

# Perceiving the Pandemic: How Socioeconomic and Environmental Factors Shaped College Students’ COVID-19 Experiences

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## Background

- 1.The COVID-19 pandemic created sudden changes in home, school, and community environments.
- 2.Stay-at-home orders and school closures disrupted access to resources, education, and mental-health support systems.
- 3.Adolescents’ experiences varied widely depending on family income, geographic location, school type, and overall environmental stability, shaping how they perceived and adapted to the pandemic.

## Research Purpose

To examine how socioeconomic status and environmental context shaped adolescents’ perspectives of their experiences during COVID-19, focusing on differences in resource access, schooling, and emotional well-being.

## Research Questions

- 1.How did socioeconomic and environmental factors shape adolescents’ experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 2.In what ways did access to resources influence perceived stress and resilience?
- 3.How did geographic location and surrounding community conditions affect educational and emotional outcomes?
- 4.How did school type (public, private, charter, etc.) and learning format (virtual, in-person, hybrid) influence students’ educational and emotional experiences during the pandemic?

## Contact Info

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## References

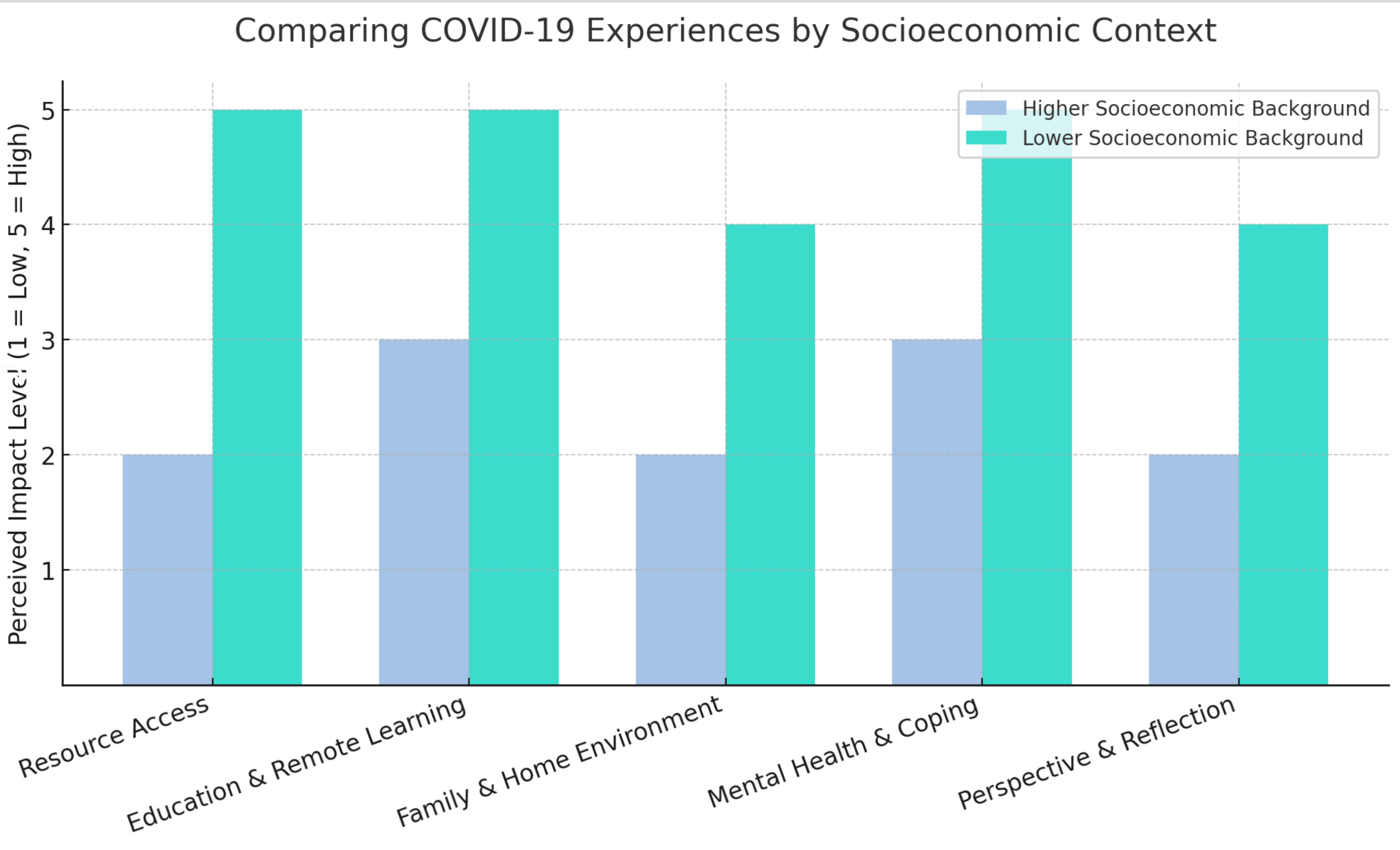


Figure 1. Bars represent the relative intensity of disruption described by participants (1 = low impact – 5 = high impact). Students from lower socioeconomic contexts reported greater challenges across all domains, particularly in resource access, education & remote learning, and mental health.

## Theories

- Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory: Individual experiences are shaped by interactions within family, school, and community environments.
- Social Determinants of Health: Access to resources and environmental stability influence mental health and educational outcomes.

## Data Collection

- Semi-structured Zoom interviews (45-60 minutes each).
- Explored adolescents’ perceptions of their experiences during COVID-19.
- Focused on how socioeconomic and environmental contexts shaped those experiences.

## Participants

- N = 7 Marquette University students (ages 18–22).
- Were 13–18 years old during the 2020–2021 COVID-19 quarantine.
- Represented diverse socioeconomic, geographic, and school-type backgrounds across the U.S.

## Data Analysis

- Interviews were transcribed and thematically coded to identify recurring patterns.
- **Analysis focused on five major areas:**
  - 1.Resource access and stability
  - 2.Education and remote learning
  - 3.Family and home environment
  - 4.Mental health and coping
  - 5.Perspective and reflection
- Impact levels (1–5) assigned to indicate disruption intensity (see Figure

## Preliminary Findings

### Resource Access and Stability

- Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds faced greater barriers to stable internet, quiet study spaces, and academic materials.
- Higher-income participants reported fewer disruptions and easier adjustment to remote learning.

### Education and Remote Learning

- Public school students described inconsistent communication and limited academic support.
- Private schools and schools in higher-income areas returned to in-person or hybrid learning faster, providing smoother transitions and stronger academic continuity.

### Family and Home Environment

- Stable home environments offered emotional support and structure.
- Students with unstable housing or divided households experienced higher stress and isolation.

### Mental Health and Coping

- Most participants reported increased anxiety, loss of motivation, and social disconnection.
- Coping was easier for those with family support, outdoor access, or creative outlets.

### Community and Geographic Context

- Urban students mentioned stricter lockdowns and less access to safe outdoor space.
- Rural or suburban participants described more flexibility and stronger community ties.

### Perspective and Reflection

- Many students reflected on personal growth, resilience, and appreciation for relationships.
- Those with fewer resources still expressed gratitude but felt lasting academic and emotional effects.

## Preliminary Conclusion

- Students’ pandemic experiences were shaped by a mix of personal and environmental factors — not just socioeconomic status.
- Things like losing a loved one, moving between homes, or living in tense or unstable environments had a major impact on how students coped, no matter their income level.
- Overall, home stability, family relationships, and emotional support played the biggest roles in how students adjusted during and after the pandemic.
- Understanding these experiences is important for improving how schools and communities support students facing major disruptions in the future.