

# COVID-19 Anxiety Leading to Suicidal Ideation Among College Students: Drinking to Cope as a Mediator

Junsung Oh<sup>1</sup>, Jusuk Song<sup>2</sup>, Corey M. Monley<sup>1</sup>, M. Dolores Cimini<sup>1</sup>, & Jessica L. Martin<sup>1</sup>  
 University at Albany, State University of New York<sup>1</sup>, University of Florida<sup>2</sup>



## INTRODUCTION

- The COVID-19 global pandemic has significantly affected individuals' mental health that more emerging adults have reported suicidal ideation (SI; Farooq et al., 2021) as well as substance use (Czeisler et al., 2020)
- Additionally, many college students drink to cope (DTC) with their psychological distress during the pandemic (Papp & Kouros, 2021; Schepis et al., 2021)
- SI is known to have a direct association with DTC, and DTC is shown to exacerbates SI (Gonzalez, 2019; Gonzalez & Hewell, 2012)
- To examine the relationship between pandemic-related psychological distress (COVID-anxiety), DTC, and SI, the current study tested the relationship using a mediation model.

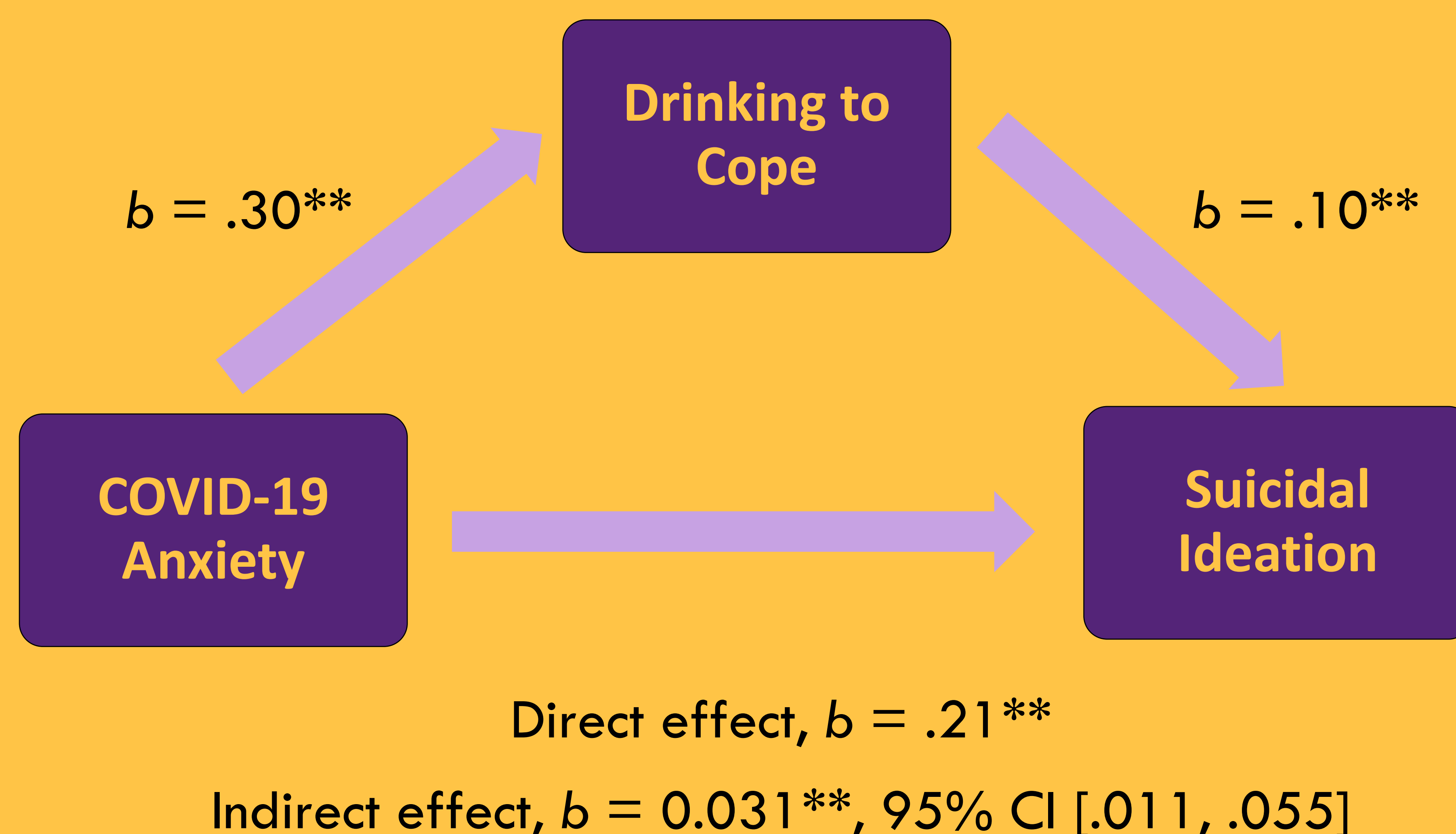
## METHODS

- Data was collected in Oct-Dec 2020 at a northeastern university through online survey.
- 390 undergraduates drank in the past month
- PROCESS extension for SPSS (Hayes, 2022) was used to test for mediation hypothesis.

### Measures

- **COVID-19 anxiety:** adapted CES-D, GAD-7, IES-R (Pew Research Center, 2020)
- **Drinking to cope:** Drinking Motives Questionnaire Revised (Cooper, 1994)
- **Suicidal Ideation:** A question asking "ever seriously considered/attempted suicide?", with options: "No, never," "No, not in the last 12 months," "Yes, in the last 12 months," and "Yes, in the last 30 days." The responses were dichotomized to represent either having or not having suicidal ideation or attempts in the past 12 months.

