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Research Paper

Change in Happiness and Well-being Levels of College Students

in India Due to Covid-19 Lockdown

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ABSTRACT

Covid-19 has affected the lives of people worldwide. With the increasing number of people getting infected around the world, India too is facing a steep ascent in the curve of rising cases (Ministry of Health and Family Affair, 2020). The period of lockdown initiated by the Indian government as a preventive measure led to a large number of people experiencing a change in their mental health, especially among the youth ("COVID-19: Indirect adverse effects", 2020). The aim of this study is to fathom the 'happiness and well-being' levels from the Initial to the last stages of the lockdown in India. We examined and compared the changes in the happiness and well-being levels of college going students from the first 15 days of the lockdown to the last 15 days by collecting data in the form of standardised questionnaires namely General Happiness Scale, Positive Affect & Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) and Life Satisfaction Scale via Google forms using a convenience sampling method. We applied Dependent-T Test using SPSS to analyse the result. We hypothesize that there is going to be a significant change in the happiness and well-being levels among college going individuals. The results have been discussed in the paper in the light of literature review.

Keywords: Covid-19, Lockdown, Well-being, Happiness, College students, Mental Health

The Coronavirus pandemic has wreaked havoc around the globe. A pandemic refers to an epidemic which occurs on a scale crossing international boundaries, usually affecting people worldwide. Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that cause illness that include common cold, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). Covid-19 is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus strain (World Health Organization, 2020). The virus responsible for this disease is now known as the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). It was first detected in the Wuhan province of China as pneumonia having an unknown cause in Nov/Dec 2019. In March 2020, the world health organization (WHO) announced Covid-19 as a pandemic leading to governments around the world deciding to initiate measures to contain the spread of this virus. At present, the virus has spread to 227 countries with approximately 14.5 million confirmed cases globally (CSSE, 2020).

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A large number of literature reveals that living through community-wide disasters (e.g., natural disasters, fires) results in immediate risk to people's mental and physical health and social relationships (Bonanno et al., 2010; Norris et al., 2002). This pandemic created a large number of stress and anxiety among the population which was also observed in a study by Roy et al. (2020). Their research found that anxiety levels were high and people reported worries, paranoia about acquiring infection and sleep disturbances during this pandemic. These feelings of fear, stress, anxiety, and uncertainties among the population in these difficult times, often leads to hampering one's mental health. In fact, more than eighty percent of the people assessed during their research were of the view that mental health care is needed to deal with the issues during the lockdown. A recent survey conducted by Indian Psychiatric Association (IPA) showed a twenty percent increase in mental illnesses in India since the coronavirus outbreak (Loiwal, 2020). This reveals the impact of this outbreak on the lives of lakhs of people, especially the younger generation. A research which aimed to study the impact on mental health during this lockdown period reported high levels of depression and stress among the age range of 21-35 and 21-25 respectively. Anxiety levels were prevalent among individuals of age range 21-25. This gives us an insight that mental health has been significantly affecting the younger population (Kazmi et al., 2020).

Due to the pandemic, educational institutions were shut down which became a roadblock in the education of lakhs of students around the globe. In times of such uncertainties, a large amount of psychological impact has been noted among students. An article published in The Times of India reported their findings on 45 students which revealed that the majority of them were suffering from feelings of restlessness and hopelessness about their future. A study conducted by Cao et al. (2020) examined the psychological impact of college students in China. This study reported that mental health of college students was significantly affected due to this outbreak, especially in case of public health emergencies. This clearly indicates that Covid-19 lockdown has had a significant psychological impact on the students. Attention, help and support from family, society and colleagues are required during these tough times.

