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# THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

Rosanne Cabonce

THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON

SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

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A Project

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Social Work

In the

School of Social Work

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ABSTRACT

This research project describes the relationship between anxiety and social support in Bachelors and Masters of Social Work students (N = 80) in a public state university. College students, specifically Social Work students, have been adversely affected due to consequences of COVID-19. Different areas of their life including their academic, financial, and especially, their mental health (e.g. anxiety) have been impacted due to the pandemic. A quantitative, descriptive study is conducted utilizing instruments to investigate anxiety and social support these students face during the pandemic. Correlation analysis is utilized to determine the relationship between anxiety and social support. Not many studies have examined the impact of COVID-19 on social work students, anxiety, and social support. As a result, findings will help fill the gap in the literature on the impact of COVID-19 on social work students, anxiety, and social support.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to give special thanks to my research supervisor, Dr. Li, for your assistance and guidance through my completion of this research project. I also would like to thank all my professors for the knowledge and lessons you all have instilled in me, especially with the knowledge I have gained in carrying out this research project.

DEDICATION

To my family: Thank you Kuya (brother), Mama (mom), Papa (dad), and Lola (pug) for your endless love, support, and guidance. This is not only for me, but for all of you as well. Thank you for everything. To my friends: Thank you for always supporting and encouraging me. To my cohort: Thank you for the unforgettable memories we have shared together. We did it! I wish you the very best in your future endeavors.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic that started in 2019 has been adversely impacting different facets of individuals' lives in the area of economy, education, physical health, and especially mental health (Amadasun, 2020; Apgar & Cadmus, 2021). College students struggle with their mental health, such as fear and worry about their own health and their family's health, trouble concentrating, sleep interruptions, reduced social interaction as a result of physical distancing, and heightened worry on their academic performance. They have pursued support from others and have used coping strategies to help themselves (Son et al., 2020).

In particular, Social Work college students encounter mental health issues (e.g. anxiety and depression) due to the impact of COVID-19 possibly due to stay-at-home orders, isolation, and change from in-class learning to online learning (Lawrence et al., 2021). Also, social distancing can cause isolation and loneliness, and intensify stress and anxiety in individuals (CDC, 2020). A mental health concern that has been increasing is anxiety. The U.S. Census Bureau conducted a survey, which reveals that the data from April 23 to May 5, 2020 showed that 40.2% of 18 to 29 year old individuals reported symptoms of anxiety disorder. Then, from Feb. 3 to Feb. 15, 2021, the data showed an increase to

47.5% (CDC, 2022). Also, the 18 to 29 year old group is the highest of all age groups to encounter reported symptoms of anxiety disorder (CDC, 2022).

In addition, Social Work students not only are involved in academics, but in field practicum as well. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and Council on Accreditation (COA) have modified conditions of field practicums to help protect Social Work students against COVID-19 (CSWE, 2020). Moreover, graduating Social Work students at the time of COVID-19 will be coming into the profession most likely helping clients in need of mental health and casework assistance (Lawrences et al., 2021). These two factors may also increase the isolation and anxiety that Social Work students experience.

Furthermore, COVID-19 has also affected people all around the world. The oppressed and marginalized groups, such as older people, individuals with impairments, and the poor are disproportionally affected (Amadasun, 2020). In particular, the effects of COVID-19 have further exposed the institutional racism, classism, sexism, and income disparity people experience (Martinez, 2020). The Social Work profession amongst other professions has been extremely affected due to COVID-19 (Amadasun, 2020). Amadasun (2020) remarks that the six Social Work core values (e.g. service, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, etc.) have been adversely impacted due to the pandemic in that COVID-19 has weakened and reversed some of these values. Specifically, the Social Work profession is currently at risk with its human

dignity value due to the lack of resources and economic hardships of individuals who are not able to obtain medical care.

Moreover, Amadasun (2020) notes that the Social Work profession has not been vocal in the middle of COVID-19. He suggests that the Social Work professionals should take action to help tackle the public health problems and consequences of COVID-19 on individuals. Additionally, Truell (2020) states that social workers are struggling working in sites where no social service policies yet exist to help deal with the pandemic and where the government has not yet acknowledged the urgent problem of the pandemic. He also adds that the International Federation of Social Workers were inundated with calls and emails from social workers globally reporting the challenges their countries were facing due to the pandemic. For example, a report came from a social work organization in West Africa expressing the starvation and food scarcity their citizens are experiencing.

