



Mental Emotional Disorders and Coping Strategies of University Students During COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

At the beginning of 2020, the world was shocked by the COVID-19 outbreak hitting almost all parts of the world. Student academic activities are faced with an online learning system and the adaptation of new habits. It caused a different response from each student. This study analyzes the coping strategy of the student-facing COVID-19 pandemic at the Public Health Faculty, Hasanuddin University. This research used a mix-method study conducted in September-October 2020 at the Faculty of Public Health, Hasanuddin University. This study used a sequential explanatory strategy where quantitative data is collected and analyzed first with 233 respondents by accidental sampling, followed by qualitative data with 12 respondents by purposive sampling. The results showed that the COVID-19 pandemic affects students psychologically. The results showed that as many as 121 people (51.9%) and there is a two-coping strategy. Problem-focused coping consists of seeking social support and planful problem solving, and Emotional-focused coping that is distancing. The government and Public Health Faculty at Hasanuddin University can maximize the assistance provided in the form of psychological and financial.

Introduction

In the middle of the COVID-19 crisis, we can observe developments in technology, business, politics, and education. We must be ready for these changes, adapt our attitudes and behaviors, and never stop learning. Indonesia is not the only country looking for ways to help students continue studying and exercise their right to an education. At the beginning of 2020, the world was shocked by the COVID-19 outbreak that attacked various parts of the world. The epicenter of the SARS-CoV outbreak was the Guangdong province of southern China. But due to air travel, it reached the other 19 countries in Southeast Asia, South Africa, North America, and Europe (Susilo et al., 2020). Over time, it infected 8,605 individuals and caused 774 deaths (CFR = 9.5%) worldwide on March 20, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared

COVID-19 a pandemic. Several countries then imposed regional quarantine protocols, and various international activities were canceled. Especially in Indonesia, the government has issued a disaster emergency status from February 29, 2020, to May 29, 2020. This policy was followed by implementing Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) and adopting new habits in several areas (Kementerian Kesehatan Republik Indonesia, 2020). However, the COVID-19 epidemic startled practically everyone, including districts/cities, provinces, centers, and even the global world, when online learning emerged. It has resulted in students' academic activities faced with an online learning system, also known as e-University, which is relatively new to them (Pujilestari, 2020). Meanwhile, in their social environment, students also have to be faced with something outside of their habits, such as getting bored at

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home until they are bored (Harususilo, 2020).

Students of the Faculty of Public Health, Hasanuddin University, as the biggest in one of students in the health sector located in South Sulawesi Province, have the potential for a higher stress impact. It is related to the high number of cases in South Sulawesi, which is 12,746 and occupies the 4th highest number of cases in Indonesia as of September 8, 2020. In addition, more extensive exposure to information is also quite influential. Therefore, a coping strategy is an individual's endeavor to meet challenges or deal with shifting circumstances both inside and externally by controlling thoughts and actions in the pandemic situation is essential for students to face the new problem (Mashudi & Toanto, 2012). Studies addressing coping strategies in previous epidemic events, such as the H1N1 pandemic in 2009, showed that individuals with a high intolerance to uncertainty were more likely to perceive the pandemic as threatening and more likely to use coping strategies focused on emotions. Research conducted with university students during the 2003 epidemic of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) emphasizes that coping was a fundamental mechanism against the negative impact of stressors on overall perceived health. Besides, showed that people used fewer active strategies (focused on problems) and more avoidable coping strategies (focused on emotions) in reaction to stressors related to SARS. Individuals can use two coping strategies, namely problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Individuals use coping strategies to manage demands both from within and outside, which are considered burdensome or exceed the capabilities of their resources. Hence, coping with students during the COVID-19 pandemic will help them adjust to new habits that they must live as it is not sure when this pandemic will end (Hendriani, 2018).

The behavior that appears can be in negative territory or moving towards a positive environment. It depends on the strengths and barriers that exist within the individual. Therefore, analyzing the reasons behind individual behavior during this pandemic is essential. Based on these problems, the researchers tried to examine the coping

carried out by students of the Faculty of Public Health, Hasanuddin University, as one of the groups that had to adapt to the COVID-19 conditions. With this research, it is hoped that it will be known how coping is done to deal with these conditions. It is worthwhile to investigate behavioral intention, causes, and problems as the potential determinants of the distance learning outcomes based on students' experiences and opinions.

