

Mental health of college students during Covid 19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Covid-19 pandemic has changed life of human beings, people become more concern about immunity, mental health and life pattern. It has been a period of stressful life for college students also. Main objective of the present research is to study the effect of Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health of college students. Researcher has selected 150 college students from Surat city by snowball sampling technique and used questionnaire for data collection. The data were analyzed through quantitative method. Result reveals that students have many mental health related issues during Covid-19 pandemic. These included worry about own health and family members' health. They felt difficulty in concentrating, disturbing sleeping patterns. To cope with the stress students helped themselves and also have sought support from others.

Key words: covid-19, stress, Mental health, college students

Introduction

According to D. Cucinotta, M. Vanelli, the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) was declared as a pandemic on March 11, 2020. In the world many countries have instructed their citizens to stay at home and to engage in “social distancing” so they have to be alone at home for long period. This pandemic situation creates significant stress among citizens. Comparable previous emergencies, such as the SARS outbreak, were strongly demonstrated as spreading stress and inducing psychological disease in terms of depression, anxiety but also panic attacks, and even psychotic symptoms, delirium, and increased rates of suicidal (Xiang et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the COVID-19-related containment measures imposed massive work and school closures, segregation and social distancing, deeply impacting on personal and

relational life and exposing people to experience uncertainty, feelings of isolation, and sense of “losses” in terms of motivation, meaning, and self-worth (Williams et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into focus the mental health of various affected populations. It is known that the prevalence of epidemics accentuates or creates new stressors including fear and worry for oneself or loved ones, constraints on physical movement and social activities due to quarantine, and sudden and radical lifestyle changes. A recent review of virus outbreaks and pandemics documented stressors such as infection fears, frustration, boredom, inadequate supplies, inadequate information, financial loss, and stigma (Brooks SK, 2020). Nelson et al (2020) have found elevated levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms among general population samples in North America and Europe due to Covid 19.

Mental health issues are the leading impediment to academic success. Mental illness can affect students’ motivation, concentration, and social interactions—crucial factors for students to succeed in higher education (Unger K., 2007).

Objectives

1. To study the mental health related issues of college students during Covid 19 pandemic.
2. To study the stress coping strategies adopted by college students during Covid 19 pandemic.

Limitation

This research was limited to 19 to 29 years old college students only. In present research only those college students who live in Surat city were included.

Methodology

A questionnaire was designed with the purpose of assessing the mental health status of college students both quantitatively and qualitatively. Researcher has elicited pandemic-specific stressors and their manifestations across academic, health, and lifestyle-related categories of outcomes such as effects on own or loved ones’ health, sleeping habits, eating habits, financial situation, changes to their living environment, academic workload, and social relations. These were included in researcher made questionnaire. Students were also asked about the impact of COVID-19 on depressive and suicidal thoughts. 150 students were selected by snowball sampling technique. The only inclusion criteria for participation was that participants should have been enrolled as undergraduate students in the university at the time of the data collection.

Data analysis

In the present research, collected data were analyzed by using percentages only.

Health, concentration and sleeping habit related issues

Students have different types of health, concentration and sleeping habit related issues.

Table-1 indicates their data.

Table -1

Students' health, concentration and sleeping habit related issues

| No | Mental health issue | Numbers of students (percentages) |
|----|--|-----------------------------------|
| | Health related issue | |
| 1 | Worry about families and relatives with higher vulnerabilities | 110 (73%) |
| 2 | Worry about families with more interpersonal contact | 145 (97%) |
| 3 | Worry about themselves being infected | 126 (84%) |
| | Concentration related issue | |
| 4 | Home as a source of distraction | 134 (89%) |
| 5 | Lack of accountability and motivation | 102 (68%) |
| 6 | Distracted by social media, internet, and video games | 98 (65%) |
| 7 | Lack of interactive learning environment | 112 (75%) |
| 8 | Monotony of life | 89 (59%) |
| | Sleeping habit related issue | |
| 9 | Stay up later or waking up later | 130 (87%) |
| 10 | Irregular sleep patterns | 128 (85%) |
| 11 | Increased hours of sleep | 78 (52%) |
| 12 | Difficulty of going/staying asleep | 45 (30%) |

From table -1 we can see that majority of students indicates that due to Covid-19 they were worried about their own health and the health of family members. They were more worried about older adults, those with existing health problems. Majority of students (89%) mentioned

that their home is a distractive environment, it is for relaxation rather than to study. Many students (75%) said that due to lack of interactive learning environment they lost their concentration. Additionally, monotonous life patterns were mentioned by some to negatively affect concentration on academic work. Many students (87%) stated that they tended to stay up later or wake up later than they did before the Covid-19 pandemic. Another disruptive impact brought by the pandemic was irregular sleep patterns such as inconsistent time to go to bed and to wake up from day to day. Some (52%) reported increased hours of sleep, while others (30%) had poor sleep quality.