Covid-19 Lockdown & Well-being

Well-being is the experience of health, happiness, and prosperity. It includes having good mental health, high life satisfaction, a sense of meaning or purpose, and ability to manage stress (Psychology Today, 2019). Due to the severe outbreak, governments around the globe decided to implement a lockdown to reduce the spread of this virus. Lockdown is necessary for avoiding contact with the virus, but it can have a severe psychological impact on the well-being of individuals. An article published by Alradhawi et al. (2020) gave insights regarding the risk factors for mental health issues like suicide, self-harm, domestic and child abuse, etc. It highlighted the heightened anxiety and depression in the UK due to an increase in loans and loss of jobs and included college and school students in risk groups due to the uncertainties faced by them. It provided an overall view of decrease in the well-being levels and larger impact of mental health due to this lockdown. Moreover, a research that studied the change in the well-being related searches by Google trends during the lockdown period found a substantial increase in the search intensity of boredom, loneliness, worry and sadness among the individuals. It indicated that the mental health of individuals had been severely affected during the first few weeks of the lockdown (Brodeur et al., 2020).

Lockdown has had a severe impact on the lives of working and active individuals, disturbing their everyday routine and increasing distress. A study by Zhang et al. (2020) highlighted the effect of lockdown on working adults in terms of health, distress and life satisfaction in

China. The study stated that people who have stopped working due to the outbreak reported high levels of mental and physical health issues, distress and life satisfaction. It is likely that physically active individuals are more vulnerable to face well-being issues during the lockdown period.

Significant impact on well-being has been noted around this time. A research by van Leeuwen and Bourdeau-Lepage (2020) highlights spatial differences and the impact of lockdown on well-being and lifestyles of individuals in Netherlands. It reported a decrease in the well-being of individuals across the country especially in urban populations than rural areas. It revealed that people living in urban areas are more likely to face mental health issues and get bored than rural area population. The younger population living in cities suffer more from boredom and health problems, and their life satisfaction has also deteriorated due to the lockdown. It can be seen that this pandemic has affected a lot of the younger population and profound decreases in well-being levels have been found among them (Aymerich-Franch, 2020).

Covid-19 Lockdown and Happiness Levels

Happiness is a central component to well-being, but only one component. Lyubomirsky defines happiness as, "the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one's life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile" (Lyubomirsky, 2008). Lockdown definitely had a major impact on the happiness levels of individuals. Increase in uncertainties during this lockdown period in terms jobs, money, self-isolation, have led to a decrease in happiness levels. In a study conducted by Greyling et al. (2020), which studied change in happiness levels from before and after the lockdown stage, indicated a decrease in the happiness levels under lockdown. This research reported the factors which affect happiness of individuals in an extreme country case i.e., South Africa is related to social capital issues like concerns over schooling and economic issues like loss of jobs, etc. A study by Greyling et al. (2020) analysed the causal effect of mandatory lockdown on happiness in South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia. The research revealed that happiness levels decline due to the lockdown regardless of the characteristics of the country, or the type or duration of the lockdown regulations. In another study by Grevling (2021), while analysing the determinants of happiness after lockdown, they found that stay-at-home orders have positively impacted happiness during this period. However, the overall results showed that the lockdown had a significant and negative impact on happiness. Greyling et al. (2020) also found a reduction in overall happiness after the lockdown.

Happiness levels are likely to decrease during these tough times and will have an impact on individuals' own life satisfaction and well-being. In a study by Yunus et al. (2020), the implementation of Lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic appeared to have a significant impact on university students' negative emotional symptoms, happiness, and work-life balance.

There have been very few studies which highlight the impact of happiness during the lockdown which have been stated above. Several studies have studied the impact on wellbeing and life satisfaction but no study highlighted the impact of both happiness and wellbeing among the group of individuals severely affected by the lockdown i.e. the college going students. The present study wants to highlight the change in these parameters from the first phase of the lockdown towards the last and the impact it has had on the college students.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The present study includes a sample of 100 college students from India in the age range of 18-25 years who filled up the google forms questionnaire. Convenience sampling technique was used to collect the sample. Only college going students from India were considered for this study.

Hypothesis

- There will be a statistically significant difference in General happiness among college students from the first phase to the last phase of the lockdown.
- There will be a statistically significant difference in Life satisfaction among college students from the first phase to the last phase of the lockdown.
- There will be a statistically significant difference in Positive Affect among college students from the first phase to the last phase of the lockdown.
- There will be a statistically significant difference in Negative Affect among college students from the first phase to the last phase of the lockdown.

