

Purpose

The aim of this study is to shed light on the damaging emotional and physiological affects of isolation amongst college students ages 18-25 in the Nashville area during COVID-19. The research questions addressed include “how does social isolation effect your mental health” and “how does the mind handle loneliness when the body is sick or in a panicked state”.

Demographic

The target demographic for this project is African American college students between the ages of 18-25 who attend Fisk University or live in the surrounding Nashville community who have been socially isolated.

Photo Novella



A 20-year-old Fisk University student became sick with COVID-19 shortly after arrival back to college. The student lived off campus and was instructed to quarantine in complete isolation for 14 days. Loneliness along with its many adverse health affects begin infiltrate. In addition, the severe symptoms that COVID-19 include were overwhelming. The above picture depicts one of the early symptoms that the student experienced which is a high fever.

Research

How does social isolation effect your mental health?

Social isolation often results in a feeling of loneliness. Loneliness and social isolation can cause many adverse health consequences ranging from sleeplessness, reduced immune function, higher anxiety, depression, and suicide rates, and can be linked to poor cardiovascular health and cognitive function ¹.

College students are more prone to feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression when compared to the general population. COVID-19 brings uncertainty, social isolation, and an abrupt transition which further worsens those feelings ².

How does the mind handle loneliness when the body is sick or in a panicked state?

When you are sick your body releases proteins called cytokines and they are responsible for helping the body fight infection. Although these cytokines are helping to stop the infection, a primary side affect is a depressed mood, affecting your performance and alertness. Therefore, if you experience both loneliness and a sickness at the same time it can amplify mood-related symptoms.

Resources

The Fisk University Counseling Center offers telehealth counseling services to undergraduate students who are in need of a counselor. They can be contacted at 615-329-8861 or counselingcenter@my.fisk.edu.

Talk Space talkspace.com is a virtual therapy service that includes free resources focused on coping with anxiety related to COVID-19.

Real real.com is a another virtual outlet that offers similar services.

Headspace is a high quality app that offers guided meditations and offers free access to its weathering the storm section for stress.

Student Tips

- 1.) YOU ARE NOT ALONE. Do not feel guilty for having these feelings. Know that it is okay to feel this way and that you are not alone. There was a time before COVID-19 and there will be a time after.
- 2.) STAY CONNECTED. COVID-19 protocol calls for physical distancing but it is possible to stay socially connected to others by engaging in phone calls and video sessions regularly.
- 3.) MAINTAIN ROUTINE. Although there has been a transition it is important to establish a healthy routine and stick to it. The less idle time you have the less you can let those notions of loneliness take root.
- 4.) TAKE BREAKS. As college students it is hard to get away from the constant coursework and deadlines that are always looming over your head. Take a break from the books and take a little time out for yourself everyday clear your mind.

Acknowledgement of Community Partners

Fisk University
Meharry Medical College
TN-MMC HBCU Wellness Project

References

- 1 Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. “Undefined.” Tulane Public Health, Tulane University, publichealth.tulane.edu
- 2 UM Medical School. “Coping with the COVID-19 Pandemic as a College Student: Psychiatry: Michigan Medicine.” Psychiatry, University of Michigan , 4 May 2020, medicine.umich.edu/dept/psychiatry/michigan-psychiatry-resources-covid-19