

Social Well-Being in the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Quantitative Analysis of Japanese University Student Survey Responses

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Abstract

As the COVID-19 pandemic emerged globally in early 2020, it started to significantly impact the social well-being of all populations worldwide. This paper investigates the impact of this pandemic on the social well-being and awareness of first- and second-year university students in Japan. A survey collected data from university students with questions regarding lifestyle adjustments made, experiences, and responses taken due to the pandemic. Data was analysed using quantitative methods. This study, although not a complete representation of the student population, shows that students overall adhered to COVID-19 health guidelines and understood about the seriousness of this pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, student attitudes, social well-being, anxiety

Introduction

“Very few phenomena throughout human history have shaped our societies and cultures the way outbreaks of infectious diseases have” (Huremovic, 2019. p.7). Humanity has faced several pandemics such as the 1918 influenza pandemic, Black Death or the Plague of the late Middle Ages, and the lesser-known

Plague of Justinian, 541–549 AD. While these examples were statistically more deadly and/or infectious, the ramifications of the recent and ongoing COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally differ from previous outbreaks. COVID-19, a previously unknown respiratory illness caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 (Wu et al., 2020), “was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on 11 March 2020, less than three months after cases were first detected” (Budd et.al., 2020, p. 1183). The progression of this pandemic has kept researchers intrigued for many reasons. The primary attractor, of course, is for those working in epidemiology, medicine, and its related disciplines.

Discussing the media itself regarding this novel coronavirus carries many implications. It is also undeniable that COVID-19 itself can be linked to each aspect of how people interact with different forms of media, how the pandemic has affected them, and how they have continued to communicate with their families and friends regarding new information. According to Ahmad and Murad “Social media has become a source of disseminating information to the public” (p.2). This study conducted a survey on social well-being in the recent pandemic, which was performed by collecting social data from university students in Japan. According to Capone, Caso, Donizzetti & Procentese (2020) “University plays a central role in youths’ lives: the need for belonging, relationship with colleagues and acceptance take on special importance for it” (p.2).

Method

This paper outlines the methods used to gather and analyse this data, discusses the questions and responses from the individuals, and ultimately concludes how this information can help determine whether these students have been participating in socially responsible behaviour or not.

As shown in Table 1.1 out of the 91 total participants, 52 (57.1 percent) identified as female, 38 (41.8 percent) identified as male, and 1 (1.1 percent) identified as neither. Data collection for this survey was straightforward and

relatively simple. Data was collected through web-based questionnaire, and it was given as homework. All students were asked eleven questions relating to their experience, response, and lifestyle adjustments due to the COVID-19 pandemic (see **Appendix A**). All questions were given in English. Participation was voluntary. Each participant was asked to answer these questions as honestly as possible while considering their past actions throughout the pandemic. All participants were English major. The survey was given in the middle of the first semester. As Table 1.1 shows that total of 52 (57.1 percent) first-year students enrolled in Core English (two classes) and Academic Writing (one course), while 39 (42.9 percent) second-year students enrolled in Core English (two classes).

There were also multiple-choice questions that the participants could choose from depending on the question (see **Appendix A**). Some had three options utilizing a ‘Not at all, Somewhat, Very Much’ or ‘More, Same, Less’ formats. Others were more variable for questions that asked about the source of their COVID information and how frequently they would ideally like to receive information on coronavirus updates.

After collecting the students’ answers, the information gathered was aggregated and put into an Excel spreadsheet to properly organize each question, response, and subject. Next, the data was cleaned in Excel and given codes

Table 1.1 Demographic information (n=91)

| | Frequency | Percent |
|------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Gender | | |
| Female | 52 | 57.1% |
| Male | 38 | 41.8% |
| Other | 01 | 1.1% |
| University Year | | |
| First year | 52 | 57.1% |
| Second year | 39 | 42.9% |

for each of the responses before running analytic processes. After that, SPSS software was used to check frequency, percentage, and cross-tabulation for first- and second-year students to determine special features of the sample. The author chose SPSS because it “allows many different types of analyses, data transformations, and forms of output” (Arkkelin, 2014, pp. 2–3).

Results and Discussion

All data results were shown in **Table 1.2**. Participant responses with the strongest majority were to the questions:

- ‘From which sources are you getting information about the coronavirus?’
- ‘Are you concerned about contracting COVID-19 by attending class?’,
- ‘Are you social distancing?’,
- ‘Family/Friend Communications’,
- ‘COVID Disruptions’, and
- ‘Whether COVID impacts learning’ questions.

The remaining responses were not divisively split and still showed greater variation. The results provided an understanding of how Japanese students reacted to COVID-19.

