

The psychosocial problems faced in COVID-19 nation-wide lockdown in India

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ABSTRACT

The studies on experiences faced by people during the spread of Coronavirus pandemic and its spread are unique and unprecedented. To help the individuals experiencing lockdown in India, it is essential to elicit an in-depth understanding of the psychological and social problems experienced by the people in India. We identified the factors specifically important to assert healthy psycho-social functioning and provided a secured platform to share all concerns regarding the factors under study. Our overall conclusion is that participants (N=20) are experiencing significant changes in daily life schedules affecting eating and sleeping patterns and general health and the online nature of study and work platforms. This is an indication to other researchers for further investigation and to mental health professionals for keeping a check on during intakes and counselling sessions.

Keywords: Covid-19 Pandemic, Psychological Well-being, Social Well-being

Different countries have seen varying levels of stressful situations, frequently changing policies and major ups and downs in the lives of every citizen since the past few months. We have abundant research that has helped understand the impact of solitary confinement and social distancing. These circumstances might be newly introduced for some countries; while others have been dealing with this since the past few months. Most countries of the world identify 'social distancing' to be the only effective solution to deal with Orthocoronavirinae (scientific name for Coronavirus) and is also suggested by the World Health Organisation. Homo Sapiens are social animals and hence, we can well imagine the kind of distress that must be experienced by them due to social isolation for an uncertain period of time. There is a need of formulating a nationwide in-depth planning and execution of providing systematic psychological first-aid to all citizens and the development of detailed crisis prevention and intervention strategies to reduce psychological distress and resulting mental health problems (Jianyin Qui, 2020).

Studies have shown great psychological impact caused by the pandemic on general public, children, older adults, medical staff and patients (Q. Chen et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020). A study on Chinese residents collected their social participation, precautionary behaviour and emotional and behavioural reactions in correspondence to their knowledge

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about COVID-19, its perceived severity and their beliefs about the controllability of this transmittable disease (Jian-Bin Li et.al, 2020). They reported that few people had direct interactions with COVID-19 related events, but most population engaged in precautionary behaviour; whereas all other cognitive appraisals were differentially related to the outcome factors. Especially in the college-going population, it was noticed that there were economic effects, effects on routine life following delays in academic activities. This had a profound impact on the level of anxiety found amongst college students and the social support they received (Wenjun Cao et.al, 2020). Yet, there is scarce detailed research on the mental health conditions of college students during the COVID-19 pandemic (Wenjun Cao et al., 2020).

Social support is essential for individuals in these times of distancing because its absence adds to the psychological pressure faced by individuals and also changes the attitude they now frame towards social support and methods by which they seek help. This indicates the necessity of effective and robust social support during such public health emergencies (Bai et al., 2005).

METHODOLOGY

Design

With the aim of developing an understanding of the psychological health and social well-being of individuals currently residing in India under the nation-wide lockdown, this study was specifically conducted to understand the specific psychological and social needs of the residents. We employed the phenomenology approach wherein the individual experiences of each respondent in the age group of 18-30 years would be looked at to arrive at a holistic understanding of their problems, attitude and approach towards the national scenario. We used an open coding process to analyze the content in their responses and categorize the data.

Participants

A total of 20 individuals in the age group of 18-30 years participated in this study (N=20). We chose this age group particularly because they are mostly involved in more outdoor activities and the nature of most of their work and interactions have changed. The respondents were normally distributed by age. Additionally, 60% of the participants identified themselves as females and 40% as males. The educational level of participants varied from 12th grade level to students with a Masters degree or Post Graduation level. 9 of the participants are currently students, whereas the rest are working in varied occupational fields. We maintained this balance to receive a representative sample.

We recognise the sensitivity of the questions we posed to them and hence, the participants were clearly explained the purpose of the study and asked to participate only if they believe they can healthily respond without being disturbed. They were assured about the confidentiality and privacy of the information they provide. We laid emphasis on the consent and will of participants to disseminate their information and experiences. We provided them with contact details of the Principal Investigator in case they wish to discuss the research, its implications or any questions regarding their performance.

