



Effect of COVID-19 on the mental health of young adults in India

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Abstract

Background: COVID-19 pandemic is devastating for human health. Apart from physical health COVID-19 has affected mental health also. This study examines how COVID-19 pandemic has affected the mental health especially in young adults in India. **Methods:** A one-time Online Questionnaire Survey was completed between the age of 18 to 30 years and form was randomly circulated across India (with the help of friends and family). **Results:** Overall, three-fourth of participants were worried about the COVID-19 pandemic where female had more fear, sadness and nightmares than male. Also, mental health is stigma in our society. **Conclusion:** Findings highlight the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of young adults in India.

Keywords: COVID-19; Coronavirus; Mental Health; Young Adults; Mental Health in India

Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic has created a disturbed situation in the well-being of people all over the world. Many people have lost their job, many have lost their life, and many are still struggling for life. Pandemic has created a self-trauma for many people.

COVID-19 has locked the whole world. India is famous for its diverse culture, religion and festivals but due to the pandemic all the festivals were dropped, all the social gatherings stopped, schools and colleges were shut down and, on this date, everything is starting to open at a slow pace. This shut down has created a long distance between human, people can't go out can't talk with their loved one's face to face and also missing all the life fun. Although these were necessary to stop the spread, but these can be the factor of rise in stress and anxiety. In March 2020, an America representative survey found that 31% of adults were very or extremely worried about

becoming infected with COVID-19, representing a 45% increase from polls conducted only a month earlier (The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, 2021). Even the hoax news circulated about Corona virus on social media made people uneasy and sad (van Der Linden, Roozenbeek & Compton, 2020) Hearing the word Quarantine itself creates an anxiety and facing that situation is even worse. Developing negative emotions, thoughts, concerns about family health and economic crisis attracted stress for common people. Similarly, as people see and hear the news from media about deaths due to the pandemic, people suffer.

Due to rising cases and lockdown in India, many people created a cage in their mind which trapped only negative thoughts and caused disrupt sleep and insomnia and also lead to some serious mental health problems like Depression, Anxiety and Stress (Singh *et*

al., 2020). This study mainly focuses on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the mental

Review of Literature:

According to the PubMed database, early evidence suggests that symptoms of anxiety and depression ranging 16-28% and self-reported stress ranging 0-8% are frequent psychological reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic and may be linked with disturbed sleep (Holmes *et al.*, 2020). Wang *et al.* (2020) studied the general population in China through Online Survey to find out the immediate psychological responses and associated factors during the initial stage COVID-19 disease and they found out that 16.5% showed moderate to severe depressive symptoms, 28.8% showed moderate to severe anxiety symptoms and 8.1% showed moderate to severe stress.

Xiao *et al.* (2020) studied the individuals in self-isolation for 14 days in China through cross-sectional, self-rated questionnaire and found out that mean anxiety score was 55.4 ± 14.3 which meant that Anxiety positively correlated with stress and negatively with

Methodology:

Young adults in India are silently suffering from these mental issues. In India mental health issues are taken as myth and most of the people hesitate to open up about this. Issue like mental health is stigma in our society. People fear that these issues will be joke for others and won't understand their situation as if it is a taboo. With the rising cases of COVID-19 in India, there is also increase in the mental health problems.

The main purpose of this research is to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting our mental health. This research is only for the young adults (18 -30) in India who are vulnerable to these issues.

Results and Discussion:

This study contributes to limited research examining the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of young adults, general population between the ages of 18-30 from different regions in India. Findings from general population of young adults COVID-19

health of young adults in India.

sleep quality and social capital (Xiao *et al.*, 2020). Social capital positively correlated with sleep quality. According to the conducted in mainland China to explore the cognition, psychological state, anxiety and depression level of students in during the 2019 pandemic year found out that out of 509 students, majority of them strongly agreed to reduce going out and gathering and anxiety and depression levels increased during the pandemic. About 24.9% of students experienced anxiety due to the pandemic. A report from National Health Service (NHS) of England published that the rate of prescribing anti-depressant during COVID-19 lockdown in UK increased significantly and the data suggested that the predictions about mental health would be severely affected by COVID-19 was correct (Armitage, 2021). However, similar assessments have not been conducted in India especially for the people between the ages of 18 to 30 yrs.

This research is designed to assess the hypothesis that COVID-19 has any impact on the mental health of young adults in India or not. A Survey research design used for general population in India between the ages of 18 to 30 years (Richardson *et al.*, 2010; Russell, Peplau & Cutrona, 1980; Spitzer *et al.*, 2006; The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, 2021).

In this research, primary data collection has been done through Online Survey by using Google Form and general population of India are taken as a variable that falls in the age group of 18 -30.

survey in India indicates that 83.8% were worried about COVID-19 pandemic (Richardson *et al.*, 2010). 77.8% were worried about someone in their family might get infected. 70.9% had fear of going out. Even, 9.4% didn't feel safe inside their home which shows that this pandemic has affected really bad. 93.2% don't feel safe in public areas.

