



Measuring COVID-19-Related Stress Among 4th Through 12th Grade Students

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Introduction

- The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the abrupt closing of schools which disrupted the daily routines of parents, teachers, and students
- While research on the initial effects of COVID-19 among youth is still emerging, there is evidence to suggest significant distress and mental health impact (Limcaoco et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2020)

Purpose

Given the far-reaching impact of COVID-19 on many aspects of life, including social opportunities, school experiences, and concerns about illness, we were interested in the types of stressors students experienced as part of COVID-19

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)

Results

- High schoolers rated Schoolwork Stress as “somewhat stressful” compared to middle and elementary students who rated Schoolwork Stress as “a little stressful.”
- On average, female middle schoolers rated Schoolwork Stress as “somewhat stressful” while male peers rated it as “a little stressful.”

Unexpected and long-term nature of the pandemic can create significant challenges for students.

Top three stressors for youth during the COVID-19 pandemic are schoolwork stress, social isolation, and concerns for illness.

Results cont.

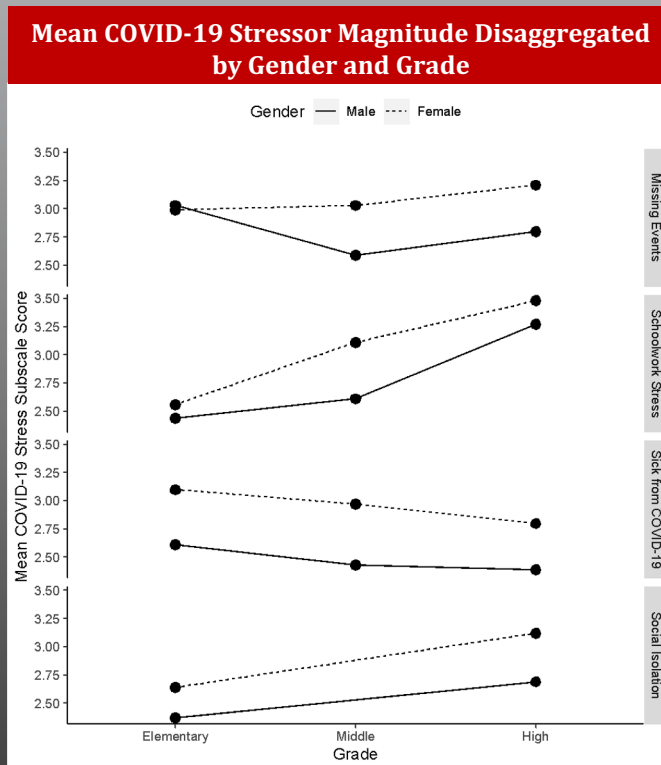
- Across grade levels, female students reported significantly higher levels of concern regarding COVID-19 compared to male students
- Female high schoolers rated Social Isolation as “somewhat stressful” while male peers rated it as “a little stressful.”
- Female secondary students rated Missing Events as “somewhat stressful” while male students rated it as “a little stressful.”

Discussion

- The three top rated stressors illustrate factors involving governmental orders (quarantine), school (schoolwork), and friends or family (fears of illness), illustrating that an ecological needs-based perspective seems to apply in this COVID-19 pandemic (Weems and Overstreet, 2009)
- There are grade and gender differences which need to be considered when thinking about how COVID-19 is affecting students

Implications

- The current study can help inform educators and parents on the types of stressors students from similar school districts may be experiencing, and how those stressors may differ at different ages and for males and females
- By highlighting the most common stressors among youth, educators and parents can address these stressors by acknowledging them, normalizing them, teaching strategies to lessen students’ response and to cope with stressors in healthy ways.





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Example Items for COVID-19 Stressors

Stressor Type	Example Items
Schoolwork Stress	“Falling behind with schoolwork” “Can’t concentrate on schoolwork”
Fear of COVID-19 Illness	“ I might get sick” “Family might get sick”
Social Isolation	“Having to stay at home” “Not going to school”
Missing Events	“Missing school sports and activities (e.g., clubs, sports, performances)” “Missing events that were important to me (e.g., dances, graduation)”