We opted for a purposive sampling method to ensure that we get those participants who are currently keeping up with the regular updates with an in-depth understanding of the national and international news and also belong to different nature of professions as outlined above to get a representative sample. Initially, we prepared an online questionnaire along with the

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rationale given the circumstances and sent it to 26 individuals falling in the given criteria. 20 individuals gave their consent to participate in the study.

Materials

Due to the lockdown, we prepared an online questionnaire for the participants. We sent them information about the nature of the study, its significance and implications so that they can take an informed decision about their participation. They were given a stipulated time period of two days to respond to the questionnaire so that they can contact the Principal Investigator even during their participation if need arises. We developed a Google Form document to be filled up by the participants with 12 base questions asking respondents to share their daily schedule changes, relationships at home and with peers, experiences with the online study/work platforms, changes in self-perception, changes in perception of others due to social media, news consumption, reactions to government functioning, approach towards the future and experiences with travel and healthcare if it applies to them. These questions were framed and kept open-ended to leave enough space for the respondents to use as much length as they feel is necessary to sum up their experience. The questions were also framed in a manner that prompts the respondent to delve deeper and present their truest opinions backing them up with instances if they will. We kept the language of the questions youth-friendly to elicit responses in words they feel accurately justify their association with the situations. Some of the questions were framed to normalize some changes experienced by the participants so that they do not produce anxiety or distress amongst respondents.

The base questions framed were as under:

1. With the lockdown, we are expected to stay inside our homes at all times. Please describe the changes this has brought about in your daily schedule.
2. Staying inside home comes with more understanding of family members/ roommates/ apartment mates, relationships at home along with certain disputes. How would you describe these changes in your view of your home relations and work distribution at home?
3. How have your peer relations changed due to the lockdown situations? Has social media played a role?
4. The studying/working platforms have changed drastically. If you are a student, please describe how the shift to online studying has been for you and if you receive support for the same. If you are working, how have the changes in work format affected your productivity, regularity, supervisory responsibility and help and financial security?
5. Many people utilize the lockdown time-period to think deeply and discover new things within themselves. What are the discoveries you have made about yourself?
6. As we see on social media, most people are learning and showcasing various talents they have. How much time do you spend on social media and what are your views on the content you see on social media during these times?
7. Due to such changes in schedules, it is natural to experience certain pleasant/unpleasant dysregulations in eating and sleeping patterns. What are the changes in your general health you have noticed in these past few days?
8. We are receiving a lot of true/fake information on Coronavirus. How do you generally respond to this information and how does it affect your health and mood?
9. The government policies are undergoing a lot of change with new rules being implemented. Please share your views on the government functioning during these times.

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10. It is true that we all work on planning and so, many of our plans have to be modified. How do you view it and what attitude do you have towards making these changes? What do you visualize the future holds for you?
11. If you have travelled long distances within the past one month within or from outside the country, please share your experiences during the travel. If your travel has been international, it would be really helpful to know your experiences through the quarantine period.
12. If you have been in occupational fields that are typically healthcare-oriented, what are your feelings and experiences constantly thinking about and working in the current scenario?

Procedure

The Principal Investigator prepared a Google form explaining the rationale of the study, importance of the study, their participation and implications in the first sections. We conveyed the confidential and private nature of the conversation and that they would also get to dwell about their experiences during the lockdown days. They were assured that the Principal Investigator is not connected to any governmental or non-governmental organisation that would pose any threat or challenge to the participant. We asked them for their demographic information in the first section. After they were clarified about these, we sought their consent for participating in the study and responding to the trust of their knowledge.

While the respondents answered the second section of the form with the 12 base questions, the Principal Investigator was present online to ensure comfort amongst the individual participants. In case the respondents had questions regarding their participation or questions posed, they were answered promptly. We used the Google forms summary sheet for keeping a check on the demographic requirements of the participation. Approximately, participants took around 40 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

In the third section of the form, the researcher thanked the participants for their valued participation and they were congratulated on showing the best standards of social participation by helping the purpose of the study. We again provided them the contact details of the Principal Investigator if they would later like to question about the study, results or their individual responses.

Data Analysis

We utilized open coding methods to interpret data from the content shared by the respondents in text. We also received some responses backed with emoticon expressions. Such questions were able to elicit information about their attitudes and concerns about their psychological, social, national, occupational and future orientation views.

