

Understanding lockdown experience and its relationship with psychological well-being in young married adults: an exploratory study during nationwide lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Since its outbreak in December, 2019, the novel coronavirus has wreaked a havoc across the world. Stringent measures such as lockdown and self-isolation were imposed in various nations to curb the transmission of the life-threatening virus. India had been under a complete lockdown from 25th March, 2020 to 3rd May, 2020, compelling its citizens to stay indoors for an unprecedented amount of time. The 'stay at home orders' had serious implications on the mental health of the people. In light of the on-going pandemic, the current study aims to understand the lockdown experience of young married adults and its relationship with their psychological well-being. Also, with a spike in the digital habits of young adults during the Covid-19 lockdown, we intended to explore the impact of technology on the psychological well-being of its users. A convenience sample of 140 married, young adults (20 to 40 years old), staying with their partners in different parts of the country, was selected for the study. A single administration of WHO QOL BREF and self-constructed Lockdown Experience Scale was carried out. A separate list of technology usage items was also presented to the participants. Due to lockdown, the questionnaires were administered through Google forms. Results indicate that Lockdown Experience (Quality of Partner Relationship, sharing of household responsibilities, Personal Space) correlated significantly with Psychological Well Being as well as with Technology Use. Implications and suggestions for future research have been given.

Keywords: COVID-19, Pandemic, Lockdown Experience, Psychological Well Being, Married Adults

Since its outbreak in December 2019 (Wang et al., 2020), the novel Corona Virus has created a havoc in the entire world. Declared as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 2020), Covid -19 poses a serious threat to the world wide healthcare systems as well as global economy after the 2nd world war (BBC News, 2020).

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In order to prevent human-to-human transmission and reduce community spread, it was mandatory to adopt nationwide lockdown measures. With a population of 1.3 Billion people, India was at a high risk and hence drastic measures were needed to stop the numbers from rising exponentially. In view of this, the Prime Minister of India announced a nationwide lockdown initially from 25th March 2020 (Covid-19, 2020), which was extended till 3rd May, 2020. As speculated by World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 2020a), lockdown, an attempt to ‘flatten the curve’, had serious implications on the physical as well as mental well-being of people (Barkur & Vibha, 2020). Earlier studies conducted to assess the psychological consequences of other pandemics, have revealed increased anxiety, depression and stress levels during the lockdown period (Hawryluck et al., 2004; Wheaton et al., 2012). This can be attributed to various factors like disruption of daily activities, unemployment, loss of livelihood and an increase in domestic violence rates (in case of women and children) (Abramson, 2020; Chandra, 2020; Graham-Harrison et al., 2020; World Health Organization, 2020b). However, for some people, lockdown turned out to be a blessing in disguise, giving them an opportunity to spend quality time with their kids, partners and/or families (Gammon & Ramshaw, 2020).

Though young adults tend to be less vulnerable to the physiological risks of Covid-19 (Sinclair & Abdelhafiz, 2020), several indicators of poor mental health have been found to be amplified in them during Covid-19 lockdown. Among 5,000 UK adults surveyed, 70% of the young adults (18- to 24-year-olds) reported anxiety regarding future and 38% seldom experienced good quality sleep during lockdown (Royal Society for Public Health, 2020). For young married couples, the enforced lockdown has uprooted many aspects of their personal and professional life manifesting in the new norm of work from home, chores allocation and household tensions. Working couples with kids bear the additional brunt of managing childcare arrangements along with their work commitments (Biroli et al., 2020; Andrew et al., 2020; Mangiavacchi, Piccoli & Pieroni, 2020). These increased demands and pressures have been taking a toll on married couples leading to a rise in interpersonal conflicts among them (Chung, Chan, Lanier & Wong, 2020). An 80 yearlong Harvard study of Adult Development (Waldinger, 2015), revealed that deep and supportive relationships are a prime source of everlasting happiness in life. The constraints on going outdoors, however, are compelling couples to spend more time than usual with each other, thus encroaching their personal space ((Srivastava & Pandey, 2020). In these unprecedented times, the extent to which people believe that their partners understand, validate, and care for them (Reis, 2012; 2013; Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004) can be a catalyst in enhancing the quality of relationship they share with each other. In view of this, the current study aims to examine the quality of the relationship between young married couples during the nationwide lockdown.

