

## Health Issues of Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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### **Abstract**

*The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the health and well-being of students worldwide, introducing a multitude of challenges across various dimensions. With lockdowns, social distancing measures and closures of recreational facilities, students have faced challenges in maintaining regular physical activity. The lack of exercise contributed to physical health issues including obesity, cardiovascular problems and weakened immune systems. The prolonged period of uncertainty, social isolation and disruptions in routine has taken a toll on the mental health of students. Cases of stress, anxiety and depression have been reported. Changes in daily routines and increased stress levels have contributed to irregular sleep patterns among students. Inadequate sleep can have profound effects on cognitive function, mood regulation and overall health. The shift to online education has brought about new health issues, including increased screen time and sedentary behavior. Students had to face difficulties in maintaining a healthy balance between academic responsibilities and self-care, leading to physical strain and fatigue. In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced a myriad of health issues for students, encompassing mental, physical, and social dimensions. In this paper data was collected through questionnaire on Google form from the undergraduate students of the college after pandemic. Key health issues faced by students during this unprecedented crisis were discussed with students to get all the information. In the future such types of studies will help in understanding and addressing these challenges for developing comprehensive strategies to support the well-being of students during and beyond the pandemic.*

### **Keywords**

*COVID-19, Cognitive Function, Mental and Physical Problems.*

## **Introduction**

The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11, 2020. COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019), has impacted the medical health service systems worldwide. Many preventive practices such as isolation, quarantine, and social distancing were imposed to prevent the spread of the virus but in the long term it affected the mental health and well-being of people (Brooks et al., 2020; Rahman et al., 2021). The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic significantly disrupted the lives of many students going to schools and colleges. Students have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in many ways. They were learning through online teaching methods during the pandemic and then joined their institute in person after the pandemic. They suffered most in their academics as well as in their well-being. Their attitude has been changed and behavioral changes have been observed in most of them. In online mode, their physiological as well as mental health has deteriorated to some extent. In many review articles also the mental health of students was found affected. With lockdowns, social distancing measures, and closures of recreational facilities, students have faced challenges in maintaining regular physical activity. The lack of exercise contributed to physical health issues, including obesity, cardiovascular problems, and weakened immune systems. The shift to online education has brought about new health issues, including increased screen time, sedentary behavior, and potential stress. Due to an inactive lifestyle and increased screen time health issues like eye problems, weight gain, and changes in eating and sleeping routines were noticed. The prolonged period of uncertainty, social isolation, and disruptions in routine have taken a toll on the mental health of students. Stress led to loss of concentration, distraction, loneliness, fear, worry, melancholy, and irritable behavior that influenced their academic performance. It was noted that isolation policies have complex effects on symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety, hypochondriasis, and depression (Chen et al., 2020). Cases of stress, anxiety, and depression have been reported. Changes in daily routines, and increased stress levels have contributed to irregular sleep patterns among students. Inadequate sleep can have profound effects on cognitive function, mood regulation, and overall health. Students had to face difficulties in maintaining a healthy balance between academic responsibilities and healthcare. The present study engaged the students of life sciences to share their experiences their self-reported pandemic-related stress, their behavior, and academic performance.

## **AIM**

This study aimed to investigate the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the physical & mental health, and lifestyle of undergraduate students of life science. Further there is a need to focus on such study to develop the best strategy for dealing with pandemics in the future.

## Study Design

A questionnaire on Google form was used to conduct an online survey among life science students to get the information in the year 2022. The poll measured how the COVID-19 epidemic affected students' physical and emotional health (Table 1).

**Table 1 Questionnaire**

QUESTIONNAIRE	
S. No.	TYPE OF QUESTIONS
<b>(A) Demographic - (05)</b>	
1.	Name of the student
2.	Male student or Female
3.	Your class & Age
4.	Do you reside in an Urban area Rural/village area Semi-urban area
5.	Name of village or area
<b>(B,C.) Attitude of students towards study &amp; pandemic- (10)</b>	
1.	Online classes were better than offline classes
2.	Do you show interest in studies
3.	Do you feel difficulty in concentrating
4.	Are you affected by virus
5.	If any other family member affected
6.	Are you worried about yourself
7.	Are you worried about your family members
8.	Do you feel helpless
9.	Do you feel insecurity in pandemic time
10.	Do you feel uncertainty in your life
<b>(D) Behavioral changes after the pandemic - (14)</b>	
1.	Your screen time of watching increased or decreased or no change
2.	Eyesight effect
3.	Feeling of Anxiety
4.	Feeling of fear
5.	Are you feeling an emotionally weak attitude
6.	Are you feeling stress
7.	Do you get angry
8.	Do you feel lonely ness
9.	Do you feel any signs of unhappiness or sadness
10.	Is there any change in sleeping patterns after Covid or during pandemic
11.	Is there any change in eating habits
12.	Conscious of healthy eating habits
13.	Any change in weight
14.	Exercise and yoga habits

