

The Effect of Mental Health on Academic Trajectories during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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America's colleges are struggling to respond to what is widely-perceived to be a growing mental health crisis on their campuses. COVID-19 led to spikes in anxiety and depression due to COVID-related stressors such as increased financial strain, health concerns, and social isolation. Because students from disadvantaged backgrounds disproportionately faced COVID-related stressors, effects of mental illness on achievement could exacerbate inequalities in higher education. This research looks at the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the class of 2023 at UNC Chapel Hill by focusing on the relationships between changes in mental health and academic trajectories. Our results indicate that depression is a significant determinate of achievement and universities should consider ways to improve access to mental health support.