## MAIN POINTS



Model fit:  $-2LL = 294.41^{**}$

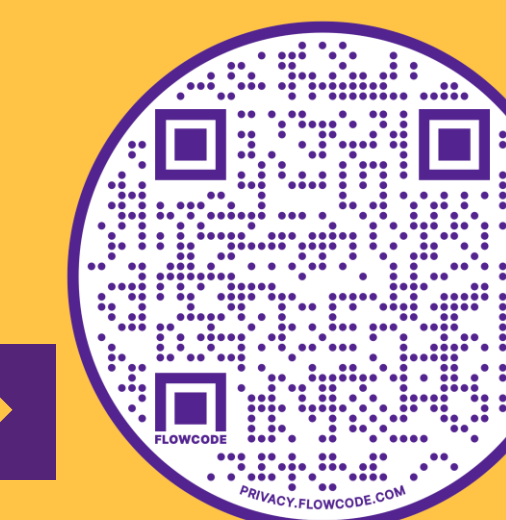
$^{**}p < .001$

Note. 5000 bootstraps are conducted. Reported weights are standardized

**Experiencing COVID-anxiety was associated with higher suicidal ideation as well as higher engagement in drinking to cope among undergraduate students.**

**Drinking to cope partially mediate the effect of COVID-anxiety on suicidal ideation, suggesting drinking to cope increases the risk of having suicidal ideation for undergraduate students who experience pandemic-related psychological distress (COVID-anxiety).**

REFERENCES →



## RESULTS

### Demographics

Age		
M (SD)	21.23 (4.31)	
Range	18-64	
Gender	N (%)	%
Men	102	26.2
Women	273	70.0
Nonbinary/Genderqueer	15	3.8
Race		
Asian/Asian American	31	7.9
Black/African American	40	10.3
Hispanic/Latinx	27	6.9
White	243	62.3
Multiracial	39	10.0
Other	10	2.6

### Correlation

Variable	M (SD)	Min-Max	1	2	3
1. COVID-anxiety	7.19 (4.37)	0-18	1		
2. SI <sup>1</sup>	-	-	.35 <sup>**</sup>	1	
3. DTC	9.67 (4.56)	5-25	.29 <sup>**</sup>	.26 <sup>**</sup>	1

<sup>1</sup>Binary, No (0) = 83.1% (N=324), Yes (1) = 16.9% (N=66)

$^{**}p < .001$

Note. SI = Suicidal Ideation; DTC = Drinking to Cope

## DISCUSSION

- Despite small indirect effect of this model, drinking to cope cannot be overlooked as it has additional effects in explaining the relationship between covid-anxiety and suicidal ideation.
- As much important it is to attend to general anxiety in clinical practice, it is also very important to pay attention to students who drink, especially to cope with their anxiety.
- Assessing drinking motives can provide clinicians with possible intervention plans to reduce the risk of suicidal ideation.