## **Discussion**

Previous studies have observed that college students suffered from extreme mental stress during this pandemic. Hawkins et al. reported that in US college students in 2020 semester subjects were more sedentary, anxious, and depressed compared to students in previous semesters. Many studies in other countries, United States (Huckins et al., 2020; Son et al., 2020), Saudi Arabia (Alkhamees et al., 2020), India (Kapasia et al., 2020), Bangladesh (Khan et al., 2020), and Jordan (Naser et al., 2020) also observed the behavioral changes in students. A variety of behaviors, such as increased phone use, decreased physical activity, and fewer places visited, have been associated with fluctuations in COVID-19 coverage (Huckins et al., 2020). During COVID-19 many review articles documented that, student health including mental health physical health was the most prominent issue (Berger, et al., 2021; Cielo, et al., 2021; . Jones, et al., 2021; Meherali, et al., 2021; Saulle, et al; Minozzi, et al., 2021).

Students had to stay inside because lockdowns had been in effect for almost a year. Their screen time grew due to the online instruction they were receiving on various platforms. It was noted that isolation policies have complex effects on symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety, hypochondriasis, and depression (Chen et al., 2020). There may be many health issues like eye problems, weight gain, changes in eating and sleeping routines, and changes in body composition as a result of their inactive way of life. Stress on the mind can lead to loss of concentration, distraction, loneliness, fear, worry, melancholy, and irritable behavior that may influence their academic performance. It was noted that alone depression may lead to many other behavioral problems. It may lead to a feeling of loneliness, sadness, and loss of interest in activities (Pompili et al., 2014; Derks et al., 2017; Caspi and Moffitt, 2018). Another common symptom among students observed was anxiety which leads to fear and insecurity such as any uncomfortable and unpleasant behaviour. In other study it was revealed that students with anxiety disorders have a passive attitude in the classroom, displaying disinterest in their work, poor performance on exams, and disruptions in their routine. Anxiety disorders can also cause problems in mood, thinking, behavior, and physiological activity. (Eslami et al., 2016; Parray and Kumar, 2017). In July 2020 an online survey at university in Hong Kong about 255 students showed symptoms of depression (Sun & Lin, 2020). Another web-based study of 324 college students in India observed that 68.8% had a high fear of COVID-19 and 28.7% had moderate to severe depression, and 51.5% had mild to severe anxiety (Chaudhary et al., 2021).

## **Research Outcome**

In this survey following outcome is noticed:

**(A) Demographically**

In this survey 350 students 68(19.5%) male students & 282 (80.5 %) female students participated online. All participants were undergraduate students of the college and were of age group 17 years to 20 years. Most of them reside in (80%) Rural/village areas & (10%) Semi-urban areas. Only (10%) belong to urban or city areas (Table:2).

**(B) Attitude of Students towards Study**

Only 5% of students preferred online classes and 21.5% preferred a blended mode of teaching. Most of the students liked offline classes 73.5%. Only 24.8% showed less interest in studies and almost 48.4% found difficulty in concentrating (Table: 2).

**Table 2 Demographically & Attitude of Students Towards Study**

(A) Demographic	(B) Attitude toward Study After Covid
Male students- 20.3 %	Online classes- 73.5%
Female – 79.7%	Offline classes – 5.0%
Age – 18---19 yr---145	Mixed – 21.5%
19-20yr--215	Show interest in studies—73.8%
Urban area----10.9%	Sometimes no interest –24.8%
Rural/village area-81.1%	No interest- 1.2%
	Feel difficulty in concentrating -- 48.4%
Semi-urban area-8%	No difficulty in concentrating --- 51.6%

**(C) Attitude of students towards the pandemic**

Most of the students remained unaffected by virus as only a few students 3.5% were caught the disease. Their family members also remained unaffected by the virus, only 7.6 % of family members were affected. Only 13.4% felt helpless, 31.7% felt insecure, and 28.7% felt uncertainty in their life during the pandemic time, 56.4% were worried about themselves and 64.4% were about their family members(Table:3) (Fig:1).

**Table:3. Attitude of Students towards Pandemic**

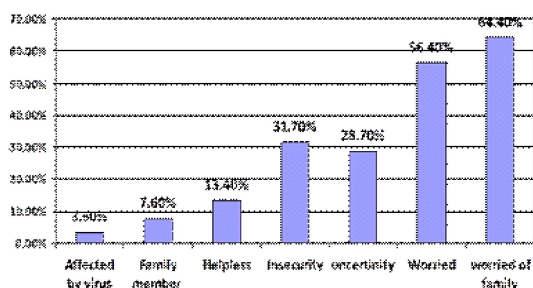
C Attitude of Students towards the Pandemic	
Affected by virus –3.4%	Not affected by virus --95.6%
If any other family member is affected --- 7.6%	No other family member affected --- 92.4%
Are you worried about yourself ---56.4%	Not worried about yourself ---43.6%
Worried about your family members -64.4%	Not worried about your family members ---35.6%
Do you feel helpless—13.4%	Do not feel helpless—86.6%
Do you feel insecurity in the pandemic –31.7%	Do not feel insecurity in the pandemic –68.3%
Do you feel uncertainty in life ---28.7%	Do not feel uncertainty in life ---71.3%

