



Impact of Perceived Threat of COVID-19 Infection on Healthcare Utilization Among College Students

UC San Diego
Herbert Wertheim
School of Public Health and
Human Longevity Science

Aida Regina Castaneda, Elizabeth Guzman, Xochil Zarate

Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science, UC San Diego

Introduction

- For more than a year now, COVID-19 has insidiously proven to be a deadly, life-costing virus that has taken the lives of millions of people.
- The CDC reported in June of 2020 that delay or avoidance of medical care could increase morbidity and mortality for both chronic and acute diseases (Czeisler et al., 2020). The health issues that continue to rise due to low healthcare utilization services among college aged individuals is incredibly important when examining the short-term and long-term consequences of avoiding medical care.
- In addition, while immunizations, sexual health check ups, and mental health care are among the services considered most important for college aged individuals, these services are often underutilized by this population due to factors such as lack of health insurance and busy schedules (Grace, 1997).

Objective

To examine the changes in health care utilization among college students due to the perceived threat of COVID-19 exposure.

Methods

- We conducted a cross-sectional research study using data from an anonymous online survey that we distributed to UCSD college students in April-May of 2021
- There were 57 participants ranging from ages 18 to 26. We asked for information from the different age groups about their number of healthcare visits and perception on COVID-19 infection.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics (N=57)

Age	
18-20	47%
21-23	49%
24-26	4%
Sex	
Female	56%
Male	37%
Non-Binary	7%
Health Insurance Provider	
Employer	1.5%
Family	51%
Private	9%
UCSD/UCSHIP	37%
Other	1.5%
Race	
Asian	35%
White	26%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	2%
2 or more races	16%
Other	21%
Hispanic Ethnicity	
	30%

Results

Figure 1. Number of College Student Healthcare Visits During COVID-19 by Age Group

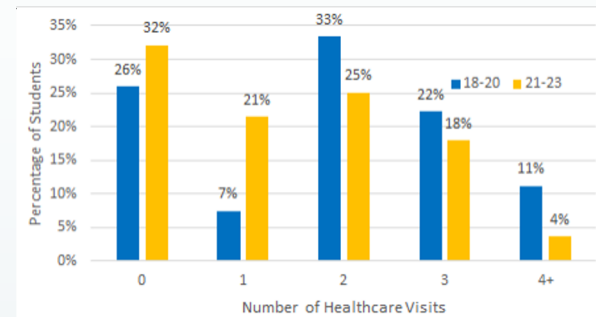


Figure 2. Changes in Healthcare Visits Due to COVID-19 Pandemic

Among students ages 21-23, 21.1% of healthcare visits were for emergencies.

P-value 0.52 signifies there is no statistically significant association between the fear of COVID-19 infection and primary care visits

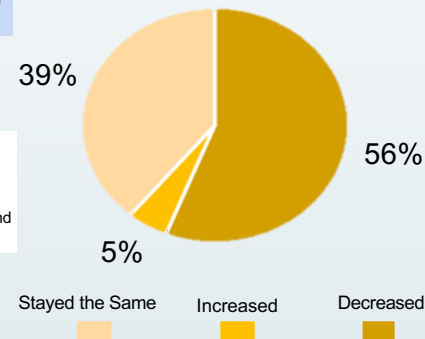


Figure 3. Students' Avoidance of Public Places, Percentage Scale



73% of participants agree that they avoided public places due to the uncertainty of exposure to COVID-19.

Conclusion

- UC San Diego college students are wary of receiving healthcare services in a public setting. Most students are utilizing healthcare services less frequently during the COVID-19 pandemic. On average, student participants experienced less visits than prior to the start of the pandemic.
- Further research is needed in a larger setting to gain a better understanding of what students need to feel safer and confident in seeking healthcare services.

Policy Implications

- Developing recommendations that can potentially increase the frequency of health care services among college students is important to ensure more students receive services they need.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the students who participated in our survey and to faculty who helped us deliver it to them. Without Dr. Romero and the Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science, this study would not have been possible. Thank you.

References

- American College Health Association. (2019). Undergraduate Reference Group Report, Fall 2019. Retrieved from https://www.acha.org/documents/ncha/NCHA-III_FALL_2019_UNDERGRADUATE_REFERENCE_GROUP_DATA_REPORT.pdf
- American College Health Association. (2020). Undergraduate Reference Group Report, Fall 2020. Retrieved from https://www.acha.org/documents/ncha/NCHA-III_FALL_2020_Undergraduate_Reference_Group_Data_Report.pdf
- Czeisler, M. E., Marynak, K., Clarke, K., Salah, Z., Shakya, I., Thierry, J. M., Ali, N., McMillan, H., Wiley, J. F., Weaver, M. D., Czeisler, C. A., Rajaratnam, S., & Howard, M. E. (2020). Delay or Avoidance of Medical Care Because of COVID-19-Related Concerns - United States, June 2020. *MMWR: Morbidity and mortality weekly report*, 69(36), 1250-1257. <https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6936a4>
- Grace T. W. (1997). Health problems of college students. *Journal of American college health : J of ACH*, 45(6), 243-250. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.1997.9936894>