

## Sources of Stress and Happiness Amidst Covid-19 Pandemic

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### ABSTRACT

The Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) outbreak has spread across the globe. Most research has focused on the adverse impact on people's mental health amidst the pandemic situation. This study aimed to explore the lay belief and awareness about COVID-19, sources of stress, and happiness amidst the first lockdown in India, using a semi-structured interview schedule. The study sample consisted of 97 healthy community-dwelling participants. Results revealed that all the participants had an adequate understanding of COVID-19. The major sources of stress were missing socialization, disruption in routine, lack of novelty, and financial instability. Despite all the difficulties, participants explored several ways to find happiness like spending quality time with significant others and self, leisure, and engagement in new learning. Gender related variability was also found. Overall, the study emphasized that sources of happiness remain same in such adverse scenario and how they may help preserve mental health during unprecedented difficult events.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Lockdown, Stress, Happiness

The Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) emerged in Wuhan city, Hubei province, and subsequently spread worldwide. Given a serious threat to human life, it was considered a pandemic and a public health emergency (World Health Organization, 2020). The government suggested and enforced lifestyle and behavioral measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19. Like several countries, India also witnessed a stringent lockdown, including the shutdown of non-essential services, declaration of states of emergency, and confining citizens to home. Social distancing represents a vital strategy to mitigate the spread of the virus, and its potential benefits are obvious. However, it came with its own cost.

It has been reported that social distancing and related norms induce unpleasant experiences such as loneliness, detachment from relationships, loss of freedom, boredom, and uncertainty about the future (Brooks et al., 2020), which can significantly affect happiness

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and quality of life. It is widely reported that the COVID-19 pandemic and related lockdown measures were highly stressful for each of us and it exacerbated various mental health problems, including anxiety disorders, mood disorders, and substance use disorders (Hossain, 2020; Verma & Mishra, 2020).

The course of events since the outbreak of COVID-19 has been continuously evolving and dynamic that people require attainment and utilization of different ways of dealing with it. Understanding the novel pathways through which people managed their distress and attained happiness during this challenging time is essential. Happiness is one of the most desired goals in our life, which has been defined as an affective and cognitive appraisal of one's life, consisting of general satisfaction with life, the presence of positive affects, and the absence of negative ones (Diener & Chan, 2011). The presence of unpleasant negative emotions was one of the prominent and consistent findings reported during the COVID-19 pandemic and related lockdown (Hossain, 2020; Taylor, 2021; Verma & Mishra, 2020), and the presence of negative emotions would adversely affect our happiness.

As per the PERMA model of wellbeing (Seligman, 2011), sources of wellbeing are experiencing positive emotions, engagement in activities in a state of flow, possessing range of meaningful relationships, feeling of working towards some meaning in one's life and accomplishment of some personal or professional goal. In normal circumstances, the most common sources of happiness are social relationships, work satisfaction, and leisure (Argyle, 1997; Benz & Frey, 2004; Spiers & Walker, 2008). All such known and obvious sources of wellbeing were significantly affected during the lockdown. Even in the subsequent gradual unlocks, there was a disruption in personal, professional, and social life. Further, throughout all the lockdowns, most of us were uncertain about the nature, outcome, and prognosis of the disease, infected people, pandemic and its waves, and enforcement or lifting of COVID-19-related lockdown. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the sources of stress and happiness during the lockdown period under social distancing policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic since it was unprecedented in recent human history. There are a number of studies revealing presence of various mental health concerns due to pandemic, however, there is a paucity of research focusing on the 'new normal' and unravelling the distinct sources of happiness using qualitative method in Indian scenario. Hence, this study aimed to explore understanding of COVID-19, sources of stress and happiness in general population during COVID-19 through a semi-structured interview. Gender related variability was also examined.

### **METHOD**

#### ***Sample:***

The study sample included 97 community-dwelling healthy urban participants. Participants were taken using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Inclusion criteria were male and female from 18 to 55 years, educated up to 10<sup>th</sup> grade and above. Exclusion criteria were known history of major psychiatric disorder and/or neurological disorder; COVID-19 diagnosis (at the time of interview), health care workers, and COVID-19 warriors.

