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Title: Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on US Medical Student Family Planning

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Background: The decision as to whether to start a family during training is challenging. Unprecedented changes to medical education and the residency application process have been implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We predict this will affect trainees' decisions on timing of starting a family.

Methods: This is a cross-sectional study of medical students who are participating in the 2020-2021 residency application cycle. Responses were collected from an anonymous survey dispersed to US medical schools.

Results: Of the 415 students who completed the survey, the average age was 27. The majority self-identified as female (n=272, 66%), 138 male (33%), and 5 non-binary gender (1%). Seventy-one (17%) of respondents indicated the recent changes have affected their thoughts on starting a family. Differences were seen based on age (p=0.009), relationship status (p< 0.019), region (p=0.031), and timing of starting a family (p< 0.001). Of the one quarter of students who planned to start a family earlier, their reasons included virtual residency interviews (71%), limited away rotations (59%), virtual medical school curriculum (47%), and significant other working from home (59%).

Discussion: The changes to medical education during the COVID-19 pandemic may affect certain groups of students based on age, region, relationship status, and planned timing of starting a family. It is important for medical educators to recognize the challenges of starting a family during medical training and support students who may consider starting a family.