Amadasun (2020) states that due to the adverse impact of COVID-19 on communities, Social Work's actions are essential in social policy practice. He recommends advocacy to be heard. Through advocacy and fighting for social safety of the oppressed, the Social Work profession can make a huge contribution. In particular, social workers could fight for long-term policies and ad hoc policies (e.g. food and medical supplies) for the oppressed groups. Amadasun (2020) asserts that social workers could educate (e.g. dispel rumors, false allegations, and public fear), counsel, and connect individuals to resources.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research study is to describe the connection between anxiety and social support among Social Work students in the middle of COVID-19 pandemic. Data collected on the 18 to 29-year-old age group revealed that this population has the greatest number of people experiencing anxiety symptoms compared to other age groups (CDC, 2022). College students are typically in this age group, which increases their likelihood of experiencing anxiety symptoms. A specific population within the college student population is Social Work students. Lawrence at al. (2021) addresses mental health issues (e.g. anxiety) that Social Work students face because of the pandemic. The reasons this group may experience anxiety come from different factors, which include having to stay at home, being isolated, and adjusting to online learning. To see the relationship between anxiety and social support on Social Work students during the pandemic, it is critical to look at the existing literature to examine the specific impact of COVID-19 on Social Work students' mental health. This, then, will be used along with social support that Social Work students feel, to describe the relationship of anxiety and social support on Social Work students.

Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice

The proposed study is necessary to help close the gap in the literature on the impact of COVID-19 on college students focusing on Social Work students.

Based on the search conducted, not many studies yet exist on specifically the impact of COVID-19 on Social Work students, anxiety, and social support. Yehudai et al. (2020) states the significance of acknowledging that Social Work students are not exempt from mental health issues and substance misuse. Thus, the findings from this proposed study will add to the literature on COVID-19's effect on Social Work students, their mental health, and social support.

This research study is informed by the second phase of the generalist intervention process: assessment. It examines and identifies the factors that impact the problem, which is seen from the perspective of micro, mezzo, and macro. It is also used to obtain important information about an issue in order to come up with decisions to solve the problem (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2020). This research study will examine the effects of COVID-19 on Social Work students. Specifically, this study will address the question: What is the relationship between anxiety and social support on Social Work students during the COVID-19 pandemic?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter will first discuss the impact of COVID-19 on college students, such as in finances and academics. After, this chapter will examine the pandemic's effects in Social Work students around the world with focus in Russian, Israeli, and Spanish Social Work students. In addition, this chapter will shed information between digital technology and Social Work students. Moreover, this chapter will talk about the relationship between social support, anxiety, and COVID-19. Furthermore, the argument for the proposed study will be discussed as well as the theory guiding conceptualization for this study.

Impact of COVID-19 on College Students

The literature points out the negative effects COVID-19 has caused to college students that affect their livelihood and well-being. First, some students harbor strong feelings (e.g. frustration, anxiety, and betrayal) in that they see the campus as like their home, but they had to leave due to the pandemic. Some students may also feel isolated and lonely during shelter-in-place due to their inability to connect with friends and partners. In addition, students who used to obtain counseling services on university grounds are not able to do so anymore, which worsens their mental health symptoms and heightens the possibility of suicide and substance use (Zhai & Du, 2020).

Impact of COVID-19 on Financial Needs

The literature presents and agrees on a specific challenge students face due to the pandemic: financial burden. Zhai and Du (2020) states that students may find it challenging to come home from their sudden evacuation from campus and handle their valuables due to their financial situation (Zhai & Du, 2020). Moreover, Lederer et al. (2021) also add to the financial burden students face. They point out that students and their family members' job loss from campus and communities has increased their financial difficulties, which leads to difficulty meeting their necessities, especially paying their tuition fee. Furthermore, Hoyt et al. (2021) also add to the financial burden of students stating that due to the continuing pandemic and the increasing economic consequences, students' financial problems may worsen from depending on their savings, unemployment pay, or financial support from their friends and family. These then can change their well-being in the future. The literature supports the financial difficulties students face due to COVID-19.

Impact of COVID-19 on Academics

The pandemic has also adversely caused changes in students' academics. First, several students had to stop their research projects and fieldwork when they were removed from campus. Thus, this may negatively impact their program, postpone their graduation, and lower their competitiveness against other job candidates. This then leads to feelings of anxiety (Zhai & Du, 2020). Another negative change is the abrupt change from in-person learning to

online learning (Lederer et al., 2021). Wang et al. (2020) supports their findings in that they found the prevailing academic concerns most students had included adapting to online learning as well as difficulty with concentration, fear, and worry about their academic growth and performance. Moreover, Lederer et al. (2021) found that some students with disabilities may not be able to completely engage with class materials due to a lack of priority for their needs (Lederer et al., 2021). A general agreement from the literature supports students' challenges, worries, and difficulties due to COVID-19.

