

Research Paper

Impact of Adjustment and Family Functioning on Wellbeing of Adolescents during COVID 19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Background and aim: Outbreak of a pandemic leaves people under a great deal of uncertainty. The life-threatening COVID 19 pandemic has undoubtedly affected all the spheres of human life around the globe. The present study aims to find out the impact of adjustment and family functioning on the wellbeing of adolescents during the pandemic. **Method:** Data were collected from 227 adolescents within 13 - 19 years using the Adolescent Wellbeing Scale, Evaluation of the Brief Adjustment Scale-6 (BASE-6), COVID-19 Household Environment Scale: The Adolescent Version (A-CHES), Adolescent report and, Socio-demographic datasheet. **Result:** Multiple regression analysis ($R^2_{adj} = .38$) indicated the significant impact of adjustment ($\beta = .56$), family cohesion ($\beta = -.20$), and family conflict ($\beta = .13$) on the wellbeing of adolescents. **Conclusion:** These results indicates that adjustment and family functioning positively contributes to the wellbeing of adolescents during the pandemic. This points out to the necessity of formulating interventions emphasising on improving family cohesion and adjustment while providing mental health services to adolescents and their parents, especially during COVID 19 pandemic.

Keywords: Wellbeing, Adjustment, Family Functioning, Adolescents

COVID 19 pandemic has impacted several domains of our life within a short span of time. In addition to the risk of getting affected by the virus and death, the pandemic has caused variations in economy, interpersonal relationships, physical health, mental health, etc. It has also inflicted uncertainty in people's lives. Governmental restrictions on social gatherings and practices like compulsory social distancing during the pandemic had a huge impact on the psychological health of individuals across lifespan (Brooks et al., 2020). Such limitations are particularly problematic for children and

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adolescents, whose psychosocial development is highly influenced and reliant on their peers (Ellis & Zabatany, 2017). Peer-to-peer interaction is more important during adolescence than at any other human age (Rohrbeck, 2003) as it places greater importance on peer pressure, striving for self-awareness, taking on more responsibility, and developing different perspectives from their parents (Crosnoe, 2000). As home-based rules and social isolation affect more and more peer-to-peer communication, teens are forced to spend more time with their parents, which can lead to altered household environments and adjustment problems.

Global research related to COVID-19 shows that children and adolescents experienced increased rates of anxiety, depression, loneliness, reduced concentration, sleeping disorders and, suicidal ideations (McIntyre & Lee, 2020., Orgiles et al., 2020., Yeasmin, 2020., Zhou, 2020) indicating a significant reduction in their wellbeing (Magson, 2021., Mastrotheodoros, 2020., Wiguna et al., 2020).

Adolescence is a period marked with series of physical and psychological changes, where the individuals deal with spurts of biological maturation, socialization demands for independence, issues of sexual identity and adjustments, educational and vocational preparations, and so on (Lakhe, 2003). Marked increase in social sensitivity, peer interaction (Somerville, 2013), and, striving for independence from parents (Meuwese et al., 2016) are associated with the wellbeing during of the adolescent.

Studies show that the wellbeing of adolescents, which is a subjective sense of contentment is correlated with their ability to adjust and adapt to changes in the environment (Bhasker & Komala, 2014, De la Barrera, 2019). Family environment is found to play a vital role in the psychosocial adjustment among young people (Deepshikha & Bhanot, 2011), especially in times of crisis (Guessoum et al., 2020). Research indicates a decline in familial relationships during pandemic which might be a result of closure of schools, online classes, working from home or grief due to loss of family members (Donker et al., 2021., Fegert et al., 2020). Lack of privacy and personal space which also increased discord among family members, a significant increase in domestic violence during the pandemic (Campbell, 2020) has adversely affected the psychological health of children (Holt et al., 2008). Financial crisis and unemployment resulted in a decline in psychological wellbeing, among adults (Haw et al., 2015., Kiernan, 2019), subsequently affecting the wellbeing of children in the household (Cobham et al., 2016., Riley et al., 2008). As there are two sides of a coin, in some families quarantine improved family cohesion, as members of the family got quality time and engaged in family activities, which is a key factor in coping with disasters (McDermott & Cobham 2012) and delivering positive outcomes (Sprague et al., 2015).

The pandemic has had a devastating effect on everyone's life. In the case of young people, lockdown, quarantine, and social distancing have hindered peer interactions that has resulted in increased demands for educational, social, emotional, and familial adjustment, and mitigated the wellbeing. Hence, in addition to studies published regarding various physical and psychological domains of adolescent health during the COVID 19 pandemic, the current study aims to find out the influence of adjustment and family functioning on the wellbeing of adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A correlational research design was adopted for the study. It attempts to determine the extent of the relationship between wellbeing, adjustment, and family functioning among adolescents during the time of COVID 19 pandemic.

