

Research Paper

## Changing Work Scenario During Pandemic: Burnout Affecting the Psychological Well-Being of College Students

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### ABSTRACT

Burnout is a three-dimensional syndrome that includes mental fatigue or emotional exhaustion, negative feelings towards colleagues or coworkers or depersonalization, and a decline in sense of personal progress. "Psychological well-being" is defined as "a state of happiness and contentment characterized by low levels of distress, good physical and mental health and perspective, and high quality of life. It must be noted that burnout can be harmful to our health and well-being. Continuous exposure to stressors can lead to emotions of helplessness, a lack of motivation, difficulties concentrating, chronic fatigue, sleeplessness, headaches, poor performance, loneliness, and more. The aim of the present study was to explore the relationship between psychological well-being and burnout in third-year and postgraduate students in changing scenarios. A cross-sectional and correlational research design was followed to do a quantitative study among college students. The sample size was 166 student participants in the age group of 20-22 years. The Burnout questionnaire (Michelle Post) and Ryff's psychological well-being scale (Carol Ryff) was used for data collection. The data were analyzed using the statistical methods of the test for independent samples. The results indicate that there was a low level of correlation which signifies that when one variable increases the other variable decreases in an uncertain manner. Furthermore, our findings made it evident that low correlation means that while one measure rises, the other lowers in an unpredictable manner. Burnout levels that increased were linked to worse psychological well-being, while burnout levels that decreased were linked to increased psychological well-being.

**Keywords:** Burnout, Psychological Well-Being, COVID-19

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A pandemic is an outbreak of an infectious disease that has spread over a large area, such as several continents or the world, and has affected a large number of people. (Pandemic, 2021). The worldwide COVID-19 lockdown was imposed to forestall the virus from spreading and 'flatten' the epidemic curve. The lockdown's impact, on the other hand, has had far-reaching outcomes in numerous factors of life, consisting of modifications within the accessibility and structure of education delivery to students, food insecurity due to unavailability and price fluctuations, global economic depression, increased mental health challenges, wellbeing, and quality of life, amongst others. (Anumudu et al., 2021).

### *Effect of the pandemic on college students*

College life is a period considered to be fun but it is also a transition period, where one gets to polish its social, and communication skills. COVID-19 has significantly put the overall physical and mental health of college students at very high risk. In terms of physical health, the sudden shift from classroom learning to remote learning has caused various health issues like headaches, back pain due to constant sitting, eyesight issues etc. Most of the students have indulged themselves into various internships, online courses, training, and part-time jobs alongside their college studies to build out their careers which has eventually increased their workload and pressurized them to an extreme level. This inappropriate work-life balance has created havoc in the students' lives which has shown a drastic face-off between physical health problems and psychological well-being. Anxiety and depression have been significant consequences of lower mental health. So, there has been a steep decline in the overall physical and mental health which has worsened the psychological well-being of college students. During the epidemic, however, the rates of despair and anxiety have risen leading to fear and worry about their own health and the health of their loved ones were among them, as were difficulty focusing, sleep disruptions, decreased social connections owing to physical separation, and increased concerns about academic success. (n.d., Liu & Hagger). Depression and anxiety can hinder a student's academic performance and social functioning.

### *Burnout*

Educational burnout refers to feelings of weariness resulting from the necessity of studying, arising pessimistic feelings with a lack of interest in coursework, as well as the feeling of poor personal development in education and curriculum (Shokrpor, Bazrafcan, Ardani&Nasiraei, 2013). Students' reactions to burnout are subjective. People struggling with imposter syndrome considered dropping out of college. The rest give a hard pull to themselves to succeed in the tasks, putting their mental health at risk. (Carlton, 2021).

The global shutdown of colleges led to changes in patterns of education dramatically, leading to an institutional dependency on e-learning. Distance learning was perceived as burdensome by the students and they reported increased levels of exhaustion that negatively influenced their academics (Rohmani&Andriani, 2019). Amongst college students during the pandemic, burnout is rooted in the challenges that the students faced during the consistent transition introduced in the mode of delivery of education from offline to online, and then from living at home to being on-campus again. Victims of the infection were forced to isolate themselves for longer periods. The pandemic has led to a shortfall in their social skills buildout. Students had to adapt ways to study, and be in class versus via a virtual platform or doing the hybrid and taking exams. Students found it frustrating witnessing the deaths of thousands of people over a span of just two years. They had to deal with national

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and generational trauma (Valera, 2021). Students enrolled in courses in sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics have lost career-building opportunities or internships as well as prospects to participate in research programs. Difficulties in completing the research projects or uncertainty in the job markets were experienced by some. Students didn't feel a need for income during the pandemic, but definitely had a fear of infection and also suffered the loss of their loved ones (Parry, 2021).

