

Effect of COVID Pandemic on the Mental health of Students

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Abstract

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has caused major disrupting of lifestyles across the world, with people being forced into prolonged duration of lockdowns or quarantine periods. This survey aimed at identifying the mental health issues of students during the pandemic and suggest the best possible solutions to cope with the difficult situation.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, Mental health status of students.

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the COVID -19 pandemic broke out from Wuhan ,China in the later half of 2019, the world has witnessed unprecedented number of deaths and hospitalisation.¹ This led most of the governments across the world to impose strict lockdowns extending to many weeks to contain the spread of pandemic. This current pandemic has taken a toll on the almost all the fronts of human civilisation, let it be media, social, economic, commercial, academic or political. ² Persons affected with COVID -19 had to undergo prolonged duration of quarantine either at hospitals or at home. This forced isolation led to a sudden increase in the number of people, both adults and children, who were mentally and emotionally affected. The student community across the world had to miss their regular schools and colleges due to the lockdowns and the strictly imposed travel restrictions. This unique and unfortunate

situation has led to the use of e platforms for continuing education which was difficult in the beginning. All those involved in this process had to overcome a lot of resistance to accept this new medium of e-education.³ This led to a change in the perception of education by students, teachers and even parents too. The way teachers teach and students perceive the lessons has taken a completely new turn and has led to psychological changes among the student community.

The psychological effects of COVID-19 pandemic and the associated restrictions on the mental health of students needs to be documented due to its long-term impact. Due to the growing concerns about the Mental Health Status being affected by COVID 19 Pandemic, there is an urgent need to address these concerns with scientific data. Being isolated from friends, especially in school and colleges has led to a profound impact on the well being of

the students. It has led to learning the 'e way' which has its own pros & cons.⁴ Hence, this study aimed to decode and understand the effects of COVID -19 pandemic on the psychosocial aspects of students, which in turn, has an impact on the academics.

Methodology

A cross-sectional, observational study was conducted on 396 volunteer undergraduate students, to analyze the effect of COVID Pandemic on the Mental health of Students with a questionnaire, designed on Google form, comprising majorly of closed-ended and a few open-ended questions. The study was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee and compliance to Helsinki declaration on Rights of Participants in a Research was fully ensured. The participation in the study was totally voluntary, and the participants were permitted to withdraw from study at their choice without

having any negative implications. The students were included in the study group only after explicitly taking informed consent.

Demographic information included age (recorded as continuous variable), gender (male, female, other), and whether the student belonged to other health sciences profession.

A sample of 396 students belonging to different professional colleges across the nation were included in the pilot study. The Google form was sent via E-mail.

Results

The Participants consisted of 72.8% Girls & 29.3 % Boys, majority of them being in the age group of 22-25. The questions included were regarding online teaching, mental health status, clinicals and other relevant health status. Table 1: gives the summary of the responses of the participants regarding the above said topics.

Table 1: *Summary of the responses to various question regarding online teaching, mental health status, clinicals and other relevant health status*

| Online teaching | Mental health status | Clinicals | Other health status |
|---|--|---|--|
| 33.3% found the online method of teaching useful while 23.3% felt it otherwise. | Around 60% of the students were aware of mental health camps & a very few around 8.8 % have undergone mental health check-ups. | 50.4% of students feared contacting covid 19 infection | 70.5 % of the students said that they have learnt a new skill during the COVID 19 Pandemic and felt positive during pandemic |
| 40.4% said that online learning has not replaced clinical teaching 81.4% said they cannot acquire practical skill online | 52.2% felt mental and physical problems during the lockdown. | 64.6% felt the workplace had taken adequate infection control measures to ensure safe working environment | At the time of the study, only 21% were tested positive for corona |
| 28.3% had trouble concentrating during an online lecture | 33% felt avoiding people sometimes, 19% often felt the same. | 43.7% felt they were unable to communicate with patients properly | around 51.9% sleep for 4-6 hours a day. 41% gave a rating of 4 for quality of sleep |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| 71.4% had difficulty in recalling previous lecture during pandemic | 20% felt low for more than 2 weeks in a row. | 82% were confident of working on patients due to vaccines | 67% said that lockdown affected daily activities |
| | | Almost equal number of students were both for and against postponing of clinical procedures. | Around 20 % had trouble sleeping 25% experience over eating or poor eating |
| | | 63.7% were worried about practicing dentistry due to pandemic | 13% always experienced grouchiness during pandemic |
| | | Almost 96% of students were vaccinated with 2 doses of vaccine. | |

Discussion

A plethora of research has helped us understand the gravity of mental health issues prevailing in academia. Mental health refers to cognitive, behavioural, and emotional well-being. Conditions such as stress, depression, and anxiety can affect mental health to a greater extent & thus affect a student's daily routine by causing a deleterious effect on their motivation, concentration, and social interactions. 8 Mental health issues can significantly impair students' academic success and social interactions thus affecting their career and personal opportunities.

