

Negative Effects of COVID-19 on Undocumented College Students

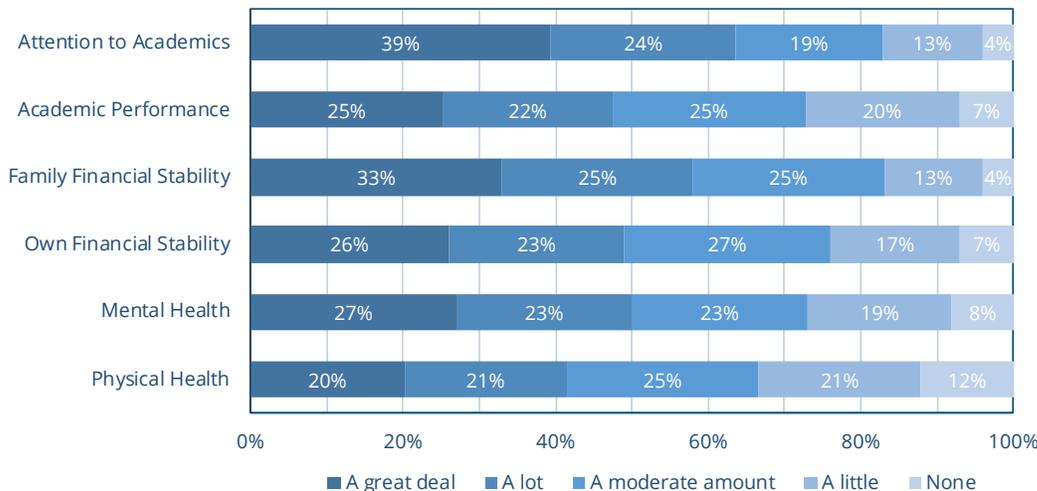
The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed existing inequalities, including the legal vulnerability of undocumented immigrants. This brief explores how undocumented college students fared in the initial months of the pandemic. We use survey data collected from April to June 2020 with 1,067 undocumented undergraduate students attending California public universities. We find that undocumented students reported significant negative impacts to their academics, finances, and well-being, with some students faring worse when cut off from campus resources.

COVID-19 has severely compromised undocumented students' academics, financial stability, and well-being.

Ninety-five percent of respondents reported negative effects to their attention to academics with 39% being affected a great deal. These effects cascaded to compromise academic performance with 25% being affected a great deal. Ninety-six percent of respondents reported family financial instability with 33% being affected a great deal. Just over half reported similar impacts to their own financial stability. Mental health impacts were more prominent than physical ones, with 27% and 20% respectively reporting being affected a great deal in these areas.

There were no statistically significant differences between students who had no legal status and those who were beneficiaries of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. UC students reported being more negatively affected than their CSU peers. Over 50% of UC students reported being affected a "great deal" or "a lot" for almost all items.

Extent that COVID-19 Affected Undocumented Students' Outcomes



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UC PromISE is a multicampus initiative at the University of California. It aims to conduct research with the goal of informing policies and practices that will advance equity and inclusion for undocumented and immigrant-origin students.

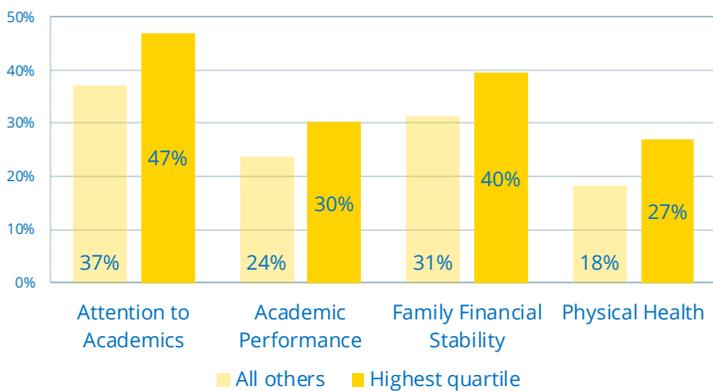
Undocumented status exposes students and their families to severe effects of the pandemic.

Undocumented immigrants and their citizen family members were ineligible for federal relief aid. Many students recognized this. For example, one wrote, “We will not be receiving a stimulus check. We also do not qualify for unemployment benefits.” Some also noted that immigration status limited their access to health insurance and the ability to seek treatment if infected. Others recognized their immigration status contributed to their employment as essential workers, forcing them to risk their health to maintain financial stability: “My mother still has work [because] she is an ‘essential worker’ and risking her health and the health of our family to make money.” These issues strained their mental health and disrupted their attention to academics.

Students who had used more campus resources reported being more severely affected by the pandemic.

Students in the highest quartile of campus resource use before the pandemic were more likely to report being affected “a great deal” in their academics, family’s financial stability, and physical health, compared to students who used fewer resources. This indicates that such resources are critical for fostering undocumented student well-being. Thus, being cut off from them made it even harder for undocumented students to navigate the pandemic.

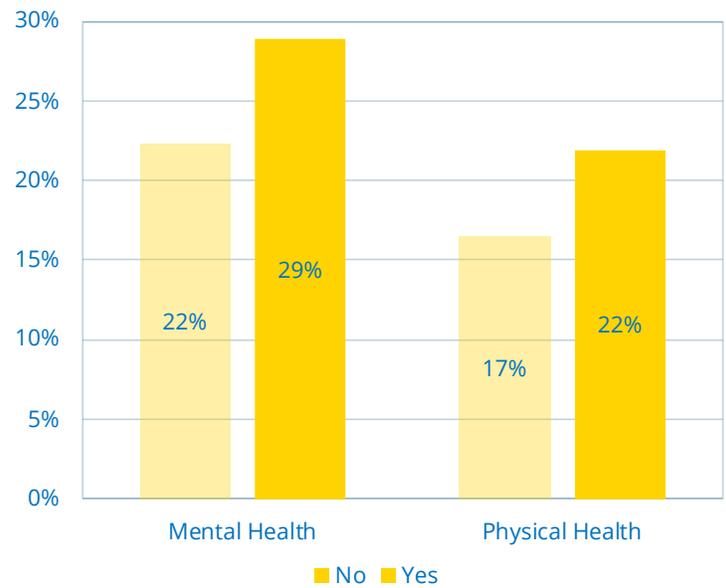
Proportion of students affected “a great deal” by COVID-19 by use of campus resources



Students who had used undocumented student services reported that their health was more severely affected by the pandemic.

Students who had visited an office or met with a staff member who focuses on supporting undocumented students were more likely to report being affected “a great deal” in their mental and physical health, compared to students who had not accessed such services.

Proportion of students affected “a great deal” by COVID-19 by use of undocumented student services



Policy Recommendations

- 1. Create resources to buffer against the unique financial strains created by the pandemic.** Replace student employment with grant aid. Make emergency grants available regardless of individual or parental immigration status. Ensure that these grants do not have restrictions, such as exhausting other financial aid awards like loans, that may dissuade students from accessing them.
- 2. Transition campus resources to virtual or other alternative formats.** In these uncertain times, universities must think through effective ways to provide campus resources virtually to ensure that students are still receiving campus-based support. These efforts should include formal services and informal programming. Given undocumented students’ tendency to access physical and mental healthcare on campus, these must also be provided remotely.