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- As respostas devem ser inteiramente redigidas em língua portuguesa, num texto coeso e coerente, observando a norma culta.
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- As respostas devem refletir a compreensão tanto das perguntas quanto das informações do texto. Evite, portanto, respostas genéricas ou baseadas puramente no senso comum. Caso queira fazer referência às ideias do texto, utilize paráfrases.
- Traduções literais ou geradas por tradutores automáticos não serão aceitas.

International Journal of Educational Research Open

Volume 3, 2022

The perceptions of Brazilian postgraduate students about the impact of COVID-19 on their well-being and academic performance¹

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Disponível online

Abstract

This study aimed at identifying the perceptions of Brazilian postgraduate students from all over the country on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their academic trajectories. Data from 5985 postgraduate students were collected in the end of 2020, through a 37-item questionnaire, including multiple-choice questions, through Google Forms. The questions were divided into blocks with different proposals: personal profile, academic profile, issues related to COVID-19 infection, and issues related to mental health. Our analysis showed that 51.43% were master's degree students; 43.02% were doctorate and 5.55% were specialization students, mostly attending Biological, Health, and Human Sciences post-graduation courses (18.13%, 17.91%, and 17.38%, respectively) of different Brazilian educational institutions, including public (e.g., UFRJ) and private (e.g., PUC) federal universities as well as research institutions (e.g., Fiocruz) from all five regions of Brazil (north, south, southeast, northeast, and center Midwest). Most of them were academically impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which also involved psychological aspects such as high levels of anxiety and depression. The results showed readjustments of research projects, and academic activities, which in some particular research fields led to the successful completion through the remote activities. However, efforts are still needed by graduate programs in order to allow greater flexibility in academic activities to fulfill all previous planning and chronograms, in addition to implementing ongoing projects to support students' mental health.

Keywords

COVID-19 - Pandemic in Brazil - Postgraduate students - Academic activities - Mental health

Introduction

On March 11th, 2021, the World Health Organization declared a pandemic caused by the etiological agent SARS-CoV-2 as individuals may or may not develop clinical symptoms which may aggravate and lead to death (CDC, 2021a; Shen et al., 2021; WHO, 2022a). Vaccination is the most effective measure to contain the spread of the virus combined with social distancing and the use of protective masks, especially in public transport and closed places with insufficient ventilation (CDC, 2021b; Si et al., 2021; WHO, 2022a).

Equitable distribution of vaccines did not happen worldwide and until August 9th, only 4.46 million doses were administered in low-income countries, 3.65 billion in middle- and high-income countries, with a total of 12.6 million doses administered worldwide in 2021 (WHO, 2022b). In this worrisome scenario, although Brazil is no longer the COVID-19 epicenter, there are records of deaths and high rates of people infected with SARS-CoV-2 (WHO, 2022b).

Within the academic context, the crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the United Nations Organization for Education, Science, and Culture, led to the suspension of classroom activities in schools, universities, and educational institutions, affecting around 90% of students around the world, with partial or total closure of educational institutions (UNESCO, 2020). According to some reports, this pandemic context impacted postgraduate students' lives in personal, academic, and psychological aspects.

Distance education (EAD) has replaced traditional face-to-face teaching, requiring great flexibility from university students. In addition, home confinement compromised the possibility of fully experiencing university life, influencing academic study (e.g., uncertainties regarding cancelation, delays in activities, and use of the digital platform) (Giusti et al., 2021). However, more studies about how these social changes related to the COVID-19 outbreak impacted the academic context at the level of post-graduate students are still in need.

¹ Este texto foi livremente adaptado.

There is a scientific relevance in the educational area of mapping COVID-19 impacts on the personal and academic trajectory of postgraduate students across Brazil, which was one of the most affected countries in the world with more than 600 K deaths to date. In this context, our study aimed at identifying the perception of Brazilian postgraduate students on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their academic trajectories, allowing a more in-depth reflection on the part of graduate programs, thus promoting the necessary adjustments to improve student's quality of life and academic success.