Table 1: Questions for all Responder (N=117)

Variable	N	%
Are you worried about COVID-19 pandemic?		
Yes	98	83.8
No	11	9.4
Maybe	8	6.8
Are you worried about someone in your family might get infected?		
Yes	91	77.8
No	18	15.4
Maybe	8	6.8
Have you been infected by COVID-19?		
Yes	92	78.6
No	25	21.4
Has anyone in your family / close friend been infected?		
Yes	92	78.6
No	25	21.4
Do you fear of going out?		
Yes	83	70.9
No	34	29.1
Do you feel safe inside your home?		
Yes	106	90.6
No	11	9.4
Do you feel safe in public areas?		
Yes	8	6.8
No	109	93.2
In the past pandemic year, how often you had the feelings of fear, sadness, or worry?		
Very Often	33	28.2
Often	25	21.4
Sometimes	45	38.5
Rarely	10	8.5
Never	4	3.4
In the past pandemic year, how often you had difficulty sleeping or nightmares?		
Very Often	21	17.9
Often	15	12.8
Sometimes	27	23.1
Rarely	26	22.2
Never	28	23.9
In the past pandemic year, how often you had physical reactions, such as headaches, body pains, and stomach problems?		
Very Often	12	10.3
Often	16	13.7
Sometimes	37	31.6
Rarely	38	32.5
Never	14	12

In the past pandemic year, how often you had Panic attacks?		
Very Often	4	3.4
Often	11	9.4
Sometimes	16	13.7
Rarely	32	27.4
Never	54	46.2
How are you dealing with the financial impact of the pandemic?		
Very Unhappy	32	27.4
Unhappy	22	18.8
Ok	51	43.6
Happy	8	6.8
Very Happy	4	3.4
Has Lockdown impacted you?		
Extremely	54	46.2
Somewhat	57	48.7
Not at all	6	5.1
If it happens to face the situation of Home-Isolation or Quarantine, how worried you will be?		
Extremely	46	39.3
Somewhat	55	47
Not at all	16	13.7
Did you already have any kind of problems mentioned above before the Pandemic?		
Yes	38	32.5
No	79	67.5
How are you managing the above problems, if any, during COVID-19?		
Yoga/Meditation	32	27.4
Cooking	42	35.9
Social Media	76	65
Watching TV/movies	73	62.4
Physical Activity	58	49.6
Reading Books	42	35.9
Listening to Music	73	62.4
Workout	1	0.9
Work and Study	1	0.9
Dance	1	0.9
Stay connected with my family	1	0.9
Doing new works	1	0.9
Painting and drawing and sketching	1	0.9
Finding opportunities to work and learn new something	1	0.9
Gaming	1	0.9
I don't have any medical issues, cold, headache will be usual	1	0.9
Socialising with the family more.	1	0.9
Do you think you can handle this Situation?		
Yes	58	49.6
No	9	7.7
Maybe	50	42.7

Do you think talking about mental health is stigma in our society?		
Yes	60	51.3
No	27	23.1
Maybe	30	25.6
Do you over think?		
Yes	48	41
No	26	22.2
Sometimes	43	36.8

However, the above findings are very common for everyone and it's very natural to be worried, but the next few findings show the effects of pandemic caused by COVID-19. 10.3% and 13.7% of respondents had physical reactions such as headaches, body pains, and stomach problems very often and often respectively. 3.4% and 9.4% of respondents had panic attack very often and often respectively (Richardson *et al.*, 2010).

COVID-19 pandemic has also affected the financial conditions of people in India. The survey suggests that 27.4% and 18.8% of the respondents were very unhappy and unhappy respectively with the financial conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mental illness stigma is one of the major issues in India (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2015). People don't receive adequate mental health care and treatment as required and people don't open up about it thinking society won't accept it. The above findings also prove the previous statement as 51.3% of the respondents think that talking about mental health is stigma in our society.

Lockdown and Quarantine also has some adverse effect on the mental health (Russell, Peplau & Cutrona, 1980). Lockdown creates a distance from your friends and relative, it keeps you away from travelling to your favorite places, so it does have an impact on everyone (Loades *et al.*, 2020). The findings suggest

that 46.2% of the respondents were extremely impacted by the lockdown.

In the same way as lockdown, but its upgraded version is Quarantine in which you are not only away from your friends and relatives but also away from your family and sometimes from your own house. Many are afraid just by listening to the word quarantine, lots of questions arises in the mind when someone is asked to move to an unknown place for 14 days (Brooks *et al.*, 2020). Rich people may get all their facilities in the quarantine center, but common man does get a proper food will be a question revolving in the minds of every ordinary person. The above statement is justified by the survey which indicates that 39.3% of the respondents were extremely worried to face the situation of home-isolation or quarantine.

