

## Covid-19 Pandemic: The Impact on Mental Health and Education among Young Adults

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### ABSTRACT

Mental health is an important aspect of individuals in order to perform adequately. The covid-19 pandemic had a drastic effect on everyone. People had never experienced such an emergency health situation in the recent past and the sudden entry of it made them overwhelmed. Students had one of the major impacts both in terms of mental health and education. The confinement, lack of social interaction and situations at their residences caused mental disturbances like stress and anxiety. Simultaneously, a drastic shift from offline to online education affected their learning. This was a new experience and it appears most of the time for students to adjust and nevertheless they had problems such as lack of technological knowledge, network problems and was not very much helpful for group interactions. In this review, we looked at papers that studied the COVID-19 impact on mental well-being issues and the preferences between online and offline modes of learning with the problems faced during the same course. It implied that issues like anxiety, stress and depression had in fact affected negatively among student's mental health and they preferred a hybrid mode consisting of both modes of learning that would benefit for them.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Pandemic, Mental Health, Stress, Anxiety, Online Education

American Psychological Association defines mental health as “a state of mind characterized by emotional well-being, good behavioural adjustments, relative freedom from anxiety and disabling symptoms and a capacity to establish a constructive relationships and cope with the ordinary demands and stresses of life”. The COVID pandemic had a huge effect on the mental wellbeing almost on all the individuals.

The infection was first detected in China in the year 2019 and went on to spread the entire world creating a pandemic and leading World Health Organization to term it as a global health emergency. After a devastating breakout, most of the countries went under lockdown by suspending all the activities in order to contain the spread. Simultaneously the whole education system shifted from classroom teaching to online platform.

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Received: July 27, 2021; Revision Received: September 03, 2021; Accepted: September 15, 2021

## **Covid-19 Pandemic: The Impact on Mental Health and Education among Young Adults**

Parallely, the lockdown restricted people from going outside and were literally in the confinements of their homes. It indeed created a lot of mental health issues. Few psychological problems like stress, anxiety, depression and irritability were seen in large in especially young population. The increased stress levels and anxiety were result of the dilemma of education progress, technological issues, isolation and being infected. Lazarus (1984) described stress as “a relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised as personally significant and as taxing or exceeding resources for coping”. Cheng (2009) stated anxiety as “an unpleasant psychological state in reaction to perceived stress concerning the performance of a task under pressure”. This was the period when mental health awareness rose to its peak.

It is important to notice that people with no prior mental health illness are prone to issues like post- traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which can happen in the due course (Duan, Zhu 2020). Adding to it, individual’s with already existing mental illness are under high risk of elevating it due to their sensitivity. Many psychologists came forward to help the general public. This started to affect their day-to-day activities to such an extent where they had to seek professional help.

Another important problem was the education of students. A huge population of them had never attended online classes. So, this sudden shift did create a tension as the learning in the initial stages created difficulties in comprehending which led to a debate on which mode would serve the purpose better and effective. There was a lot of pressure upon the institutions to rework on the syllabus so that it could be efficiently conducted on online platforms and the students needed sufficient amount of time to adjust.

However, this review examines the pandemic effect on the mental well-being with the mode of education in young adults. It contains empirical data that brings out contrasting result in both the domains.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This article examines the present studies on the impact of COVID-19 upon the mental health and education among young adults. The primary mode of data collection was through search engines like Google Scholar, Sage hub, Springer, Frontiers and PubMed using key terms “COVID-19”, “Mental Health”, “Online Education”, “Mental wellbeing”, “Stress” and “Anxiety”.

A total of seven peer reviewed empirical papers published in 2020 and 2021 were selected for the study. They are broadly from United States, China and India all published in English language. There were certain criterions upon which the papers were selected such as it is based on complete empirical studies, specific focus on stress and anxiety experienced by college students during the pandemic, inclusion of the comparison between the offline and online mode of education and is not gender specific and only considered college students. The literature review does not include the extremities in the psychological disorder spectrum.

### **RESULTS**

*The below reviews provide a brief description of the papers examined with supporting empirical data.*

***Effect of pandemic upon student's mental well-being***

Chongying Wang and Hong Zhao (2020) studied the effect of COVID-19 on Anxiety of students in academic field. A quantitative analysis was carried out on 3444 under graduation and post-graduation students. They had been supplied with Self Rating Anxiety Scale. It presented that 66.9% of students were facing different challenges like being unable to sit for a longer duration, 20.33% of them felt weak, tired and 15.43% of students were reported to be anxious. 40.43 was the mean score for the anxiety scale which when compared to the national norm of 29.78 indicated that their anxiety level was much higher during the pandemic compared to the regular days. So, this study indicates negative effect of pandemic on student's mental health.

Wenjun Cao et al. (2020) carried out research to investigate the psychological impact of COVID-19 upon college students. The mental well-being status of 7143 participants were assessed by a structured questionnaire. They were provided with Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7). It contains seven items based on seven core symptoms and questions the occurrence of these symptoms with last two weeks. Non parametric test was used in order to find the relationship between the sample characteristics and anxiety. The result indicated that approximately 30% of college students have been having anxiety from the pandemic. Students residing in city areas, with parents and consistent income- acted as protection against anxiety. It can be concluded that mental status of young adults affected considerably when confronted with crisis and economic crunch.

