

The psychological impact of COVID-19 on young adults

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ABSTRACT

Covid-19 has caused a significant impact around the globe. It has caused serious damage to the mental health of young adults. India and other countries implemented nationwide lockdown to cure the virus. Psychological distress is a state of emotional suffering associated with stressors and demands that are difficult to cope with in daily life. Depression is a mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest. An emotion is a feeling such as happiness, love, fear, anger, or hatred, which can be caused by the situation that you are in or the people you are with. The current research is conducted to study emotions, psychological distress, and depression among young adults. The lockdown has resulted in many challenges for young adults. The study was conducted on 103 young adults (59 females and 44 males) aged: 18-25 years. Standardized measures of psychological distress, emotions, and depression were used on the participants. The study revealed a negative correlation between positive emotions and psychological distress, a positive correlation between negative emotions and psychological distress, a positive correlation between depression and psychological distress, and a positive correlation between depression and negative emotions. The results also show that the males are higher than females in positive emotions but there is no gender difference in negative emotions, psychological distress & depression. The study suggests that there is a need to expand mental health services among the individuals during the pandemic as well as a need to relax and maintain a proper schedule to avoid the negative impact of the lockdown.

Keywords: *Psychological impact, Covid:19, Young adults*

"We are in this together and we will get through this together." (Antonio Guterres)

The government declared the COVID-19 as a pandemic, as the virus spread worldwide. The government-imposed lockdown, and various restrictive measures such as; self-isolation and social distancing, for preventing the spread. These measures disrupted people's lives, health, and well-being, and led to psychological distress. The lockdown has badly affected the young adults' mental health. As people are staying at home all the time, it's difficult for them to cope with the family and the new normal, which is why young adults are feeling distressed, have negative emotions, which has also led to suicidal thoughts and depression.

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Grover et al.,(2020) conducted a study that aimed to evaluate the psychological impact of lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic on the general public to assess the prevalence of depression, anxiety, perceived stress, well-being, and other psychological issues.

In a study by Cao et al.,(2020) it was found that the lockdown was a risk factor for increasing the anxiety of college students in China.

Emotion

Woodworth (1938) defines emotions as “a stirred upstate of an individual. It is a disturbing muscular and glandular activity”. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), emotion is defined as “a complex reaction pattern, involving experiential, behavioral and physiological elements”.

Juric et al.,(2020) conducted a longitudinal study on the emotional impact caused by the COVID-19. This study aimed to assess the emotional impact of the lockdown measures imposed by the Argentinian government to fight the virus. Folkman and colleagues (1997) have made similar claims that experiences of positive affect during chronic stress help people cope. Negative emotions, with their heightened and often prolonged cardiovascular activation, have been implicated in the etiology of coronary heart disease (Blaschovich & Katkin, 1993).

Psychological Distress

Psychological distress is a state of emotional suffering associated with stressors and demands that are difficult to cope with in daily life. Qiu et al.,(2020) conducted a nationwide survey of psychological distress among Chinese people. These measures in China have kept a large number of people in isolation and affected many aspects of people’s lives. It has also triggered a wide variety of psychological problems, such as panic disorder, anxiety, and depression. This study was the first nationwide large-scale survey of psychological distress in the general population of China during the COVID-19 epidemic.

Glowacz & Schmits (2020) conducted a study to measure psychological distress during the COVID-19 lockdown: the young adults at risk. It was found that the population suffers from anxiety and depression. Young adults reported lower levels of living space, occupational activity, social contact, and alcohol use, but higher anxiety, depression, and uncertainty than older participants.

Depression

Depression (major depressive disorder) is a common and serious medical illness that negatively affects how you feel, the way you think, and how you act. Depression causes feelings of sadness or a loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed. It can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems and can decrease your ability to function at work and home.

In the study by Rehman et al.,(2020) the main aim of the research was to explore the levels of psychological distress (stress, anxiety, and depression) among different sections of the Indian population. The data was collected from different professionals including students for this study. As far as gender differences in stress, anxiety, and depression were concerned, both males and females seemed to suffer equally. The levels of stress and depression were found to be mild, whereas the levels of anxiety were moderate among males and females.

