

For Richer or Poorer in Sickness and Health: Socioeconomic Status and its Effect on Students' Attitudes and Behavior During COVID-19

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Abstract

A previous study suggested that despite travel restrictions becoming more lenient, people with higher socioeconomic status (SES) traveled more frequently than those who identified with a lower SES.¹ This study aimed to examine difference among students with different SES backgrounds and their knowledge and behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic. Causal comparative approach was utilized; MANOVA was conducted using SAS. The independent variable was SES; dependent variables include (1) agreement with CDC guidelines (2) change in behavior in accordance with online COVID-19 information (3) concern about Omicron (4) agreement that vaccine offers protection against Omicron (5) knowledge of COVID-related death (6) willingness to share symptoms (7) willingness to isolate if they tested positive (8) travel by plane (9) change in mental health. There were four statistically significant findings: the proportion of (1) students (13%) who would conceal if experiencing symptoms ($p < 0.03$) (2) students (72%) concerned about Omicron ($p < 0.02$) (3) students (81%) willing to change behaviors based on online COVID-19 information ($p < 0.03$) (4) students (39%) who have traveled by plane ($p < 0.004$). Results suggested lower class (LC) and upper class (UC) students would conceal if they experienced symptoms, but UC students worry the least about Omicron whereas lower middle class (LMC) students worry the most. LC and LMC students would change their behavior based on online COVID-19 information. Contrary to the aforementioned study, LC and LMC students traveled the same if not more than UC students. These results implore for a call to action to bridge the gap among socioeconomic disparities intertwined with healthcare disparities.

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Introduction

This study focuses on understanding how SES affects students' behaviors in the setting of the Omicron variant of the COVID-19 pandemic. The data was acquired from a survey of 506 University of South Florida (USF) students from January to February 2022. Of the students that participated in the survey, 5.6% identify as lower class, 11.5% identify as lower middle class, 41.9% identify as middle class, 34.4% identify as upper middle class, 3.4% identify as upper class, and 3.4% do not know or choose not to answer.

Methods and Materials

- A causal comparative approach was utilized. A multi-variance analysis of variance was conducted using SAS 9.4 (Cary, NC)
- The independent variable was SES
- The dependent variables include (1) agreement with CDC guidelines (2) change in behavior in accordance with online COVID information (3) worry about Omicron variant (4) agreement with vaccine offering protection against variant (5) knowledge death from COVID (6) willingness to share symptoms (7) willingness to isolate if tested positive (8) travel by plane (9) change in mental health

