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.

Mental health care is crucial for students to present the necessary emotional well-being that allows them to be aware of their abilities, face the normal stresses of life and show good academic performance that allows them to successfully complete their studies; and thus be able to work productively and fruitfully and thereby contribute to the development of their community.

The period where university studies occur is also where the highest incidence of socio-emotional disorders occurs, between the ages of 17 and 24, the transition stage between late adolescence and early adulthood. Students who manifest mental health problems during this period are at risk of low academic performance and even dropping out of school, dropping out before obtaining a university degree. In addition to presenting difficulties in interpersonal relationships and an increase in the occurrence of suicidal ideation.

In the study COVID-19: Health risk factors among students population in Albania, the authors investigate state that the research is aimed at studying the consequences of mental health in students and their ability to cope with the pandemic and is part of a longitudinal project, presenting as a working hypothesis that the Covid-19 pandemic has inflicted changes in the levels of anxiety, depression and suicide risk on the student population; and changes in daily lifestyle.

Methods

The study procedure was to distribute among the university student population of various cities in Albania a questionnaire composed of questions on the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample and the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) inventories, an instrument with high international recognition for its ability to identify depressive disorders and the Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7) instrument that is widely used to assess generalized anxiety disorder during the last 2 weeks, according to the DSM-5. The presence of suicidal ideation was estimated using only item 9 of the PHQ-9. No evidence is shown on the validation of these instruments in the Albanian population.

The sampling method was for convenience, and although it had the approval of the Ethical Committee of the Department of Pedagogy-Psychology of LOGOS University College in Tirana; there is no mention of the inclusion of an informed consent letter where the subject is properly informed about the possible risks and personal benefits, as well as the scientific relevance of the research. Nor is the time of year indicated when the surveys were carried out, an important fact since it has been seen that student anxiety increases considerably during the exam period.

Results

The study shows a descriptive statistical analysis of the results. The sample number varies between the tables, from 225 to 206 valid surveys. There are missing values of different magnitude between the variables studied.

The sample includes only 5.33% men and 94.66% women. This great disparity in the proportions by gender makes any type of analysis impossible. The authors observe this phenomenon but do not give a possible answer that explains this result.

The age group table shows that 91.96% of those surveyed are in the 18-29 age range, so it is not possible to make comparisons.

Concerning the risk of depression, the methods do not indicate the cut-off point, however, they found a value of 44.5%. A recent meta-analysis shows that The overall prevalence of depressive symptoms was 24.4% (95% CI, 19.2%-30.5%) in low- and middle-income countries. (PMID: 32664032). According to the authors, 18.9% of the sample is at suicidal risk and although they do not explain what they base their perception on, they consider that the percentage is low but significant. In relation to anxiety, they show that 37.9% of the participants have low anxiety. The study presents many tables, but not all of them are necessary to understand the results of the work.

The main findings of the study indicated in the conclusions are that the study confirmed a prevalence of depressive symptoms among students during the first year of the pandemic (44.5%). Also, anxiety rates were present in more than 55% of participants. The work does not present the limitations of the study.