#### ***Tools:***

- **Socio-demographic sheet:** A socio-demographic sheet prepared by the researchers included basic socio-demographic details. Questions related to medical comorbidities, psychiatric/neurological diagnosis, major traumatic event, and diagnosis of COVID-19 were also asked.

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- **Semi-structured interview schedule:** All three researchers conducted a literature review and focused group discussion to brainstorm on themes to be explored. All the researchers consensually decided to explore the following themes using open-ended questions: COVID-19 awareness, sources of stress, and sources of happiness during the lockdown period under social distancing policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pre-decided themes/questions were used as a broad framework to maintain the flow of the interview.

### *Procedure:*

With the brief aim of the study and the tentative duration of the interview, a message inviting people to participate in the research was circulated via various social media platforms. The data collection procedure was initiated in the first lockdown phase; hence, the entire procedure was conducted telephonically to ensure safety and maximize reach. Information about study objectives and procedure was given to the participants verbally and via a Google form, followed by their consent to participate. Those who denied giving consent or fulfilled the exclusion criteria were thanked and asked to discontinue.

The researcher conducted a semi-structured interview with the rest of the participants, which approximately took 20 to 30 minutes. Open-ended questions were asked suiting the language and time required by the participant. The researcher wrote verbatim of the participants. After completing the semi-structured interview, the researcher thanked the participants and ended the telephonic interview.

### *Data analysis:*

A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the qualitative data was conducted to identify common sources of participants' stress, happiness, and understanding of COVID-19. Narratives and descriptions gathered from the semi-structured interview were manually transcribed. All the transcripts were carefully read through to get familiarized with the data. After multiple readings, similar responses and patterns were grouped for potential themes. After discussions and a common consensus, all the authors jointly reviewed, defined, and named the themes and sub-themes. For all the themes and sub-themes, frequency and percentage were obtained. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows, Version 16.0 was used. For the statistical test,  $P < 0.05$  was considered statistically significant. Demographic characteristics were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage or mean and standard deviation. Independent sample t-test was used to compare males and females on level of education and age. Chi-square test of independence was carried out to examine the relationship between gender and knowledge and awareness about COVID-19, sources of stress and happiness.

**RESULTS****Table 1 Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants**

Characteristics	Male (N=43)	Female (N= 54)	Total (N=97)
Age (in years)	M (SD) 30 (10)	M (SD) 33 (12)	M (SD) 32(11)
Education (in years)	16 (02)	16 (02)	16 (02)
<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>N (%)</b>	<b>N (%)</b>	<b>N (%)</b>
Married	12 (28%)	22 (41%)	34 (35%)
Unmarried	31 (72%)	31 (58%)	62 (64%)
Widow	00 (00%)	01 (01%)	01 (01%)
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>N (%)</b>	<b>N (%)</b>	<b>N (%)</b>
Student	06 (14%)	16 (30%)	22 (23%)
Employed	31 (72%)	23 (43%)	54 (56%)
Unemployed	06 (14%)	15 (27%)	21 (21%)
<b>Socio-Economic Status</b>	<b>N (%)</b>	<b>N (%)</b>	<b>N (%)</b>
Middle	14 (33%)	17 (31%)	31 (32%)
Upper-middle	23 (53%)	26 (48%)	49 (51%)
Higher	06 (14%)	11 (21%)	17 (17%)

As shown in table 1, a total of 97 participants formed the study sample. The mean age of the participants was 32 years, and the mean education was 16 years (i.e. graduate level). Total 64% of participants were unmarried, and 35% were married. Total 56% of participants were employed, and the rest were either student, currently unemployed, or homemakers. Male and female participants were comparable on age ( $t(95) = -1.3, p > 0.05$ ) and level of education ( $t(95) = -.13, p > 0.05$ ).

