

Research Summary

This NBER working paper (Aucejo et al., 2020) analyzes the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on approximately 1500 students at a large US public university. Using a survey designed to isolate the pandemic's effects, the study reveals substantial negative consequences across various dimensions of student life. Key findings include a 13% delay in graduation, 40% job/internship loss or offer withdrawal, and a 29% reduction in expected earnings at age 35. The study highlights significant heterogeneity in these effects, with socioeconomic disparities playing a crucial role. The research demonstrates that the negative effects of COVID-19 were not uniform. While approximately half of the students reported decreased study hours and academic performance, a quarter increased their study time by over four hours weekly. Lower-income students were 55% more likely to experience graduation delays compared to their higher-income peers. These disparities are linked to the economic and health shocks experienced by students, with the severity of these shocks varying systematically across socioeconomic groups. The study's contribution lies in its quantitative assessment of the pandemic's causal impact on students' academic performance, labor market participation, and future expectations. By comparing students' reported outcomes under both pandemic and counterfactual scenarios, the authors provide valuable insights into the heterogeneous effects and the mediating role of socioeconomic factors. The findings underscore the lasting and disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on students' educational trajectories and future prospects, particularly for those from lower-income backgrounds.