<div align="center">Effects of COVID-19 in Social Work Students</div>

A consensus exists in the literature on the effects of the pandemic in Social Work students around the world with focus in Russian, Israeli, and Spanish Social Work students. First, Reznik et al. (2012) studied the connection between fear, alcohol consumption, mental health, and resiliency amongst Israeli and Russian Social Work students where they found indications of resilience and practices of coping among them in regard to COVID-19. Psycho-emotional state, such as feeling depressed, lonely, nervous, angry, as well as smoking and binge drinking in Israeli students stayed mostly the same in survey one (May) and survey two (October/November). However, these conditions increased in Russian students. In general, the study found indications of resilience and coping in Russian and Israeli students in relation to COVID-19. For survey two, they found Israeli students who did not consume alcohol during the previous month

the survey was given had reduced fear towards COVID-19. However, for Russian students, students who had consumed alcohol had reduced fear. In survey one, there was no significant difference of fear towards COVID-19 connected with substance use in Russian and Israeli students (Reznik et al., 2021).

Second, Díaz-Jiménez et al. (2020) found Spanish Social Work students' anxiety levels during COVID-19 increased significantly. Many had moderate (28.5%) or extreme (34.2%) anxiety. Connected risk factors consist of worrying about their academics, future economic situation due to the financial challenges created by the pandemic, living in urban communities, and leaving their campus residence. Steady family income and social support were prominent as protective factors (Díaz-Jiménez et al., 2020). Cole et al. (2021) also agrees with their findings where they found U.S. Social Work students' personal, educational, and cumulative experiences have been affected because of COVID-19. They identified themes of isolation, collective trauma, and passion to work towards mutual well-being. The literature supports COVID-19 has negatively impacted Social Work students in different parts of the world.

Digital Technology and Social Work Students

In contrast to studies that have shown negative impacts of changing from in-person learning to online learning (Lederer et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020), other studies dispute this stating that Social Work students, in particular, seem to be adjusting well to online learning with the use of digital technology. Some literature agree on the power digital technology can bring to Social Work

students. Popouli et al. (2020) found digital technology was utilized to aid students during the lockdown. One is by being active, healthy, and fit with the use of online exercise resources. Second is by being connected to others, which helps in dealing with negative events and helps with building community, avoiding isolation, and lessening stress and anxiety. Furthermore, it was also used as a modality to support self- and online- learning from home. Apgar (2020) agrees with their findings where he observed Social Work students who had positive effects technology can bring to them. They observed that technology (i.e. group text messaging) seems to have a significant role in providing and strengthening emotional, educational, and collegial support (Apgar, 2020).

In contrast, not all Social Work students were successful in being able to positively cope with the pandemic. First, some students were unsuccessful in adapting to online learning due to problems, such as poor connection to the internet. Also, some students felt tremendous pressure where it led them to inaction, anxiety, and depression (Popouli et al., 2020).


Social Support, Anxiety, and COVID-19

Much of the literature also focus on social support and anxiety during COVID-19 around the world. In a study in Turkey, Özmete and Pak (2020) found that perception of social support is a protective factor that lessens state anxiety during COVID-19. The pandemic heightened the levels of state anxiety (severity of current anxious feelings that intensified in the present moment; Spielberger et

al., 1970). State anxiety goes up during stressful living conditions. In contrast, trait anxiety is defined as a natural predisposition to anxiety that consists of how individuals generally feel (Spielberger et al., 1970). Perceived social support was a predictor of state and trait anxiety, which may protect their mental health during the pandemic. In addition, the high perception of social support was a buffer to state anxiety during COVID-19 (Özmete & Pak, 2020). Xu et al. (2020) agreed with their outcome. They conducted a study in China on the relationship amongst trait loneliness, perception of social support, and anxiety during COVID-19 stages (before, peak, and decline). They found that the connection between loneliness and chronic anxiety was moderated by perception of social support. They also found that perceived social support went up from before the pandemic to the peak of the pandemic, and then stayed approximately the same from the peak to the decline stage. In addition, anxiety from COVID-19 went down from the peak to the decline of the pandemic. Moreover, the connection between loneliness and anxiety from COVID-19 was moderated by perception of social support at the peak and decline stages (Xu et al., 2020).

Lechner et al. (2020) also studied social support and anxiety, but also depression and alcohol consumption. They conducted a study with U.S. college students of the amount of alcohol they consumed before and after the announcement of campus closure. They observed a growth in alcohol consumption after the campus closure announcement. They also discovered that students with greater levels of depression and anxiety disclosed more alcohol

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consumption as time went by compared to students with reduced level of distress. Perception of social support was connected with lesser alcohol consumption in general, but it did not moderate the impact of psychological distress on more alcohol consumption over time (Lechner et al., 2020). These studies show how vital perceived social support is in the middle of COVID-19.