Young adults in India mainly are students and working people and they already have lots of pressure of work and studies. Adding pandemic in their life is just like overloading problems with a pinch of anxiety and stress (Aarons *et al.*, 2008). People who never knew about mental health issues got a great knowledge during the pandemic and people who never had any of this problem also started to get some of it. Findings indicate that 67.5% of respondents never had any kind of mental health problems before the pandemic and 7.7% of respondents were not able to handle this pandemic situation.

Table 2: Questions Stratified by Gender

Variable	Male (N=59)	Female (N=58)	Chi-Square Statistics	p-Value	Interpretation
Are you worried about COVID-19 pandemic?					
Yes	48	50	0.85	0.654	No significant association.
No	7	4			

Maybe	4	4			It accepts the Null Hypothesis
Are you worried about someone in your family might get infected?					
Yes	44	47	2.591	0.274	No significant association. It accepts the Null Hypothesis
No	12	6			
Maybe	3	5			
Have you been infected by COVID-19?					
Yes	10	15	1.383	0.24	No significant association. It accepts the Null Hypothesis
No	49	43			
Do you feel safe in public area					
Yes	4	4	0.001	0.98	No significant association. It accepts the Null Hypothesis
No	55	54			
In the past pandemic year, how often you had the feelings of fear, sadness, or worry?					
Very Often	10	23	10.762	0.029	Significant Association. It rejects Null Hypothesis and accepts Alternate Hypothesis
Often	11	14			
Sometimes	28	17			
Rarely	7	3			
Never	3	1			
In the past pandemic year, how often you had difficulty sleeping or nightmares?					
Very Often	9	12	18.319	0.001	Significant Association. It rejects Null Hypothesis and accepts Alternate Hypothesis
Often	7	8			
Sometimes	7	20			
Rarely	13	13			
Never	23	5			
In the past pandemic year, how often you had physical reactions, such as headaches, body pains, and stomach problems?					
Very Often	2	10	9.77	0.044	Significant Association. It rejects Null Hypothesis and accepts Alternate Hypothesis
Often	9	7			
Sometimes	16	21			
Rarely	22	16			
Never	10	4			
In the past pandemic year, how often you had Panic attacks?					
Very Often	0	4	10.088	0.039	Significant Association. It rejects Null Hypothesis and accepts Alternate Hypothesis
Often	5	6			
Sometimes	5	11			
Rarely	15	17			
Never	34	20			
How are you dealing with the financial impact of the pandemic?					
Very Unhappy	11	21	9.839	0.043	Significant Association. It rejects Null Hypothesis and accepts Alternate Hypothesis
Unhappy	16	6			
Ok	24	27			
Happy	6	2			
Very Happy	2	2			
Has Lockdown impacted you?					
Extremely	26	28	0.223	0.894	No significant

Somewhat	30	27			association. It accepts the Null Hypothesis
Not at all	3	3			
If it happens to face the situation of Home-Isolation or Quarantine, how worried you will be?					
Extremely	24	22	1.242	0.537	No significant association. It accepts the Null Hypothesis
Somewhat	29	26			
Not at all	6	10			
Did you already have any kind of problems mentioned above before the Pandemic?					
Yes	12	26	7.998	0.005	Significant Association. It rejects Null Hypothesis and accepts Alternate Hypothesis
No	47	32			
Do you think talking about mental health is stigma in our society?					
Yes	24	36	6.059	0.048	Significant Association. It rejects Null Hypothesis and accepts Alternate Hypothesis
No	15	12			
Maybe	20	10			
Do you over think?					
Yes	25	23	6.735	0.034	Significant Association. It rejects Null Hypothesis and accepts Alternate Hypothesis
No	18	8			
Sometimes	16	27			

This study contributes to the active, limited research examining the impact of COVID-19 on young adults, particularly through finding the differences by gender. There was a significant association in the feelings of fear, sadness, and difficulty sleeping which means that gender is dependent on these situations. Females are in greater risk for psychological problem than males (Hou *et al.*, 2020). Female had more fear, sadness and nightmares than male. Not only the mental reactions but physical reactions like headaches, body pains and stomach problem were seen more in female than male. Panic attacks were also seen more in female. These findings also indicate that there was a significant association between financial impact of the pandemic and gender. Females were unhappy with financial condition during pandemic than male. For some people, mental health issue may have risen due to this pandemic, but this study shows that mental health problems were seen in both the gender before the pandemic in which female were more than male.

Conclusion

The conclusion from this finding indicates that the effect of pandemic on the mental health is more in female than male. More concern should be emphasized on the women of this country. People hesitate to open up about their mental condition especially in India so programs regarding mental health should be developed in future. Platforms and opportunities should be provided to open up about the conditions and their issues. More concern regarding mental health should be given in the medical field. Many activities should be programmed to overcome the stigma of mental health. Several awareness programs should be started to spread the understanding of mental health problems. Therapy sessions and live interactions should be motivated in India. Mental health problems should be treated just like any other health disease without any disclosure. As soon as we start to open about the mental health and start talking about it, half of the mental illness will be reduced automatically.

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Conflict of Interest:

Conflict of Interest is declared none.

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