Review of: "COVID-19: Health risk factors among students' population in Albania"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

I find this study to be highly relevant and timely, focusing on the mental health consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on Albanian university students. The authors have conducted a comprehensive investigation using a convenience sample and collected valuable data on depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation.

The study's sample size, consisting of 227 participants, provides a reasonable representation of the university student population during the pandemic. However, it is noteworthy that there was an overwhelming majority of female participants, limiting the generalizability of gender-specific findings.

The study's use of standardized questionnaires, such as PHQ-9 and GAD-7, for assessing depression and anxiety, adds credibility to the research. The findings show that a significant proportion of students experienced depressive symptoms and anxiety, indicating the pandemic's substantial impact on mental health in this population.

Although the study established associations between mental health and socioeconomic factors, such as personal income, it may benefit from additional information on other potential confounding variables, such as pre-existing mental health conditions and access to mental health support services.

The authors' discussion of the results is informative, providing insights into the possible factors contributing to the observed mental health challenges among students. However, further exploration and analysis of the data are needed to better understand the complex interplay of variables affecting mental health during the pandemic.

The study's limitation lies in its cross-sectional design, which prevents the establishment of causal relationships between the pandemic and mental health outcomes. A longitudinal approach, as mentioned in the article, could help identify trends and patterns over time.

In conclusion, this research sheds light on the mental health consequences faced by Albanian university students during the initial year of the Covid-19 pandemic. The findings underscore the need for targeted interventions and support systems to address the mental health challenges faced by students during such global crises. Future studies with larger and more diverse samples and a longitudinal perspective will be crucial in understanding the long-term effects of the pandemic on students' well-being.

The study lacks a control group, which could have provided a baseline for comparison and a better understanding of the impact of the pandemic on students' mental health in relation to a non-pandemic period.

The convenience sample used in the study may not be representative of the entire student population, as it could introduce bias and limit the generalizability of the findings.

The study relies heavily on self-report questionnaires, which may be prone to social desirability bias and may not accurately capture the full extent of students' mental health struggles during the pandemic.

The longitudinal nature of the research is mentioned, but the first-year data alone may not provide a comprehensive understanding of the long-term effects of the pandemic on students' mental health. Additional waves of data would be crucial for a more comprehensive analysis.

The study does not explore potential confounding factors that could influence students' mental health, such as pre-existing mental health conditions, social support networks, or access to mental health resources during the pandemic. These factors could play a significant role in understanding the observed mental health outcomes.

To address the limitations mentioned in the study, several strategies can be implemented:

Incorporate a control group: For future research, include a control group of students who did not experience the pandemic's effects. This will allow for a more accurate comparison and assessment of the pandemic's impact on students' mental health.

Diverse and Representative Sampling: Ensure a more representative sample of the student population by employing random sampling methods and reaching out to various educational institutions. This will help reduce bias and increase the generalizability of the findings.

Triangulation of Data: Instead of solely relying on self-report questionnaires, incorporate multiple methods of data collection, such as interviews and behavioral observations. Triangulating data from various sources will provide a more comprehensive and objective understanding of students' mental health struggles.

Longitudinal Studies with Multiple Waves: Extend the study's duration and include multiple waves of data collection over an extended period. This approach will enable researchers to analyze the long-term effects of the pandemic on students' mental health and identify trends and changes over time.

Comprehensive Analysis of Confounding Factors: Conduct additional assessments to identify and control for confounding factors. This could involve gathering information on pre-existing mental health conditions, social support systems, access to mental health resources, and other relevant variables that may influence mental health outcomes.

Collaboration with Mental Health Experts: Involve mental health professionals and experts in study design and data interpretation. Their insights can help ensure that the research instruments are valid and reliable, and the findings are interpreted accurately within the context of mental health dynamics.

Ethical Considerations: Pay attention to the ethical aspects of the study, especially when dealing with sensitive topics like mental health. Obtain informed consent from participants, assure confidentiality, and provide appropriate support or

referrals for those who may require assistance during or after the study.

By incorporating these strategies, future studies can overcome the identified limitations and provide more robust insights into the impact of extraordinary events like the pandemic on students' mental health. This knowledge can lead to the development of targeted interventions and support systems to help students cope with similar challenges in the future.