## Argument for the Proposed Study

In examining the literature, only a couple studies specifically discuss the relationship between anxiety and social support on social work students in the middle of COVID-19. No studies seem to investigate the research question proposed in this paper on Social Work students in a California public state university in the U.S. This is significant in that California State University (CSU) system is the biggest four-year public university in the U.S. Therefore, this study will contribute to the literature on the connection between anxiety and social support on Social Work students during the pandemic, focusing on a public state university in California.

## Theories Guiding Conceptualization

A framework is used to guide this research study: Person-in-Environment. This perspective helps explain the relationship between social work students and their environment. This framework views individuals as continually interacting with a variety of systems in their surroundings, such as family, friends, and

educational systems (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2012). The framework is valuable as it is social work's fundamental foundation (Greene, 1999). Gordon (1962) states this framework is founded on the assumption that social work's key mission necessitates a dual focus on the individual and the environment, and is a structured concept to the practice of helping. Meyer (1987) states the framework presents as a model or manual for assessments and interventions at different levels of systems with social work practice. This framework helps to formulate the interaction between social work students and their environment (impact of COVID-19). The environment consists of different systems (e.g. family, friends, education, finances) that affect social work students' well-being and functioning.

## Summary

This study examined the adverse impact of COVID-19 on college students particularly, in finances and academics, which may increase feelings of anxiety. This chapter also discussed the pandemic's effects in Social Work students, with focus in Russian, Israeli, and Spanish Social Work students. Moreover, this chapter looked at the positives of digital technology with a few downturns. Additionally, this chapter investigated the connection of social support, anxiety, and COVID-19. Lastly, the argument for the proposed study was discussed as well as the theory guiding conceptualization (e.g. person-in-environment).

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This research attempted to investigate the relationship between anxiety and social support experienced by Social Work students (Bachelors and Masters) at a public state university in California during the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter covers and explains the methods section of the research study: study design and its strengths and limitations, sampling type, data collection and instruments to measure anxiety and social support, procedures for how the study was conducted, protection of participants, and data analysis.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to describe the connection between anxiety and social support in BSW and MSW Social Work students during COVID-19 pandemic. This was a descriptive study on the negative impact of COVID-19 on college students, specifically on social work students' mental health. However, this research aimed to add to the understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on a specific population in the areas of anxiety and social support, and the relationship between them.

The research method that best addressed the research question is quantitative study. Quantitative, descriptive study with the use of surveys was employed to investigate the research question. Utilizing surveys have strengths.

One strength of surveys is it is versatile. It can improve understanding of social issues including mental health. Second strength is it is efficient in that it is inexpensive and fast to administer. Third strength is that results from the survey are generalizable (Grinnell & Unrau, 2018). However, this research study used a non-probability sampling, so generalizability was limited. Although strengths for surveys were present, limitations need to be aware. One limitation was possible nonresponse from participants which may have altered the sample. Second limitation was the risk of bias. The questions may be interpreted differently by participants. Third limitation was in regard to recall bias. Participants may not remember a situation or behavior correctly or accurately (Grinnell & Unrau, 2018).

Pre-experimental design, particularly cross-sectional survey, was used in this study. The research question investigated is: What is the relationship between anxiety and social support on Social Work students during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Sampling

The research study used a non-probability, purposive sampling. Only BSW and MSW students from a public state university in California were recruited as participants for this study. Permission was asked from the Director of School of Social Work. A total of 80 participants completed the survey.

Data Collection and Instruments

Quantitative data was obtained using online questionnaire. Social support was measured using Multidimensional Perceived Social Support Scale (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988), a 12-item scale divided into 3 subscales ranging from very strongly disagree (1) to very strongly agree (7). Zimet et al. (1988) found its internal reliability was good for the whole scale ($\alpha$ = .88) and its construct validity was moderate.

Anxiety was measured using COVID-19 Anxiety Syndrome Scale (C-19ASS; Nikčević & Spada, 2020), a 9-item scale ranging from not at all (0) to nearly every day (4). Its reliability and validity showed acceptable levels. Lastly, a reliability analysis was used to measure the demographic variables (i.e. age, program type, sex, and ethnicity).

Procedures

Participation was solicited in a variety of ways. The mass email/material included information about the study, such as the purpose of the study, a survey link and QR code, as well as the student researcher's information for further questions and/or concerns. First, the Director of School of Social Work sent a mass email to all Social Work students. In addition, the manager of a school district was asked to send a mass email to interns targeting Social Work interns who attends this particular university. Moreover, a GroupMe account with Social Work students was used. Furthermore, fellow Social Work classmates were

requested to distribute the survey to their own cohort's GroupMe account to gather more participants.

