

Journal of Loss and Trauma

International Perspectives on Stress & Coping

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/upil20>

COVID-19 Fear Association with Ukrainian “Help Profession” Student Mental Health, Substance Use, and Resilience

Valentyna Pavlenko, Anton Kurapov, Alexander Drozdov, Nataliia Korchakova, Alexander Reznik & Richard Isralowitz

To cite this article: Valentyna Pavlenko, Anton Kurapov, Alexander Drozdov, Nataliia Korchakova, Alexander Reznik & Richard Isralowitz (2021): COVID-19 Fear Association with Ukrainian “Help Profession” Student Mental Health, Substance Use, and Resilience, Journal of Loss and Trauma, DOI: [10.1080/15325024.2021.1961408](https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2021.1961408)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2021.1961408>



Published online: 09 Aug 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

LETTER TO THE EDITOR



COVID-19 Fear Association with Ukrainian “Help Profession” Student Mental Health, Substance Use, and Resilience

Dear Editor

This letter to the editor responds to the recently published paper in the *Journal of Loss and Trauma* about COVID-19’s impact on Russian university student fear, mental health, and substance use (Isralowitz et al., 2021). We replicated the survey to examine Ukrainian medical, psychology, and social work students in May 2021. The country was at that time, and remains, in a third wave of COVID-19 infection including the delta variant.

After Russia, Ukraine is the second-largest and poorest country in Europe. Nearly the size of Texas with a population of about 41 million people, Ukraine was part of the former Soviet Union until 1991 when it gained independence. Positioned in Eastern Europe, the nation borders Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, and the Black Sea (The World Bank, 2021).

In terms of the COVID-19 vaccinated population, Ukraine ranks among the lowest in Europe. At the end of July (2021), only about 4% of the country’s population had received full vaccination. For comparison, neighboring Poland has 44% of its population vaccinated (Our World in Data, 2021).

Data were collected from a cross-sectional sample of Ukrainian “help profession” students from four universities. Among such students, women tend to account for about 80% of those who will become health and social workers (UN Development Programme, 2020). The COVID-19 Scale (FCV-19S) (Ahorsu et al., 2020) and Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) (Smith et al., 2008) were used for data collection. Both scales were found to be reliable (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.815 and 0.753, respectively). These scores are comparable to those reported for the Russian student study. All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS, version 25. The Pearson’s Chi-square test, *t*-test, as well as one-and two-way ANOVA were used. This survey included 907 participants, 17.8% ($n = 161$) male and 82.2% ($n = 746$) female, 42.5% reported being secular; and, 20.5% medical, 73.3% psychology, and 6.2% social work students. The mean age of the respondents is 20.6 years ($SD = 4.6$).

The average COVID-19 fear value is 21.0 ($SD = 6.1$). Significant differences were found regarding COVID-19 fear based on student gender—female more than male ($t_{862} = 4.453$; $p < 0.001$) and religious status—religious more than secular ($t_{861} = 4.987$; $p < 0.001$). One-way ANOVA shows COVID-19 fear associated with study discipline (i.e., medicine, psychology, and social work) ($F_{2, 861} = 3.626$; $p = 0.027$). Bonferroni post hoc test evidences a significant difference between COVID-19 fear value among students from medicine and psychology ($p = 0.032$). No significant difference was found regarding COVID-19 fear among psychology and social work students ($p = 0.725$); therefore, they were combined as one group for comparative analysis purposes.

Regarding last month substance use, 34.4% of the survey respondents reported tobacco use (i.e., cigarette smoking), male more than female ($\chi^2(1) = 18.545; p < 0.001$) and secular more than religious ($\chi^2(1) = 18.827; p < 0.001$). Students who smoked had a lower level of COVID-19 fear than nonsmokers ($t_{846} = 2.851; p = 0.004$). Male more than female ($\chi^2(1) = 4.327; p = 0.038$) and secular more than religious ($\chi^2(1) = 4.701; p = 0.030$) students reported past month alcohol use. Current, last month, binge drinking was reported by 10.3% of students—secular more than religious ($\chi^2(1) = 5.220; p = 0.022$). Gender status was not found associated with binge drinking ($\chi^2(1) = 0.227; p = 0.634$).

Regardless of gender, religiosity, and study discipline, most students (66.8%) reported a deterioration of their psycho-emotional state due to COVID-19. Specifically, over one-third reported being: depressed (34.8%); exhausted (36.6%); lonely (35.6%); nervous (41.7%); and, angry (33.8%). Students who reported a deterioration of their psycho-emotional state had a higher level of COVID-19 fear ($t_{837} = 8.886; p < 0.001$).

Based on regression analysis, mental health factors associated with COVID-19 fear are depression ($\beta = 0.223; p < 0.001$), loneliness ($\beta = 0.113; p = 0.001$); nervousness ($\beta = 0.166; p < 0.001$); and, anger ($\beta = 0.077; p = 0.023$). Tobacco use (i.e., cigarette smoking) is a paradoxical predictor ($\beta = -0.102; p = 0.001$) that contributes to fear reduction.

