



COVID-19 Stress, Anxiety, Depression, and Coping Among Students

Megan Gilbertson, M.S., S.S.P., Yoonsun Pyun, M.A., Michelle Demaray, Ph.D., Julia Ogg, Ph.D., Christine Malecki, Ph.D., & Kara Styck, Ph.D.
Northern Illinois University, Department of Psychology



Introduction

- With the worldwide spread of COVID-19 it is imperative to understand the impact of this pandemic on the mental health of youth.
- School disruption is associated with emotional harm, psychological suffering, and educational declines for youth (Berkman, 2008).
- Increases in levels of anxiety and depression are common among youth during times of disaster (Becker-Blease et. al., 2010), and has been linked to increased physical and mental health difficulties (Sandifer & Walker, 2018).

Purpose

We examined associations between students' self-reported COVID-19 stress with symptoms of anxiety and depression; and how different coping strategies mitigated these associations.

Method

A total of 2,738 4th – 12th grade students (60% female; 18.9% elementary, 35.0% middle school, 46.1% high school) participated via online survey.

Measures:

- COVID-19 Adolescent Symptom and Psychological Experience Questionnaire (CASPE; Ladouceur, 2020)
- Brief COPE (Carver, 1997)
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item Scale (GAD-7; Spritzer et al., 2006)
- Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale for Children (CES-DC; Weissman et al., 1980)

Results

- High school students exhibited higher internalizing symptoms than other grades.
- Female middle/high school students demonstrated higher anxious and depressive symptoms than their male counterparts.

COVID-19 is associated with **alarming levels of depressive symptoms in adolescent females, and higher levels of anxiety and depression in all students.**

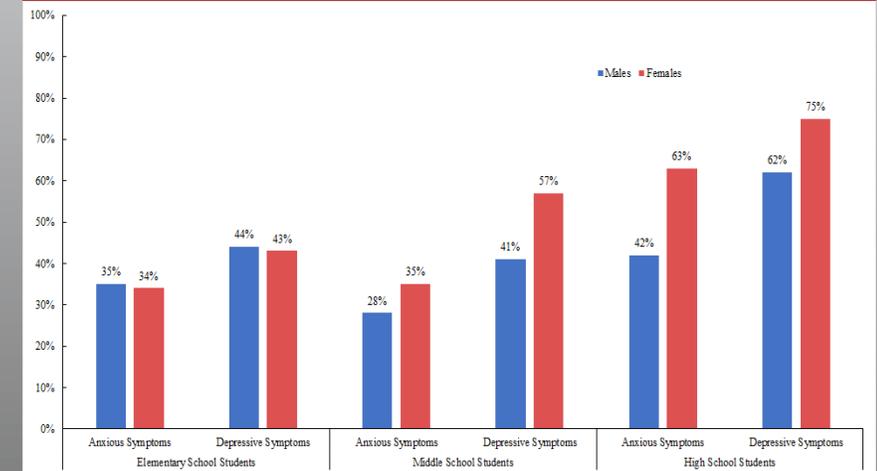
Positive reframing may help support their mental health. Timely social-emotional screening and monitoring is needed.



Results cont'd

- Schoolwork Stress was the strongest predictor of measured internalizing symptoms across grade levels.
- Self-Distraction strategies (i.e. escape/avoidance) were the strongest predictor of levels of anxiety and depression symptoms.

COVID-19 Related Internalizing Symptoms By Gender Across Grade Levels



Discussion

- Students' reports of anxiety and depressive symptoms indicate concerning levels of anxiety symptoms and alarming levels of depressive symptoms for high school females.
- Timely screening and regular monitoring of emotional health is imperative once schools resume.
- Educators need to understand the association between schoolwork stress with maladaptive mental health and help students manage academic stress.
- School psychologists could explore how to capitalize on students' use of healthy self-distraction and help students to find ways to engage in healthy coping activities to mitigate mental health symptoms.