Participants

The sample consists of 227 adolescents aged between 13 to 19 years. Data were collected using a convenient sampling technique through an online survey.

Inclusion Criteria

Male and female adolescents between the age range of 13 years and 19 years who can read and understand English, irrespective of their place of residence or any other socio-demographic variables were included in the study.

Exclusion Criteria

Students below the age of 13 years and above 19 years, adolescents having any kind of intellectual disabilities, developmental disorders, or any serious physical illnesses were excluded.

Tools used

The following tools were used for the study:

- 1. Adolescent Wellbeing Scale:** Adolescent Wellbeing Scale (Birleson, 1980) examines both depressive symptoms and wellbeing in children and adolescents. The scale consists of 18 items, each relating to various aspects of day-to-day adolescent life, rated on a 3-point scale. A total of 13 and above indicates depressive tendencies. The scale demonstrates acceptable internal consistency reliability in the current study ($\alpha = .790$)
- 2. Evaluation of the Brief Adjustment Scale-6 (BASE-6):** The BASE-6 (Cruz et al., 2020) measures a person's general psychological adjustment, with ratings between 1 (not at all) and 7 (extremely) for 6 items. The total score is attained for each item will give the total adjustment score. Lower scores indicate better adjustment. This scale exhibited good internal consistency in the present study ($\alpha = .829$)
- 3. COVID-19 Household Environment Scale: The Adolescent Version (A-CHES) _ Adolescent Report:** A-CHES (Behar-Zusman et al., 2020) assess the impact of restrictions due to COVID-19 on family functioning, with special reference to conflict and cohesion between adolescents and their parents. It contains the 16-item conflict and the 13-item cohesion subscales items measured on a 5-point scale. Higher scores indicate better family functioning (lower family conflict and higher family cohesion). Cronbach alpha coefficient of the scale obtained from the present study is .819.
- 4. Socio-Demographic Data Sheet:** This section of the survey collected some basic demographic information from the participants.

Procedure

After obtaining informed consent and assent, data were collected from 239 adolescents aged between 13 to 19 years using convenient sampling through an online survey (Google forms). The spreadsheet responses obtained from Google forms were converted into SPSS 20 for analysis of the data. Out of the 239 responses received, 227 remained after the data was

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cleaned. Statistical analysis techniques like multiple regression and correlation analysis were used in the present study.

RESULTS

Among 227 participants, there was 142 (62.6%) females and, 85 (37.4%) males. 37.9% of the students belonged to 13-15 age range, 30.4% were 16-17 years and 31.7% were 18-19 years. Majority of the adolescents were hailing from a nuclear family (68.3%), followed by joint family (23.3%) and single parent family (8.4%). Regarding birth order of the adolescents, 49.8% of the data consists of first born while 12.2%, 32.2% and 5.7% consists of middle born, youngest child and, single child respectively. Details regarding socio demographic profile are given in Table 1.

Table 1 Socio Demographic Profile

	Frequency (%)
Gender	
Female	142 (62.6)
Male	85 (37.4)
Age	
13-15	86 (37.9)
16-17	69 (30.4)
18-19	72 (31.7)
Type of family	
Joint family	53 (23.3)
Nuclear family	155 (68.3)
Single parent family	19 (8.4)
Birth order	
First born	113 (49.8)
Middle child	28 (12.4)
Youngest child	73 (32.2)
Single child	13 (5.7)

Table 2 Correlations for Wellbeing, Adjustment, Family Functioning, and its Subdomains

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2
Wellbeing	13.22	5.75	–	
Adjustment	24.57	8.52	.58**	–
Family functioning	94.02	11.65	-.32**	-.21**
Family conflict	46.72	9.28	.27**	.34**
Family cohesion	44.74	9.66	-.13*	.07

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

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Mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficients of study variables are shown in Table 2. The values indicates that wellbeing scores have a significant positive correlation with adjustment scores ($r = .58, p < .01$) and family conflict scores ($r = .27, p < .01$), and a negative correlation with family functioning ($r = -.32, p < .01$) and family cohesion ($r = -.13, p < .05$). Results of the study showed that adjustment, family functioning, and its subdomain family cohesion enhance wellbeing, whereas wellbeing tends to decline with increased family conflict. Adjustment scores have a negative correlation with family functioning ($r = -.21, p < .01$) and a positive correlation with family conflict ($r = .34, p < .01$). This indicates that with the increase in adjustment, family functioning increases and family conflict decreases on the contrary decrease in adjustment, family functioning decreases, and family conflict increases.

Table 3 Multiple Regression Coefficients of Adjustment and Family Functioning Subdomains on Wellbeing

Variables	B	95% CI	β	t	p
Constant	5.76	1.982, 9.545		3.00	.003
Adjustment	0.38	.300, .449	.56	9.93	.000
Family conflict	0.08	.008, .148	.13	2.20	.029
Family cohesion	-0.12	-.184, -.057	-.20	-3.74	.000

Note. $R^2_{adj} = .38$ ($N = 227, p = .000$). CI= Confidence Interval.