Results I

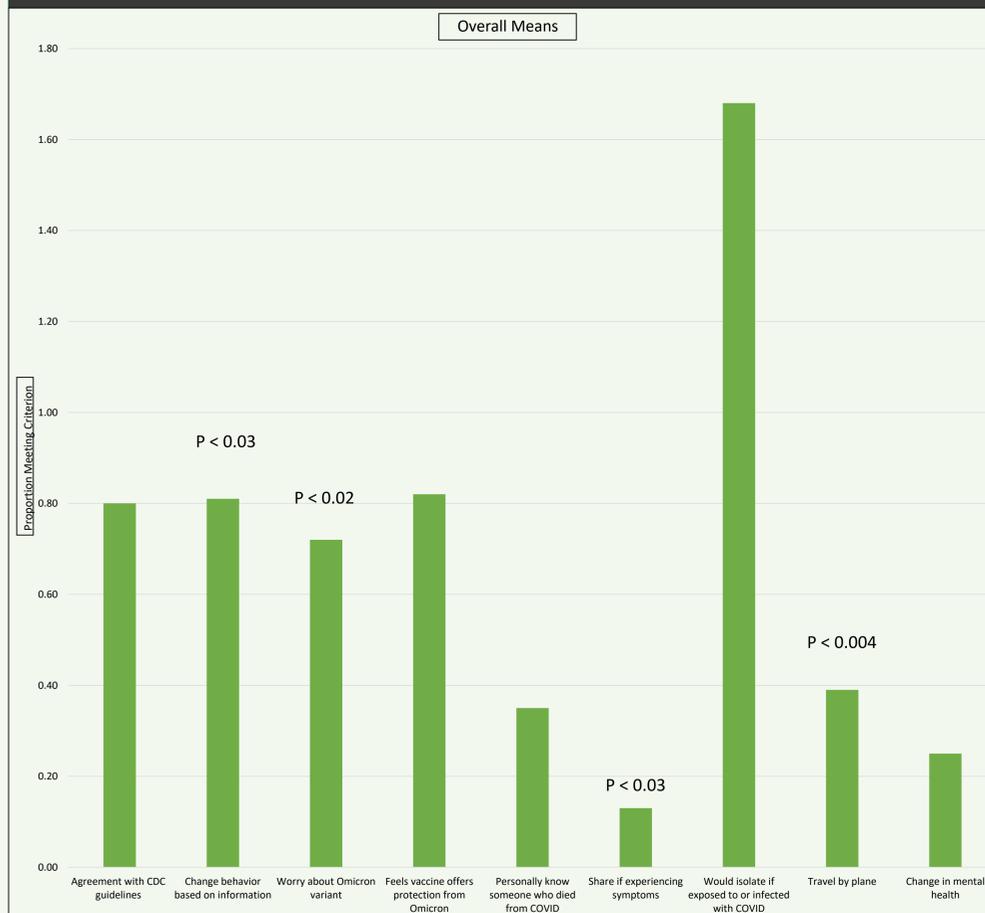


Figure 1 Bar graph showing overall means of each independent variable

Results II

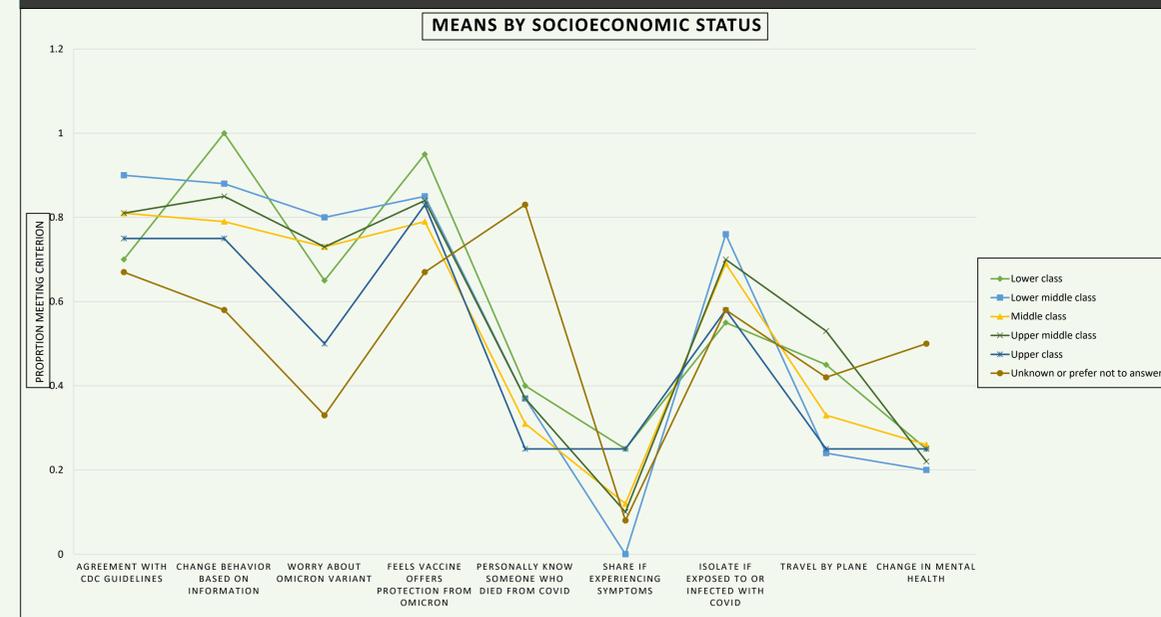


Figure 2 Line graph showing proportion of students for each dependent variable with regard to differing socioeconomic status

Results

There were four statistically significant findings: (1) the proportion of students (13%) who would not share if they are experiencing COVID symptoms ($p < 0.03$) (2) the proportion of students (72%) who worry about the Omicron variant ($p < 0.02$) (3) the proportion of students (81%) who would change their behavior based on information they receive online about COVID ($p < 0.03$) (4) the proportion of students (39%) who have traveled by plane ($p < 0.004$).

Discussion

- Results suggest lower class (LC) and upper class (UC) students would conceal if they are experiencing symptoms
- UC students worry the least about the Omicron variant whereas lower middle class (LMC) students worry the most
- Both LC and LMC students would change their behavior based on online COVID information.
- Contrary to the aforementioned study, LC students traveled the same if not more than UC students.

Conclusions

- Because the sample size was limited to USF students, it is difficult to generalize the results for all university students globally
- These results implore for a call to action from USF to bridge the gap between socioeconomic disparities that are intertwined with healthcare disparities
- USF should promote the reporting of COVID-related symptoms as well as new policies requiring students to quarantine after travel
- Additionally, it is the university's duty to inform students of up-to-date COVID information

References

1. Brough, Freedman, M., & Phillips, D. C. (2021). Understanding socioeconomic disparities in travel behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Regional Science*, 61(4), 753–774. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jors.12527>