Javed et al⁴ in their study also concur with the results obtained in our research that dealing with the mental challenges thrown up by this pandemic needs to be taken up seriously and destressing can be done by spending time with family members, indulging in different healthy exercises, sports and taking a break from the traditional social media

The COVID 19 Pandemic has caused profound implications on health and economic progress disrupting the demand & supply chain across the world placing everyone in an unprecedented situation thus affecting all walks of life. Education is among those aspects which has been hit to a greater extent thus affecting the mental health of the students. There has been a paradigm shift from traditional classroom teaching to online teaching methods due to the pandemic which has further exacerbated academic stressors for students. The prevalence of the pandemic has accentuated fear among students constraining their physical activities. Fear of contacting COVID 19 infection, boredom, inadequate supplies & financial loss are some of the stress-causing factors which are impediment to their mental health. In our study, only one third of the participants found online teaching useful. This has been substantiated by other studies wherein the result has shown that online teaching is not favoured. This low acceptance may be because of other co factors like boredom, lack of active participation of motivation, missing friends. 8 They felt that online learning cannot replace clinical teaching and practical skills could be learnt properly

only in offline mode. Many found difficulty in concentrating during online lecture and had difficulties in recalling previous lectures.⁵

According to Ma Z et al⁶ conducted an online survey in which they found the students to be afflicted with acute stress, anxiety and depressive symptoms associated with the COVID-19 pandemic due to prolonged periods of isolation/quarantine. This pandemic provided all the ingredients for heightened mental health problems like multiple epidemic and psychosocial factors such as family members being infected, media bombardment with excessive COVID news, low social support, academic pressures and prior mental health problems. The study recommends psychosocial support and counselling services to be provided to students at risk.

In dentistry, clinical expertise come from rigorous practice. But as Corona virus spreads through aerosols⁷, clinical procedures were postponed unless it was an emergency wherein with due protection, the procedures could be done. Rest of the procedures were postponed. This led to students losing time to learn clinical skills. This was one of the reasons more than 40% of the students were unable to communicate with the patients properly. They were not confident of their skills due to substantial decrease in the practical experience.³

Another reason was fear of contacting COVID while working on the patient. A strong proportion of students felt that adequate infection control measures were undertaken at the workplace to ensure safe work environment. In spite of this, the consensus regarding conduction of clinical procedures were split equally between students. With vaccination, a majority were confident of working on patients. A few were still worried about practicing dentistry due to pandemic.

A multitude of compassionate academic activities which were carried out by the students before the pandemic are not being accomplished by them due to the consequences of the pandemic. A series of adverse effects which have a deteriorating influence on the

mental health of the students include high degree of irritability, mood swings, anxiety, low mood, inclined towards emotional eating, difficulty to recall, disturbed sleep.^{8,9} Students often tend to lose concentration & have difficulty in recalling the previous lectures. Academic performances were found to be low. ⁶ Lack of communication with the patient has been stressful to the students which reduces their confidence to work on patients. The Pandemic has not only caused issues academically but has created a huge negative impact on the students' social life thereby affecting the relationship with their loved ones or family members. Some students might also lose appetite thus increasing their chances of gaining weight due to improper diet control or over-eating which is common during the pandemic. This further affects their standard of living & causes hindrance to their mental health status.

The percentage of people knowing about mental health camps was substantial. But actually, very few have undergone the checkup. People who were positive are suggested to go for counselling to cope up with the fear associated due to the new disease and high rate of mortality.

Majority had physical and mental issues during lockdown as they were not prepared for the isolation it brought about. a low percentage felt depressed for more than 2 weeks. A third of the participants avoided people during lockdown due to fear factor. But only a small percent was tested positive for corona. The lockdown affected daily activities. Some experienced disturbed sleep pattern and the eating habits A majority of them used the lockdown time learn a new skill. They spent most of the time listening to music and pursued their hobbies.

To deal with stress, many people have tried yoga and meditation¹⁰ especially during the prolonged lock-down times.

Studies have shown that the social distancing norms imposed due to the Pandemic have severely affected students due to their greater concerns about social isolation, and increased stress, anxiety, and depression as a result.¹¹ In

such a scenario, the students will require responsive & methodical way of approaching and solving their problems by the academic institutions. Further research is needed to assess the risk factors associated with the mental health being affected by COVID 19 Pandemic.

Conclusion

Ensuring adequate infection control measures to ensure safe working environment & periodic counselling can help students cope up with the negative impact of covid 19 on mental health. Support systems from grass root level to national level is the key to fight the impact of COVID 19 pandemic on the mental health of the students.

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