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Purpose

The purpose of this study is to assess the psychological impact of COVID-19 on young adults.

Hypothesis

1. There will be no gender difference in psychological distress, emotions, and depression.
2. There will be a significant relationship between psychological distress, emotions, and depression.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample consisted of 103 young adults (59 females and 44 males) from Chandigarh.

Measures

The following standardized measures were used:

1. **The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS-GEN)** is a self-report questionnaire that consists of two 10-item scales to measure both positive and negative affect and was developed by Watson, Clark, and Tellegen in 1988. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much).
2. **The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10)** is a simple measure of psychological distress and consists of 10 questions about emotional states each with a five-level response scale and was developed by Kessler et al. (2003).
3. **Beck's Depression Inventory (BDI-2)** is a 21-question multiple-choice self-report inventory created by Beck, which was revised in 1996.

Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaires were filled through google forms. The participants were assured of the confidentiality of the information to elicit their honest responses without any fear or inhibitions. Standardized psychological tests were administered to participants.

RESULTS

Table 1: Shows correlation between all variables

	Psychological Distress	Positive Emotions	Negative Emotions	Depression
Psychological Distress	–			
Positive Emotions	-0.228*	–		
Negative Emotions	0.468***	0.047	–	
Depression	0.674***	-0.187	0.559***	–

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 2: Shows difference among females and males in all variables

	GROUP	N	MEAN	SD	df	p value	t ratio
Psychological Distress	Female	59	24.1	8.68	101	0.822	-0.226
	Male	44	24.5	7.90			

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	GROUP	N	MEAN	SD	df	p value	t ratio
Positive Emotions	Female	59	33.3	7.05	101	0.043	-2.048
	Male	44	36.3	7.90			
Negative Emotions	Female	59	23.1	7.35	101	0.718	-0.362
	Male	44	23.7	7.71			
Depression	Female	59	12.5	9.24	101	0.318	-1.003
	Male	44	14.4	9.74			

DISCUSSION

The results found that there is a negative correlation between positive emotions and psychological distress ($r=-0.228$, $p<.05$). Further, there is a positive correlation between negative emotions and psychological distress ($r=0.468$, $p<.001$) and a positive correlation between depression and psychological distress ($r=0.674$, $p<.001$). The results also show that there is a positive correlation between depression and negative emotions ($r=0.559$, $p<.001$). The results also show that the males are higher than females in positive emotions ($t=-2.048$) but there is no gender difference in negative emotions, psychological distress, and depression.

Benke (2020) in a study done at the beginning of lockdown found that higher restrictions due to lockdown measures, a greater reduction of social contacts, and greater perceived changes in life were associated with higher mental health impairments such as anxiety, depression, and distress. In a study by Nezelek & Kuppens (2008), they examined how people regulate their emotions in daily life and how such regulation is related to their daily affective experience and psychological adjustment. Kuruppuarachchi et al.,(2014) conducted a study on psychological distress among students in Sri Lanka to determine the proportion of university students that are psychologically distressed when compared to an age and to describe the factors that may contribute to their distress. It was found that psychological distress among undergraduates was significantly greater than among the general population. More students who enter from rural schools seem to be distressed than those who enter from suburban and urban schools.

CONCLUSION

This lockdown has resulted in many challenges for young adults. The research was conducted to study emotions, psychological distress, and depression among young adults. The study was conducted on 103 young adults (59 females and 44 males) aged: 18-25 years. The standardized measures of emotions, psychological distress, and depression were administered to participants through google forms. The study revealed a negative correlation between positive emotions and psychological distress, a positive correlation between negative emotions and psychological distress, a positive correlation between depression and psychological distress, and a positive correlation between depression and negative emotions. The results also show that the males are higher than females in positive emotions but there is no gender difference in negative emotions, psychological distress, and depression. Studies show that men have greater problem-solving abilities and cognitive flexibility which can contribute to greater resilience and positive mood. Women's reactivity to stress makes it harder for them to challenge their thinking at times and this can exacerbate symptoms of low mood. Men who express their emotions are often seen as weak. Because of that, many men neglect to show their emotions because they're afraid of the repercussions. Men are told that crying in front of other people will threaten their masculinity.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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