Social relation, academic performance and eating patterns related issues

Students have many social relation, academic performance and eating patterns related issues. Table-2 shows their data.

Table-2

Students' social relation, academic performance and eating patterns related issues

| No | Mental health issue | Numbers of students (percentages) |
|----|--|-----------------------------------|
| | Social relation related issue | |
| 1 | Reduced interactions with people | 134 (89%) |
| 2 | Lack of in-person interactions | 140 (93%) |
| 3 | Restricted outdoor activities | 104 (69%) |
| | Academic performance related issue | |
| 4 | Challenges of online classes | 120 (80%) |
| 5 | Impacts on academic progress and future career | 72 (48%) |
| 6 | Worry about grades | 105 (70%) |
| 7 | Reduced motivation | 136 (91%) |
| 8 | Less interest for study | 96 (64%) |
| | Eating patterns related issue | |

| | | |
|----|---------------------|-----------|
| 9 | Increased eating | 105 (70%) |
| 10 | Inconsistent eating | 71 (47%) |
| 11 | Decreased appetite | 35 (23%) |
| 12 | Emotional eating | 60 (40%) |

Table-2 reveals that majority of students (89%) answered that Covid-19 has increased the level of isolation, their overall interactions with other people had decreased. Many students (93%) shared their worried about a lack of in person interactions, face to face meetings with friends. Others (69%) stated that disruptions to their outdoor activities (eg, jogging, walking) have affected their mental health. The biggest perceived challenge was the transition to online classes (80%). In particular, students stated their concerns about sudden changes in the syllabus, the quality of the classes, technical issues with online applications, and the difficulty of learning online. Many students (70%) mentioned the uncertainty about their grades under the online learning environment to be a major stressor. Majority students (90%) indicated their reduced motivation to learn and tendency to procrastinate. Many (70%) stated that the amount of eating has increased, including having more snacks since healthy dietary options were reduced, and others (47%) addressed that their eating patterns have become inconsistent because of COVID-19. Some students (23%) reported decreased appetite, whereas others (40%) were experiencing emotional eating or a tendency to eat when bored.

Social relation, academic performance and eating patterns related issues

Students have many types of social relation, academic performance and eating patterns related issues. Table-3 display their data.

Table-3**Students' social relation, academic performance and eating patterns related issues**

| No | Mental health issue | Numbers of students (percentages) |
|--|--|-----------------------------------|
| Living environment related issue | | |
| 1 | Changes while staying back home | 108 (72%) |
| 2 | Reduced personal interactions | 66 (45%) |
| 3 | Staying longer indoor | 53 (35%) |
| Financial condition related issue | | |
| 4 | Worried for future employment | 101 (67%) |
| 5 | Poor economic condition of family | 59 (39%) |
| 6 | Study cost | 32 (21%) |
| Study workload related issue | | |
| 7 | Catching up with online courses and class projects | 93 (62%) |
| 8 | Increased or more difficult assignments | 57 (38%) |
| 9 | Difficulty of covering the same coursework in shorter time | 50 (33%) |
| 10 | Need more effort to understand content | 24 (16%) |

A majority of these students (72%) referred to living with family members as being less independent and the environment to be more distractive. For those who stayed in their residence (45%), a main change in their living environment was reduced personal interactions with roommates. Some (35%) mentioned that staying inside longer due to self-quarantine or shelter-in-place orders was a primary change in their living circumstances. Many (67%) noted that COVID-19 has impacted or is likely to impact their own current and future employment opportunities such as part-time jobs and internships. Some (39%) revealed the financial difficulties of their family members, mostly parents, getting laid off or receiving pay cuts in the wake of COVID-19. The effect of COVID-19 on class workload among the college students was not conclusive. Many students (62%) indicated their academic workload has increased due

to COVID-19. For those who were experiencing increased workloads, they thought they needed to increase their own efforts to catch up with online classes and class projects given the lack of in-person support from instructors or teaching assistants. Some students (38%) perceived that assignments had increased or became harder to do. Other (16%) stated that they need more effort to understand the content.