There are various physical symptoms of burnout that are experienced by college students which include difficulty in concentration, weakens the immune system, persistent gastrointestinal problems, difficulty sleeping, and shortness of breath. Some of the behavioral symptoms include irritability, heightened emotional responses, suspicion and paranoia, substance abuse, rigid thinking, stubbornness, and unwillingness to listen to others, loss of motivation, missing deadlines, or a decline in academic performance, experiencing feelings of hopelessness, helplessness or irritability (Freudenberger, 1974; University of Colorado, 2018).

According to several studies, students have experienced burnout during their education period due to the e-learning concept, academic stress, lack of social support, isolation period, worry about the career aspects, etc. Furthermore, research has shown that student stress in academic work has detrimental implications such as mental health issues and discomfort. Therefore, these features have declined the significance of the psychological well-being of students.

### ***Psychological Well-being***

“Psychological Well-being” comprises physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Due to increased academic pressure, psychological well-being among college students has been deeply affected since the pandemic started. Many students have faced severe mental exhaustion due to the sudden shift to an online mode which has eventually lowered their well-being. This is quite evident from one of the previous studies which have examined the relationship between burnout and psychological well-being among South Indian college students who are adjusting to a virtual learning environment, undergoing behavioral changes in socializing, and dealing with a variety of worries as a result of the current pandemic (Thuruthel and Tungol, 2021). According to the findings, there is a significant negative association between burnout and college students' psychological well-being.

Excessive long-term stress can lead to burnout, and emotional, physical, and mental fatigue. When you are stressed, emotionally tired, and unable to meet your constant demands, it is known as burnout. Burnout can cause you to lose energy, reduce productivity, and be helpless, discouraged, cynical, and angry. (Smith et al., 2021) Whereas, Psychological well-being consists of positive interpersonal relationships, personal proficiency, autonomy, a sense of purpose in life, and personal growth and development. Mental well-being is achieved by finding a state of balance affected by both challenging and rewarding life events. (Ryff, 2021) Current research falls under the topic of positive and organizational psychology, a branch of positive psychology investigating “Changing work scenario during Pandemic: Burnout affecting the psychological well-being of college students.” This study focuses on young adults between the ages of 20 and 22, and the sample population is college students. As burnout has a significant role on a person's health, it is essential to study the concept from every aspect to gain a complete understanding of it. (Epps, 2021). When it comes to mental health, the importance of psychological well-being cannot be overstated.

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In the light of the above discussion, the following objectives related to the study were formulated:

### *Objective*

- To explore the relationship between psychological well-being and burnout in the third year and postgraduate students in changing scenarios.

### *Hypotheses*

- There is a significant relationship between psychological well-being and burnout in third-year and postgraduate students in changing scenarios.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Sample*

For the present research, to study the level of psychological well-being among college students during the pandemic a total of 166 students were selected belonging to various educational streams by using purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling methods. The data was collected from January 2022 to February 2022. The participants were selected on the basis of their educational qualifications i.e., students in their final year of graduation and those who were pursuing their post-graduation. The participants were selected irrespective of their gender and the state to which they belong. The form consisted of the burnout questionnaire and the psychological well-being questionnaire, along with the demographic details and the consent form for the participants. The participants were first asked for their consent and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. They were assured that the data collected was going to be used only for educational purposes.

### *Instruments*

Two tools were employed for the process of data collection carried out in a single phase

- **The Burnout Questionnaire:** A questionnaire was used known as a *burnout questionnaire*. The scale was adopted by Michelle post, which is a systematic method for determining burnout. The burnout questionnaire's reliability and validity are satisfactory, and can be used to assess burnout in the students ( $\alpha = 0.82$  to  $0.85$ ).
- **Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale:** An 18-item version of Ryff's psychological well-being scale was included in the questionnaire. Developed by psychologist Carol D. Ryff (1989), the Psychological Well Being (PWB) Scale measures consist of 42 items, that measure six aspects of and happiness and well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance (Ryff et al., 2007; adapted from Ryff, 1989). The test-retest reliability coefficient of RPWBS was 0.82. The overall alpha coefficient for the 18-item PWBS was 0.88. There was a positive correlation between perceived health and the 18-item PWBS ( $r = 0.20$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), indicating that criterion validity is acceptable.