Results

The results of our research involved the participation of 5985 students, who answered questions about gender, ethnicity, age and family income, which allowed us to identify the general profile of the group. The percentage of female students was higher, around 70%, thus representing twice the percentage of male students, 29.4%. The percentage of individuals who did not declare themselves or even fit into other gender categories, the percentages were 0.3% and 0.08%, respectively.

As for the academic profile of the participants in our research, 51.43% were master's students; 43.02% doctorate and 5.55% were specialization students. Regarding the ethnic data of the study, individuals who declared themselves to be of European origin constitute the majority of postgraduate students, around 61.37%. Pardos of Afro origin then represented 27.6% of the population studied, representing less than half of white students of European origin, followed by blacks of Afro origin, who accounted for 9.1% of the population.

The data also show how the monthly income of the students' families varied among the interviewees. Most incomes are concentrated in the \$260 to \$500 and \$500 to \$1500 range, respectively. For this analysis, we used the value of the minimum wage in Brazil, which corresponds to 198 dollars. Regarding the income range of Brazilian graduate students, according to the survey, we can suggest that 62.1% of students earn wages above the average of the general population, which earns up to one minimum wage.

Discussion

The data related to the changes made in the projects of the students participating in our research showed the direct impact of the pandemic on ongoing research and the efforts of graduate students, as well as their tutors, to meet the need for project adjustments in this area stressful scenario. According to research carried out by Pennisi in (2020), tutors were very creative in readjusting field and laboratory work, as many students carried out their research without having to leave home, thus reducing geographic and financial barriers.

According to the WHO (2020b), there has been a significant interruption in essential mental health services in about 93% of countries, while the demand for mental health has been increasing, especially in Brazil, a country known for having the highest cases of anxiety and depression in the world, especially among young people. Despite our results expressing a high percentage of individuals without a clinical diagnosis, we inferred that most graduate students had psychological problems, since they did not seek care from specialized professionals and, consequently, did not obtain a diagnosis.

Conclusion

According to our data, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Brazilian postgraduate students' mental health, who felt demotivated, with difficulty concentrating, had insomnia, as well as to high levels of anxiety and depression. Notwithstanding, students, tutors, and course coordinators made efforts in order to readjust research projects, especially those relating to the field research stage, thus allowing the completion of academic activities even remotely. Many students were not sure if they were infected, which is caused by the need for public investment in mass testing to plan a safe return to educational institutions. Our data reinforce that, despite facing the pandemic adversity and being under continuous stress, students were committed to their academic trajectory, yet the research showed that there is still a need for postgraduate programs to offer more flexible academic activities, as well as the implementation of ongoing projects to support students' mental health. Although it is true that this study resulted in positive findings, future studies are desirable and may include other Brazilian universities and a more significant postgraduate sample of students.

1. Com base nas informações do resumo acadêmico e da introdução, discorra sobre o(s) objetivo(s) do estudo.
2. Explique a metodologia adotada no estudo.
3. O que os resultados obtidos indicam em relação à saúde mental dos sujeitos da pesquisa?
4. De que forma(s) o sistema de distribuição vacinal adotado durante a pandemia de COVID-19 afetou os alunos brasileiros considerados no estudo?
5. Quais foram as principais queixas apresentadas pelo corpo docente envolvido nos programas de pós-graduação investigados no estudo?
6. Que efeitos a educação remota (ou à distância) trouxe à vida dos alunos investigados?
7. De que forma(s) as variáveis de gênero, etnia, idade e renda familiar foram observadas no estudo?
8. De que forma(s) a pandemia impactou os projetos de pesquisa dos sujeitos entrevistados?
9. Durante a pandemia de COVID-19, a Organização Mundial da Saúde observou uma significativa mudança na procura por serviços relacionados à saúde mental em muitos países. O que se observou no Brasil? Explique.
10. Quais foram as conclusões do estudo?