Regarding resilience, the average value is 18.5 (SD = 4.0) and a significant difference was found based on student gender—male more than female ($t_{869} = 4.251; p < 0.001$) and study discipline—medicine more than psychology/social work ($t_{869} = 2.531; p = 0.012$). Tobacco and alcohol use were not found associated with resilience ($t_{863} = 0.836; p = 0.404$ and $t_{864} = 0.220; p = 0.826$ respectively). Students who reported a deterioration of their psycho-emotional state tend to have lower resilience ($t_{858} = 6.383; p < 0.001$). Lower resilience is associated with factors of exhaustion ($\beta = 0.105; p = 0.004$), loneliness ($\beta = 0.123; p < 0.001$), nervousness ($\beta = 0.109; p = 0.003$), and gender status—female ($\beta = 0.119; p < 0.001$). Ukrainian “help profession” students evidence a lower level of COVID-19 fear than those from Russia and Belorussia (21.0 vs. 22.6); and, they have a resilience level similar to Russian students (18.5 vs. 18.8) (Gritsenko et al., 2020).

The present study is, to the best of our knowledge, the first investigation of COVID-19 fear and its association with Ukrainian medical, psychology, and social work student mental health, substance use, and resilience. This study contributes to an understanding of the COVID-19 fear impact on Ukrainian “help profession” students, as well as those throughout Eastern Europe, in terms of addressing student health-related needs (Gritsenko et al., 2020). Also, further research should be considered to promote understanding and response to the impact of COVID-19 fear on front-line health and social service providers as well as academic faculty members and support personnel affected by the pandemic (Carson et al., 2020; Der Feltz-Cornelis et al., 2020).

Acknowledgments

Gratitude is expressed to Drs. Toby and Mort Mower for their generous support of the Ben Gurion University of the Negev—Regional Alcohol and Drug Abuse Research (RADAR) Center.

Notes on contributors

Valentyna Pavlenko, Ph.D., Department of Applied Psychology, V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, Ukraine.

Anton Kurapov, Ph.D., Department of Experimental and Applied Psychology, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine.

Alexander Drozdov, Ph.D. Department of General, Developmental and Social Psychology, T.H.Shevchenko National University “Chernihiv Colehium”, Ukraine.

Nataliia Korchakova, Ph.D., Department of Developmental & Pedagogical Psychology, Rivne State University of Humanities, Ukraine.

Alexander Reznik, Ph.D., Regional Alcohol and Drug Abuse Research (RADAR) Center, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel.

Richard Isralowitz, Ph.D., Regional Alcohol and Drug Abuse Research (RADAR) Center, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel.

ORCID

Richard Isralowitz  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8413-1686>

References

- Ahorsu, D. K., Lin, C. Y., Imani, V., Saffari, M., Griffiths, M. D., & Pakpour, A. H. (2020). The fear of COVID-19 scale: Development and initial validation. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 1–9. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-020-00270-8>
- Carson, J., Eyre, H., Lavretsky, H. (2020). *Dear mental health innovators: The COVID-19 honeymoon is almost over*. *Psychiatric Times*. <https://www.psychiatristimes.com/article/dear-mental-health-innovators-covid-19-honeymoon-almost-over>
- Der Feltz-Cornelis, V., Maria, C., Varley, D., Allgar, V. L., & De Beurs, E. (2020). Workplace stress, presenteeism, absenteeism, and resilience amongst university staff and students in the COVID-19 lockdown. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 11, 588803. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2020.588803>
- Gritsenko, V., Skugarevsky, O., Konstantinov, V., Khamenka, N., Marinova, T., Reznik, A., & Isralowitz, R. (2020). COVID 19 fear, stress, anxiety, and substance use among Russian and Belarusian university students. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 1–7. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-020-00330-z>.
- Isralowitz, R., Konstantinov, V., Gritsenko, V., Vorobeva, E., & Reznik, A. (2021). First and second wave COVID-19 impact on Russian medical student fear, mental health and substance use. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 26(1), 94–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2021.1872274>
- Our World in Data. (2021). *Coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccination*. https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations?country=OWID_WRL
- Smith, B. W., Dalen, J., Wiggins, K., Tooley, E., Christopher, P., & Bernard, J. (2008). The brief resilience scale: Assessing the ability to bounce back. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 15(3), 194–200. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705500802222972>
- The World Bank. (2021). *The World Bank in Ukraine*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ukraine/overview>.
- UN Development Programme. (2020). *UN study documents devastating impact of COVID-19 in Ukraine*. United Nations. <https://www.undp.org/press-releases/un-study-documents-devastating-impact-covid-19-ukraine>.



Valentyna Pavlenko

Department of Applied Psychology, V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, Ukraine

Anton Kurapov
*Department of Experimental and Applied Psychology, Taras Shevchenko National
University of Kyiv, Ukraine*

Alexander Drozdov
*Department of General, Developmental and Social Psychology, T.H. Shevchenko National
University "Chernihiv Colehium", Ukraine*

Nataliia Korchakova
*Department of Developmental & Pedagogical Psychology, Rivne State University of
Humanities, Ukraine*

Alexander Reznik and Richard Isralowitz 
*Regional Alcohol and Drug Abuse Research (RADAR) Center, Ben Gurion University of
the Negev, Israel*
 richard@bgu.ac.il