

# The Psychological Wellbeing of International University Students during COVID-19 Pandemic: An Empirical Study in Siam University, Thailand

Rashminda Attanayake<sup>1</sup>, Tushar Ahmed<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Siam University, Thailand

<sup>1</sup>*rashminda@siam.edu*

## ABSTRACT

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) is a new infection that caused the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Infection rates and transmission patterns are threatening people's sense of control, and safety measures taken to curb the spread of the virus require physical distance. In the absence of specific vaccines or treatments, non-large-scale collection, isolation, and isolation are the only way to minimize global spread and avoid overloading the medical system. During turbulent times like the current pandemic, bad pressure is usually reported. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted education systems around the world, resulting in close closures of universities. Compared with the general population, international students are increasingly regarded as a vulnerable population due to psychological pressure resulted by the pandemic. In Thailand, however, the psychological wellbeing of university students during Covid-19 pandemic has not been investigated. The empirical study will be adopted to understand the association between Fear of COVID 19, Perceived Social Support and Psychological Wellbeing among international students studying in Siam University, Thailand. The results seek to foster the importance of addressing university-level mental health and student well-being concerns.

**Keywords:** Fear of Covid-19, Perceived Social Support, Psychological Wellbeing, International University Students

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

The coronavirus 2019 disease (COVID-19) outbreak in December 2019 emerged by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), is a major global health crisis (Lipsitch et al. 2020). The World Health Organization declared it as a global pandemic on March 11th, 2020 (Cucinotta and Vanelli, 2020). COVID-19 had spread to more than 219 countries and territories since December 2019.

The turbulent situation has caused a global health crisis and has had a profound impact on the way people perceive the world and everyday life. Infection rates and transmission patterns

threaten people's control consciousness, and security measures taken to slow the spread of the virus require physical distance. In fact, judging from recent similar outbreaks of other infectious diseases (i.e. Ebola and SARS), in the absence of specific vaccines or treatments, the absence of mass concentrations, quarantine, and quarantine may minimize the spread worldwide and the only one way to avoid overloading the population. health system (e.g. Parnell et al., 2020).

During turbulent times such as the current pandemic, it is common to report a poor state of stress, which is generally characterized by physical / mental arousal and stress in daily life and well-being (see Weinberg and Cooper, 2012). When encountering negative life events, these stressful states and the perception of stress itself can also be exacerbated by the general lack of relationships with others to maintain overall happiness (Segrin & Rynes, 2009). Therefore, the current emergency situation may have a large emotional impact (see Lima et al., 2020; Xiang et al., 2020), and restrictions and uncertainties are associated with increased emotions and negative emotions (Lades et al., 2020).

The impact of this worrisome and stressful situation could also extend to university students. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted education systems around the world, resulting in close closures of schools, universities, and colleges. Compared with the general population, international students are increasingly regarded as a vulnerable population, suffering from higher levels of anxiety, depression, drug abuse, and disordered eating. The 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic of coronavirus disease has affected university teaching worldwide. In addition to the risk of death, the widespread outbreak of the COVID-19 virus has also brought considerable psychological pressure. In Thailand, however, the psychological impact on university students has not been investigated. The effects of mental health on international university students have been ignored. The focus of this study is to measure the psychological wellbeing of international university students during Covid1-19 pandemic.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study aims to investigate the psychological impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on international students based on the assumption that the mental health of international students may deteriorate over prolonged periods of physical distance. In recent years, studies have shown that living in urban areas, living with parents, having a stable family income were protective variables during the COVID-19 outbreak for college students against experienced anxiety. Having a parent or acquaintance infected with COVID-19, however, was an independent risk factor for anxiety encountered. COVID-19-related stressors were positively correlated with the level of anxiety symptoms of college students during the outbreak, including economic stressors, impacts on everyday life, and academic delays, while social support was negatively associated with their anxiety.

Therefore, the results of this study could serve as a starting point for future studies, in addition to providing scientific evidence on the interactions between the factors treated. These results seek to foster the importance of addressing university-level mental health and student well-being concerns and enable universities to respond by developing student collaborations and adapting teaching. As can be seen from literature, various viral diseases have occurred in the world over the past 20 years. For example, the pandemic of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) occurred in 2003, outbreaks of H1N1 subtype influenza virus in 2009, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in 2012, and Ebola virus in 2014[1-3]. Since December 2019, the coronavirus has become a serious public health

emergency.[4]. Fever, chills, cough, sore throat, myalgia, nausea and vomiting, and diarrhea are signs of the Coronavirus infection. People with a history of underlying diseases are more likely to become infected with the virus and could have worse outcomes [5]. Extreme cases of illness can result in heart failure, respiratory failure, acute respiratory syndrome, or even death [6]. COVID-19 is a new condition that also does not have a vaccine yet. Owing to the lack of awareness about this disorder, people are terrified. In the infected nations, International students were required to do Lockdown for social distancing, leading them to be worried about what will happen to their lives. The condition of confusion slowly impacted international students and lead international students to have mental health issues.

