

Title: Navigating the Impact of COVID-19: Anxiety in the Learning Environment

Description: A high percentage of post-secondary students experience anxiety. Anxiety can range from being a helpful stimulus, to completely debilitating. This project explores the relationship between the learning environment and student anxiety.

Research purpose: The overarching goal of this research program is to better understand the factors that contribute to student anxiety. The smaller project, described here, focused on analyzing a subset of focus group data that directly related to the impact of COVID-19 on student anxiety.

Preliminary Findings: All the research participants were undergraduate nursing students at one mid-sized Western Canadian University. Participants were representative of all levels of students from first year first term to final term of the program. When posing questions about the overall learning environment and factors that influenced student anxiety, COVID-19 became a very common theme. Embedded within this theme were common experiences of students feeling overwhelmed, isolated, and having decreased motivation. The feeling of isolation was felt most strongly by students in the early years of their program. Many participants also identified that additional communication and work was required for their courses. Additionally, the changes in physical environments which previously helped to maintain boundaries between home, school and work had become blurred. Students described a phenomena of “melding together.”

In order to maintain high quality nursing education, it is imperative that educators attend to challenges students experience. The learning environment has been impacted by COVID-19. Changes within the learning environment have resulted in students feeling overwhelmed, having decreased motivation, isolation, and blurring of boundaries. While our study is focused on the implications for students, as researchers we noted a mirroring of the many implications COVID-19 is having on our own mental wellness as faculty and advocate for educators to be cognizant of these same areas in their own mental wellbeing.

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