

Stress, coping and quality of life in the US during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Credit: Nik Shuliahin, CC0

A new study in the journal *PLOS ONE* examines how individuals coped with stressors during the COVID-19 pandemic and which strategies were associated with higher quality of life.

The study's findings provide important insights for both individuals and institutions as they prepare for and respond to future large-scale [traumatic events](#). It was based on responses from more than 1,000

Americans on their experiences and behaviors during the pandemic.

The research found that problem-focused and emotion-focused coping [strategies](#) were associated with higher quality of life, while avoidant coping had a negative correlation.

Problem-focused coping involves tactics such as problem-solving, obtaining instrumental support, and planning. Emotion-focused coping strategies include the use of emotional support, humor, religion, and positive reframing. Avoidant coping includes tactics such as distraction, behavioral disengagement, and [substance abuse](#).

"People use different types of coping to deal with different stressors, and people may use all three strategies at different times," said the study's author Dr. Fathima Wakeel, associate professor in the Department of Community and Population Health at Lehigh University. "What this study demonstrates is how those strategies work during a large-scale traumatic event."

The study's findings echoed existing research conducted in other contexts that demonstrate positive associations with problem-focused coping. However, this study demonstrated a distinctive positive correlation between emotion-focused coping and quality of life.

Researchers say emotion-focused coping strategies may be most helpful when [stressors](#) are unpredictable or outside of individuals' control, like many of those faced during the pandemic.

In addition, the study found that avoidant coping correlated with worse physical and psychological well-being. Avoidant tactics such as substance abuse can exacerbate problems over the long run.

According to Wakeel, the findings can be valuable to individuals in

dealing with stressful life events as well as to societal institutions. Both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping require strong social supports and available resources within communities, and the discouragement of avoidant coping will require cooperation among all levels of wellness providers.

More information: Stress, coping, and quality of life in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic, *PLoS ONE* (2023). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0277741](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0277741)

Provided by Lehigh University

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