The author will focus on the larger profile of what this data can tell researchers about college-aged students in Japan, to what extent COVID-19 has affected their lifestyles, and university life. The survey data will also be useful in gauging any differences between first- and second-year students. Though these two groups are often viewed as homogenous in answers, there can always be room for difference and growth, especially with thorough data that can help reveal some of the finer, minute differences.

How closely are you following news about the coronavirus?

As it can be seen in **Table 1.2**, most first-year students (48.07 percent) said they followed the COVID-19 news “Very closely,” whereas second-year

Table 1.2 Descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation

| | Frequency (n=91) | Percent (n=91) | Frequency [first year at university] (n=52) | Frequency [second year at university] (n=39) |
|---|---------------------|-------------------|--|---|
| How closely are you following news about the coronavirus (COVID-19)? | | | | |
| Very closely | 38 | 41.8% | 25 (48.07%) | 13 (33.33%) |
| Not so closely | 44 | 48.4% | 19 (36.53%) | 25 (64.11%) |
| Not closely at all | 9 | 9.9% | 8 (15.4%) | 1 (2.56%) |
| From which sources are you getting information about the coronavirus (COVID-19)? | | | | |
| News/media | 81 | 89% | 47 (90.38%) | 34 (87.18%) |
| Government health organizations | 1 | 1.1% | 1 (1.92%) | 0 |
| Parents | 3 | 3.30% | 1 (1.92%) | 2 (5.13%) |
| Medical professionals | 2 | 2.2% | 1 (1.92%) | 1 (2.56%) |
| Influencers celebrities on social media | 4 | 4.40% | 2 (3.85%) | 2 (5.13%) |
| Are you concerned about contracting COVID-19 by attending class? | | | | |
| Very worried | 18 | 19.78% | 12 (19.8%) | 6 (23.08%) |
| Somewhat worried | 60 | 65.93% | 33 (65.9%) | 27 (63.46%) |
| Not worried at all | 13 | 14.29% | 7 (14.3%) | 6 (13.46%) |
| To what degree are you practicing “social distancing”? | | | | |
| Not at all | 2 | 2.20% | 1 (2.2%) | 1 (1.92%) |
| Somewhat | 56 | 61.54% | 33 (61.5%) | 23 (63.46%) |
| Very much | 33 | 36.26% | 18 (36.3%) | 15 (34.62%) |
| How connected would you say you feel to your friends right now? | | | | |
| More connected than usual | 22 | 24.18% | 18 (34.62%) | 4 (10.26%) |
| About as connected as usual | 34 | 37.36% | 21 (40.38%) | 13 (33.33%) |
| Less connected than usual | 35 | 38.46% | 13 (25%) | 22 (56.41%) |
| How do you stay connected with family/friends who you no longer see in person due to the coronavirus (COVID-19)? | | | | |
| Chats | 43 | 47.25% | 22 (42.30%) | 21 (53.85%) |
| Different applications | 3 | 3.30% | 1 (1.92%) | 2 (5.13%) |
| Email | 9 | 9.89% | 6 (11.54%) | 3 (7.69%) |

| | Frequency (n=91) | Percent (n=91) | Frequency [first year at university] (n=52) | Frequency [second year at university] (n=39) |
|---|---------------------|-------------------|--|---|
| Social media | 19 | 20.88% | 11 (21.15%) | 8 (20.51%) |
| Video texts | 15 | 16.48% | 10 (19.23%) | 5 (12.82%) |
| All the above | 2 | 2.20% | 2 (3.85%) | 0 |
| How often would you like to receive updates from university about the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis? | | | | |
| Daily | 27 | 30% | 23 (44.23%) | 4 (10.53%) |
| Twice a week | 25 | 27.78% | 12 (23.08%) | 13 (34.21%) |
| Whenever there is new information | 35 | 38.89% | 15 (28.85%) | 20 (52.63%) |
| Never | 3 | 3.33% | 2 (3.85%) | 1 (2.63%) |
| How disruptive has the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak been to your usual university experience? | | | | |
| Very disruptive | 58 | 63.74% | 29 (55.77%) | 29 (74.36%) |
| Somewhat disruptive | 31 | 34.06% | 22 (42.31%) | 9 (23.08%) |
| Not disruptive at all | 2 | 2.20% | 1 (1.92%) | 1 (2.56%) |
| Do you think that COVID-19 concerns impact your ability to learn/study? | | | | |
| No | 14 | 15.38% | 7 (13.46%) | 7 (17.95%) |
| Yes | 77 | 84.62% | 45 (86.54%) | 32 (82.05%) |

students chose “not so closely” (64.11 percent). It is tempting to assume that students are less interested in following COVID-19, mainly when grouped with the respondents who said they did not follow it at all. However, considering the increased frequency of those who chose this answer, which is just 7 percent lower than the middle ground, it could ‘Very closely’ match it. Rather than not following news about the novel coronavirus at all, 90.2 percent of students follow it in some way, shape, or form. Only 9.9% percent answered they do not mind it closely, which does not indicate they do not keep track of it; this could imply that, but it is more likely not to actively seek out information about it than they do not know anything about it. It is also worth noting that first-year students

were more likely than second-year students to claim they were keeping up with COVID-19 news. The overall difference was minor, but it did demonstrate a shift in attention that might be linked to the exposure to new settings after second-year students finished the spring and fall semesters of 2020 with COVID-19 in mind.

