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Effect of COVID on the Mental Health and Academic performance of Adolescents

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Abstract

For a long while now, the world has been battling COVID. In the Indian context, COVID-19 is a bigger battle and an ongoing one. This led to everything shutting down and restrictions being placed. During this time period, all educational institutions shut down their physical classes and switched to an online mode of classes, causing students everywhere to become locked in their houses. This paper investigates the effect of the pandemic on the mental health and academic performance of adolescents. The paper contains various literature reporting the same, most of which is reported by students, teachers and caregivers. Data was collected using a survey method. A questionnaire that consisted of 26 questions, was distributed among a 100 participants from an urban area. Keeping in mind the current situation, this study aimed to further investigate the same. The results of this study showed that a majority of the adolescents showed reduced performance and increased mental distress. It was also seen that there was a vicious circle, which connects the mental health of adolescents to how efficiently they can study and perform academically.

Keywords: mental health, COVID-19, education, adolescent

Introduction

For the past two years, the world has been trying to fight the coronavirus. Schools all over, switched from in-person to online modes of teaching. It has long been seen that the mental health and psychological wellbeing of students is positively correlated to their academic performance. During the period of the pandemic, it was seen that a lot of teenagers went through an array of psychological issues, including but not limited to depression, anxiety and a lot of stress. This study was conducted in order to understand what adolescents are going through mentally, during

the pandemic and how it affects them academically. This paper will help get a clearer understanding of the issue and propose solutions for the same.

Coronavirus disease OR COVID-19, is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness. The virus has been named SARS-CoV-2 and the disease is now called COVID-19. (WHO, 2020).

As the paper focuses on mental health and academic performance, it is necessary to define these terms, as used in the paper. According to The World Health Organisation (WHO) mental health is a state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community. On the other hand, academic performance is the measurement of student achievement across various academic subjects. Teachers and education officials typically measure achievement using classroom performance, graduation rates and results from standardised tests.

Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of this research was to study the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health and academics of teenagers. The objectives are as follows:-

1. To understand the overall mental health of teenagers during the period of the pandemic.
2. To understand the effect of the teenagers' mental health on their academic performance

Scope of the study

The study focused on adolescents, aged 13 to 19. It focuses on adolescent students in an urban city, and their mental health, as well as academic performance, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study was conducted over a week, where questionnaires were sent out to 100 students, to see the effects of the pandemic on their mental health and academic performance. This study focuses on both mental health and academic performance, rather than just one, making the paper more

relevant to adolescents in a learning environment, during the pandemic.

Research problem

What is the effect of COVID-19 on the mental health and academic performance of adolescents?

Review of literature

Most papers that were reviewed as literature, focused on the mental health of adolescents in India and their academic performance. Since the current paper is focused on both of those, during COVID-19, the literature was chosen accordingly.

COVID-19 has been found to be associated with quite a few changes in adolescents' mental health, a majority of it being caused by the fear of COVID-19. In a population with adequate exposure of COVID-19, this fear was proven to create adverse mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression. Adolescents who have had an experience with previous trauma in addition to social isolation [or quarantine] and loneliness were more prone towards anxiety and depression. This was seen during and even after the enforced isolation had ended.

In the papers reviewed there was substantial evidence about COVID-19 negatively impacting an adolescent's mental health. It was seen that the inefficient ability to process difficult circumstances, like the pandemic, are likely due to negative coping skills. These skills are risk factors for depression, stress and trauma among various ages of adolescents and are more likely to cause a number of related issues.

During the pandemic, it was seen that academic performance of students of all grades seemed to have been negatively influenced. It was reported that adolescents with neurodevelopmental disorders or special education needs were reported to have faced more academic challenges during the pandemic. Most results were recorded not only by students but by parents, caregivers, and teachers as well.

Students in secondary and tertiary education settings are known to face a varied range of ongoing normative stressors associated with their ongoing academic demands. In the current situation

imposed by the pandemic, there has been an escalation to severe levels of academic stress in students. Evidence has demonstrated that severe as well as long-standing academic-related stress, leads to negative impact on academic performance, mental health and the well-being of adolescents.

Some studies show that anxiety and depression affect academic achievement. These findings confirm that adolescents with anxiety and depression are vulnerable to underachievement in academic terms. Students with symptoms of anxiety and depression are predisposed to focusing their attention on recurrent and irrelevant thoughts, leaving little sustained attention available for cognitive tasks, which then leads to academic failure.

Methodology

A. Research design

Quantitative Research design using a questionnaire, with a 5 point likert scale. A survey method is a good method for research where the respondents want to have a sense of anonymity. It also helps reduce the human error involved as the scores are computerised. The data collected was quantitative in nature.