**Table 2 Knowledge and awareness of COVID-19**

Sr. No.	Major themes	Male N (%)	Female N (%)	Total N (%)	X <sup>2</sup>	p	Response
1	Scientific knowledge of COVID-19	41 (95%)	43 (80%)	84 (87%)	5.09	0.03*	“Corona is a virus which spreads through touch, contact and results in flu like symptoms.” (Male, 30 years)
2	Psychosocial consequences of COVID-19	21 (49%)	30 (56%)	51 (53%)	0.43	0.54	“It is not just a scary virus, but a torture to the society at large. It has changed our lives significantly and God knows when it will stop spreading.” ( Female, 50 years)
3	Miscellaneous	11 (26%)	11 (20%)	22 (23%)	0.37	0.63	“It is a scam. Pharma companies want to earn from mere flu like symptoms.” (Male, 20 years)

\*Significant at 0.05 level

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Table 2 shows participants' knowledge and awareness of COVID-19, number of participants responding to a particular theme and common responses. Gender differences in reporting a particular theme is also shown in table 2. Most participants (i.e., 87%) had adequate knowledge regarding COVID-19. It included different responses about the nature of the disease, symptoms, precautions to be taken, and available treatment options. Rest of the participants did have basic knowledge about COVID-19, however they chose to talk about other details related to it. Most participants (i.e., 53%) reported the psychological consequences of the scenario, such as helplessness, uncertainty, and unpredictability attached to COVID-19. Few participants also used adjectives like terrific, scary, deadly, risky, and dangerous to describe COVID-19's psychosocial impact. Miscellaneous responses included opinions on the government's way of dealing with the pandemic, the general public's carelessness for precautionary measures, conspiracy attached to COVID-19, and considering the lockdown a boon.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between gender and knowledge and awareness of COVID-19. Men were more likely to report scientific knowledge of COVID-19 ( $X^2 (1, N=97) = 5.09, p=.03$ ) than women. Gender differences in reporting psychological consequences of COVID-19 were not significant.

**Table 3 Sources of Stress amidst COVID-19**

Sr. No.	Major themes	Male N (%)	Female N (%)	Total N (%)	X <sup>2</sup>	p	Responses
1	Missing socialization	17 (40%)	28 (52%)	45 (46%)	1.46	0.30	"It seems that is has been ages seeing people, hugging them, talking freely to them. I never thought I would value meeting my colleagues and friends this much". (Female, 26 years)
2	Disruption in routine	14 (33%)	26 (48%)	40 (41%)	2.40	0.15	"I don't understand what to do with my plans and to-do list. It is all hay wired and I just can't take it". (Male, 40 years)
3	Lack of novelty/boredom	16 (37%)	18 (33%)	34 (35%)	0.16	0.83	"It is so boring being home all the time. No going out, no dinners and no fun. I want some entertainment now." (Female, 19 years)
4	Financial instability	17 (40%)	11 (20%)	28 (29%)	4.28	0.05*	"I am so stressed thinking that what if I lose my job. What will I do if there is major recession after this and no job options. This thought keeps haunting me." (Male, 32 years)
5	Negative affect	07 (16%)	16 (30%)	23 (24%)	2.36	0.15	"There is so much of negativity around that most of the time I feel sad and anxious. There is this unknown fear and it keeps affecting my peace. I have never remained so negative before this period." (Female, 38 years)
6	COVID-19 related	07 (16%)	13 (24%)	20 (21%)	0.89	0.45	"It is so annoying to keep in mind mask, sanitizer and

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Sr. No.	Major themes	Male N (%)	Female N (%)	Total N (%)	X <sup>2</sup>	p	Responses
	difficulties						distancing. I get angry whenever I have to and I get stressed if I don't follow it. Just want to get rid of it." (Male, 18 year)
7	Work-life imbalance	04 (09%)	07 (13%)	11 (11%)	0.31	0.75	"I don't like working from home. I can't concentrate and discipline myself at all. I am neither enjoying at home nor being able to work properly." (Male, 45 years)
8	Miscellaneous	01 (02%)	09 (17%)	10 (10%)	5.32	0.03*	"For me, major reason for stress is the screen. There is no option but to rely on it. Excessive usage is killing my eyes and mind, both." (Female, 50 years)