Method

This research took time in September-October 2020. The location used as the research setting was the Faculty of Public Health, Hasanuddin University. Students of the Faculty of Public Health, Hasanuddin University, as one of the students in the health sector located in South Sulawesi Province have the potential for a higher stress impact. It is related to the high number of cases in South Sulawesi, which is 12,746 and occupies the fourth highest number of cases in Indonesia as of September 8, 2020. In addition, wider exposure to information is also quite influential.

This research is mixed methods research which is a form of research that combines two forms of research approaches, namely quantitative and qualitative. This study uses a sequential explanatory strategy where quantitative data is collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative data. This study explores the coping strategies students of the Faculty of Public Health, Hasanuddin University, in dealing with COVID-19. Quantitative data is the result of measuring stress levels in students. Meanwhile, qualitative data were obtained from interviews about coping strategies and sources of support during the COVID-19 pandemic. The informant selection was by purposive sampling. Sources of information in this study were public health students in classes 2018 and 2019 who had experienced stress during the pandemic (SRQ score >6). The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Public Health Faculty at Hasanuddin University with approval number 7024/UN4.14.1/ TP.02.02/ 2020.

One alternative to evaluate the prevalence of risk symptoms is through the general mental disorder concept, assessed by the

Self Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ-20) 16. This study uses a cross-sectional design, while the data were collected with a Socio-Demographic Questionnaire and Self Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ-20) used by this research because it is a psychiatric disorder screening questionnaire with good validity and reliability developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) for research purposes and was used by Indonesia Basic Health Research to screening the mental health of the Indonesian population since 2007 and had through stages of validation by language translation to filter the meaning of words to be more understandable. Respondents that answered at least 6 questions with “yes” were declared to have mental disorders symptoms used as our cutoff point, which was determined by Indonesia Basic Health Research, with cutoff point 6 through a validity test with a sensitivity of 88% and a specificity of 81% and followed with a degree of significance p-value <0.005.

In quantitative data in this study, univariate analysis was carried out on the general characteristics of respondents and research variables, aimed to determine the frequency distribution of respondents based on the characteristics of respondents and the variables studied. The number of informants is determined based on the number of students from the 2018 and 2019 batches of Public Health Faculty Hasanuddin University, which is 560 people, with accidental sampling. The Slovin formula is used to determine the number of samples to become a total of 233 with google form with voluntary method without any intervention of coercion to be respondents.

The results of the study were obtained through in-depth interviews with students with mental and emotional disorders based on SRQ. Informants were limited to those who had experienced stress during the COVID-19 pandemic based on the results of the SRQ-20 questionnaire. There are 12 participants by purposive sampling method by informant consent through the text chat with the candidate before the researcher calls the selected respondent for interviewing. The characteristics of the informants studied are those second and third-year students of the Faculty of Public Health, Hasanuddin University (class of 2018 and 2019), having a stressful experience with an

SRQ score > 6 during the COVID-19 pandemic and willing to be an informant and have agreed to the informed consent. The obtained data is categorized before proceeding to the elaboration of conclusions. Data collecting occurs before, during, and after the data analysis process based on the simplification and interpretation of the collected data. This method is divided up into three linked steps: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion-making.

Result and Discussion

The characteristics of the respondents in this study were age, gender, and class year. The experience status of emotional disturbances and the distribution of respondents' characteristics can be seen in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Distribution of Respondents based on General Characteristics of Respondents

Respondents' Characteristics	Total (n)	Percentage (%)
Age		
17 years old	2	0.8
18 years old	16	6.9
19 years old	92	39.5
20 years	112	48.1
21 years old	11	4.7
Batch		
2018	121	51.9
2019	112	48.1
Gender		
Man	22	9.4
Woman	211	90.6
Experience of Emotional Disturbance		
Yes	121	51.9
No	112	48.1
Total	233	100

