

ABSTRACT

Submission Form

ENVIRONMENTS BY DESIGN: HEALTH WELLBEING AND PLACE

- **PAPER / PROPOSAL TITLE:**

Psychological distress among Italian University Students during the COVID-19 pandemic

- **AUTHOR(S) NAME:**

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- **UNIVERSITY OR COMPANY AFFILIATION:**

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- **PRESENTATION METHOD.** I would like to:

Present via pre-recorded film (without a written paper)

- **PREFERRED STRAND.** (Selection optional)

Pandemic effects on vulnerable people (Italian Society for the Sociology of Health)

- **ABSTRACT (300 words):**

The COVID-19 pandemic induced numerous changes in daily life of each individual with important social, economic, and psychological consequences. Particularly, the psychological impact encountered among students might be affected by social isolation, concern for personal and family health, and uncertainty about academic progress. This study aimed to investigate the psychological impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on Italian University students compared to workers. The responses of 478 University students and 478 workers were included in the final dataset. Participants were asked to provide sociodemographic and occupation-related information, and to complete: (1) COVID-19-related questions, (2) health-related Visual Analogue Scales (VAS); (3) State-Trait Anxiety Inventory-Form Y1 (STAI Y1); and (4) Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II). Results of comparisons between University students and workers revealed that the former reported higher levels of anxiety (STAI Y1, students vs. workers, mean \pm SD: 49.8 ± 12.0 , 47.8 ± 13.0 , $t(948.19) = 2.48$, $p = .013$, $d = 0.16$) and depressive symptoms (BDI-II: 12.5 ± 9.2 , 10.0 ± 8.8 , $t(953) = 4.40$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.28$). Furthermore, regression analyses showed that in University students, gender ($\beta = -0.149$, $p < .001$), VAS health evaluation ($\beta = -0.268$, $p < .001$), and VAS health concern ($\beta = 0.346$, $p < .001$), and gender ($\beta = -0.112$, $p = .011$), educational level ($\beta = -0.123$, $p = .010$), and VAS health evaluation ($\beta = -0.342$, $p < .001$) significantly predicted anxiety and depressive symptoms, respectively. The final model for STAI Y1 explained 24% of the variance ($F(9, 468) = 17.740$, $p < .001$), whereas the final model for BDI-II explained 14% of the variance ($F(9, 467) = 9.859$, $p < .001$).

Taken together these findings suggest that specific factors could predispose university students to a high risk of developing mental health symptoms as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **AUTHOR(S) BIOGRAPHY (200 words each):**

Dr Annunziata Romeo is a research fellow in Psychology at University of Turin, Italy. During both her undergraduate and postgraduate studies, she carried out research projects aimed at investigating psychological components in different clinical populations. Particularly, her PhD research focused on the investigation of psychological factors in fibromyalgia, a chronic pain syndrome. These studies highlighted the presence of traumatic events, insecure attachment style and dissociative experiences in fibromyalgia patients. This work has led to the publication of different scientific articles and nationally funded research projects, with impact on the fields of fibromyalgia and chronic pain.

During her postdoctoral work, Dr Romeo investigated psychological outcomes in people who experienced various traumatic experiences, including the recent COVID-19 outbreak. The findings of those studies indicate a non-linear relationship between positive (posttraumatic growth) and negative (anxiety-depressive symptoms) outcomes, with different factors involved in determining one or the other. This work brought to the publication of different scientific articles, impacting the understanding of post-traumatic outcomes in clinical and non-clinical populations.

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▪ **WHERE DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THIS CONFERENCE:**

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