\*Significant at 0.05 level

Table 3 shows sources of stress amidst the COVID-19 outbreak, specific responses and the number of male and female participants reporting that particular source of stress. Gender differences in reporting a particular source of stress is also shown in table 3. Major sources of stress were missing socialization, disruption in routine, lack of novelty, and financial instability. Missing socialization included not being able to meet friends and extended family members, not getting equal satisfaction from the online mode of communication and missing meeting people physically and seeing expressions of people. Another major area was reported to be unpleasant and long-term changes in the routine, uncertainty about the future, and disruption in current routine and plans.

Financial instability included a reduction in pay, loss in business, anticipating a financial crisis, anticipating fewer job opportunities, and fear of loss of job. Lack of novelty/boredom included monotonous life, home confinement, and reduced activity levels. COVID-19-related difficulties were also mentioned in terms of having to take a lot of precautionary measures daily and fear of contamination. Negative emotions and state of mind being triggered by or caused by COVID-19-related scenario were also reported. It included participants feeling anxious, sad, depressed, lonely, and worried during different phases of COVID-19 and getting irritated quickly, remaining stressed, having mood swings, and overthinking things. Work-life imbalance included not being able to concentrate in work-from home, need for a separate environment for work and decreased productivity. Also, due to work from home, participants reported not having any fix schedule for work resulting in overload and burden. Miscellaneous responses included having to spend a lot more time on screen, managing without house help, and not getting own space because of being around others all the time.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between gender and sources of stress. Men were more stressed because of financial instability than women ( $X^2 (1, N=97) = 4.28, p=.05$ ). Gender difference was not significant in other sources of stress.

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**Table 4 Sources of Happiness amidst COVID-19**

Sr. No.	Major themes	Male N (%)	Female N (%)	Total N (%)	X <sup>2</sup>	P	Responses
1	Quality time	28 (65%)	42 (78%)	70 (72%)	1.91	0.18	“I am so happy that I got to spend so much time with my son. It suddenly seems that the generation gap has faded and I know him much better now.” (Female, 60 years)
2	Engaging in fitness-related activities	14 (33%)	22 (41%)	36 (37%)	0.69	0.53	“I never knew that exercising will give me so much satisfaction. But it was one major reason I could survive lockdown.” (Male, 25 years)
3	‘Me’ time	10 (23%)	24 (44%)	34 (35%)	4.72	0.03*	“It was after a long time that I actually sat with myself and looked deep within. Penning down my thoughts, ideas and wishes became a habit and made me more conscious. This I feel is what made me happy in lockdown.” (Female, 34 years)
4	Leisure	13 (30%)	17 (31%)	30 (31%)	0.02	1	“What a time it is! So glad to relieve my childhood, relax, play and have fun.” (Male, 45 years)
5	Learning/indulgence in creative activities	06 (14%)	20 (37%)	26 (27%)	6.5	0.01**	“I always used to crib about not having enough time. Thanks to lockdown, I finally could learn new skills through courses and home-practice. It makes me so happy to be finally able to do it.” (Female, 27 years)
6	Work-life	09 (21%)	09 (17%)	18 (19%)	0.09	0.79	“Only time-pass would have killed me. Ongoing work, new projects and work from home kept me going.” (Male, 30 years)
7	Sense of security	03 (07%)	06 (11%)	09 (9%)	0.49	0.73	“It feels so happy to know that I have a house, a family to take care of me, all the essentials and a healthy life. This security is needed to stay calm.” (Female, 47 years)
8	Optimism	04 (09%)	05 (09%)	09 (9%)	0.00	1	“No matter what, I am sure things will get better soon. This hopeful, wishful thought makes me feel happy

