

Ethnicity and its Effects on Mental Health during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Various studies have analyzed the effects of majority-minority ethnic status and mental health, demonstrating that ethnic minorities experience greater stress in general, but especially during the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic, given that they face disproportionate rates of infection. This has not been replicated at McMaster University, thus, this study aimed to examine if perceived stress during the COVID-19 Pandemic is differentially associated with mental well-being in dominant versus non-dominant ethnic groups. Data was collected from 217 undergraduate students at McMaster University ranging from 18 to 28 in age through an online survey. This survey entailed self-reporting on mental wellbeing and perceived stress using The Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale and the Perceived Stress Scale and answering an open-ended question related to stressors during the Pandemic, followed by answering various demographic questions. Contrary to previous findings on ethnicity and health, the effects of ethnicity on mental wellbeing and the interaction of ethnicity and perceived stress on mental wellbeing were not significant. However, the effects of stress on mental wellbeing were significant, showing a strong negative correlation and indicating that mental wellbeing was heavily impacted by stress. These findings may reflect the low mean-age of participants as well as the small sample size, and further longitudinal research is encouraged. Further, these findings are beneficial for implementing stressor specific resources at McMaster University to support students, including additional and novel supports for challenges relating to online learning such as feelings of social isolation, a lack of institutional support, and increased workload, among others.

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