

COVID-19 in the Mena Region. Lessons Learned in Research, Public Health Policy and Clinical Practice. Impact of US and International Collaboration.

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Accepted Abstract

Well-being and associated factors among Birzeit University's undergraduate students during the COVID-19 pandemic in the occupied Palestinian territory.

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Background: The COVID-19 outbreak resulted in unanticipated and abrupt changes in daily lives, and triggered a variety of psychological impacts on populations. As is the case elsewhere, social distancing and strict lockdown not only negatively affected the social and psychological health of Palestinians living in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territory but also affected the economy resulting in unemployment, financial insecurity, and impoverishment. University students were no exception, as initial reports seem to indicate that they are suffering the negative effects of the pandemic, raising concerns about their well-being and mental health during the pandemic due to limited social contact and psychological support.

Objective: This study aimed to assess the well-being and its selected associated factors among Birzeit University BZU students in the West Bank WB of the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territory during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods: Cross-sectional study conducted in late March to mid-April 2021 using the WHO-5 Well-being Index using an online survey tool. The study was conducted during a full lockdown to limit the spread of COVID-19. KOBO Toolbox software was used to build the survey online and was posted on BZU's main online platform RITAJ . The WHO-5 Well-being Index was converted into a scale with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.91 and indicating high reliability, and then recoded into low levels and moderate/high levels of wellbeing using 50 as a cutoff point. Univariate and bivariate analyses were conducted with well-being as the dependent variable and selected variables as possible associated

factors. Multivariate analyses for variables found significant in the bivariate analysis were conducted to check for confounders using SPSS® version 26. This research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the Institute of Community and Public Health, BZU.

Results: 1010 undergraduate students participated in the study representing 7% of total undergraduate student attending BZU. Sixty-seven percent were women. Ages ranged from 18 to 26 years mean 19.9 ± 1.6 . The prevalence of low well-being among undergraduate students was 82.9%. Multiple logistic regression revealed that women OR 1.81, 95%CI [1.26–2.6], those whose permanent place of was outside Ramallah & Al-Bireh or Jerusalem Governorates OR 2.35, 95%CI[1.42–3.91], those who reported a decrease in the general monthly income of the family OR 2.6, 95%CI[1.66–4.05], and those who need to talk to someone about their general and psychological situation OR 2.52, 95%CI[1.79–3.55], had significantly higher odds of reporting low levels of well-being.

Conclusion: This study demonstrates a very high level of low well-being among BZU undergraduate students. This raise concerns over particular student groups especially among women, those living away from the center of the WB, and whose income was impacted by the pandemic, and those who indicated a need for support. Identifying risk factors associated with well-being among such vulnerable groups is essential for policymakers to develop policies, plans and interventions which can relieve students from low well-being levels and poor mental health status, and provide support for those in need.