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Sr. No.	Major themes	Male N (%)	Female N (%)	Total N (%)	X <sup>2</sup>	P	Responses
							at least for a few hours.” (Female, 55 years)
9	Miscellaneous	04 (09%)	07 (13%)	11 (11%)	0.31	.75	“Lockdown is all what we needed. This clean sky, pure rivers make me feel so happy that I forget other problems.” (Male, 20 years)

\*Significant at 0.05 level, \*\*Significant at 0.01 level

Table 4 shows sources of happiness amidst the COVID-19 outbreak, specific responses and the number of male and female participants reporting that particular source of happiness. Gender differences in reporting a particular source of happiness is also shown in table 4. Major sources of happiness were reported to be quality time spent with significant others, engagement in fitness-related activities, getting ‘me’ time, leisure, and learning/indulgence in creative activities. Quality time included responses like being around family members, developing a deeper bond with them, having more enriching conversations with them, enjoying doing household chores together, and connecting to old friends. Engaging in fitness-related activities included initiating, continuing, and giving more time for engaging in various activities, like yoga, cycling, walking, and other home-based exercises. Participants also reported learning or indulging in online courses, preparation for future interviews, technology, and cooking as a source of happiness.

After years, engaging in leisure activities like indoor games, outdoor games, watching shows, using social media, reading books, and listening to music for endless hours was also reported to be giving happiness. On the other hand, continuing work-from-home and making new content related to work, carrying out research, and thinking of new ideas for the future was also reported to be a source of happiness. Getting ‘me’ time included being able to spend time with self, introspect and understand oneself better, being able to make small changes in oneself. Remaining safe and healthy, having a shelter and required amenities, not being stuck somewhere without family and an overall sense of security was a reason for happiness for some participants. Optimistic views, faith, and hope that this is a phase and things will eventually get better were also reported to be a reason for some participants' happiness. Miscellaneous responses included improvement in the environment, sense of gradual comfort in the scenario and adopting a healthy lifestyle.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between gender and sources of happiness. Women were more likely to be happy because of getting ‘me’ time ( $X^2(1, N=97) = 4.72, p=.03$ ) and indulging in learning new things ( $X^2(1, N=97) = 6.5, p=.01$ ) compared to men. For all other sources of happiness, no significant gender difference was found.

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore an understanding of COVID-19 and sources of stress and happiness during the lockdown period of the pandemic. A total of 97 participants formed the sample of the study. Study participants were relatively young and well-educated, belonging to urban area.



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Results revealed that most study participants had adequate understanding and awareness regarding COVID-19. Their responses corroborated with the existing scientific knowledge, which could be attributed to several factors, including the survival threat imposed by the virus, heightened fear response to the pandemic, and government and media-led awareness drives. Given that our study sample was quite educated and young, they had easy access to information regarding COVID-19, which could have resulted in adaptive cognitive, behavioral, and lifestyle-related changes. Several studies have reported similar findings regarding knowledge and awareness in the general population (Chakraborty & Chatterjee, 2020; Liang et al., 2020; Roy et al., 2020), which is consistent with our findings. Contrary to other study findings (Ferdous et al., 2020; Levkovich & Shinan-Altman, 2021), our study revealed gender difference in reporting scientific knowledge about COVID-19. It was observed during the interviews that despite having the required knowledge, female participants chose to talk about the psychosocial impact more than the factual details, whereas males talked about both.

The findings of the study revealed several sources of stress among the participants, like lack of socialization, disruption in routine, lack of novelty/boredom, and financial instability. Interestingly, both male and female participants endorsed missing socialization as the most important source of stress. It is well-known that human connections and socialization increase our well-being, and a lack of social support can make us feel lonely. Due to the nature of the pandemic, multiple studies revealed loneliness in the general population (Liu et al., 2020; Tull et al., 2020), and some studies found loneliness higher in the COVID-19 pandemic compared to the previous epidemic outbreak (Killgore et al., 2020). India being a collectivistic society, emphasizes on the fundamental connectedness of human beings. In such non-western cultures, individuals are motivated to find a way to fit in with others in society and to become part of various interpersonal relationships (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Hence, such prolonged social isolation and home confinement may have impacted the psychological health of our study participants.