Table 3 shows the impact of adjustment and family functioning on the wellbeing of adolescents during the COVID 19 pandemic period. The R^2 value of .38 revealed that the predictors explained a 38% variance in the outcome variable with $F(3, 223) = 45.41, p < .001$. The findings revealed that adjustment scores ($\beta = .56, p < .001$) and family conflict ($\beta = .13, p < .05$) scores positively predicted wellbeing scores while family cohesion negatively predicted wellbeing scores ($\beta = -.20, p < .001$) i.e.; from the scoring interpretation of the scales used for this study it is obvious that, the impact of adjustment and family cohesion is positive and that of family conflicts is negative on the wellbeing of adolescents.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the influence of adjustment, and family functioning on the wellbeing of adolescents during COVID 19 pandemic.

Relationship Between Wellbeing, Adjustment, and Family Functioning

Results from correlation analysis indicate that there is a decline in wellbeing with preeminent adjustment issues. As a result of difficulties faced to adjust with the unpredictable changes the mental health of adolescents are adversely affected during COVID 19 pandemic (Magson et al., 2021., Mastrotheodoros, 2020., Wiguna et al., 2020). The emotional distress and anxiety could be due to the adolescents' reduced social interactions and difficulty adapting to the changed life circumstances.

The findings also revealed that harmony among families improves wellbeing. Family support can be beneficial for the wellbeing of adolescents during these difficult times of online schooling and restricted social gatherings. Analyzing the correlation between subdomains of family functioning and wellbeing it was found that, family cohesion contributes to the betterment of wellbeing while family conflicts negatively affect the wellbeing of adolescents during this pandemic. These findings become more insightful in the light of some former studies (Yeasmin et al., 2020., Deepshikha & Bhanot, 2011.,

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Donker et al., 2021., Cobham et al., 2016., Ellis et al., 2020) emphasizing the importance of parental support and family togetherness for the wellbeing of adolescents. Along with the support from family (Xu et al., 2010), the adjustment or the ability of adolescents to adapt, stay calm, and be occupied with positive thoughts/activities during the pandemic period contributes to better functioning within the family.

Impact of Adjustment, Family Conflicts and Family Cohesion on Wellbeing

Results indicate that wellbeing among adolescents can be explained by the level of adjustment, family conflict, and family cohesion. Studies indicate the importance of emotional, social, and familial adjustment in developing emotional stability, psychosocial adjustment, and wellbeing among adolescents (Stanescu & Romer, 2011., Tyagi & Pandey, 2015). The pandemic has brought into light the importance of family relationships on the adjustment of adolescents. A positive relationship with parents can be linked to increased cohesion and better adjustment. Moreover, the pandemic situation also reduced peer interaction which is one of the most important social connection for adolescent, in such a situation family support and cohesion is all the more important for the better wellbeing of adolescents. Factors like family cohesion, acceptance, caring, expressiveness, etc. are reported to be positively correlated with the wellbeing of adolescents (Maheshwari et al., 2020).

The positive association between better family functioning and positive psychological development is already established in studies conducted among various cultures (Leidy et al., 2010., Perrino et al., 2016., Uruk et al., 2007). It points to the need to create awareness in parents about the importance of a calm and dependable household environment for improving the wellbeing of adolescents. Looking on to the t values, it can be seen that adjustment significantly contributes more to the wellbeing than family functioning which vividly sheds a light on the individual's role in adapting oneself to these unpredictable events for their wellbeing. The results of the study point out that adjustment has a significantly greater contribution to the wellbeing than family functioning which vividly sheds a light on the individual's role in adapting oneself to these unpredictable events for their wellbeing. The results also reveal that family cohesion impacts wellbeing indicating that families can focus on engaging in fruitful conversations, extending social support and spending quality time, which improves cohesion in families and abate family conflicts. Adolescents can be helped to enhance their adaptability skills by training them in relaxation techniques, positive thinking, and more specialized techniques like emotional intelligence training programs (Jdaitawi et al., 2011). The above training programs can be crucial for boosting adjustment among adolescents, which could directly contribute to their wellbeing.

CONCLUSION

The COVID 19 pandemic has brought several drastic changes in our lives. The pandemic has highlighted the significant impact of adjustment, family cohesion on the wellbeing of adolescents. Furthermore, it points to the necessity of communication and understanding between the family members for better adjustment and wellbeing of the adolescents, especially in the phase of a pandemic where lockdown becomes unavoidable. The study puts forth the need of including psychological services to adolescents and their family during emergencies or disasters, in preparedness measures. The study also brings in the need for making policy decisions on the provision of mental health services at various levels of the community.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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