Source: Primary Data, 2020

Table 1 shows that most respondents were 20 years as many as 112 people (48.1%). At least 17 years old, namely 2 people (0.8%). Furthermore, for the class of students, the largest number of students was in the 2018 class, which was 121 people (51.9%), while for the 2019 class, there were 112 people (48.1%). Most gender was women, namely 211 people (90.6%) and only 22 men (9.4%). Furthermore, the number of respondents who experienced symptoms of mental-emotional disorders was 121 people (51.9%) compared to Respondents

who did not experience symptoms of mental-emotional disorders were 112 people (48.1%). The results showed that 51.9% of public health faculty students experienced symptoms of mental-emotional disorders. Those who did not was 48.1%. In general, this occurs due to rapid changes in conditions and limited interaction with the surrounding environment, which has become daily life before the COVID-19 pandemic. This study also found that the symptoms were more common in female students and younger class years.

It is per the research conducted by Dybrye et al (2007) which showed that women had higher rates of depression, anxiety, and stress. It is caused by biopsychosocial factors such as social roles and psychological status. Social difficulties, physiological factors, and stress caused by the environment are important risk factors to consider in the problem of mental disorders among women. Women are more likely to experience stress due to higher self-expectations and feelings of incompetence. In addition, women also tend to overreport medical and psychological symptoms. The findings in this study indicate that some of the informants experienced problems related to the online lecture method they were undergoing. Although several informants claimed to be interested in online lecture methods that were more flexible in terms of location, some of them still encountered obstacles. The obstacles encountered include lack of network access, boredom with lecture methods that are less varied, and lecture materials that are more difficult to understand.

The COVID-19 pandemic had affected education. These effects include switching from in-person instruction to online instruction, expanding the use of technology in the classroom, and boosting student learning autonomy (Word, 2022). Reality demonstrates that the COVID-19 outbreak is currently disrupting Indonesian educational dynamics, which has effects such as schools are moved into homes through online learning processes; there is a change in the types of technology-based learning media being used, including WhatsApp, Zoom, Google Classroom, WebEx, Youtube, and TV channels (TVRI); The

demands for collaboration between parents of kids at home as a substitute for instructors to govern children’s learning include adjustments to learning techniques, adjustments to learning evaluation to set standards of grade advancement and graduation (Mansyur, 2020). The COVID-19 outbreak affected many aspects of life, including education, student life, parent involvement, and the educational process. It is impossible to ignore a teacher’s duty to instruct his students. Teachers need to develop effective strategies for fostering both academic and socioemotional learning. Teachers must be capable of running both live and online classes (Setyorini, 2020).

Table 2 shows the relationship between age, gender, and class year with symptoms of mental-emotional disorders in college students. The relationship between age and stress in college students is insignificant, based on a p-value of $0.471 > 0.05$. Meanwhile, gender was significantly related to stress, based on the p-value of $0.039 < 0.05$. The class year was also significantly associated with stress based on a p-value of $0.014 < 0.05$.

TABLE 2. Relationship of Age, Gender and Year of the Public Health Student Hasanuddin University Force with Symptoms of Mental-emotional Disorders

Respon- dents' Charac- teristics	Mental-emotional Disorder		p-value
	Yes	No	
Age			
16-18	10	8	0.471
19-21	111	104	
Gender			
Man	7	15	0.039
Woman	114	97	
Batch			
2018	54	67	0.014
2019	67	45	

Source: Primary Data, 2020

The results of the study were obtained through in-depth interviews with students with mental-emotional disorders based on SRQ. The scheme we have designed is related to the perceived severity of the COVID-19 pandemic on academic and non-academic life.