To draw conclusions from the data, we chose to use an open coding method of content analysis. The content written by the respondents was examined and divided into categories after analyzing positive, neutral, negative or indifferent approach of the responses. We considered the thoughts, attitudes and insights of the participants coupled with examples or instances of their experiences during the lockdown in entirety. First, the Principal Investigator examined the data from the text shared by respondents to identify if there are any specifically serious problems reported. This analysis was used as a prognostic tool if problems were identified to refer the participants to a therapist. Next, we categorized the responses of the participants into positive/ negative, pleasant/ unpleasant, constructive/

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destructive as per the nature of the question posed. After categorizing, the information was evaluated in terms of the kind of information that the participants abundantly have and those aspects where they are seeking more information or help to cope with their unforeseen problems.

RESULTS

Discourse (Data) Analysis

Daily Life Changes. All the respondents reported drastic changes in their routine lives. However, 18 participants out of 20 reported significant disturbances in sleeping patterns. The general physical health of the participants was also seen to be highly affected. They reported problems such as dietary changes, mood changes, irritability, eating too much or too less, lesser workload, weight loss or gain, less exercise, emotional disturbances, laziness, disturbed socialization, boredom, lack of planned schedule, involvement in other unproductive activities and problems with time management.

Family Relationships. A total of 16 respondents reported constructive relationships with the family. 2 responses were found to be neutral in their attitude. Most of the responses seemed to be very optimistic in their approach mentioning that they spend more time with their family and get to know more about them. Some of the respondents did not have enough time to talk to family and relatives, but see this as a time to re-connect and re-strengthen their social relationships. One of the participants who responded in the opposite direction works as a counsellor and hence, continues working, ultimately facing discriminatory behaviour by the family as he works in the vicinity where Coronavirus patients are kept.

Peer Relationships. 17 respondents reported that the lockdown situation has not changed their relationships with their peers because of social media and that they are still connected with the same intimacy due to virtual media. 2 participants held neutral approach towards the changes in peer relationships due to their more active involvement in other activities. One of the respondents reported frequent disputes and differences of opinion with the apartment mates.

Educational/ Occupational Challenges. In our sample, we had 9 students, whereas 11 of them were working professionals belonging to different fields. One of the students is on a semester break and hence, did not comment on the online learning platform. All of the remaining 8 students preferred offline classes compared to online classes due to certain reasons like difficulties in concentration, distractions, decreasing interests, possibilities of sneaking out of classes, decreased group work in classroom, difficulties in clarification of doubts and lack of examination atmosphere online. The reason behind anxiety of college students can be attributed to the effect of virus towards their study and potential future employment (C. Wang et al., 2020).

Of the 11 professionals, 5 respondents faced difficulties in online working platforms due to financial insecurity, changes in working hours, apprehensions about future working efficiency, lack of working environment, laziness, lacking motivation and losing work. One of the respondents reported how the person is productive, but does not report before time to not raise expectations for extra work. They also reported difficulties managing household chores and work. Rest of the 6 respondents are either not working from home or are into healthcare professions and still working. For them, working platforms have not undergone a change.

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Self-Perception. Each of the 20 participants indulged in introspection during the lockdown period and has discovered many characteristics about themselves. The traits might be positive as well as negative, but each of them reported working further for personal improvement. They discovered various talents and abilities within themselves ranging from cooking, playing certain musical instruments, ability to manage a household independently, multi-tasking, ability to concentrate, introspect, working in absence of a maid, keep away from eating non-vegetarian food, cutting down on unnecessary social interactions, and focussing more on love and positivity.

Other-Perception. 4 participants said that they were dissatisfied with the content people post online, whereas some participants did not spend enough time on social media. 3 respondents felt that there were extreme kinds of content being posted up. They also mentioned the new upcoming trends on social media and their spread. They felt that this is a way to express their creativity and feel a part of the larger community by engaging in a collective activity. Most of the respondents reported anguish and aggression towards others who are violating the lockdown and attacking healthcare professionals working for their own benefit.

News Consumption. A 100% of the participants reported that they resort to reliable news resource such as WHO, UN and CDC website, scientific articles and government websites. Some respondents also said that they speak to medical professionals before relying on any pertinent information. They also acknowledged how some information has an emotional impact and that they have limited their information consumption over time. They also reported being cautious of the true or fake information and not forwarding it when in doubt.

