

COVID-19 and Substance Use Among College Students

Alyssa Tran, Pranav Law, Kalaya Macias
University of California, San Diego

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has been the cause of physical, mental, and emotional stress for many college students; in a study conducted on Ohio university students, higher psychological distress was associated with higher alcohol consumption overall (p=0.013)

With substance abuse already posing an issue on college campuses before the pandemic, it is important to understand how the anxiety and stress produced by the pandemic can contribute to increased rates of misuse.

Objectives

To explore the association between the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on mental health and substance use in college students.

Methods

We disseminated a web-based survey on April-May 2022 using Google Forms (n = 61).

Frequency tables, cross-tabulations, and Chi-square tests were used in SPSS to evaluate the impacts of COVID-19 on college students' substance use, perceived effects of the pandemic, and perceived usage of other students.

Results

Fig. 1. Substance Use Before Pandemic

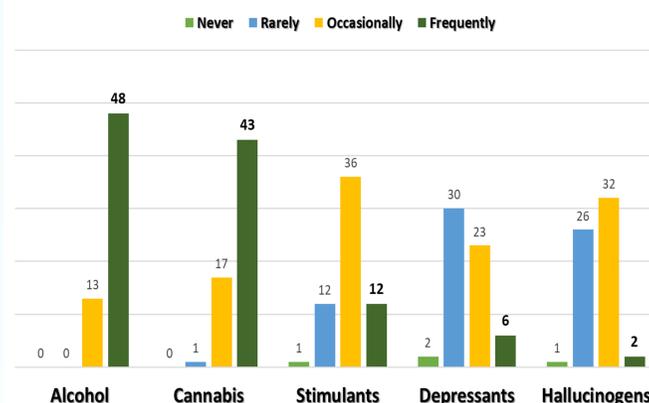


Fig. 2. Substance Use During Pandemic

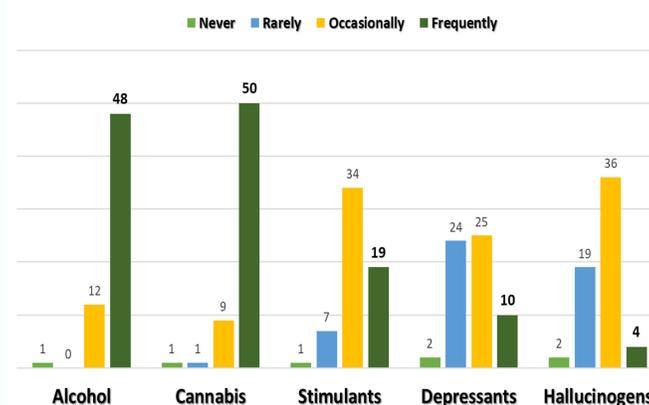


Fig. 3. Increased Substance Use from Negative Impact of COVID-19

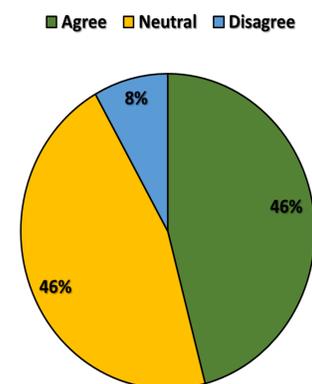
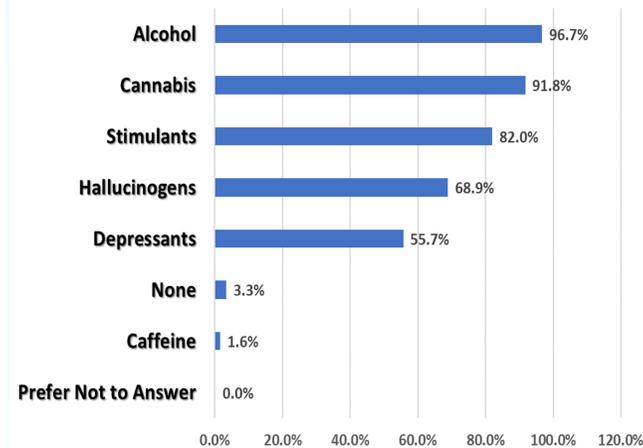


Fig. 4. Students Perceived Peer Usage



95.1% of UCSD students surveyed believed that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the mental health of college students.

The negative effects of COVID-19 on mental health are correlated with college students' substance use during COVID-19 ($X^2 = 1.147$). Not enough data was collected to determine whether the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to increased substance use among college students ($p > 0.05$).

Conclusions

- COVID-19 has negatively impacted the mental health of UCSD students.
- COVID-related stress is a possible mechanism for the increase in substance use and decrease in mental health functioning.

Policy Implications

- Harm reduction information campaigns in schools
- Required course on drug and alcohol safety
- Social planning activities improving mental health

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Dr. Sally Romero and Amalia Cristiano for assisting us in completing this project, as well as all of the students who participated in completing our survey.

References

1. Gritsenko, V., Skugarevsky, O., Konstantinov, V. et al. COVID 19 Fear, Stress, Anxiety, and Substance Use Among Russian and Belarusian University Students. *Int J Ment Health Addiction* 19, 2362-2368 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-020-00330-z>
2. Hunt, A. N. (2020). Access to Mental Health Care during and after COVID-19. In G. W. Muschert, K. M. Budd, M. Christian, D. C. Lane, & J. A. Smith (Eds.), *Social Problems in the Age of COVID-19 Vol 1: Volume 1: US Perspectives* (1st ed., pp. 113-121). Bristol University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv15d81tx.16>
3. Lechner WV, Laurene KR, Patel S, Anderson M, Grega C, Kenne DR. Changes in alcohol use as a function of psychological distress and social support following COVID-19 related university closings. *Addictive Behaviors*. 2020;110:106527. doi:10.1016/j.addbeh.2020.106527
4. Monnig, M. A., Treloar Padovano, H., Sokolovsky, A. W., DeCost, G., Aston, E. R., Haass-Koffler, C. L., Szapary, C., Moyo, P., Avila, J. C., Tidey, J. W., Monti, P. M., & Ahluwalia, J. S. (2021). Association of Substance use with behavioral adherence to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Guidelines for covid-19 mitigation: Cross-sectional web-based survey. *JMIR Public Health and Surveillance*, 7(11). <https://doi.org/10.2196/29319>
5. Saladino V, Algeri D, Auriemma V. The psychological and social impact of covid-19: New perspectives of well-being. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 2020;11. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2020.577684
6. University of California . (n.d.). Universitywide Crime Summary. University of California Police Department Annual Report and Crime Statistics . Retrieved February 12, 2022, from <https://police-statistics.universityofcalifornia.edu/2016/uwide.html>
7. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.). Alcohol Facts and Statistics. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Retrieved February 15, 2022, from <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/alcohol-facts-and-statistics>