**(D) Behavioral changes after the pandemic - (12)**

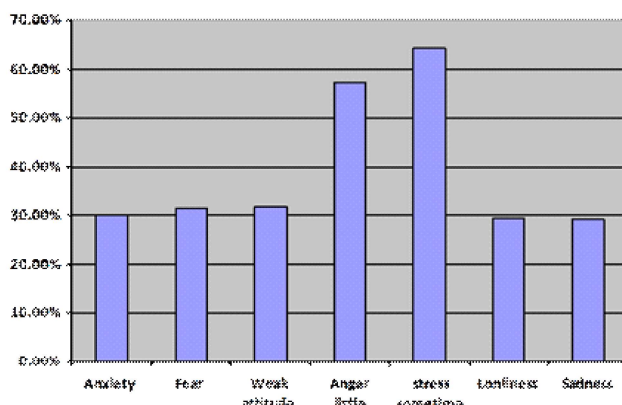
Almost 41.2% of students screen time of watching was increased and 58.8% did not change their time of watching screen. Only 19.5% were complaining of poor eyesight effect. Anxiety was observed in 23.6% & feelings of fear were observed in almost 24.3%. It was analyzed that 31.8% noticed an emotionally weak attitude & 29.6% felt loneliness as well as 29.1 % felt sadness or were not happy. 30.9% observed change in sleeping patterns after Covid or during pandemic . Similarly 30.7% observed a change in eating habits. However 64.1% complained of the stress of studying and 75.6% got angry often and sometimes. Almost 71.1% were conscious about healthy eating & 71.3% practiced yoga and did exercise off and on (Table:4) (Fig:2, Fig:3).

**Table 3 Behavioural Changes after Pandemic**

Questions	Response in%		Response in%
Your screen time of watching –increased	41.2%	No change	58.8%
Eyesight effect -	19.5%	No effect	80.5%
Feeling of Anxiety-	23.6%	No Anxiety-	76.4. %
Feeling of fear---	24.3%	No fear---	75.7%
Emotionally weak attitude	31.8%	Strong attitude---	68.2%
Are you feeling stressed ---	64.1%	No stress---	28.8%
	7.1% often		
Do you get angry ---	57.7%	No anger ---	24.4%
	17.9% often		
Do you feel loneliness ---	29.6%	No loneliness---	70.4%
Change in sleeping patterns	30.9%	No change	69.1%
Change in eating habits --		No change	
Conscious about healthy eating habits –	77.1%	Not Conscious	22.9%
Exercise and yoga habits---	71.3% sometimes	No Exercise and yoga habits---	12.8%
	15.9% Regular		

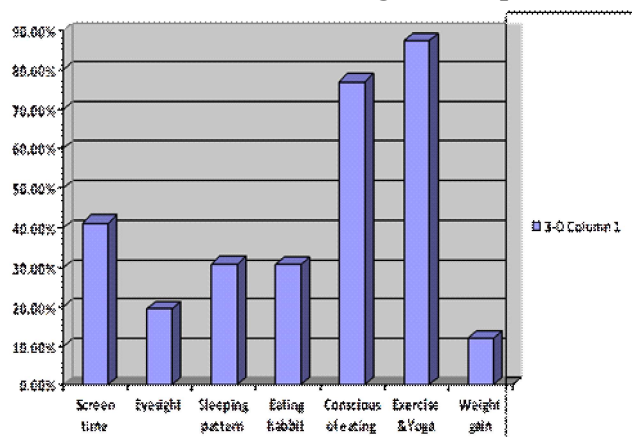


**Fig:1. Attitude of students towards the pandemic**



**Fig.:2. Behavioural changes after pandemic**

**Table 4 Behavioural changes after pandemic**



## Conclusion

The impact of COVID-19 on the physical and mental health of students has been significant and multifaceted. As the pandemic unfolded, students faced unprecedented challenges that affected various aspects of their well-being. During COVID 19 with lockdowns and restrictions, students experienced a decline in physical activity and led sedentary lifestyles. Social distancing measures and remote learning contributed to feelings of isolation and loneliness among students, impacting their mental well-being. The shift to online learning and increased screen time resulted in digital fatigue, leading to issues such as eye strain, headaches, and difficulty concentrating. Uncertainty about the future, academic pressures and concerns about personal and family health led to heightened stress and anxiety levels among students. The epidemic has had a mixed effect affecting the mental

and physical health of the students but it has also made students aware of adopting healthy lifestyles. Parents and family members are the first persons to deal with students, therefore it becomes essential to pay attention to the well-being of their wards. There is a need to focus on such a study to develop the best strategy for dealing with pandemics in the future. Strategies may include promoting healthy lifestyles, providing mental health support services, and fostering a supportive academic environment. Additionally, ongoing research and collaboration are essential to understanding the evolving impact of the pandemic on students and developing effective interventions to mitigate its effects.

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