### **The Objectives of the Study**

This study is carried out to focus on the following objectives;

1. To assess the relationship between the Fear of Covid 19 & Psychological wellbeing of universities Students.
2. To determine the relationship between perceived social support and the psychological wellbeing of university students.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Covid-19 Pandemic and Its Impact**

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) spread to more than 150 countries around the world. Covid-19 disease was first reported in December 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, caused by extreme acute respiratory coronavirus 2 syndrome (SARS-CoV-2). The first case of Covid-19 in Thailand was found on 13 January 2020. The crisis worsened rapidly and to control COVID-19 efficiently, Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha declared an emergency state on March 26, 2020, and a curfew is in place from 3 April. The pandemic has caused severe economic disruption in the region, of which tourism is a significant business. The International Monetary Fund forecasted Thailand 's GDP would shrink by 6.7 percent in 2020, while it was said to have been an estimated increase of 2.5 percent in the past until COVID 19. [3] Both international commercial flights were suspended from 4 April, and shutdown procedures were enforced throughout the country in varying degrees.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching effects beyond the dissemination of the disease itself and the quarantine attempts, including political, cultural and social ramifications. The COVID-19 epidemic impacts all parts of the population and is especially harmful to members of those demographic classes in the most disadvantaged circumstances; it tends to influence communities, including people living in situations of poverty, elderly persons, people with disabilities, teenagers and indigenous peoples. Early research shows that poor people are largely responsible for the health and economic consequences of the infection. For example, homeless people are extremely vulnerable to the danger of the virus and they may be unable to find safe shelter in place. The pandemic and its aftermath were still adversely impacted by those lacking access to running water, immigrants, migrants or displaced persons, whether attributable to restricted travel, less job prospects, increased xenophobia, etc. If the socioeconomic problem created by the COVID-19 pandemic is not adequately handled by legislation, injustice, alienation, prejudice and global unemployment will likely escalate over the medium and long term. ("United Nations DESA", 2020)

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted education systems around the world, resulting in close closures of schools, universities, and colleges. To minimize the spread of COVID-19, most countries around the world have briefly closed educational institutions. As of 4 September 2020, in reaction to the pandemic, nearly 1,277 billion students are affected due to school closures. UNESCO suggested, in reaction to school closures, the use of distance learning services and accessible instructional software and channels that can be used by schools and teachers to access learners directly and to reduce education interruption. Around the globe, the influence on intellectual credibility has been noted. An increase in contract cheating and the sharing of academic data and test cheating has been described as particularly troublesome. Many universities switched to commercial providers to take over the proctoring of tests, but fears over student anonymity, monitoring and the effect on student mental health were raised almost immediately. This led to an increase in student demonstrations against the usage of commercial e-proctoring facilities in a variety of countries. In a report that primarily looked at school closure in the United States, school closure was correlated with 1.37 million fewer incidents and 40,600 fewer COVID-19 deaths over a six-week period of report.

### **Fear of Covid-19**

A pandemic of unimaginable nature triggered by a new, evolving and yet poorly understood infectious disease, coronavirus disease, is currently plaguing the planet (COVID-19) (Wu and McGoogan, 2020). In addition to being a global health emergency, the COVID-19 pandemic has several socio-economic and psychological consequences. Analysis and media reports from COVID-19 have indicated an increase in concerns linked to virus contracting. The COVID-19 pandemic is a constantly evolving disease outbreak and has specific risk factors, while fear is a typical psychological outcome during pandemics. Fear related to COVID-19 may therefore manifest not only in fear and anxiety related to the contraction and death of the disease but also in associated socio-occupational stress. Fear may be both a positive and negative factor. A reasonable approach is to consider and control the risk of harm occurring—that is, the risks. An irrational but common answer is fear. Panic arises when the perceived risk has "feared" characteristics. In these cases, even reliable, objectively validated evidence can increase fear in the general population. As COVID-19 has shown, sound scientific advice is necessary, but not sufficient to dispel fear and prevent panic (McKay et al., 2020). All spheres of life are affected by COVID-19 and the risk factors are more unique, multiple, and complex than in other pandemics. As a result, anxiety may extend beyond falling ill or dying as a result of virus contraction, evoking other fears such as economic adversity (Yoon, 2020) and infecting others.

### **Perceived Social Support**

Perceived social support refers to how people view friends, family members and others as outlets that are accessible during times of need to offer material, therapeutic and general support. Well-being has been consistently linked to perceived social support, as the perceived levels of support, affection and care will provide positive experiences (e.g., Siedlecki et al., 2014). A analysis showed that high perceived social support is correlated with better physical and mental health outcomes as well as better physical and mental health outcomes (Uchino et al., 2013).