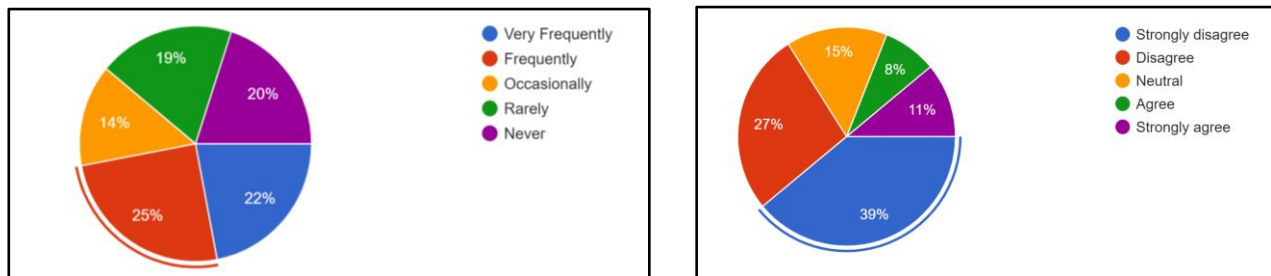
B. Sample

The sample method used was a random sample. There were 100 responses in total. The sample consisted of 49 Male Respondents, 49 Female Respondents and 2 respondents who identified as Other. Out of the 100, 43 respondents were between the ages of 13 and 15, and 57 respondents were between the ages of 16 and 19. The mean age across all the participants was seen to be at 16.05. All participants for the survey were adolescents from an urban area.

C. Procedure

To study the research problem, a survey method was used. The data collected was quantitative. A questionnaire was sent to participants using a google form. Confidentiality of all the respondents was maintained. The questionnaire consisted of a total of 26 questions, out of which 10 aimed at finding out the mental health of adolescents and the other 10 aimed at finding out the academic performance. The other 6 aimed at collecting data for the purpose of demographics.

Results



Graph

1.1

Graph 1.2

Graph 1.1 - 'Nowadays I feel scared without any good reason'

Graph 1.2 - 'I am paying as much attention in online classes as I was in offline classes'

Discussion

Mental health

After conducting the survey, there were a few really interesting findings about the mental health of adolescents. One of the questions asked was about whether the respondent felt that they had had more conflicts with people around them during the pandemic. 29% of the respondents responded with 'very frequently'. This is indicative of the fact that in today's times, due to COVID-19, there is a lot of stress and unrest in an adolescent's life. Such unrest and stress can lead to a decline in the mental health of an adolescent.

Another question asked was about the sleeping pattern and if the respondent felt that they had been able to wake up feeling well rested at least 4 times a week. 26% of the respondents responded with 'rarely'. This shows that during the pandemic, most adolescents have not been sleeping well and are rarely ever well rested. This is indicative of the fact that in today's times, due to the stress caused by COVID-19, there is a reduction in the quality and amount of sleep that an adolescent gets. This can further cause imbalance in moods, increased stress and depressive symptoms.

Respondents were also asked if they seemed to be getting into more conflicts than usual, with people around them and 29% of respondents responded with 'very frequently' and 22% responded with 'frequently'. This shows that during the pandemic, due to the increased amounts of stress and frustration, there has been an increase in conflicts between adolescents and people around them. Such conflicts can usually give rise to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

Academics

After conducting the survey, there were a few really interesting findings about the academic performance of adolescents. One of the questions asked was whether the respondents were paying as much attention in online classes as offline classes. 39% of respondents strongly disagreed with this statement. This indicates that during the pandemic, an adolescent's focus and attention has gone down. A reduction in focus and attention could lead to a reduced performance academically.

Another question asked was whether the pandemic had restricted the adolescent's learning, causing them to feel scared and vulnerable about their futures. Unsurprisingly, 37% of the respondents strongly agreed with this statement. This indicates that during the pandemic, adolescents have gotten increased stress and anxiety levels, due to the uncertainty of their future. This could lead to a reduced academic performance, as increased stress and anxiety are inversely proportional to academic performance.

Respondents were also asked if the burden of studies and the limited scope of online teaching made their studies feel like a burden to them on most days. 34% of respondents strongly agreed with this statement and 37% agreed. This shows that during the pandemic, academics have overburdened the adolescents and made it a burden, rather than an enjoyable activity. This could lead to reduced academic performance as adolescents view it as a chore rather than an enjoyable activity.

Implication

The data collected indicated that even though we as a society are doing everything, we can to make education effective using online modes, it has been tough, as well as overwhelming, for

students and teachers alike. Given the current situation, some adolescents may find it difficult to cope with their studies which can lead to a decline in their mental health, which will further affect their academics. It is almost like a vicious cycle. There has to be a change in the way adolescents are taught. So far, educational institutions are working as they always did, with the same curriculum and same amount of lessons. The method of teaching is the same, it is just the mode that has changed. This is something that could be changed, in order to help adolescents cope better with the changing situation and reduce the burden on them. When looking at the mental health aspect, while there is stigma connected to mental health, it has to be kept in mind that the current pandemic situation is a trying period for people of all ages, more so for adolescents juggling school. Educational institutions can set up webinars or conferences for both teachers and parents, and train them to better understand the symptoms of mental health distress and support the adolescent through it.

Conclusion

COVID-19 is an ongoing battle faced by all countries worldwide. With the entire world being locked in their houses for most of these past two years, there have been quite a few changes that have been seen. Even though there has been a lot of emphasis on the importance of mental health, it is still seen that adolescents are not getting enough support on that end. Collected data shows that there is a lot of mental distress experienced by adolescents on a daily basis. This can also be seen in their academic performances. Data pointed toward a decline in the academic performance of adolescents, mainly due to the pressure and lack of proper support systems. Lastly as a concluding statement - the COVID-19 pandemic is one that requires coordinated effort, combined with long term structural changes to the educational system, and more awareness about the mental health of adolescents.

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