Another reason for stress was reported to be financial instability. Apparently, there was a statistically significant gender difference in reporting financial instability as a source of stress. Being the breadwinners of the family, most men reported fear of loss of job, reduction in salary and reduction in job opportunities. It can be explained by specific gender role strain and responsibilities prescribed by Indian society and many other cultures worldwide (American Psychological Association, 2018). While for men, financial instability was the second most stressful source, for women, disruption in routine emerged as the second most stressful source. Lockdown-related lifestyle and routine changes included changes in the mode of education, work timings, modes of communication, routine throughout the day, and family members being around all the time. Most women reported having a set routine and pattern of activities established before lockdown. When that got shattered suddenly and unwillingly, they reported not being able to digest or settle with such sudden shift. While a set routine may be increasing well-being (Ludwig, 1997), disruption in the same was found to be distressing for study participants.

Boredom was another prominent source of stress for both men and women. A lot of participants felt being 'under-stimulated' due to remaining home and not knowing what else one can do during the initial phase of lockdown. Sudden disrupted routine, home confinement, number of constraints, inability to participate in enjoyable activities, and monotonous life are usually found to be causing boredom (Danckert et al., 2018; Eastwood et al., 2012) which were all exaggerated during the lockdown. Additionally, we want to

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highlight a sense of pervasive uncertainty regarding pandemics and related restrictions in our participants. Other studies conducted in the COVID-19 scenario have also reported the impact of intolerance to uncertainty on stress and anxiety (Smith et al., 2020), loneliness (Parlapani et al., 2020), and mental well-being (Satici et al., 2020) in the COVID-19 situation. Therefore uncertainty as a psychological state could have further resulted in excessive worry and helplessness in our study participants.

Although people were stressed due to the unprecedented lockdown, there were certain factors providing happiness and preserving their mental wellbeing. Quality time spent with loved ones was a significant source of happiness during the pandemic, followed by 'me' time, leisure and fitness activities, and learning new things. Quality time spent with significant others emerged as the most important source of happiness for both males and females. While not being able to connect outside led to stress, connecting to the family and spending more time with them turned out to be a stress buster for people. Several participants reported that the lockdown time brought them closer their family members and gave scope of developing deeper bonds which was the sole factor keeping them strong during the uncertain times. In concordance with this study finding, a large body of research shows that quality social relationships, social support, and spending time with loved ones enhance our well-being and life satisfaction (Argyle, 1997; Tay & Diener, 2011) and lower negative affect (Brannan et al., 2012). Previous studies have found interpersonal relations to be a source of happiness especially among Indians (Singh et al., 2016)

Additionally, for female participants, 'me' time was found to be the second most reported source of happiness. There was a statistically significant gender difference in reporting 'me' time as a source of happiness. The study sample had 43% of working women. Given the fact that Indian females struggle to balance multiple roles prescribed by society, getting more time for themselves during social distancing should not come as a surprise. It is reported that playing several roles simultaneously with inadequate time and energy often creates conflicts in the role performance of women (Bhattacharya & Pramanik, 2020). The period of lockdown probably brought some flexibility in time and scope for self-reflection for the female participants, which is found to be increasing happiness (Elliott & Coker, 2008).

While boredom or lack of novelty was a source of stress for people, it might have motivated pursuit of alternate goals for attaining well-being. Significant literature on boredom supports the notion that boredom may increase opportunity to attain social, cognitive, emotional and experiential stimulation which could have been missed (Bench & Lench, 2013). Boredom, in fact, motivated people to engage in fitness related activities, leisure activities and learning new things which provided them with happiness. In this study, both male and female participants reported happiness due to engaging in fitness related activities. Several studies have reported that fitness related activities have a positive relationship with happiness in everyday life (Downward & Rasciute, 2011; Hendriks, 2017; Zhang & Chen, 2018) and during the pandemic as well (Okabe-Miyamoto & Lyubomirsky, 2021).

