

## Psychological distress and perceived social support among young adults during COVID-19

Vishnupriya S<sup>1\*</sup>, Amala Sudarsan<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic and related practice of physical/social distancing upsurge a threat to almost all domains of an individual's life. Similar to the psychological health of people who are tested positive with COVID-19, the outer circuit of people who holds the fear of being affected is also unignorable. The present study focuses on the relationship between psychological distress and perceived social support among young adults during this pandemic. This ex post facto study consists of 200 people between the age group 18-35. The data obtained was analyzed statistically and the result shows that there is a significant negative correlation between the psychological distress and perceived social support among young adults.

**Keywords:** *Psychological Distress, Perceived Social Support, Young Adults, COVID-19*

COVID-19 is a rapid and disastrous infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus which was an epidemic reported within the Chinese wall and later became the first pandemic of the decade. While taking care of the people who are being diagnosed with covid-19 we should also ensure the wellbeing of people in the outer circle. Because, the depth of insecurities they abide while living each moments is inconceivable, and the major concern is that, these may remain unaddressed forever. Once the symptomatic subside of COVID-19 ensues, from the very next moment people may rush to gain back their material assets and ensure financial equilibrium, and the unaddressed psychological bruises may go beneath in this struggle. As there are high chances for these bruises to get worse in the progression of time and it may inaudibly bout the mental health of individuals, thus in order to provide a better mental health for the community effective steps has to be taken to in the earliest momentum.

As a very primary step to reach out this goal, the concurrent study is designed among the population of young adults, who constitute a larger percent of Indian populace. Primary intention of the study was to assess the psychological distress of the sample. "Psychological distress covers a wide spectrum, ranging from normal feelings of vulnerability, sadness, and fears to problems that can become disabling, such as depression, anxiety, extensive worries,

<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, Dept. of Applied Psychology, Pondicherry University, Pondicherry, India

<sup>2</sup> Post Graduate in Applied Psychology, Central University of Tamil Nadu, India

\*Responding Author

Received: April 10, 2020; Revision Received: May 01, 2020; Accepted: May 25, 2020

negative thoughts, or social isolation” (Zimmermann, Puschmann, Porzelt, Ebersbach, Ernst, Thomsen & Scherer, 2015). Thus by assessing the psychological distress we may get a nutshell of the mental state that our sample possess. As per empirical studies, social isolation is correlated with loneliness (Ge L, Yap CW, Ong R & Heng BH, 2017). Considering the complete lockdown in the country perceived social support was taken as another variable to be studied. Perceived social support can be defined as a verbal and nonverbal communication occurring between the providers and recipients that help in reducing the uncertainty about self, others, relationships and functions; and thereby enhancing the perception of personal control in the individual’s life experiences (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). The notion of "seeking social support" has been beheld as a coping strategy for managing with contending stress. Studies have found that social support does moderate or buffer the impact of psychosocial stress on both physical and mental health (Kong & Wertheimer, 2011; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Antonucci, 1985). Social support can also be explained as a coping assistance to help the people to handle their stress and negative life events (Thoits, 1986). There are studies nailing the relationship between supportive social networks and physical health (House, Landis & Umberson, 1988).

As social support can influence the cognitive appraisal and function as a coping strategy by providing resources needed to meet the stressors, here the current study attempt to explore the inter relation between psychological distress and perceived social support. The study also looks to explore the level of social support that the people is believing that they are availing during this period which demands social distancing as the key to survive. The results of the study may help to explore the underlying aspects of these variables and may aid in developing intervention strategies to enhance the mental health of humanity.

#### ***Objectives of the study***

- To assess the extent of psychological distress among young adults during COVID-19
- To find out the relationship between psychological distress and dimensions of perceived social support.
- To find out whether psychological distress differ with respect to the selected socio-demographic variables.
- To find out whether perceived social support differ with respect to the selected socio-demographic variables.

