

SWACSM Abstract

Stress and Eating Behaviors Pre- and Post COVID-19 Pandemic Declaration in a Sample of College-Aged Adults

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study compared stress and eating behaviors pre- and post-COVID-19 pandemic in college students. **METHODS:** This was a non-experimental comparative study. Participants were invited to the laboratory for a single visit to measure eating behaviors and stress indicators. Four instruments were used in this study: The Weight and Lifestyle Inventory questionnaire, the Mindfulness Eating Questionnaire, the Three-Factor Eating Questionnaire, and the Perceived Stress Scale. Independent t-test and a two-way ANOVA were used to compare participants who were tested before the COVID-19 pandemic declaration and after. **RESULTS:** N=151 (n=81 male, n=70 female) participants completed pre-covid testing, and a separate group, N=79, completed post-covid testing (n=40 male and n=26 female). There was a pre-post COVID*sex interaction on TFEQ-uncontrolled eating ($F(1,207) = 4.73, p = .031, \eta^2 = .022$). There were pre-post COVID group differences ($F(1,204) = 5.64, p = .019, \eta^2 = .027$) and sex differences ($F(1,204) = 16.84, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = .076$) on the TFEQ-emotional eating. There were pre-post COVID group differences in eating when stressed, depressed/upset, anxious, and when alone (all $p < .05$). There were sex differences in eating when stressed, depressed/upset, anxious, and when alone (all $p < .05$). PSS score increased from pre- to post-pandemic declaration ($p = .003$). Females (20.4 ± 5.4) reported higher stress than males (17.8 ± 6.3) ($p = .003$). **CONCLUSION:** Post-pandemic college students show increased stress levels and emotional eating compared to pre-COVID-19 college students. Female college students reported higher stress and emotional eating levels than male college students.