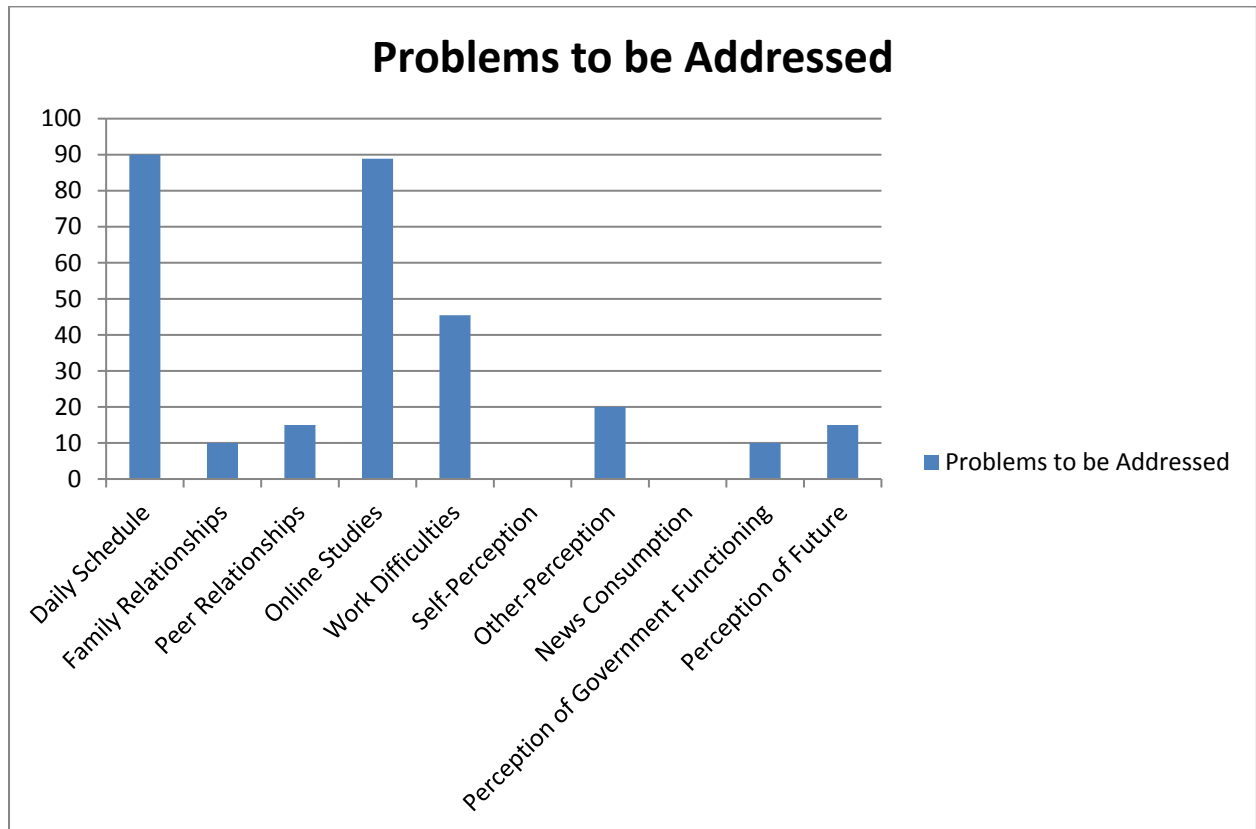
Perception of Government Functioning. 18 participants reported complete satisfaction with the governmental functioning. One respondent reported that working in a hospital setting, the person faces harassment from officials and hence, not satisfied, while other participant suspected political conflicts interfering. The respondents showed immense faith in the steps government is taking nationally and the international help the government is providing displaying high standards of humanity. However, some respondents suggested that government should provide financial relief to agriculture and industry, create more awareness amongst uneducated people and that it should also take economic impact into consideration and that they should start planning for contingencies in these tough times.

Perception of the Future. 3 respondents focussed more upon the present and also shared apprehensions about the future. Of these, some expressed disrupted study plans, vacations, poor adaptive skills and other plans during these months, whereas some focussed on the current adversities and how coping with this situation is more important. Remaining participants reported certain confidence with future planning, with a focus on enjoying the free time they have got now to introspect and know more about themselves, do the best possible in the moment, optimism about various ways to overcome problems, continuing their new found passions and healthy lifestyle patterns developed during the lockdown period.