### **MATERIALS AND METHOD**

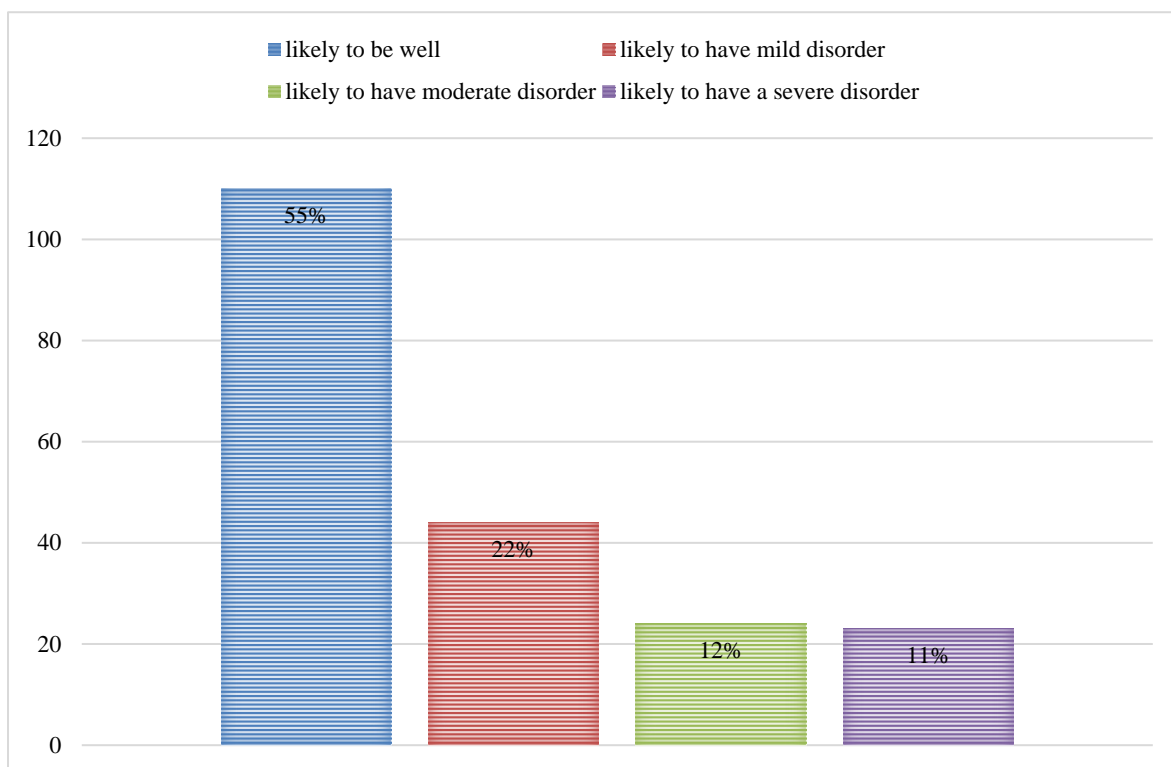
The sample of the study consisted 200 people aged between 18-35 including male and female, living in COVID-19 affected districts of Kerala. In this study which follows ex-post facto research design, participants were selected via convenient sampling method. The study was carried out from March 2020 to April 2020. The informed consent was collected from every participant before filling out the Questionnaire. After assuring the confidentiality and mentioning the ethical considerations, the data on psychological distress and perceived social support were collected using Kessler psychological distress scale (K10) (Kessler, Barker, Colpe, Epstein, Gfroerer, Hiripi, et al., 2003) and Multidimensional *Scale* of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet & Farley, 1988), along with the Socio- demographic data profile.

#### ***Statistical analysis***

Along with frequency, percentage and measures of central tendencies, Spearman Rank order correlation, Mann Whitney U test and Kruskal Wallis H test were used to analyze the data.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

*Graph 1, Indicate the level of psychological distress experienced by young adults during the period of COVID-19*



Graph 1 designates that, nearby 55% of the entire sample are expected to be well and they tend to have lesser level of distress, whereas; 22% were found to have mild levels of distress. Considering these two groups remaining were found to have higher psychological distress, among which 12% possessed moderate levels of distress and 11% had severe levels of distress. It is noteworthy that the data extracted at the very first trimester of COVID-19 headway indicated that around half the populace experience varying levels of distress, thus the chances of hike in the percentage is highly anticipated.

*Table 1, Shows the relationship between psychological distress with respect to dimensions of perceived social support.*

Variables	M	SD	Psychological distress	Significant others	Family	Friends	Perceived Social support
Psychological distress	19.9	6.98	1				
Significant others	5.28	1.53	-.093	1			
Family	5.52	1.39	-.171*	.480**	1		
Friends	5.67	1.21	-.097	.463**	.482**	1	
Total Perceived Social support	16.4	3.41	-.150*	.828**	.794**	.753**	1

Note: M and SD are used to represent mean and standard deviation respectively.

\*Indicates correlation is significant at 0.05 level

\*\*indicates correlation is significant at 0.01 level

## Psychological distress and perceived social support among young adults during COVID-19

A significant negative correlation between psychological distress and perceived social support has been highlighted by several earlier studies such as of Cruza-Guet, Spokane, Caskie, Brown & Szapocznik, (2008). Current study also travels in same direction, and has found that the same bond is conserved among the variables even in the midst of a pandemic. There exist empirical findings that suggest elevated perceived social support shields from distress, also sharing with the significant people who can support us lightens the burden of stress (Serovich, Kimberly, Mosac & Lewis, 2001). This might be one of the underlying reason behind the negative correlation between psychological distress and perceived social support. Among the all three dimensions of perceived social support only family was found to have a significant negative correlation with psychological distress. This finding can be validated in the light of studies such as the one by Serovich, Kimberly, Mosac & Lewis (2001) that highlights the role of familial support in diminishing distress. Being the most significant and consistent bond of support, family serves a great role in ensuring the mental health of its members. This might be the pivotal factor fostering negative relation between familial sub-dimensions and psychological distress. Apart from these, significant positive correlation was found between all the three sub-dimensions of perceived social support such as friends, family and significant others like in the study of Banovcinova and Baskova (2016).