Moreover, with a compulsion to stay indoors, the screen time of young adults has skyrocketed during the pandemic (Sinha et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2020). Global Web Index (2020) reported an increase in the consumption of digital content by 80% in the UK and 87% in the US. 68% of users were found to be seeking for Covid-19 updates on the internet making it the biggest online activity. Digital habits such as livestreams (30% users), podcasts (40% users), online reading (70% users) also gained popularity in the millennial generation during the outbreak. In terms of app usage, Facebook, with 69% users became the most frequently used app in the US for connecting with friends, family. While in the UK, Whatsapp shared the same position, with millennial consumers rising to 77%.

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However, technology is a double-edged sword when it comes to the implications it bears on the mental health of its users. On one hand, staying proactive in the digital world keeps people (emotionally) connected in times of social isolation (Kraut & Burke, 2015; Sharma & Subramanyam, 2020; Canale et al., 2020). For instance, 71% Europeans claim that technology made connecting with their friends and family convenient during the lockdown; 36% agreed to increased comfort levels in staying in touch with their loved ones as compared to the pre Covid -19 era (Kaspersky Daily, 2020). Excessive immersion in the same digital world, on the other hand, gives rise to feelings of loneliness, depression and anxiety (Horwood & Anglim, 2019; Shakya & Christakis, 2017; Sharma et al., 2020). Also, exposure to fake covid-19 news circulating on various digital platforms (eg. online news portals, apps) creates panic (Dong & Zheng, 2020) and results in digital burnout (Sharma et al., 2020). Thus, it is imperative, especially in these unprecedented and stressful times, to examine how technology can foster or hamper one's quality of life.

Furthermore, with India experiencing its first ever lockdown in national history, not much empirical evidence is available at the moment highlighting the impact of the same on the mental health of its citizens (Ahmad & Agarwal, 2020). The need of the hour is to tap on these lockdown experiences and explore the link between one's psychological well-being and the stringent lockdown measures during a pandemic. Thus, the current study aims to understand how lockdown experience and technology use are related to the psychological well-being of young married couples in the context of nationwide lockdown following Covid-19 pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

For the current research, a purposive and a convenience sample of 140 urban married young adults (86 females, 54 males) belonging to the age group of (20 to 45) years ($M = 34.31 \pm 5.76$) was taken. The sample consisted of working as well as non-working married adults who were living together with their spouses in India during the second phase of the nationwide lockdown that concluded on 3rd May, 2020.

Instruments

Following the Covid-19 outbreak, the country has been under a complete lockdown from 25th March, 2020 to 3rd May, 2020, posing restrictions on physical movement. Thus, the measures chosen for the study were presented to the participants through a Google form.

World Health Organization Quality of Life–BREF (WHOQOL-BREF). The participants' quality of life during the nationwide lockdown was measured in terms of two domains of WHO Quality of Life-BREF (WHOQOL-BREF) namely Psychological Health and Social Relationships. The 26-item instrument has displayed good discriminant validity, content validity and test-retest reliability. Domain scores produced by the WHOQOL-BREF have been shown to correlate at around 0.9 with the WHOQOL-100 domain scores (WHOQOL Group, 1998).

Lockdown Experience Questionnaire. In order to study the participant's experience of lockdown following Covid-19 pandemic, a 9 item questionnaire with a Cronbach alpha of 0.80 was constructed and standardized. Initially 12 items were constructed followed by conduction of Exploratory Factor Analysis in which three factors (Quality of relationship with partner, sharing of household responsibilities and Personal Space) were identified. The final scale included 4 items assessing Quality of Partner relationship while 2 and 3 items for

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Sharing of Household Responsibilities and Personal Space respectively. These item's factor loadings ranged from .93 to .36. Factor structure of the model is shown below (Table 1).