From which sources are you getting information about the coronavirus (COVID-19)?

News media is the primary source of information as 89 percent of the students report on the COVID-19 pandemic. The celebrity influence on social media follows media; it is the second most used source of information after news media, with 4.4 percent of the student using it as a source. However, the Japanese government and the medical personnel are the least sought sources with 1.1 percent and 2.2 percent respectively. First-year students get the highest number of news from media and other sources, compared to second-year students who have the least sourced information on the pandemic. This question was focused on their primary source rather than all sources. It is likely that some respondents had seen, heard, or sought out information from the other options available.

Are you concerned about contracting COVID-19 by attending class?

Most of this response falls somewhere around the middle, and it was constant among first- and second-year students. This paper can use this result to generate several new concepts. First, when compared to second-year students, a higher percentage of first-year students (individual percentage as a group) said they were ‘Very worried’ about getting COVID-19 by attending class. Several external variables could influence this, including that first-year students are less comfortable with the collegiate in-class setting than second-year students. Second, only 13 of the 91 participants (14.29 percent) said they were “not at all concerned” about the possibility of becoming infected. Most students were still worried about their health (which could be linked to their concern for their

friends and family members) if they should go to class.

To what degree are you practicing “social distancing”?

This question resulted in an unusual divide, with nearly all participants (89 students) indicating that they were deliberately socially distancing to some degree. Most respondents chose ‘Somewhat’ (61.54 percent), which makes sense in a collegiate atmosphere because they are likely to have frequent contact with their peers. As a result, they would probably only exercise social distance in professional settings or in places where they are surrounded by people they do not know. The replies for social distancing were broadly similar in both years of surveying, with comparable numbers. Only two people (2.2 percent) responded with ‘Not at all’. Therefore, there is not much to say about them. Given the marked tendency towards social separation, this may be attributable to several other not as prominent characteristics in this sample group.

How connected would you say you feel to your friends right now?

The slight majority (38.46 percent or 35 students) discovered among those who answered, “Less connected than usual” was intriguing. More first-year students (40.38 percent or 21 students) indicated they felt the same level of connection, while more second-year students said they felt less attached (56.41 percent or 22 students). Furthermore, first-year students reported being considerably more connected than second-year students. This trend could lead to the discovery of a few COVID-19 effects. First, it appears plausible that second-year students would feel less connected overall because they did not get to connect in actual settings with peers throughout their first year. This trend leads to the logical inference that first-year students may feel “about as connected as usual,” given how they have felt since the start of the university year. Since visiting or hanging out through virtual means has become commonplace in social situations, first-year students may feel more connected than usual. Because they have

constant access to devices, these students can see their peers significantly more frequently than they could before the COVID limits.

How do you stay connected with family/friends that you no longer see in person due to the coronavirus (COVID-19)?

When it comes to talking about the coronavirus with friends or family, 47.25 percent of students prefer to use ‘Chats.’ While only two students in their first year of university (3.85 percent) said they used all of the ways outlined. This age group would employ such conveniently accessible means to stay in touch with others. Close behind were the respondents who said they used “Social media” (20.88 percent) and “Video texts” (16.48 percent), both of which are simple to use, typically free, and effective modes of communication. Finally, just twelve individuals chose ‘Email’ (9.89 percent) or ‘Different applications’ as their preferred mode of interaction (3.30 percent or three students). Depending on the student and their preferences, there could be various other application that are easier and faster. For this age group, email is far less frequent as a means of communication. While the category of “Different applications” is more difficult to define due to its breadth, “Email” has typically surpassed by other modes of communication due to convenience. Overall, given the ever-expanding methods of communication that become available, the preferences listed here can all be explained relatively adequately.

How often would you like to receive updates from the university about the coronavirus crisis?

The responses were almost evenly split between ‘daily, twice a week, and whenever there is new information,’ with only three people saying ‘never (3.33 percent). Except for the three who answered ‘Never,’ these groups appear to agree that some type of information supplied to them would be beneficial. Those who want daily information may be the most concerned about the epidemic

for other reasons. They, or their friends and family, may have unique health problems, prompting them to seek continuous updates for their safety. Those who want two weekly updates may be cautious individuals who, while less anxious, want to regularly be aware of the situation. Those who selected ‘Whenever new information becomes available’ might be divided into two groups. The first group consists of those who are interested in staying current but are unconcerned about the pandemic. They are just interested in hearing what is new and immediate, not all information. People who answered ‘Never’ could make up the other group; it can be mentally taxing because the illness has been going on for so long. Only hearing about it on rare occasions with new, pertinent information could rescue them from emotional anguish.