Participants read and acknowledged the informed consent before continuing with the survey. Qualtrics, an online survey website, was utilized for data collection. Afterwards, participants answered demographic questions consisting of program type, ethnicity, sex, and age. Participants then answered questions from the C-19ASS and MSPSS scale instruments. The debriefing statement then followed.

## Protection of Human Subjects

Personal identifiable information, such as participants' names and Social Security Number, was not asked, collected, nor distributed. The first page of the online survey first included the description of the study, confidentiality, and informed consent. Participants needed to electronically sign by placing an "X" above the line after acknowledging the informed consent, if they agree with the stated informed consent. However, if they did not agree and/or had questions about the informed consent, a statement indicating that they contact the student researcher and/or research advisor before signing it, was stated. The student researcher and their research advisor were the only authorized individuals to access the data. Information was stored in Qualtrics where data is secured and protected. In addition, the student researcher secured the data and did not share it with anyone else with exception of their research advisor.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was employed to analyze the data. The composite score for C-19ASS was calculated by adding all the 9 questions for anxiety and dividing it by 9 resulting in a composite mean score of 3.08 and *SD* of .921. The composite score for MSPSS was calculated by adding all 12 questions and dividing it by 12 resulting in a composite score mean of 5.56 and *SD* of 1.136. A reliability statistics was ran for MSPSS scale and received a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha$ = .929. A reliability statistics was also ran for C-19ASS scale and received a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha$ =.831.

Descriptive statistical analysis was used to report participants' characteristics: program type, ethnicity, sex, and age. Then, correlation analysis was utilized to see the relationship between the variables.

Summary

This research study set out to examine the relationship between anxiety and social support experienced by Social Work students at a public state university in California during the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter discussed the study design and its strengths and limitations, sampling (i.e. purposive), data collection and instruments to measure anxiety and social support, procedures for how the study was administered, protection of participants, and data analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter revealed the findings of the study, such as demographic information of participants and the outcome of the analysis. Table 1 displayed the demographic statistics of the participants on program type, ethnicity, age, and sex. Table 2 presented the outcome of the Pearson Correlation analysis to conclude if statistically significant result was present between social support and anxiety on BSW and MSW students at a public state university in California.

Presentation of the Findings

Table 1 presented the participants' demographic information (N=80), including age, sex, program type, and ethnicity. The study comprised of forty-six participants 29 years old and under, more than half of the sample (57.7%); thirty-two participants 30 years old and above (40.6%); and two participants declined to state their age (1.7%). As for sex, the study was predominantly female accounting of seventy female participants (87.5%) and ten male participants (12.5%). In regards to program type, sixty-one MSW students (76.3%) and nineteen BSW students (23.8%) participated. For ethnicity, fifty participants (62.5%) identified as Hispanic or Latinx; sixteen White or Caucasian (20%); seven as others (i.e. Asian or Pacific Islander, Native American or Alaskan Native, Multiracial or Biracial, A race/ethnicity not listed) (8.8%); six Black or

African American (7.5%); and one declined to state (1.3%). As also shown in

Table 1, seventy-four entirely completed the anxiety scale ($M = 27.00$; $SD = 8.16$)

and seventy-seven finished the social support scale ($M = 66.38$; $SD = 13.59$).

This showed a slight negative skewness.

Table 1
*Demographic Information*

| Variable | N | % | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Age* | *80* | *100* | |
| 29 and under | 46 | 57.7 | |
| 30 and above | 32 | 40.6 | |
| Declined to state | 2 | 1.7 | |
| *Sex* | *80* | *100* | |
| Female | 70 | 87.5 | |
| Male | 10 | 12.5 | |
| *Program Type* | *80* | *100* | |
| MSW | 61 | 76.3 | |
| BSW | 19 | 23.8 | |
| **Ethnicity** | **80** | **100** | |
| Hispanic or Latinx | 50 | 62.5 | |
| White or Caucasian | 16 | 20 | |
| Others | 7 | 8.8 | |
| Black or African American | 6 | 7.5 | |
| Declined to state | 1 | 1.3 | |
| **Variable** | **N** | **Mean (*M*)** | **Std. Deviation (*SD*)** |
| Anxiety | 74 | 27.00 | 8.16 |
| Social Support | 77 | 66.38 | 13.59 |

A Pearson Correlation analysis examined the relationship between anxiety

and social support. A moderate, positive correlation between anxiety and social

support was found; however, the relationship was not statistically significant ($r$ (78) = -.099, p > .05). No association was found between anxiety and social support; it cannot be concluded that the higher the social support, the lower the anxiety the students would feel due to non-significant results.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter discusses the study's results in relation to the research question. This chapter provides an explanation for its findings and discusses its limitations and suggestions for further research. In addition, conclusion and implications for the social work practice are explained.