Table 1 Factor Loadings of Lockdown Experience Scale items

	COMPONENT		
	Quality of Partner Relationship	Sharing of Household Responsibilities	Personal Space
I am spending quality time with my partner at home these days	.93		
The onus of running the household is entirely on me these days		.88	
I think I do more of household work than my partner these days		.919	
I miss having 'me' time these days.			.819
I believe lockdown has increased my daily mental load			.54
I think lockdown is helping me and my partner in strengthening our relationship	.93		
My partner and I have divided the household responsibilities fairly among ourselves	.44		
My partner treats my time at home as less valuable these days	.52	.36	
I find it hard to spend all my time with my family these days.			.909

The factor loadings were extracted using Varimax Rotation

The scale responses were scored on a 5-point Likert Scale with response choices ranging from “Strongly Agree” (a score of 5) to “Strongly Disagree” (a score of 1). The questionnaire has shown to display good internal consistency with a Cronbach alpha of 0.80.

Technology Use. For assessing the usage of technological applications during the Covid-19 Lockdown, three separate items were included in the questionnaire. The items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale with response choices ranging from “Several times a day” (indicating a score of 5) to “Rarely” (indicating a score of 1).

Procedure

While keeping in mind the restricted physical movement due to a nationwide lockdown, a Google form was prepared that comprised of items from WHOQOL-BREF, the self-

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constructed Lockdown Experience Scale and Technology Use items. The participants of the current study were contacted via various social media platforms (WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Facebook) and were requested to fill the forms while emphasizing the confidentiality of the results. It was ensured that the participants' queries were clarified either over a call or via mail. Also, a pilot study with 20 participants was conducted in order to gain a better insight regarding the relevance of the items presented in the questionnaires.

Data collection was completed within 10 days, before the second phase of the nationwide lockdown concluded on the 3rd of May, 2020. Thereafter, correlation analysis was carried out using SPSS version 20.0 and results were interpreted in the light of existing literature relevant to the research question.

RESULTS

Table 2 Mean, Standard Deviation of Lockdown Experience, Psychological Well Being and Technology Use among married young adults during Covid-19 Lockdown (N=140)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>
Quality of Partner Relationship	14.68	3.01	4.00	20.00
Sharing of Household Chores	6.66	2.13	2.00	10.00
Personal Space	10.11	2.73	4.00	15.00
Total Lockdown Experience Scores	31.46	6.07	16.00	45.00
Psychological Well Being	26.15	3.57	15.00	34.00
Technology Use	9.00	2.73	3.00	15.00

As it can be seen from Table 2, the mean values of Quality of Relationship with Partners ($M=14.68 \pm 3.01$), Sharing of household chores ($M=6.66 \pm 2.13$) and Personal Space ($M=10.11 \pm 2.73$) indicate that participants felt the quality of their marital relationship enhanced during the lockdown along with greater 'me space' and satisfaction levels regarding the division of domestic labour among themselves.

In case of Total Lockdown Experience scores ($M=31.46 \pm 6.07$) and Psychological Well Being ($M=26.15 \pm 3.57$), the mean values fall toward the higher end of the scale suggesting a positive lockdown experience with increased levels of mental peace.

For Technology Use, the mean value ($M=9.00 \pm 2.73$) indicates a moderate frequency of video call platforms (eg. Zoom) and application's (eg. Houseparty) usage.

