

# **ARTICLE TO FOLLOW UP OUR RESEARCH**

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Mission TT.

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On the 27th of May, 2021, we issued a questionnaire and consequently, on the 1st of June, we wrote a research paper which delved into the effects of COVID-19, the lockdown and the imminent CXC examinations on Form 5/6 students in Trinidad and Tobago. The research thoroughly covered the varying opinions of students in the twin island; from Scarborough, all the way to Point Fortin. Ergo, this article is being written in a conscientious effort to supplement that paper, and to examine if the CSEC and CAPE students' released examination results are reflective of their responses to the questionnaire.

Predominantly in our research, a multitude of students (76%) expressed that both their mental health and quality of education had been affected by online learning - or lack thereof - and isolation due to the COVID lockdown, with many explaining that they were experiencing high levels of stress, anxiety and depression.

We inferred that this was affecting their ability to study effectively, and based on statistics from CXC in 2021, it is clear that this inference is true. Why? Well, at the CXC Results Ceremony 2021 held in Guyana, for the CSEC examinations, a staggering 11.23% of students were absent from one or more of their exams, 5.88% more than 2020. While 122,248 students wrote the exams in 2020, 103,445 wrote it in 2021; an 18,803 difference in participants. Furthermore, over 15,000 students deferred exams to next year, 3000 of which have not yet chosen an exact time to do so. Concerning the CAPE examinations, 8.83% of students were recorded absent, 4.84% more than 2020. This was coupled with the lowest registration rate for CAPE in the last four years. Hence, these statistics reiterate the lack of preparation of students as a result of online learning or lack thereof, isolation and their diminished mental health.

Due to the latter, our country should breathe a sigh of relief that we are moving back to some sort of normalcy by the reopening of physical school. While some individuals are worried due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the emergence of the Delta and Omicron variants, and rightly so, there is the possibility of widespread mental health issues in our country, in other words, a mental health epidemic. As a matter of fact, the following was written by a respondent of our research to the question, 'In what way has your mental health been affected?'

He said,

*"Waves of sadness due to constant school pressure.... With physical school there is a balance with friends, extra curricular (distractions) and then I make time for school work"*

*which is how I work best to avoid “burning out” but because of the switch (which was unfortunately inevitable due to the virus) I’m home 24/7 on the online platform doing school work with no other escape outlets unfortunately. In terms of preparation for exams, it is difficult to keep a momentum because studying tends to get monotonous so it’s hard to find ways to make studying fun/enjoyable as everyday is pretty much the same.”*

This heartfelt response conveys the internal and external struggles that students have had to face throughout the past year; scuffles with monotonous routines, isolation and more; a plethora of phenomena that have the ability to give rise to severe mental health issues within our generation.

This is why it is paramount that physical school is reopening as previously mentioned; so that our routines can once again be diversified, our isolation can be eradicated, and those who struggled with online school can be benefitted. Moreover, in this time where many struggle with maintaining good mental health, it is of utter importance for us to thoroughly educate ourselves about the various mental illnesses, the corresponding signs, the misconceptions and more, so that we can manage it sufficiently while simultaneously ending the stigma around it. Additionally, parents need to regularly check up on their children’s mental health and shower them with love. Classmates and friends must make every effort to maintain contact with each other for the sake of their social well-being and teachers need to be aware of their students’ well-being as well, whether it be in the classroom or a personal issue.

Indeed, these practices need to be sustained even if school reverts back to the online platform; which may unfortunately be inevitable. Regardless, if that platform returns or not, if parents, classmates, friends and teachers assiduously carry out their roles of support, it can be ensured that the quality of education, grades and mental health of students will be significantly improved in our beautiful twin island.

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