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to describe the relationship between anxiety and social support in BSW and MSW students during COVID-19 pandemic. The research consists of 80 participants in the bachelors and masters program from a public state university in California. The findings from this study do not support the findings from past studies.

It is hypothesized that a negative correlation would be found between anxiety and social support—the higher the social support, the lower the anxiety students would feel. Unfortunately, the Pearson Correlation analysis show no significant findings between these variables. A couple of reasons may serve as explanations for the findings: the change of the circumstances of COVID-19 from past to present and the use of coping skills.

One explanation for the study's findings could be due to the changing situation of COVID-19 from beginning to now. A lot has happened since the start

of the writing of this paper. As COVID-19 swarm its way throughout individuals'

lives, people may have started getting adjusted with their lives under the

pandemic with the vaccines making it possible for individuals to start living their

life as closely as they did before as well as experiencing lifted restrictions now. In

the beginning of the pandemic, students had to unexpectedly adapt to the rapid

changes brought by the pandemic. For instance, students had to deal with

financial problems and job loss, which has adversely impacted their well-being

(Zhai & Du, 2020; Lederer et al., 2021).

The amount of people experiencing anxiety symptoms has gone down

compared to the middle of the pandemic. At the end of April and beginning of

May 2020, 40.2% of 18- to 29-year olds have reported anxiety disorder

symptoms. Then, in the beginning to mid-February 2021 (10 months after), the

data showed an increase of people experiencing anxiety symptoms to 47.5%

(7.3% higher). Subsequently, in the beginning to mid-March, the data showed a

decrease of people dealing with anxiety symptoms to 41.7% (5.8% lower) (CDC,

2022).

The COVID-19 events have had fast-paced effects as can be seen by this

CDC (2022) data. On March 11, 2020, The World Health Organization

announced COVID-19 as a pandemic. Two days later, on March 13, 2020,

Former President Donald Trump called for a nationwide emergency. Four days

later, on March 15, 2020, the United States started closing down schools,

restaurants, and other establishments to avoid the transmission of the virus. On

April 3, 2020, CDC declares wearing of face masks when outside of home. Months after, on January 18, 2021, the COVID-19 has resulted in 400,000 deaths in the U.S. Then, on February 21, 2021, COVID-19 has then resulted in 500,000 deaths in the U.S. On March 8, 2021, CDC declares completely vaccinated individuals can assemble indoors without wearing masks. Then, more and more individuals are getting vaccinated from 100 million vaccines in mid-March 2021 to around 200 million end of April 2021. On April 2, 2021, CDC declares completely vaccinated people can securely travel within the U.S. with no COVID-19 test (CDC, 2022). Due to these new developments of COVID-19, people may have learned how to live and deal with the pandemic better as well as learn how to adjust better compared to the beginning where negative changes were happening rapidly from one to the next.

Second explanation for the study's findings could be due to social work students' knowledge of coping skills. Apgar and Cadmus (2021) found social work students utilize coping skills they acquired from their social work classes to acknowledge the difficulties of COVID-19 and recognize the necessity of healthy coping strategies. They stated exercise, breathing techniques, guided meditations, and other relaxation strategies as effective means to cope, which social work students learned from their social work classes. They also stated faith and spirituality as coping skills, which was discussed in social work classes (Apgar & Cadmus, 2021). The knowledge of coping skills social work students learned from their program can be protective factor in dealing with COVID-19,

which other students from a different program may not have the opportunity to do so.

<u>Limitations</u>

A limitation could be the scales' used in this study and its inability to capture the mental health experience of social work students as it pertains to COVID-19. For example, past studies have incorporated scales specific to test a type of anxiety, such as state and trait anxiety (Xu et al, 2020). However, this study used a short scale to gather information on people's anxiety specifically due to COVID-19 (C-19ASS; Nikčević & Spada, 2020). Another limitation could be about the sample size. The study may have benefitted by having a larger sample size of more than 80 participants. Moreover, another limitation could be that the sample size consisted of predominantly women (N = 70) than men (N = 10). Guo et al. (2021) found that women receive increased support from family, friends, and other individuals while men had increased degree of depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms compared to women. Having a larger sample size could help detect the significant relationships between anxiety and social support.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Social Work Policy, and Social Work Research

<u>Recommendations for Social Work Practice</u>

Further research could study how field placements and academic support from faculty can provide support to social work students during COVID-19 and

how this could help with anxiety they may feel. The MPSS scale used in this study did not include questions about academic support. Cummings et al. (2021) found that many students expressed their professors as flexible with class requirements and were accessible to discuss questions and concerns. Many also expressed that faculty has provided them with support. In addition, it seems that educational support from faculty can provide a positive impact on students (Cummings et al., 2021). As for field placement, social work students also have to do an internship in addition to their classes. The CSWE and COA have changed the conditions of field practicums to help protect Social Work students from COVID-19 (CSWE, 2020). Further research could be done to explore ways social work students can be supported.