### *Procedure*

Once the design was formulated, a form was prepared, which consisted of four parts. The first part contained a brief about the present study and a consent form.

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Prior to initiating the study, ethical consent was granted. The research was explained to the participants, and they were given forms to fill out. They were also told that if they did not want to continue with the survey, they may stop at any time and receive no penalty. All of the participants were aware of the study's goal and agreed to take part by signing the informed consent form. The second stage was filling out demographic information. The third part consisted of a Burnout questionnaire, and the fourth part consisted of a Psychological Well-being scale. The form was circulated once again among the people, and 168 responses were collected, out of which 166 desired responses were used for further evaluation. APA guidelines were followed throughout the whole procedure.

### RESULTS

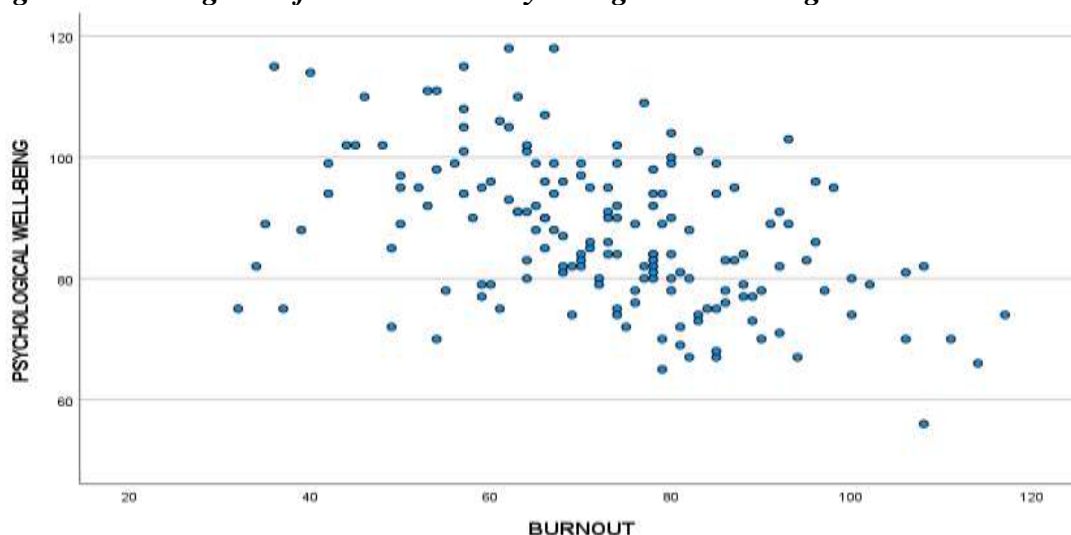
**Table No. 1 Relationship between Burnout and Psychological Well-being Correlations**

		BURNOUT	PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING
BURNOUT	Pearson Correlation	1	-.454**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	166	166
PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING	Pearson Correlation	-.454**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	166	166

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The above table shows the significant negative correlation between Burnout and Psychological well-being. The value of correlation is -.45 which signifies that the increase in the burnout level lead to a decrease in the psychological well-being of college students and vice-versa.

**Fig 1 Scatter diagram of Burnout and Psychological well-being variables**



The figure illustrates the negative correlation between the two variables- burnout and psychological well-being.

## **DISCUSSION**

On March 11th, 2020, WHO declared the COVID-19 pandemic due to a rise in the number of cases and rapid worldwide proliferation of the new Coronavirus (WHO, 2020). They claimed that maintaining personal hygiene was critical in preventing SARS-CoV-2 infection at the time (e.g., washing hands frequently, applying hand sanitizer, etc.). When these measures failed to stop the virus from spreading, a social isolation public policy was implemented by a number of government agencies in partnership with the WHO. As a result of these social distancing strategies, people's mental health problems have been exacerbated (Zhu et al., 2021). Indeed, because involuntary isolation irritates a person's sociable nature, a sudden decrease in social connection could have negative psychological consequences. Anxiety levels are rising, as are signs of severe psychiatric diseases including depression and other psychotic affective spectrum illnesses (Pietrabissa & Simpson, 2020). It's understandable to grow tired of performing the same thing over and over, they can lead to chronic exhaustion, often known as "burnout."