Depressive thoughts and Suicidal thoughts related issues

Students have depressive thoughts and Suicidal thoughts related issues during Covid-19. Table-4 displays their data.

Table-4
Students' Depressive thoughts and Suicidal thoughts related issues

| No | Mental health issue | Numbers of students (percentages) |
|--|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Depressive thoughts related issue | | |
| 1 | Loneliness | 69 (46%) |
| 2 | Insecurity | 44 (29%) |
| 3 | Powerlessness | 23 (15%) |
| 4 | Hopeless life | 18 (12%) |
| 5 | Negative thinking | 30 (20%) |
| 6 | Poor academic performance | 24 (16%) |
| Suicidal thoughts related issue | | |
| 7 | Linking to depressive thoughts | 17 (11%) |
| 8 | Problems with parents | 14 (9%) |
| 9 | Fear from insecurity | 8 (5%) |
| 10 | Isolation from everything | 8 (5%) |

Table-4 reveals that when researcher asked about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on depressive thoughts, students said that they were experiencing some depressive thoughts

during the COVID-19 pandemic. Major contributors to such depressive thoughts were loneliness (46%), insecurity or uncertainty (29%), powerlessness (15%), hopeless life (12%), negative thinking (20%) and poor academic performance (16%). Out of 150 students, few (11%) stated that the pandemic had linked them to depressive thoughts. Other gave different response, problems with parents (9%), fear from insecurity (5%) and isolation from everything (5%).

Coping strategies adopted by college students during Covid 19 pandemic

Different types of coping strategies adopted by college students during Covid 19 pandemic. Table-4 shows their data.

Table-5

Coping strategies adopted by college students during Covid 19 pandemic

| No | Coping mechanism during covid-19 | Numbers of students (percentages) |
|----|--|-----------------------------------|
| | Self-management | |
| 1 | ignoring the news about Covid-19 | 38 (25%) |
| 2 | sleeping longer | 29 (19%) |
| 3 | distracting themselves by doing other tasks | 42 (28%) |
| 4 | drinking or smoking | 8 (5%) |
| 5 | meditation and breathing exercises | 33 (22%) |
| 6 | keeping routines | 24 (16%) |
| 7 | positive reframing | 23 (15%) |
| 8 | Doing relaxing hobbies including physical exercise | 41 (27%) |
| 9 | playing with pets | 18 (12%) |
| 10 | Journaling | 15 (10%) |
| 11 | listening to music | 42 (28%) |
| 12 | Reading | 27 (18%) |
| 13 | Drawing | 8 (5%) |
| | Seeking Support From Others | |

| | | |
|----|---|-----------|
| 14 | communicating with families and friends | 101 (67%) |
| 15 | virtual meeting with friends | 50 (33%) |
| 16 | Professional therapist | 3 (2%) |

When researcher asked about how to cope with stress and anxiety imposed by COVID-19, college students reported that they seeking support from others but were mainly using various self-management methods. Students relied on negative coping methods such as ignoring the news about COVID-19 (25%), sleeping longer (19%), distracting themselves by doing other tasks (28%), and drinking or smoking (5%). Many students used positive coping methods such as meditation and breathing exercises (22%), keeping routines (16%), and positive reframing (15%), doing relaxing hobbies including physical exercise (27%), playing with pets (12%), journaling (10%), listening to music (28%), reading (18%), and drawing (5%). Many students (67%) mentioned that communicating with their families and friends was a primary way to deal with stress and anxiety during COVID-19. Some (33%) stated that they were using a virtual meeting application to connect to friends. Only (2%) students claimed to be receiving support from a professional therapist.

Findings

The findings of this research bring into focus the effect of Covid-19 pandemic on mental health of college students. There is negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on a variety of health, academic and lifestyle related outcomes. Majority of the students were experiences stress and anxiety due to Covid-19. Students were worried about their health and family members' health. They felt difficulty in concentrating. The impact of pandemic on sleeping and eating habit also. Students expressed concerns regarding academic performance and grade. Some students reported experiencing depressive thoughts and suicidal thoughts. They felt loneliness, powerless, insecurity and hopeless life.

Conclusion

Research finding suggest that identification of students' coping behavior is important to guide them. Interventional program for students can be design and psychological counsellor and

psychologist can run it. Digital technologies and telehealth applications can be useful to enable students for self-management of mental health issues. There is a need for immediate attention to and support for students who have mental health issues.

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