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Table 3 Correlations between Lockdown Experience scores and General Health, Psychological Well Being and Technology Use during Covid-19 Lockdown among married young adults (N=140)

	Overall Quality of Life	Satisfaction with Overall Health	Psychological Well Being	Frequency of using video call platforms (eg. Zoom Call) during Covid-19 Lockdown	Frequency of spending time on social networking sites (eg.Facebook,Instagram) to stay connected with friends, families during Covid-19 Lockdown	Frequency of using technological applications (eg. Houseparty, Ludo) to spend quality time with friends, family during Covid-19 Lockdown
Partner Relationship Quality	.43**	.19*	.63**	.02	-.04	.12
Sharing of Household Responsibilities	.13	.11	.17	-.19*	-.10	-.06
Personal Space	.39**	.33**	.44**	-.15	-.080	-.09
Total Lockdown Experience score	.43**	.28**	.57**	-.13	-.09	-.004

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

As shown in table 3, Quality of Partner Relationship correlates significantly with Overall Quality of Life ($r=.43$, $p < 0.01$), Psychological Well Being ($r = .63$, $p < 0.01$) as well as with Overall Health ($r = .19$, $p < 0.05$). However, Sharing of Household Responsibilities displays a negative significant correlation ($r = -0.19$, $p < 0.05$) with Frequency of using video call platforms, indicating an inverse relationship between the two.

Personal Space correlates significantly with Overall Quality of life ($r= .386$, $p < 0.01$), Satisfaction with Overall Health ($r = .328$, $p < 0.01$) and Psychological Well Being ($r = .441$, $p < 0.01$).

Total Lockdown experience scores correlate significantly and positively with Overall Quality of life ($r= .483$, $p < 0.01$), Satisfaction with Overall Health ($r = .238$, $p < 0.01$) and Psychological Well Being ($r = .571$, $p < 0.01$) indicating likelihood of a positive lockdown experience when one is content with one's physical as well as mental health.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the current research was to understand how Lockdown Experience and Technology use are related to one's Psychological Well-being in context of Covid-19 lockdown. As shown in Table 2 from result section, the mean values of Quality of Relationship with Partners, sharing of household chores and Personal Space indicate that participants experienced an enhanced quality of marital relationship during lockdown accompanied by contentment with the division of labour at home. For some couples possibly, lockdown came with an opportunity to get to know each other better and strengthen their relationship. From binge watching on Netflix to performing the household chores together, couples have been spending a substantial amount of time together during

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lockdown. The Knot Worldwide (2020), a relationship health application, for example found that not all couples are finding lockdown gloomy and dim. 40% of the survey respondents stated that they have been spending more than 18 hours a day with their partner. Also, while three fourths of the couples surveyed claimed to have learnt something novel about their partner, around half (47%) of the engaged and married respondents believed that their relationship blossomed during this period (Bhandari, 2020).

In case of Total Lockdown Experience scores and Psychological Well Being, the mean values falling toward the higher end of the scale suggest a positive lockdown experience with increased levels of mental peace. From spending quality time with the loved ones to bidding adieu to the worries of commuting every day to their offices and getting stuck in traffic, people seem to enjoy the very first experience of staying indoors. These findings are consistent with that of the survey conducted by Centre for Marketing in Emerging Economies at Indian Institute of Management, Lucknow (Independent News Service, 2020). A pan online survey covering 104 cities across 23 states, revealed that 13% of the participants treated lockdown as an unplanned and paid vacation. Also, 52% of the respondents reported to have worries regarding the Covid-19 pandemic yet managed to stay happy. Thus, being in the company of one's loved ones appears to be an aid in maintaining a state of happiness even during these fearful times.

Interestingly, in the current research, the mean value of Technology Use indicates a moderate frequency of video call platforms and app usage. Though with restrictions on physical movement in the real world, virtual world seems to be a viable and the only option to venture, the results of the current research suggest otherwise. This is perhaps because with the emerging trend of remote work and virtual classrooms, couples are trying to limit their screen time and optimize the prevailing situation by spending some quality time with each other (Gammon & Ramshaw, 2020). Couples are possibly embracing the real connections over the virtual ones.