Recommendations for Social Work Policy

More research could examine support for social work students. For example, schools of social work could integrate programs to help students with the effects of COVID-19. They could provide students and their family with resources to help with their financial difficulties. Lederer et al. (2021) asserts that students and their family members' job loss from campus and communities has intensify their financial hardships, which results to obstacles with satisfying their needs (e.g. tuition fee payment). In regards to students' mental health, Kim et al. (2022) states the mental health difficulties experienced by students differ from one to another due to their backgrounds and preventive actions. emphasizes the significance of addressing social work students' mental health necessities due to

the lasting impact of COVID-19 on their mental health. They state that social work students should be given priority in that they would be more likely be the biggest providers of behavioral health to individuals. They are also attempting to deal with their own experience of the pandemic (Kim et al., 2022). Providing increased counseling services for students at their school and communities could help them deal with mental health challenges.

<u>Recommendations for Social Work Research</u>

Researchers could further explore additional variables to incorporate in their studies to add to the literature and narrow the gap of this study. As this study showed, the findings of this study was in contradiction with the studies done in the past. In particular, Xu et al. (2020) found a relationship between trait loneliness, perception of social support, and chronic anxiety. This study included an additional variable (trait loneliness) unlike this study the only studying two variables (anxiety and social support).

Moreover, investigating other pertinent variables could strengthen the study. For instance, as discussed earlier, Özmete and Pak (2020) discovered that perception of social support is a protective factor for anxiety (i.e. state and trait), which can then support individuals' mental health during the pandemic.

CONCLUSIONS

In contrary to past studies, this quantitative, descriptive study study did not find a relationship between social support and anxiety on social work students

during the pandemic. As discussed earlier, this could be due to multiple factors. Prior studies investigated social support and anxiety during the beginning of the pandemic. However, in this present moment, restrictions are being lifted, such as the mandatory mask wearing and gatherings indoors. As such, anxiety among students may now have returned to pre-pandemic level.

APPENDIX A

INSTRUMENTS

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)
(Zimet, 2016)

Instructions:  We are interested in how you feel about the following statements.  Read each statement carefully. Indicate how you feel about each statement.

Circle the "1" if you Very Strongly Disagree
Circle the "2" if you Strongly Disagree
Circle the "3" if you Mildly Disagree
Circle the "4" if you are Neutral
Circle the "5" if you Mildly Agree
Circle the "6" if you Strongly Agree
Circle the "7" if you Very Strongly Agree

| | Very Strongly Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Mildly Disagree | Neutral | Mildly Agree | Strongly Agree | Very Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. There is a special person who is around when I am in need. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 2. There is a special person with whom I can share joys and sorrows. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 3. My family really tries to help me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 4. I get the emotional help & support I need from my family. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 5. I have a special person who is a real source of comfort to me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 6. My friends really try to help me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 7. I can count on my friends when things go wrong. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 8. I can talk about my problems with my family. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 9. I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 10. There is a special person in my life who cares about my feelings. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 11. My family is willing to help me make decisions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 12. I can talk about my problems with my friends. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

COVID-19 Anxiety Syndrome Scale (C-19ASS)
(Nikčević & Spada, 2020)

A series of statements regarding people's ways of dealing with the threat of coronavirus (COVID-19) are listed below. Please rate the extent to which each statement applies to you over the last two weeks.

Not at all = 0
Rarely, less than a day or two = 1
Several days = 2
More than 7 days = 3
Nearly every day = 4

1. I have avoided using public transport because of the fear of contracting coronavirus (COVID-19).

2. I have checked myself for symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19).

3. I have avoided going out to public places (shops, parks) because of the fear of contracting coronavirus (COVID-19).

4. I have been concerned about not having adhered strictly to social distancing guidelines for coronavirus (COVID-19).

5. I have avoided touching things in public spaces because of the fear of contracting coronavirus (COVID-19).

6. I have read about news relating to coronavirus (COVID-19) at the cost of engaging in work (such as writing emails, working on word documents or spreadsheets).

7. I have checked my family members and loved one for the signs of coronavirus (COVID-19).

8. I have been paying close attention to others displaying possible symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19).