Psychological Health of Healthcare workers. 6 participants belonged to healthcare occupations and they talked about the available services for general public emphasizing upon the prudence of their profession and that general public should take the necessary precautions to help them deal with the coronavirus cure. They reported how it is difficult for them to deal with the situation since they are themselves under stressful times. However,

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they encourage others to indulge in physical activities within homes to keep themselves healthy. One respondent also shared apprehensions regarding the attacks on healthcare professionals and the people who violate the lockdown.



Graph 1: This graph plots the percentage of respondents who indicated problems in the factors studies above. This gives an idea about the areas in which mental health professionals need to actively start working and spreading awareness to help in times of distress.

Overall Participant Impressions: Some participants adopted the external locus of control, where they reported performing at their maximum, but being restricted by the environmental circumstances and lockdown. The perception of society is going on a drastic change due to the lockdown conditions. Some participants also adopted an approach where they talked more about their observations of the outside world and compared those experiences to their own. This suggests the need to generalize their current situation and report how the experiences of all human beings are at this stage synchronous. Many of them also resorted to 'should' and 'must' statements indicating self and other expectations. This also includes saying wise statements that indicate the way in which the situation should be dealt with and how far they have reached in doing so. Some of them reported apprehensions about getting back to work after the lockdown gets over.

Most participants took this time to self-reflect and identify new talents within themselves or became aware of certain constructive/ non-constructive traits within themselves. Some participants were optimistic about the current situation and took time to indulge in activities that gave them pleasure. Some participants took this opportunity to get attuned with the external world and others cut off from certain aspects of the news due to its negative nature.

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Most of the participants reported being indifferent to the situation and suggested to 'go with the flow'. This is an important point to be considered for all mental health professionals, as we need to consider not just the experiences during lockdown, but what occurs after the lockdown to ensure individual and societal harmony.

DISCUSSION

The objective of the current study was to identify the specific psychological and social problems experienced by 18-30 year-old individuals residing in India during the COVID-19 lockdown. On the basis of the results, we can assert that the respondents are facing problems in managing their daily life schedule. They are also reporting problems in online studies platform, which need to be addressed. 45% of the respondents are facing work-related problems. While it is important to consider the problems they are facing, it is equally necessary to check which factors they are performing satisfactorily at. The further efforts directed towards providing relief should be based on these considerations. It might be expected that family relationship problems might be experienced, but as noted, they are at a minimal and there is some improvement noted in the family relationships too. Additionally, they are utilizing this time to introspect and improve themselves. Information consumption is not a problem as the respondents have minimized their exposure to news and reported relying on necessary information from reliable resources. They are satisfied with the government functioning and hence, have faith that the situations will be normalized as the government is working in the directions most suitable. All these are pointers that mental health professionals are suggested to keep in mind during an intake to consider as the lockdown experiences will have a profound impact on the future orientation and attitude of the clients. However, while we are collectively taking steps to create awareness and help a larger community, we should look at the types of problems typically found amongst the community and work towards the same.

Future Implications and Directions for Research

We have provided an outline of the kind of problems experienced. However, the study formulated open-ended and broad questions to allow free responses from the respondents to identify problem areas. On the basis of these problems, further research should be conducted on a greater sample size to establish the understanding of that area. Since the number of factors analyzed and scope of this study is wide, a preliminary study was conducted to serve as a basis for further research. The sample size of the study was kept 20 because of this complexity to gain in-depth understanding. Interpreting this information in this manner, we could delineate what nature of work needs to be focussed upon by psychologists and mental health professionals in India to help Indians cope with the current circumstances. This would also point towards the pointers mental health professionals should be emphasizing upon regarding the lockdown experiences of clients in their clinical settings. This study is also helpful for those mental health occupation students who are currently conducting online sessions or providing voluntary counselling services in times of distress. The goal was to understand related areas of maladjustment that is natural to develop as a result of sudden change in daily routine and work-life disruption. This shall aid therapists, psychologists, counsellors and all mental health professionals in foreseeing what to expect in sessions for this age group.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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