As shown in table 3 of the result section, Quality of Partner Relationship, the first component of the Lockdown Experience Scale, correlates significantly and positively with Overall Quality of Life, Psychological Well Being as well as with Satisfaction with Overall Health. In other words, married couples sharing a stable and intimate relationship are likely to have a sound state of health— physical as well as mental. Quality of marriage has been established as a strong predictor of happiness in married couples (Russell & Wells, 1994). The findings of the current research are consistent with evidence reporting a significant link between supportive marriages and enhanced health outcomes (eg.reduced morbidity, mortality, risk reducing behaviors and better physical, emotional health) (House et al., 1988; Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; Umberson et al., 2010). Conversely, low marital relationship quality is associated with to poor health outcomes such as increase in morbidity, and degrading mental health (e.g., Carr and Springer, 2010; Woods et al., 2014).

Sharing a strong emotional bond with one's partner reduces health risks as much or greater than the well-established health-promoting practices (eg.weight loss, daily exercises, quitting smoking) (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; Pietromonaco & Beck, 2019; Pietromonaco & Collins, 2017). Also, sexual intimacy, a crucial element of a healthy marital relationship can be helpful in thriving through stressful times such as the Covid-19 Lockdown. Oxytocin, a hormone released during sexual intercourse, is essential in lowering irritability and fighting

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off periods of depression as its stimulation instills a sense of security and cohesiveness in couples (Magon & Kalra, 2011).

The second component of the Lockdown Experience Scale, sharing of household responsibilities displays a negative significant correlation with frequency of technology usage, indicating an inverse relationship between the two. In other words, the more the partners are satisfied with the distribution of household responsibilities among themselves, the less likely they are to invest time in the digital world. This particular finding can possibly be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, as participants, are occupied with performing daily household chores (with additional work commitments in case of the working ones), they tend to have less time in hand for using technological apps or video call platforms such as WhatsApp and Zoom. Secondly, as mentioned earlier, carrying out daily tasks (eg.washing dishes or clothes, buying groceries) may provide couples an opportunity to spend some quality time with each other which was not an option before the Covid-19 lockdown (Gammon & Ramshaw, 2020; The Knot Worldwide,2020). This may in turn, refrain couples from mindlessly surfing through online profiles of their friends or families who are physically distant from them.

Akin to Partner Relationship Quality, Personal Space correlates significantly with Overall Quality of life, Satisfaction with Overall Health and Psychological Well Being. These correlation coefficient values (reported in table 3 of result section) not only suggest a consistency in the findings of the current research but also points to the secret of maintaining one's mental homeostasis during a global crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic. Personal Space or the protective bubble around each person (Hecht et al., 2019) can be interpreted as a quarantine from psychological threats (eg. negative, fearful thoughts, anxiety etc.) (Furedi, 2020). Construction of personal boundaries is associated with seeking solitude (Kowalski et al., 2019) that may aid in building organic and authentic connections with oneself as well as with others.

In case of Lockdown Experience Scale, the total score correlates significantly and positively with Overall Quality of life, Satisfaction with Overall Health and Psychological Well Being indicating a direct relationship between participant's lockdown experience and their mental as well as physical well being. In other words, a high quality of life and sound physical health are likely to contribute significantly in making the historical nationwide lockdown experience a brighter as well as a happier one.

Thus, the current research draws a significant association between psychological well-being and lockdown experience of married young adults in the context of Covid-19 Pandemic. Also, it highlights the importance of healthy relationships in the real world for surviving a pandemic with utmost (mental) stability. Moreover, the findings reflect the valuable role that technology plays in keeping world emotionally connected in times of physical distancing.

For future research, a larger sample size selected using a more representative procedures may improve the generalizability and predictability of the results. Despite sincere efforts to understand couple's quality of life during Covid-19 lockdown, effects of social desirability on participant's responses cannot be ruled out completely. Conducting telephonic one to one interview with the participant's may thus help in gaining deeper insights into the lockdown experiences of married couples during a pandemic.

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Conflict of Interest

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