### **Psychological Wellbeing**

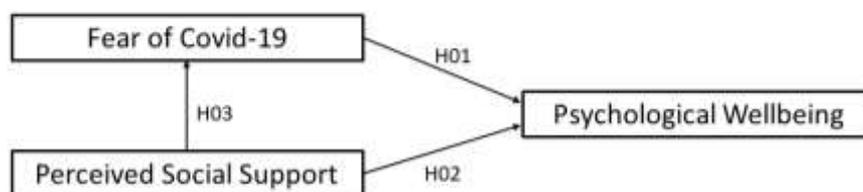
Psychological well-being refers to healthy measures of inter- and intra-individual functioning that may include one's relation to others and self-referential behaviors that include one's sense of mastery and personal progress. Subjective well-being represents facets of the effect of life satisfaction decisions. There are two major facets of psychological health. The first of these applies to the degree to which good emotions and feelings of pleasure are encountered by individuals. This component of psychological well-being is often called subjective well-being (Diener, 2000). The notion of well-being, both in science and lay literature, has received tremendous attention in recent years. As such, well-being is sometimes cited internationally as a global concern for government policy (Beddington et al. 2008). The notion of well-being can, however, have very different connotations, based on one's professional and personal viewpoint. For example, in terms of economic potential and prosperity, economists can view well-being as growth in both individual and national economic wealth. Population health researchers can concentrate on problems.

### Hypotheses of the Study

H01: Fear of Covid-19 has a negative association with psychological wellbeing among international university students.

H02: The higher the perceived social support the higher the psychological wellbeing among international university students

H03: The higher the perceived social support the lower the fear of Covid-19 among international university students



**Figure 01: Proposed Conceptual Framework**

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study will determine the impact of fear of Covid-19 on the psychological wellbeing of international university students during the Covid-19 pandemic. It will also assess how perceived social support the students receive, will affect their physiological wellbeing. An online survey using Google form will be utilized to collect quantitative data to test the proposed hypotheses. The empirical study will be adopted to understand the association between Fear of COVID 19, Perceived Social Support and Psychological Wellbeing among international students studying in Siam University, Thailand.

The questionnaire for this study is adopted from the previous literature. The instruments for this study is compromised of the following: Independent variables namely Fear of Covid-19

(FC) and Perceived Social Support (PSS) and the dependent variable namely Psychological Wellbeing (PW). The data will be used to examine the degree of relationship between dependent and independent variables in quantitative forms.

### **Sampling Method and Data Analysis**

An online survey will be performed at the International College of Siam University, Thailand. The sampling frame will be the international students pursuing undergraduate, masters and doctor level degrees. It is expected to include participants from a number of Asian, European and African nations to get the maximum participation, purposive non-probability snowball sampling method will be adopted. Cross-sectional data from the online survey using google form will be used for this study. Email and other social media platforms namely Line, WhatsApp and Facebook will be used to distribute the google form link for the participants. Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) Version 25 will be used to analyze the data. Person's bivariate correlation will be carried out to find out the relation between the independent and dependent variables. Multiple regression analysis will be carried out to understand whether the association fits a model.

### **Measurement**

The scale for this survey were adopted from previous literature. The Fear of COVID 19 (FOC) was measured from the FCV-19s scale with seven item Uni-Dimensional scale measuring the magnitude of COVID 19 fears, which was adopted by Ahorsu et al (2020). Perceived Social Support (PSS) was measured from Perceived Social Support Multidimensional Scale (MSPSS). The scale contains total of twelve items, with four items for each subscale which was adopted by Zimet et al (1988). Psychological Wellbeing (PW) was measured by Psychological wellbeing scale, which includes forty-two items and was developed by psychologist Carol D. Ryff (1995). Demographic questionnaire covers age, gender, marital status, nationality, educational background, and employment status of the international students.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The proposed study aims to investigate the psychological wellbeing of international university students during the Covid-19 pandemic. The researcher also wants to find out how the Fear of COVID 19 is linked with perceived social support and psychological wellbeing of international university students. The present research will only focus on international students studying in Siam University, Thailand which is one of the limitations of this study. The overall outcome which has been expected to see is the positive correlation of fear of COVID 19 with the of International Students. Like in a past research paper it has been seen that COVID-19-related stressors were positively correlated with the level of anxiety symptoms of college students during the outbreak, including economic stressors, impacts on everyday life, and academic delays, while social support was negatively associated with their anxiety. (Cao, W., et al. 2020). However, the results of this study could serve as a starting point for future studies, in addition to providing scientific evidence on the interactions between the factors treated. These results seek to foster the importance of addressing university-level mental health and student well-being concerns and enable universities to respond by developing student collaborations and adapting teaching.

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