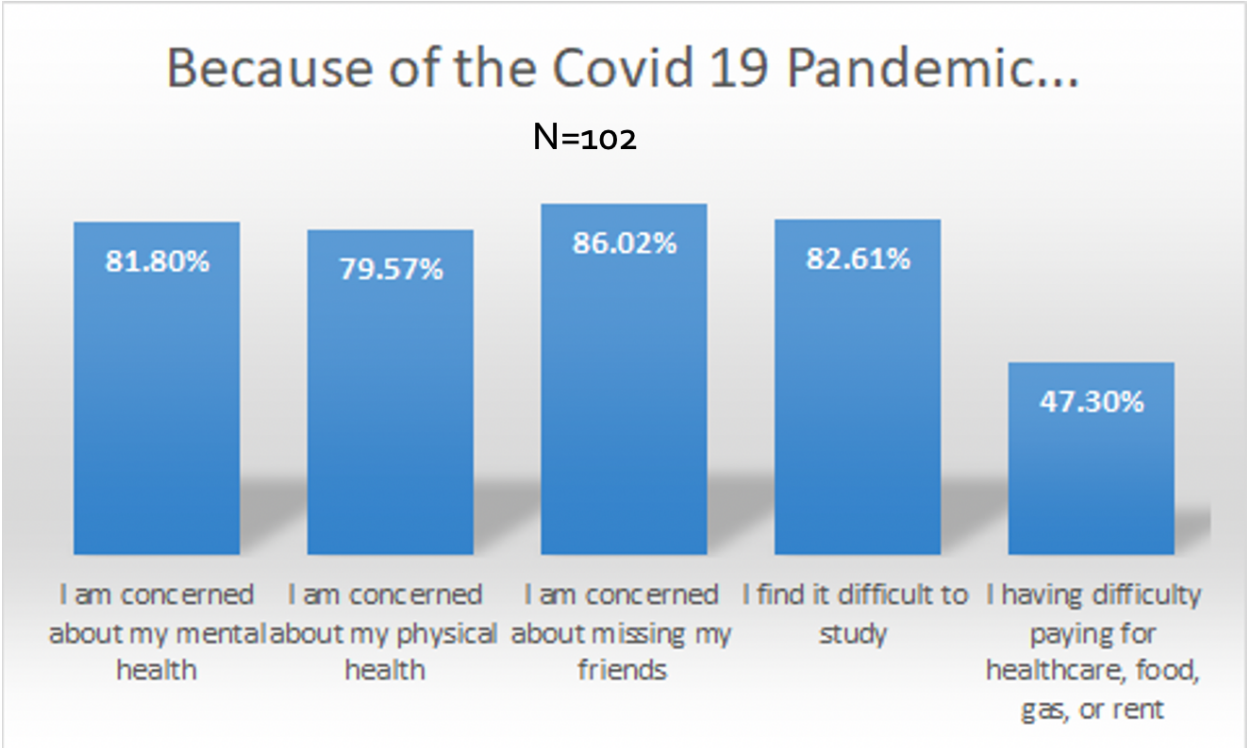
26. I am concerned that the COVID-19 pandemic is negatively impacting my ability to do well in school.  
Not at all concerned  
Slightly concerned  
Somewhat concerned  
Moderately concerned  
Extremely concerned
27. I find it difficult to complete my studies due to unreliable wifi or lack of wifi (internet access).  
Strongly agree  
Agree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree
28. I find it difficult to study during the COVID-19 pandemic.  
Strongly agree  
Agree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree
29. I am concerned about missing friends due to the COVID-19 pandemic.  
Strongly agree  
Somewhat agree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree
30. I am concerned about missing family due to the COVID-19 pandemic.  
Strongly agree  
Somewhat agree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree
31. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I feel lonely at times.  
Strongly agree  
Somewhat agree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree
32. I am concerned about my mental health due to the COVID-19 pandemic.  
Strongly agree  
Somewhat agree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree

33. I have spoken with a healthcare provider about my mental health concerns. (yes/no)
34. I have spoken with a mental health professional about my mental health concerns. (yes/no)
35. If you answered no for either of the two previous questions, please explain reason(s) for not seeking professional care. \_\_\_\_\_
36. I am concerned about my physical health due to the COVID-19 pandemic.  
Strongly agree  
Somewhat agree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree
37. When I feel the need to relax, the most **frequent** behavior I engage in is:  
a. Exercising or physical activity  
b. Talking with friends and/or family  
c. Card and board games  
sexual activities  
d. Other (please describe):
38. When I want to distract myself, the most frequent activity I engage in is? (please select one)  
a. Social media  
b. Drinking alcohol  
c. Smoking weed / using other recreational substances  
d. Watching television / movies  
e. Reading  
f. Other (please describe):
39. My ability to engage in stress relieving activities has decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic.  
Strongly agree  
Agree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree
40. What other concerns do you have during the COVID-19 pandemic? Please write:
41. If you could tell your faculty or WMU administrators something that would help you during COVID-19 pandemic, what would it be? Please write:

## Appendix B

Characteristic	N=102
<b>CHHS School / Program</b>	
Nursing	76.5% (n=72)
Speech, Language, Hearing	12.8% (n=12)
Social Work	5.3% (n=5)
Physical Therapy	2.1% (n=2)
<b>Undergraduate</b>	85.1% (n=80)
<b>Graduate</b>	14.9% (n=14)
<b>Work</b>	69.9% (n=65)
<b>Front line Worker</b>	71.9% (n=46)
Healthcare	55.4% (n=36)
<b>Quarantine for COVID</b>	<b>49.5% (n=46)</b>
1x	60.9% (n=28)
2 x	34.8% (n=16)
≥3	4.4% (n=2)

Appendix C



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