

Stress, Coping, and Substance Use Among College Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract : The COVID-19 pandemic has brought substantial changes to the lives of college students, impacting them negatively. A consequence of these impacts has led to a significant increase in the negative emotional states of depression, anxiety, and stress, as well as substance use. The present study investigated the relationship between substance use (alcohol, cannabis, nicotine, benzodiazepines, psychedelics, and opioids) among college students from March 2020 to March 2021 and the negative emotional states of depression, anxiety, and stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the relationship between certain personality traits and substance use. Participants (N = 85) answered three questionnaires that measured their expressed symptoms of each negative emotional state, their frequency of substance use, and their levels of five specific personality traits. Investigators predicted that individuals experiencing symptoms of stress and anxiety from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as individuals showing higher levels of neuroticism and low levels of conscientiousness, would use more depressants (alcohol and benzodiazepines) and opioids to cope with their negative emotional states. Investigators also predicted that individuals who expressed high levels of openness to experience would be more likely to use psychedelics and cannabis to cope with symptoms of depression. Significant correlations showed that individuals primarily used depressants to cope with symptoms of anxiety, as well as cannabis and psychedelics to cope with symptoms of depression. It was also revealed that individuals with higher levels of openness to experience used cannabis and psychedelics, and those with high levels of neuroticism were more likely to use depressants. Two unexpected outcomes appeared for alcohol and depression and depressants and extraversion. Possible explanations for these outcomes are later discussed.

Keywords : substance use, mental health, personality traits, coping strategies

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