**Table 2, Shows the difference in levels of psychological distress with respect to perceived threat of getting affected by COVID-19**

Variable	Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	P
Perceived threat of getting corona	High threat	96	98.74	20192.00	3802.00	0.068
	Low threat	104	117.40	5233.00		
	Total		200			

Table 2 indicate that people with higher perceived threat of getting affected by COVID-19 may have higher psychological distress than people with low perceived threat. This finding is congruent with the findings of Lancaster, Cobb, Lee and Telch (2016) who found association between perceived threat and stress. As the concerns in a person's mind may increase while they perceive themselves in an endangered condition, it may fuel a state of distress among them. Even human physiology has an influence in moderating distress, release of elevated cortisol in threat appraised conditions is an example of this (McHugh, Behar, Gutner, Geem and Otto, 2010).

### CONCLUSION

Being one of the worst pandemic of the century, COVID-19 has turned out as a nightmare of humanity across the globe, indications of this was vividly visible while conducting the study. The study found that 45% of the total sample has psychological distress, among whom people with moderate and severe distress were 12% and 11% respectively. Study also found a significant negative relationship between psychological distress and perceived social support, whereas; family sub dimension of perceived social support also had a significant negative relation with psychological distress. Correspondingly, it was also found that psychological distress may differ with respect to levels of perceived stress and a higher psychological distress was observed among people with elevated threat appraisal.

## LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the unabridged populace of young adults living in COVID-19 pretentious areas, the study was conducted on a relatively smaller sample. As well as dissemination of sample amid the categories of certain socio-demographic variables were uneven, so it was inept to identify the momentous variance in psychological distress and perceived social support with respect to these socio-demographic variables. For cumulating the generalizability and overcoming these confines, an analogous study can be conducted among a larger representative sample. Besides, studies which endorse interventional strategies to diminish the psychological distress among the population can be also regaled.

## REFERENCES

- Albrecht, T. L., & Adelman, M. B. (1987). *Communicating social support*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Antonucci, T. C. (1985). Social Support: Theoretical Advances, Recent Findings and Pressing Issues. *Social Support: Theory, Research and Applications*, 21-37. doi:10.1007/978-94-009-5115-0\_2
- Banovcinova, L., & Baskova, M. (2016). Role of the family, friends and significant others in providing social support and enhancing quality of life in cancer patients. In *SHS Web of Conferences* (Vol. 30, p. 00020). EDP Sciences.
- Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis: An integrative review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 98(2), 310-357.
- Cruza-Guet, M. C., Spokane, A. R., Caskie, G. I., Brown, S. C., & Szapocznik, J. (2008). The relationship between social support and psychological distress among Hispanic elders in Miami, Florida. *Journal of counseling psychology*, 55(4), 427.
- Ge L, Yap CW, Ong R, Heng BH (2017) Social isolation, loneliness and their relationships with depressive symptoms: A population-based study. *PLoS ONE* 12(8): e0182145. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0182145>
- House, J. S., Landis, K. R., & Umberson, D. (1988). Social Relationships and Health. *Science*, 241(4865):540-5
- Kessler, R. C., Barker, P. R., Colpe, L. J., Epstein, J. F., Gfroerer, J. C., Hiripi, E., ... & Zaslavsky, A. M. (2003). Screening for serious mental illness in the general population. *Archives of general psychiatry*, 60(2), 184-189.
- Kong, S. X., & Wertheimer, A. I. (2011). Social Support: Concepts, Theories and Implications for Pharmacy Research. *Journal of Pharmaceutical Marketing & Management*. 9(1), 63-90 [https://doi.org/10.3109/J058v09n01\\_06](https://doi.org/10.3109/J058v09n01_06)
- Lancaster, C. L., Cobb, A. R., Lee, H. J., & Telch, M. J. (2016). The role of perceived threat in the emergence of PTSD and depression symptoms during warzone deployment. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 8(4), 528.
- McHugh, R. K., Behar, E., Gutner, C. A., Geem, D., & Otto, M. W. (2010). Cortisol, stress, and attentional bias toward threat. *Anxiety, Stress, & Coping*, 23(5), 529-545.
- Serovich, J. M., Kimberly, J. A., Mosack, K. E., & Lewis, T. L. (2001). The role of family and friend social support in reducing emotional distress among HIV-positive women. *AIDS care*, 13(3), 335-341.
- World Health Organization. (2020). coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): situation report, 51.
- Zimet, G. D., Dahlem, N. W., Zimet, S. G., & Farley, G. K. (1988). The multidimensional scale of perceived social support. *Journal of personality assessment*, 52(1), 30-41.
- Zimmermann, T., Puschmann, E., Porzelt, S., Ebersbach, M., Ernst, A., Thomsen, P., & Scherer, M. (2015). Promoting Self-Management in Primary Care-the Association of

## Psychological distress and perceived social support among young adults during COVID-19

Motivation for Change, Self-Efficacy and Psychological Distress Prior to the Onset of Intervention. *Psychiatrische Praxis*, 42, S44-8.

### ***Acknowledgements***

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author declared no conflict of interest.

***How to cite this article:*** Vishnupriya S, Sudarsan. A (2020). Psychological distress and perceived social support among young adults during COVID-19. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 8(2), 26-31. DIP:18.01.202/20200802, DOI:10.25215/0802.202