9. I have imagined what could happen to my family members if they contracted coronavirus (COVID-19).

Demographic survey created by: Rosanne Cabonce

Demographic questions:

Q1 What is your current program? Please choose the appropriate answer:

○ Bachelor of Social Work: Freshman  (1)

○ Bachelor of Social Work: Sophomore  (2)

○ Bachelor of Social Work: Junior  (3)

○ Bachelor of Social Work: Senior  (4)

○ Master of Social Work: Advanced Standing Program  (5)

○ Master of Social Work: Two-year Program  (6)

○ Master of Social Work: Three-year Program  (7)

○ Master of Social Work: Pathway Distance Education Program  (8)

○ Master of Social Work/Master of Public Administration Concurrent Program  (9)

○ I decline to answer  (10)

Q2 What is your ethnicity?

○ White or Caucasian  (1)

○ Hispanic or Latinx  (2)

○ Black or African American  (3)

○ Asian or Pacific Islander  (4)

○ Native American or Alaskan Native  (5)

○ Multiracial or Biracial  (6)

○ A race/ethnicity not listed here  (7)

○ I decline to answer  (8)

Q3 What is your sex?

○ Female  (1)

○ Male  (2)

○ Other  (3)

○ I decline to answer  (4)

Q4 What is your age?

○ Age in years:  (1)

○ I decline to answer  (2)

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

# INFORMED CONSENT

The study you are asked to participate is designed to examine the relationship between anxiety and social support in Social Work students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study is being conducted by Rosanne Cabonce, a graduate student, under the supervision of Dr. Yawen Li, Professor in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSUSB.

**PURPOSE**: The purpose of the study is to examine the relationship between anxiety and social support in Social Work students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**DESCRIPTION:** Participants will be asked some questions regarding feelings of anxiety due to COVID-19 and feelings of social support as well as some demographics.

**PARTICIPATION**: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**: Your responses will remain confidential and data will be reported in group form only.

**DURATION**: It will take less than 15 minutes to complete the survey.

**RISKS**: Although not anticipated, there may be some discomfort in answering some of the questions. You are not required to answer and can skip the question or end your participation.

**BENEFITS**: There will not be any direct benefits to you. However, findings from the study will contribute to our knowledge in this area of research.

**CONTACT:** If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to email Rosanne Cabonce at rosannec@coyote.csusb.edu and/or call Dr. Li at (909) 537-5584.

**RESULTS**: Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2022.
********************************************************************************

I understand that I must be 18 years of age or older to participate in your study, have read and understand the consent document and agree to participate in your study by placing an X mark and entering today's date. If I do not agree and/or have questions, I will first contact Rosanne Cabonce and/or Dr. Li (contact information above), before signing this.

_____                    _____

Place an X mark here                                                        Date

APPENDIX C

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

# DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Thank you for partaking in this study. The purpose of this study you have just completed is to examine anxiety and social support in BSW and MSW students from a public state university in California during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. The results of this study can be found through Pfau Library ScholarWorks database. If you would like any additional information and/or have any questions and concerns, please do not hesitate to email Rosanne Cabonce at rosannec@coyote.csusb.edu and/or call Dr. Li at (909) 537-5584 or email her at yawen.li@csusb.edu. Some risks of participating in this study may include some discomfort in responding to a few questions. The benefit of this study would be to contribute to the literature about the relationship of anxiety and social support in BSW and MSW students from a public state university in California during the COVID-19.

If you have encountered any discomfort from answering any of the questions, listed below are some available resources:

- **Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS):** Call (909) 537-5040 to make an appointment to be seen by a therapist. Visit their website for more information: https://www.csusb.edu/caps
- **Crisis Text Line:** Text HOME to 741741 if you feel anxiety due to COVID-19 pandemic or if you feel you are in any crisis. This is a 24/7, free resource. Visit their website for more information: https://www.crisistextline.org
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** call 1 (800) 273-TALK(8255) if you are in a suicidal crisis or emotional distress. It a free, confidential resource, and is available 24/7 in English and Spanish. A chat feature is also available. Visit their website for more information: https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org
- **SAMHSA's National Helpline:** Call 1 (800) 662-HELP(4375). It is confidential, 24/7 resource for people and their loved ones who are dealing with mental health conditions and/or substance use disorders. Visit their website for more information: https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness San Bernardino:** visit their website for resources on hotlines, crisis centers, residential treatments, etc.: https://www.namisb.org/crisis-services.html
- **San Bernardino County Behavioral Health:** visit their website for more resources: https://wp.sbcounty.gov/dbh/resources/#crisisresources
- **911:** Call 911 if you are dealing with a life-threatening situation.

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