Procedure

In order to collect the data, a Google form was created and circulated among 100 college going individuals in the month of July, 2020. The form consisted of 3 parts: Informed consent, demographic information and psychological assessments used in the study. Basic information about the study was already mentioned in the forms and email address of the researcher was provided in case the participants had questions regarding the study before they decide to make an informed choice or if they wanted to withdraw from the study due to any reason. Demographic information including name, age, year of college, contact number/email address and gender was collected. The main body of the form was the Part 1 and 2 i.e., first Phase and last phase of the lockdown. All the three psychological tests were used in both of these parts. There were separate instructions for each test and were provided prior to the starting of each test. The respondents were asked to answer based on their feelings during the first phase of the lockdown in case of part 1 and Second phase in case of Part 2. It was made sure that the participants' information was kept confidential. The aim of the study and information about the psychological assessments used were provided under the column of debriefing at the end of the questionnaire. Results were sent to participants who wanted them. It was made sure that all the ethics like sharing of results, debriefing, withdrawal from the study etc. were followed. After the data was collected, statistical tool of dependent t-test was used and analysis was done using SPSS software.

Tools Used

There were in total 3 standardized tests used i.e., general happiness scale (The alpha's ranged from 0.79 to 0.94, M = 0.86). The test-retest reliability ranged from 0.55 to 0.90. Convergent validity revealed substantial correlations, ranging from 0.52 to 0.72), Positive affect negative affect Scale (PANAS-For the Positive Affect Scale, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.86 to 0.90; for the Negative Affect Scale, 0.84 to 0.87. Over an 8-week time period, the test-retest correlations were 0.47-0.68 for the PA and 0.39-0.71 for the NA. The PANAS has strong reported validity with such measures as general distress and dysfunction, depression, and state anxiety) and Life satisfaction scale (Reliability has been demonstrated in terms of high internal consistency with a value of 0.87 and test-retest coefficient of 0.82). Both PANAS and Life satisfaction scale will be used for measuring well-being.

PESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

	Descriptive Statistics							
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the difference				Sig. (2-
				Lower	Upper	t	df	tailed)
Pair 1 General Happiness								
(Before & After)	.37121	3.83715	.33398	-2.8948	1.03191	1.111	131	.268
Pair 2 Positive Affect								
(Before & After)	2.45522	5.50545	.47560	1.151451	3.39594	5.162	133	.000
Pair 3 Life Satisfaction			51078-0-2-15972	0.000		14.1.1.1.1.1.1.1.1.1.1.1.1.1.1.1.1.1.1.		
(Before & After)	.67910	3.70044	.31967	.04681	1.31140	2.124	133	.035
Pair 4 Negative Affect								
(Before & After)	58955	6.95875	.60114	-1.77859	.59949	981	133	.329

The first hypothesis states that there will be a statistically significant difference in General happiness among college students from the first phase to the last phase of the lockdown.

To understand the difference between the two phases among the college students for General Happiness, t-test was calculated. The t value came out to be 1.111 which is a positive t value indicating that the general happiness has lowered since the beginning of lockdown as seen in table 1. There isn't a significant difference between the happiness levels of college students and the Covid-19 lockdown. Thus, we can say that the hypothesis has been rejected. However, as the result is positive this indicates that there has been a slight decrease in the happiness levels but not to a significant extent. The assumption that the happiness levels will change in the happiness levels of people i.e., negative change (decrease in happiness levels) was made because of the lockdown phase which barred individuals from going out and restricted them into their houses and shut colleges and schools nationwide hampering the education of lakhs of students. One of the reasons why we didn't find a significant change in the happiness levels, can be because of the greater time available with students to spend with family. More time might have allowed them to pursue and learn new skills or hobbies that in turn helped the students to cope up with the difficult time. This is indicative of the resilient attitude of the people at the time of adversity. In fact, researchers have found that there exists a close relationship between well-being and close social relationships and thus, this could have been one of the factors that allowed individuals to remain happy during these tough times. Evidence indicates that social relationships may have a profound effect on wellbeing over the course of life (Umberson & Montez, 2010). Family relations, as well as social and tangible resources that benefit well-being, can provide a greater sense of meaning and intent (Hartwell & Benson, 2007; Kawachi & Berkman, 2001). In fact, India being a collectivistic society which puts a larger emphasis on human relationships like family, friends, colleagues, etc. It is likely that this period of lockdown allowed students to spend greater time with family and reconnect with them. These examples indicate the reason behind no significant change in the happiness levels during the lockdown period. In fact, an online survey conducted by pan-India online survey conducted by Centre for Marketing in Emerging Economies (CMEE) at Indian Institute of Management, Lucknow (IIML) revealed that at least 13% of the respondents felt happy during the lockdown situation which included students. Some were happy to stay at home and enjoy family time, others were happy to not commute everyday which is always a hustle especially during the scorching heat during summers and the latter half was happy that earth was healing. Despite different reasons, this survey indicates a positive attitude of Indians who decided to have an optimistic mindset

