

## THE EFFECTS OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC ON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND STAFF

From a psychological perspective, pandemics consist of life events associated with uncertainty. It is known that stress, emotional distress, uncertainty, and loss of control trigger anxiety, depression, and anger. When evaluated together with the quarantine and social isolation processes brought about by the coronavirus pandemic, it is seen that it is characterized by some concerns. These primarily include concerns about one's own and loved ones' health, economic difficulties and losses, lifestyle changes, social isolation, and loneliness.

One of the areas where the impact of the coronavirus pandemic is strongly felt is education. Since March of last year, the decision has been made for university education to continue online. Although the final effects of this process are not yet known due to its ongoing nature, scientific studies conducted worldwide show that students and administrative/academic staff are greatly affected psychologically by this process. It is suggested that the experiences can lead to various psychological effects that can be expressed as anxiety, fear, and depressive mood.

In a study conducted with students and staff of a university in Spain, it was observed that 34% of the participants experienced depressive symptoms, 28% experienced severe stress symptoms, and 21% had very high anxiety levels. It was found that students in health and engineering departments showed more symptoms compared to students in other departments than the staff. The higher prevalence of symptoms among students compared to university staff is thought to be due to concerns such as the inability to establish communication in emergencies and feeling lonely.

In a survey conducted in Switzerland, university students expressed their concerns about meeting daily life needs, the effectiveness of control measures for maintaining health, and especially the concerns about the health threat posed by the virus. It has been found that all three of these concerns are associated with anxiety and depression symptoms. Among the three types of concerns, concern about daily life needs was found to be the most important risk factor for somatic symptoms.

In a study conducted with university students in Greece, it was found that 65% of the participants had high levels of depression, and 12% were at a level to receive a diagnosis of major depression.

According to the results of a comprehensive study conducted in China, there are students who experience high levels of anxiety (7%) and high levels of depressive symptoms (12%). It has been observed that the presence of individuals diagnosed within the family or close circle has the greatest impact on anxiety and depression levels. During this period, there has been an increase in students' demand for psychological support. 40% of the students reported needing psychological support, but only 10% applied. 87% of students reported needing a better

understanding of what they can do to reduce anxiety and depression symptoms, and 70% reported needing to understand what they can do to reduce negative psychological effects.

In a study conducted in Italy, it was observed that both students and administrative staff had their sleep patterns affected during this period. High levels of depressive symptoms were observed in 27% of this group, and high levels of anxiety symptoms were observed in 34%. It was reported that students struggled to maintain their biological rhythms, and staff had difficulty falling asleep due to anxiety symptoms.

In another study, it is shown that the anxieties experienced by university students regarding the pandemic may be related to their careers and future employments. Moreover, it is suggested that due to reasons such as quarantine and social isolation, increasing distances between people may have occurred. It is known that anxiety disorders are more likely to emerge and increase due to restricted communication. The pandemic process is particularly effective among young adults with a migration background. The perceived level of stress increases due to closed borders or the situation of loved ones severely affected by the pandemic. In recent days, secondary consequences such as graduation, career, starting a job, romantic relationships, which are more strongly felt, especially for young adults, have been observed. They experience difficulties, anxiety, and disappointment at these points, which are considered important transitions in life. When the studies are evaluated, the importance of monitoring the mental health of university students and staff and providing psychological support is understood. Individuals should be informed about anxiety and depression symptoms and coping methods, and encouraged to seek one-on-one support online.

Maintaining a daily routine, engaging in attractive topics, engaging in physical activities have been seen to be effective in evaluating the situation more positively and developing coping strategies. It is especially known that regular physical activity is an effective antidepressant. Research shows that spending more time with family, partners, or close friends, allocating time for hobbies, and being able to sleep regularly increase the potential for well-being during the pandemic.

#### ABOUT PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

As a student or staff member, you can receive online therapy or counseling support from our university's psychological support unit regarding the difficulties brought about by the coronavirus pandemic we mentioned above or other issues you may be struggling with in daily life. To contact us, you can send an email to [psikolojikdestek@altinbas.edu.tr](mailto:psikolojikdestek@altinbas.edu.tr) including your name, surname, and department/unit.