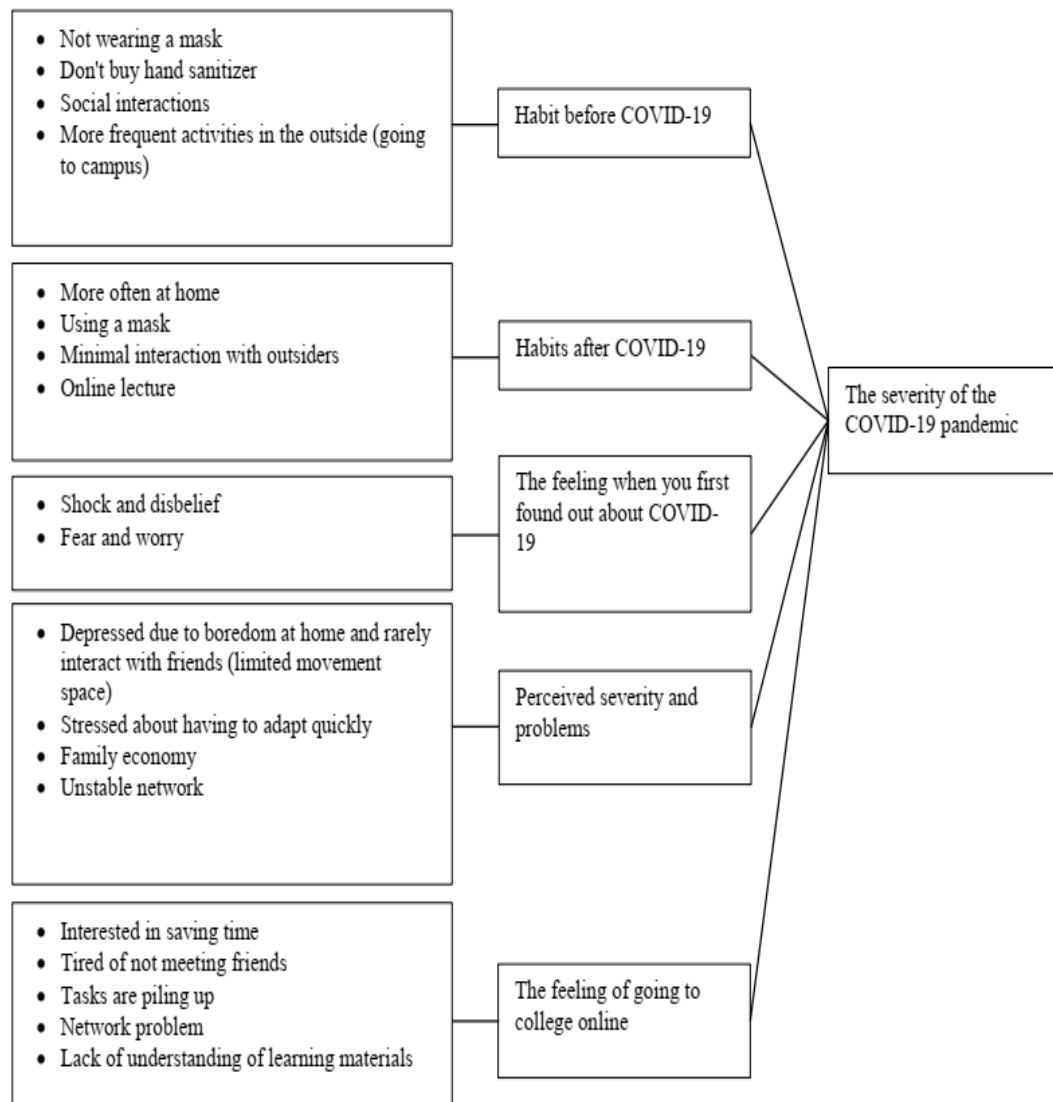


FIGURE 1. Schematic of the Results of the Analysis of Theme

In addition, the informants have varied patterns of coping behavior. It is because the chosen coping behavior is adjusted to the problem faced. Meanwhile, to adjust to the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the actions taken are complying with health protocols and utilizing online platforms to continue activities such as meetings or webinars. It is expressed in the following interview excerpt:

“What I feel when I go to college online is that I am bored because every day I do it just like that, I can't meet other friends on campus. At first it was quite difficult for me to accept” (FN, 19 years old)

However, several informants said that

the coping behaviors used sometimes had negative impacts, such as difficulty sleeping and neglecting to do college assignments. It can be seen in the following interview excerpts:

“I often do fun things that sometimes I neglect to do my homework” (YN, 19 years old)

“I often have trouble sleeping” (AM, 20 years)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, informants have received some support. The informant stated that the assistance he received during the COVID-19 pandemic came from the government through the Ministry of Education and Culture, the campus, family, and close friends. It can be seen from the following

interview excerpts:

“I was given financial assistance was usually from the campus committee, and the campus also reduced tuition fees for underprivileged students but somehow it’s such a family burden for me with low economic status” (MR, 18 years old)

Nevertheless, several informants admitted that they still needed some other support, as expressed in the following interview excerpt:

“Yes, I think all students who take online lectures much prefer financial assistance from campuses/schools, such as cutting tuition fees, which is expected to be more substantial” (AM, 20 years)

“Improving internet access may also help to understand people to stay at home to prevent the spread of the virus. One more thing, maybe reduce the burden of learning that is too focused on the task” (RD, 19 years)

MATRIX 1. Categorization of Informants based on Coping Behavior in Overcoming the Impact of COVID-19

Coping Behavior	INFORMANT											
	AD (19)	YN (19)	TA (20)	FN (19)	AM (20)	RD (19)	SR (21)	SN (20)	NI (20)	MR (18)	UM (19)	AA (20)
Coping behavior focuses on emotions (emotional focused coping)												
To do fun thing _ like watch and cook (<i>distancing</i>)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Coping behavior focuses on the problem (problem focused coping)												
Talk to friends (<i>seeking social support</i>)	✓					✓		✓			✓	
Save expenses (<i>planful problem solving</i>)	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓

MATRIX 2. Categorization of Informants based on Coping Behavior in Dealing with COVID-19

Coping Behavior	INFORMANT											
	AD (19)	YN (19)	TA (20)	FN (19)	AM (20)	RD (19)	SR (21)	SN (20)	NI (20)	MR (18)	UM (19)	AA (20)
Planful problem solving												
Wearing a mask	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Washing hands	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Keep the distance	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Using hand sanitizer	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓	✓

Based on the Table Matrix 1, some informants showed coping behaviors focusing on emotions and problems. The 6 informants in this study showed coping behavior focused on emotions, namely avoiding (*distancing*) by doing fun things at home, such as watching or cooking. Furthermore, two showed problem-focused coping. Namely planning for problem solving (*planful problem solving*) by saving expenses and one with coping seeking help/support (*seeking social support*) by confiding in friends.

The type of problem-focused coping

behavior is problem-solving in a planned manner (*planful problem solving*). The 6 informants in this study showed coping behavior by wearing masks when leaving the house, 5 using hand sanitizers, and 4 diligently washing their hands and keeping their distance (Matrix 1). The results showed two coping strategies used by students in dealing with feelings and problems that arise due to COVID-19, namely problem-focused coping (*problem-focused coping*) which consists of venting to friends (*seeking social support*) and saving expenses (*planful problem-solving*) and

emotion-focused coping (emotional-focused coping) by doing fun things such as watching and cooking (distancing).

The chosen coping behavior is affected by several factors such as demographic (income and having children), as well as adaptive and maladaptive personalities in dealing with COVID-19. Personality is indirectly related to broader demographic factors (income, age, gender, having children) with COVID-19 coping responses (Volk et al., 2021). Research conducted by Babore, et al, revealed that women are more likely to seek social support in dealing with high-stress situations caused by the pandemic (Babore et al., 2020). In addition, differences in the chosen coping strategies are also affected by the ability to manage the emotions and personality of the individual (Prentice et al., 2020).

Individuals who experience higher psychological distress tend to spend more time seeking information about COVID-19, are in locations with high exposure, adopt more negative coping styles, and receive relatively less social support. Concerns about COVID-19 transmission and the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic makes psychological pressure even higher (Asmundson et al., 2020). Better social support will reduce psychological symptoms due to COVID-19. Specific prevention strategies at the community level, such as implementing effective communication and providing adequate psychological services must be carried out to reduce the psychological and psychosocial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Zhang et al., 2020). In addition, health education needs to be improved by using online methods. Social fears related to COVID-19 must be addressed quickly and appropriately. So far, stigma and discrimination are still the main challenges that create social pressure. Hospital protocols related to health emergency management need to be improved to ensure adequate health facilities managed by professionals (Özmete & Pak, 2020).