The results of the present study focused on how burnout affected the psychological well-being of students in their final year of graduation or those pursuing their post-graduation. The results showed a negative correlation with a value of -0.454 which signifies that an increase in the burnout level resulted in a decline in the psychological well-being of the participants and vice versa. Since the pandemic began, there has been a drastic shift in the teacher-student learning experience, from the traditional classroom to e-learning. As a result of this dramatic shift, the student's academic journey has dropped significantly, causing substantial distress. This sudden shift has become one of the primary causes of burnout. Several kinds of research have shown that prolonged exposure to screens, intelligent devices, and tablets leads to a significant rise in tension and worry. During the pandemic, mandatory lockdowns and quarantines increased stress levels, resulting in a decreased capacity to socialize, attend events, and connect with others, as well as boredom and suicidal thoughts. The anxiety or anger regarding academic performance drives individuals to participate in avoidant behaviors such as refraining from classroom activities and absence from the learning setting when they are fatigued and perceive themselves to be incapable. As a result of psychological and physical disengagement from studies, which is prevalent among students experiencing burnout and effective learning is harmed (Basri and Hawaldar, 2022). Digital learning has increased the onset of physical ailments like headaches, migraine, strain in the eyes, etc. For long periods, staring at displays and bending down over devices causes physical injury. Due to the long and twisted position when using these devices, neck strain was a prevalent issue among adolescent and pediatric users. (Fares et al.). Increased screen time has led to decreased concentration, lack of attentiveness, and mental exhaustion. New concerns occurred during the COVID-19 epidemic, such as competing family schedules, changes in eating and sleeping patterns, separation from classmates, and loneliness, all of which impacted college students negatively. Another major factor that led the pathway to burnout was the financial crisis. Many families were impacted by the financial crisis, due to which most of the parents faced various issues while paying the educational fees and handling the other expenses of their children. The Economic Weaker sections have been the hit the most as they could not afford the intelligent mobile phones to attend the online classes. Due to the significant decline in financial status, some students had to drop off their studies because their parents did not have enough money to support their education. This led to mental and emotional exhaustion among the students as they were not able to support their parents during this crisis as not even part-time jobs were available in the market at that time which they could take up and lend a helping hand to their

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parents. Studies have shown a sharp rise in the prevalence of mental concerns like anxiousness, despair, and emotional stress, as well as physical weariness symptoms including drowsiness, aches, sleeping problems, weakness, and muscle pain among young people throughout the forced lockdown period.

There is no doubt that burnout has severely affected the overall psychological well-being of the students, but some of the students were still able to manage their well-being by taking appropriate steps and precautions. The most popular activities that students were engaged in were listening to music and watching movies/series, followed by chatting online and using social media. Even though exercise is proven to reduce stress, these activities were preferred by a higher percentage of students than indoor or outdoor exercise. Many students began journaling their thoughts, creating a to-do list, and developing self-care practices to stay healthy. Mental health breaks have been one of the most critical techniques that some students have used to keep their mental health in check. This technique deals with taking small breaks from academics and spending time with oneself to comprehend one's emotions, feelings, and ideas, as well as what the individual is going through. Some educational institutions have implemented new strategies to lessen the emotional load of online studying while confined at home, like taking counseling sessions so that students can vent out whatever they are going through and provide them the attention and care that they need. In fact, during the outbreak, several schools introduced Happiness classes in their curriculum so that children could comprehend the value of happiness in their lives. Parents and teachers have also played a vital role in maintaining the student's well-being. They have provided constant support to them to tackle every situation. They helped them to acknowledge and vent out their emotions without any hesitation. Some pupils have undergone therapy to help them cope with their difficult situations. However, despite being impacted by so many unexpected occurrences, students were able to improve their well-being with the aid of parents, teachers, and social support.

Burnout frequency among medical students has been recorded as high as 46 percent during the pandemic, according to a research study. In a similar group, another study utilizing the same survey found a prevalence of 5.2 percent for moderate burnout syndrome, which could point to the COVID-19 pandemic as a contributing factor. (Martinez & Garza, 2021) There can be various reasons for low psychological well-being, like the uncertainty about the years ahead, job loss, and the dread of losing loved ones are all factors to consider (Bahlman et al., 2020).

This study has a few limitations as well. Firstly, the researcher was unable to directly gather data from the participants due to the usage of the snowball approach for data collecting. We don't know how the participant felt while answering because there was no rapport formation. Participants may have filled out the form haphazardly without really thinking about the question. And finally, even social factors like the social desirability bias might have negatively influenced the responses of the participants and no measures could have been opted to take care of that.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

There was no conflict of interests.

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