

# Exploring the Unique Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic Among College Students from Underrepresented Groups in the U.S.

by: Tereza Pesmazoglou  
Faculty Advisor: Royette T. Dubar, Ph.D.



Sleep & Psychosocial Adjustment Lab

WESLEYAN  
UNIVERSITY

## Introduction

- ❖ Individuals from socio-demographic minority groups experienced unique stressors and challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hunt et al., 2021)
- ❖ Emerging adulthood is a critical developmental period for mental health and psychosocial adjustment (Syed, 2010).
- ❖ Few qualitative studies have specifically explored how emerging adults from underrepresented groups navigated unique challenges during the pandemic.
- ❖ The goal of the present study was to explore how college students from underrepresented groups in the U.S. perceived of their unique challenges in response to the pandemic, relative to that of individuals who do not belong to an underrepresented group.

## Method

- ❖ Participants were 15 emerging adults enrolled at a small, liberal arts university, who were part of a larger longitudinal qualitative study.
- ❖ Participants were recruited based on their identity as a member of at least one socio-demographic group in the U.S. (i.e., race/ethnicity, gender, LGBTQ+, first-generation, low-income, religious minority) and a member of the Class of 2024.
- ❖ **Interview Question:** “In what ways do you think the pandemic has affected students from underrepresented groups differently than students who do not belong to an underrepresented group.”
- ❖ **Plan of Analysis:** Thematic analysis

## Results

The results of the thematic analysis led to 6 emergent themes:

### 1. Identity

“During the pandemic have to stay with my parents, with my mom most of the time and [pause] there’s lots of like we have lots of different opinions about it [sexuality] and there’s no other space to stay away, like to hide or keeping distance”

### 2. Racism

“I’m East Asian- I’m from China... and people are being like, in general, people are being more- there’s more racist like action towards the whole Asian community, especially the East Asian community.”

### 3. Mental Health and Emotional Functioning

“...getting [pause] like appropriate care for like trans and queer people, it’s definitely been a challenge””

### 4. Living Situation

“I just don’t want to be responsible for accidentally killing my grandparents with COVID-19.”

### 5. Socio-Economic Status (SES)

“I have to watch my dad go to work every day and I know some students’ parents can work from um home and that’s like a blessing for them”

### 6. Social/ Community Contact

“If everything is online or you’re just cooped up in your room, it’s going to be even harder to find people that are like you.”

## Discussion

- ❖ Although the COVID-19 pandemic has been a *global stressor*, individuals from underrepresented groups in the U.S., faced additional/unique challenges.
- ❖ Racism against members of the Asian community, as well as increased attention to the Black Lives Matter Movement during the pandemic meant that college students had additional stressors to navigate.
- ❖ Students who identify as LGBTQ+ may have been cut off from mental health resources on campus, while possibly navigating tense familial relationships
- ❖ Students from low-income households experienced job loss, increased exposure to COVID due to the nature of their (or their parents’) jobs, limited access to equitable health care, and limited resources to buffer increased stress.
- ❖ University administration should employ effective strategies to support the unique needs of diverse groups of students. Future Research should employ long-term assessments of both stressors and protective factors among this population.

## References

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