Sudeep et. al (2020), conducted a study on the effects of COVID-19 on adolescent student's mental health in United States of America. They conducted both qualitative and quantitative analysis on 195 students from different universities. To find out the general stress, Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) was used and qualitative analysis was done through interviewing by asking questions about pandemic related stressors such as academics, lifestyle, health, financial situations, social relations, work load and many more. The results were that out of 195 students, 138 students (71%) indicated increased level of stress and anxiety by the outbreak. Multiple stressors that gave rise to anxiety, stress and depression were found inclusive of fear and worry about themselves and beloved one's health- reported by 177 students, difficulty in concentrating- by 173 students, disruptions in sleeping patterns- by 168 students, decreased social interaction from social distancing- by 167 students and elevated disturbance on educational attainment- by 159 students. This can be concluded by stating that the long-lasting pandemic had negative impacts on student's mental health which interfered in their day-to-day work.

Isabel Padron et al. (2021) did a study to investigate the psychological vulnerabilities caused by COVID-19 among university students. They conducted a quantitative study on 932 Spanish students ranging from undergraduate to Ph.Ds. The variables taken into study were psychological well-being, stressors and coping techniques. Under Psychological health, Anxiety was measured using General Anxiety Disorder Scale 7, depression by Patient Health Questionnaire and Irritability by Brief Irritability Test. To identify the stressors associated with COVID-19, a questionnaire of 26 statements containing possible sources of stress were included. To find out the coping strategies, Brief COPE questionnaire was used. The result indicated that in psychological scale there was higher level of emotional disturbance. With respect to stressors, academics was found the highest distress whereas social discords were minimum. Coping techniques like distraction and relaxation were widely used, whereas healthy routines were the least to be used. This study can be concluded that the pandemic did a take toll on student's mental health on all the aspects of life.

***Student's choice of online and offline mode during the pandemic***

Lisa et al. (2020) studied the student's viewpoint of classroom and online education during the pandemic. A total of 301 under graduates took part in the study. They were provided with a questionnaire that consisted of items related to experiences from both online and offline mode and were asked to provide response according to their preferences. After the evaluation it was found that 52.6% of students preferred online education and the remaining indicated displeasure in online mode as it wasn't a viable option to group communication, unreliable data connection, excess monetary burden for internet charges, difficulty in managing time and to stay focus for longer period of time. It concluded that despite few challenges, they could adapt to the different way of education.

Muthuprasad et al. (2021) studied the student's belief and choice for online education in India during the pandemic. Around 307 students took part in the study. They were provided with the structured questionnaire consisting of statements related to online mode of learning. Information was gathered on demographic characteristics, learner's choices, insight, advantages and constraints. To analyze, items were rated on five-point continuum scale. The end result indicated that 70% of students favored online mode because it provided flexibility and comfort while 30% of students preferred offline mode due to technological constraints and technical problems. It may be concluded that the existing online learning is the beginning and as we progress academic establishments would possibly undertake a hybrid mode comprising of online and offline methods. This study inclines towards the preference of online over offline mode of learning.

Yun Hong et al. (2020) conducted a comparative analysis of online and offline education during pandemic. A survey questionnaire was circulated among the students which consisted questions about their class experience, learning effect, evaluations and curriculum. The responses indicated that online courses did have a major part in teaching but they also agree to the fact that overall teaching experience is better in offline compared to online. It is suggested to use a mix of both the modes in order to give a complete educational experience. In conclusion, it can be stated that effective and proper use of online mode helps in learning but impossible to replace the regular classroom teaching.

**CONCLUSION**

By reviewing above research papers, it can be concluded that COVID-19 indeed had negative impact on student's mental health. Stimulus like academics, financial burden, emergency health situations, lack of social interactions became stressors causing mental harm. The overwhelming situation like shifting from offline to online mode caused anxiousness in students who couldn't easily adapt to the new situation. Students who were in urban areas with parents and stable income weren't much affected by this pandemic than for those who got contracted with the infection or encountered death of loved ones.

Another issue was the transition from traditional class room learning to online learning. Students had difficulties in adapting to the new mode as they never had any prior experience with it. Challenges like lack of technical knowledge, disruption of network and inability to socially interact caused barrier in the initial days but gradually adjusted to the new setting. We can conclude that psychological factors indeed interfered in people's day to day activities causing imbalance in their lives. It is important to note that young adolescent under psychological distress started to use certain strategies to cope up with it such as not undergoing significant pressure, taking some time off from academics so that they could

## Covid-19 Pandemic: The Impact on Mental Health and Education among Young Adults

reflect upon themselves, diverting upon activities that would provide happiness was a potential resource from stressful stimulus and resorting to professional help.

The students preferred a hybrid mode of learning that involved both online and offline mode but in the current pandemic, online platform was the best method for learning as it was the only option to continue education.

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### Acknowledgement

The author appreciates all the researchers who have put in their efforts to conduct the above studies, the guidance provided from the Assistant Professor and the Department of Psychology for their cooperation in the due course.

### Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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***How to cite this article:*** Roy Choudhury N. & Manjunath S. (2021). Covid-19 Pandemic: The Impact on Mental Health and Education among Young Adults. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 9(3), 1577-1582. DIP:18.01.145.20210903, DOI:10.25215/0903.145