Leisure activities like, indoor games, watching shows, using social media, reading books, and listening to music after years was also reported to be giving happiness. A large body of research also supports the role of leisure activities in positive affect and well-being (Takeda et al., 2015; Fancourt et al., 2020). A study conducted during lockdown also revealed a positive relationship between happiness and time spent on hobbies (Paz et al., 2022). Participants also reported learning new things and indulging in various online courses or creative activities as a source of happiness. Such creative and active engagement in

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different activities is found to be promoting well-being otherwise (Ceci & Kumar, 2015; Csikszentmihalyi, 2014) and during COVID-19 outbreak (Brosowsky et al., 2022) as well. There was a statistically significant gender difference in reporting learning new things as a source of happiness. Gender-specific roles and responsibilities can explain the same. Broadly seeing, lockdown was the time people got for themselves after years to engage in leisure, fitness, creativity and family. Corroborating with the lay understanding, literature also supports how spending time with the right people, comforting activities, and a relaxed environment can provide happiness (Aaker et al., 2011).

The findings of the study corroborate with the PERMA model of well-being. The entire scenario initially made it difficult for people to keep a positive outlook and focus on life in constructive manner. Increased negative emotions hence, disrupted people's wellbeing. When engagement in routine activities became difficult, people found it stressful. However, it is worth mentioning that by choosing different activities and adopting a flow state, they found happiness again. Relationship being another component of wellbeing, was both compromised and improve in this unique scenario. When people found their relationships and human touch being thwarted, they found multiple ways to keep it intact and developed newer bonds, which ultimately protected their wellbeing. With sudden changes and threat to one's being, people may have experienced losing sense of purpose or meaning in life. Gradually, people managed to find meaning through introspection and inculcating useful habits in new routine. What people were working towards or wanting to achieve suddenly got changed and hence for some period it seemed very stressful for people to deal with. However, people could modify their goals according to the situation and find accomplishment from achieving them. Hence, it seems that both the sources of stress and happiness seem to be in line with the PERMA model of wellbeing in this adverse situation as well.

This study has some limitations. The sample size was small. Due to the pandemic-related scenario and government guidelines for maintaining social distancing, the interviewer had to rely on smartphone access and telephonic interview instead of face-to-face interviews, which could have limited the participation. There was no representation from rural domicile and lower socio-economic strata due to the dependence on technology for the data collection. All this could limit the generalization of the findings to the overall Indian population. It was desirable to include a larger and heterogeneous sample from all age groups, socio-economic strata, and levels of education to generalize the findings to the overall Indian population.

To conclude, the present study revealed that participants had adequate knowledge and awareness about COVID-19 pandemic. Both males and females were stressed due to missing socialization, financial instability, change in daily routine, and lack of novelty. Males reported financial instability as a source of stress more than women. The study revealed the absence of interpersonal relationships and human connection to be stressful, and spending quality time during social distancing enhanced their well-being. For women, getting 'me' time and learning new things led to more happiness than for men. The top reasons for happiness reported by the present study participants included social relationships, achieving and mastering new skills, and being interested and involved in living which is consistent with the PERMA model of wellbeing (Seligman, 2011). It seems that the sources of happiness were the same as the pre-pandemic or usual scenario.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, several studies have reported stress and other mental health concerns globally. However, compared to stress, well-being and happiness

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seem more resilient (Sibley et al., 2020). At times, negative emotions, suffering, loss or isolation can promote growth and resilience in adverse situations (Wong, 2011). It seems that the pandemic made people adapt to circumstances and achieve personal growth in whatever possible way; hence, despite the uncertainties of the current situation, all the restrictions, and the pressure to adapt to the 'new' normal; people managed to find happiness. This finding is not surprising given that the 2021 World Happiness Report reveals a stable life evaluation and happiness ranking even post-pandemic (Helliwell et al., 2021). Overall, this study highlights the need to identify and promote factors that give happiness even in such pandemic times to prepare people for any such challenging and overwhelming situation that may come up in the future.

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