Information service center channels, internet access, social media, and special forums should be implemented to reduce the impact of self-quarantine and loneliness and allow certain populations (e.g., infected individuals in hospitals or quarantine) to communicate

with their loved ones. Limited interaction between humans can be overcome by: (1) developing new spaces for inter- and intra-social communication and psychological care support tools; (2) psychotherapists training in managing online devices and applying adaptive skills; and (3) making the general public aware of telepsychology and its advantages (Qi et al., 2020). Coping strategies used in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic tend to use emotion-focused coping strategies. It is caused by the anxiety factor due to being in an area with the highest number of cases and anxiety due to distance learning/learning from home. Another study showed that during online lectures, most of them used stress-coping strategies in the form of emotion-focused coping (Hanifah et al., 2020; Kristamuliana & Simak, 2020; Firman, 2022).

Students use adaptive (seeking social support) and maladaptive (acceptance and release) coping strategies. The results showed that students used more maladaptive coping strategies than adaptive coping strategies to deal with anxiety due to the pandemic and the effect of movement restrictions. One way that can eliminate anxiety or stress experienced by the community is relaxation (Aufar & Raharjo, 2020; Wang et al., 2020). Psychological resilience can generally be defined as the ability to support or restore psychological well-being during or after dealing with stressful conditions. Various mental health support strategies are needed in pandemic areas to facilitate lifestyle changes and activities to adapt to new habits after an outbreak (Khan et al., 2020). The inability to cope with social threats, such as pandemics, can increase the risk of developing a psychiatric condition (Chew et al., 2020).

Resilience, the adaptive coping mechanisms, and social support can all affect how one experiences COVID-19-related stress and acute stress disorder. Problem-focused treatment, social support, avoiding situations, and making the best of them are examples of possible coping mechanisms (Khan et al., 2020). Most responders listen to professional guidance and try to act calmly and responsibly, and coping mechanisms are heavily problem-focused. People understand that it will take time for COVID-19 containment measures

to work. Bulk food purchases and storage are justifiable due to convenience and a perceived need to be ready for a future quarantine (Chew et al., 2020). The positive attitude towards physical distancing introduced by the government as a strategy to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 is a form of positive coping strategy that can decrease psychological stress (Gerhold, 2020). It is also carried out in the form of particular preventive measures (eg washing hands, keeping a distance) and show an effective protection (Moore & Lucas, 2020). In addition, coping is also shown by self-isolation (Alkhamees et al., 2020). Resilience and positive coping will lead to psychological and mental health (Asmundson et al., 2020).

This research has limitations, both in distribution and questionnaires to respondents who are less than optimal. Due to COVID-19, researchers used online questionnaires through Google Forms help. The respondents either felt that they were less than optimal in filling out the questionnaire because usually, it is in the form of a print out and distributed in class and waiting by the researchers. Most likely, the respondents filled in well according to reality events experienced in the classroom. However, with this filling out the questionnaire distributed online, many students are careless in filling out the questions given by the researcher. In addition, the signal is an obstacle in the filling, where researchers cannot live one day get answers from respondents who are samples in the study this. It took one week before the respondents feedback obtained.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic affects students psychologically. The results showed that half of the respondents in this research experienced symptoms of emotional mental disorders. This psychological pressure arises because of the quarantine policy at home, the increasing burden of online learning, the uncertainty of learning outcomes, as well as family financial constraints. There are 2 types of coping strategies used, namely problem-focused coping (problem-focused coping), namely venting to friends (seeking social support) and saving expenses, wearing masks, and diligently washing hands (planful problem

solving). We recommend students to recognize the symptoms better and factors that cause stress so that they can prevent and adapt during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is suggested to Public Health Faculty Hasanuddin University to maximize psychological services during the pandemic to reduce the psychosocial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students. We recommend the government to maximize equitable distribution of network access and financial assistance for students whose economy is affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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