



## Psychological Impact of COVID 19 Pandemic on Italian University Students: A Qualitative Study Using the Focus Group

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### ABSTRACT

*Background:* COVID-19 pandemic has been spreading worldwide causing considerable psychological stress to everyone. The general lockdown, one of the most drastic provisions adopted by the Government to contain the spread of contagion, could represent a very stressful event for people, especially if prolonged over time. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the experience and several points of view related to COVID-19 pandemic focusing on three groups of university students during the first lockdown and one year later, by using the focus group technique.

*Methods:* A qualitative study comprising two focus groups carried out online during the first lockdown period in Italy, in May 2020, and one focus group carried out in January 2021, at the end of the second lockdown. Online videoconferencing using Microsoft Teams platform. Sixteen Italian university students aged between 21 and 25 years. Authors chosen to use this methodology because: (a) the focus group proved to be the most suitable and easy method to implement, considering the restrictions and limitations adopted by the Italian government to contain the spread of COVID-19; (b) the group discussion allows to study a specific topic, (c) the group discussion allows the creation of an informal atmosphere in which participants do not feel judged.

*Results:* This study suggests that the pandemic had both a positive and negative impact on university student's life. COVID-19 pandemic has created a sense of threat and stress that has surged globally at an alarming pace. Most governments have temporarily closed educational institutions to

contain the spread of COVID-19, for this reason university students had to face new challenges. Authors found that the main emotions felt by students were boredom, anxiety, hopeful and frustration, in addition, most of the participants improved their familiar relationships, especially with their siblings.

*Conclusions:* This unprecedented experience of 'home quarantine' during the lockdown, with the uncertainty of academic and professional careers, has multifaceted impacts on the life of students.

### BIOGRAPHY

Alessia Maria Rita Milia got a master's degree in Psychology in the University of Palermo (Italy) at 24 years old. During the internship she conducted her first study with her colleagues at the Department of Psychology, Educational Science and Human Movement, University of Palermo, Italy. They studied COVID 19 effects in universities students through the Focus Group methodology. Alessia is interested in human wellbeing, now she is focusing and working in the field of Learning Disorders in children. In June 2022, she will get a post-graduation degree in Learning Disabilities.



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