How disruptive has the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak been to your usual university experience?

COVID-19 had an impact on all but two (2.20 percent) of the respondents’ university experience. These two people were anomalies, which may be attributed to a variety of circumstances. Without more investigation, it would not be easy to say. The majority of those polled (63.74 percent) said the adjustments they have gone through have been “Very disruptive.” First-year students (42.31 percent) said their experience had been just “Somewhat disruptive,” which could be because this is their first year at university. Second-year students were more likely than first-year students to reply with ‘Very disruptive,’ which is understandable given that their first semester of university was likely very different from the one that followed. Many factors could have influenced these responses, but the top two were most likely influenced by the differences between online and in-person classes, how connected they were to their friends, and if they had first-hand experience with COVID-19 (i.e., either they or someone they know contracted it).

Do you think that COVID-19 concerns impact your ability to learn/study?

Finally, the majority response to this question was yes (84.62 percent), indicating that most students in both years felt the pandemic negatively influenced their learning ability. As previously said, the replies to this question were strikingly identical to those to the question, “Are you concerned about getting COVID-19 by attending class?” Though this is merely guesswork based on these two replies, the trend could still indicate that individuals who are least concerned about contracting COVID-19 by attending class feel their learning has been minimally impacted. Also, because it deals with a similar problem, the response to this question fits nicely with the answer to “How disruptive has the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak been to your regular university experience.” It is worth noting that the responses to that question are pretty varied; only two students indicated their academic experience had been minimally affected. This experience could be because the previous question inquired about how their class performance had been generally affected. As a result, it’s understandable that students would find it simple to adjust to online instruction. Regardless, most students learning patterns have been influenced by COVID, according to the majority.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the present study. First, COVID-19 is far from over yet. Hence, the current findings might be true only for this phase of the outbreak. Second, data were only collected from one survey at the mid of the first semester therefore limiting the amount of data collected. Third, all survey questions were written in English; students may have been better able to understand meaning of questions had they been translated in Japanese.

Further studies need to be conducted from different perspectives as this paper has not observed every detail in the social straining the COVID-19 pandemic has

brought. To completely appreciate the extent to which the pandemic has socially influenced student life and well-being, more precise data will be acquired by asking more detailed and correct questions.

Conclusion

This paper analyzed the social implications of COVID-19 on Japanese tertiary students in their first or second year of university and how anti-virus measures have impacted their social lives. COVID-19 have had substantial and far-reaching impacts on students' lifestyles, their employment status, the way they work, their environmental surroundings, and the way they interact and communicate with each other. "University students are a special social group with active life habits based on relationships and contacts, physical and university activities, travel, and gatherings. The pandemic emergency changed their life drastically..." (Villani, 2021, p. 2). Contacts between friends and distant family have reduced due to travel social gatherings restrictions imposed. Most students gather information from social media, which can convey false information other than listening to the people with the correct information, such as the medical personnel. It was evident that all participants understood the seriousness of the pandemic and took measures to act responsibly, although it affected their university and social life. It is necessary to continue to survey students to understand students' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and to determine what kind of support instructor and class community can provide for students.

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APPENDIX A

Anxiety Survey

1. What is your gender?

Female

Male

Other

2. Are you.....at University?

first year

second year

3. How closely are you following news about the coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Very closely

Not so closely

Not closely at all

4. From which of the following sources are you getting information about the coronavirus (COVID-19)?

News/media

Medical professionals

Influencers /celebrities on social media

Government health organizations

Parents

None of the above

Others (please specify)

5. Are you concerned about contracting COVID-19 by attending class?

Very worried

Somewhat worried

Not worried at all

6. To what degree are you practicing “social distancing”? Social distancing refers to household members staying home as much as possible and not gathering in groups, to avoid possible spread of the virus.

Very much

Somewhat

Not at all

7. How connected would you say you feel to your friends right now?

More connected than usual

About as connected as usual

Less connected than usual

8. How do you stay connected with family/friends who you no longer see in person due to the coronavirus (COVID-19)

Video texts

Chats

Email

Social media

Different applications

All the above

9. How often would you like to receive updates from university about the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis?

Daily

Twice a week

whenever there is new information

Never

10. How disruptive has the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak been to your usual university experience?

Very disruptive

Somewhat disruptive

Not disruptive at all

11. Do you think that COVID-19 concerns impact your ability to learn/study?

Yes

No