during these crises and make the best use of the free time available. This may have allowed them to stay calm, collected and cope better during the lockdown period.

The second hypothesis states that there will be a statistically significant difference in Life satisfaction among college students from the first phase to the last phase of the lockdown.

To understand the difference between the two phases among the college students for life satisfaction t-test was calculated. The t value came out to be 2.124 i.e., a positive t value indicating that life satisfaction of students is lowered during this period as seen in table 1. Cohen d was calculated to understand the level of difference. The value of Cohen d is 0.37 indicating that there is a significant difference in the life satisfaction levels and the Covid-19 lockdown in case of college students. Thus, our second hypothesis has been accepted. The reason behind the significant change in life satisfaction can be because the colleges have been shut and many college graduates face uncertainties related to placements, exams, further studies or internships. Thus, such a phase has become a source of tension and stress for a lot of college students, hampering their life satisfaction. A research which aimed to study the impact on mental health during this lockdown period reported high levels of depression and stress among the age range of 21-35 and 21-25 respectively. Anxiety levels were prevalent among individuals of age range 21-25. This gives us an insight that mental health has been significantly affecting the younger population (Kazmi et al., 2020). In another study by Roy et al. (2020) found that the pandemic created a large number of stress and anxiety among the population which was also observed. Their research found that anxiety levels were high and people reported worries, paranoia about acquiring infection and sleep disturbances during this pandemic. In fact, more than eighty percent of the people assessed during their research were of the view that mental health care is needed to deal with the issues during the lockdown. This indicates that Covid-19 lockdown had a considerable impact on the mental health of individuals. A study by Lombardo et al. (2018) reveals that subjective mental health contributes significantly to the satisfaction of life, being correlated more strongly than other previously identified factors. All these instances of stress, anxiety, sleep disturbances have affected the mental health of various college students across India which has in turn hampered their life satisfaction during these uncertain times of Covid-19. These unprecedented times of lockdown, when everything from the exams to placements is uncertain, creates a sense of tension for the youth who are not only concerned about their future but also about the suffering across the world. Thus, this evidence gives us better insight about the decreased life satisfaction among college students.

The third hypothesis states that there will be a statistically significant difference in Positive Affect among college students from the first phase to the last phase of the lockdown.

To understand the difference between the two phases among the college students for Positive Affect t was calculated. The t value came out to be 5.162 i.e., a positive value indicating that positive Affect of students has lowered during this pandemic period. Cohen d was calculated to understand the level of difference. The value of Cohen d is 0.87 indicating that there is a very large significant difference in the positive emotions of students due to this lockdown. Thus, our third hypothesis has been proved correct. This can be because students had been forced to stay inside the house all the time which didn't allow them to breathe fresh air and led to confinement in their own house. The levels of stress and uncertainties during this time about the pandemic, lockdown, shutdown of educational institutions could have also contributed to redacted in their positive emotions. So many things all at once may have led to loss of hope and uncertainty about their future. An article

published in The Times of India reported their findings on 45 students which revealed that the majority of them were suffering from feelings of restlessness and hopelessness about their future. A study by Aymerich-Franch (2020) reveals that the younger population living in cities suffer more from boredom and health problems, and their life satisfaction has also deteriorated due to the lockdown. During these times of uncertainties may have affected individuals especially the college students as they face uncertain times related to their internships, placements, etc. due to which their positive emotions may have significantly lowered during the lockdown. Such Instances indicate that the pandemic has affected a large number of the younger population which has led to decrease in positive emotions of satisfaction, interest, contentment, joy among them. This has also very strongly been reflected in our findings as well.

The fourth hypothesis states that there will be a statistically significant difference in Negative Affect among college students from the first phase to the last phase of the lockdown. To understand the difference between the two phases among the college students for Negative Affect t was calculated. The t value came out to be -.981 i.e., a negative value indicates that there hasn't been any significant effect in negative emotions among students during this phase. There is no significant difference in negative emotions and the lockdown among students. Thus, the fourth hypothesis has been rejected. The assumption that there would be a significant difference between negative affect and lockdown on students was assumed because of the significant impact that Covid-19 had on students' psychology. In a study by Cao et al. (2020), it was found that college students in China during lockdown faced anxieties of varying degrees which was positively correlated to academics. Research that studied the change in the well-being related searches by Google trends during the lockdown period found a substantial increase in the search intensity of boredom, loneliness, worry and sadness among the individuals. It indicated that the mental health of individuals had been severely affected during the first few weeks of the lockdown (Abel Brodeur et. al., 2020). Such instances led us to believe that negative emotions are likely to increase during these uncertain times. But the findings indicated alternative results, which can be because the Indian college students didn't let negative emotions hamper them during this lockdown and took this time as an opportunity to spend time with their family or pursue any lost hobby. In the results above we found out that the positive emotions of students decreased drastically but the negative emotions remained stagnant. This can be because people are experiencing mixed emotions during the lockdown period. A recent study led by Kate Barford explored mixed emotions. One of the findings indicated that the occurrence of purely negative emotions are rare and mixed emotions are more. When a survey was conducted in Australia during this pandemic, it reported that less than 3% experienced negative emotions and more than 70% experienced mixed emotions. People also reported positive feelings of joy and contentment. Thus, drawing parallels from this study, it is likely that the younger populations i.e., the college students are experiencing mixed emotions during this pandemic and are trying their best to cope up with the present scenario. The authors also stated that mixed feelings can prepare us to respond in flexible ways to unpredictable circumstances and can help individuals sail through this tough time.

Limitations

The present study has two limitations. One of the limitations is inability to generalize the results of the survey to the population as a whole because of the usage of convenience sampling technique. Another drawback is that the measures we utilized rely on participants' self-reports, which may be prone to under- or overreporting of symptoms.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we used the general happiness scale to measure happiness levels, PANAS and life satisfaction scale to measure well-being levels among college going students before and after the lockdown.

To explore happiness and well-being levels of college students during the pandemic, before and after the lockdown measures were introduced in India. We intended to find whether there was a statistically significant difference between these measures among college students before and after the lockdown period.

Our results were varied. We used SPSS to find whether our hypothesis was statistically significant. For happiness levels and negative affect, there was no significant difference indicating a stagnant happiness and negative emotions among college students during the lockdown period. Such a result indicates a resilient and optimistic attitude of the college students despite uncertainties during the pandemic. In case of positive affect and life satisfaction levels, there was a statistically significant reduction. This can be a result of various factors including boredom, uncertainty and anxiety about the future, stress among many others.

Considering the results mentioned above, it can be concluded that Covid-19 has had an impact on the lives of thousands of students and filled their lives with uncertainties for their future but the results gives us hope that students are able to manage and engage themselves during these tough times as the happiness levels of students has been the same. Necessary measures have been taken up by the government by introducing 24*7 helpline for any mental health related issues. Even though certain mental health hospitals have already started providing free services to relieve people from stress and anxiety during this pandemic, it is important for other institutions to do so and advertise it well so that people in need can avail this opportunity. Free sessions related to yoga and other forms of therapy that can help students relax during this time could be beneficial for them and allow them to deal with the situation with ease and calmness.

Thus, it can be concluded that Covid-19 has had an impact on the lives of thousands of students and filled their lives with uncertainties for their future but the results also give us hope that students are able to manage and engage themselves during these tough times.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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