



## COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND MENTAL HEALTH: EXPLORING QUALITATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF INDIVIDUALS IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT:

**Background:** Since the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, the entire world has to undergo many troubles. Naturally, the pandemic also exerted its influence on mental health. Most of the studies analyze several experiences of common people during the COVID-19 pandemic. But the experiences of the youth are less investigated in studies. The purpose of this study was to reveal adult experiences during Covid-19. **Methods:** This qualitative study consisted of 15 adults aged between 20 and 25. For data collection, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted, and thematic analysis was applied for data analysis. **Results:** After data analysis, 3 themes were generated. The themes highlight how the Covid-19 has brought impact upon the mental health of individuals.

### KEYWORDS:

INDIVIDUALS, ADULTS, MENTAL HEALTH, COVID-19, QUALITATIVE STUDY.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

People's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are all part of their mental health. Professionals in mental health care can assist individuals in managing problems that impact their thoughts, feelings, and actions, including addiction, bipolar disorder, depression, and anxiety.

A person's relationships, daily life, and physical health can all be impacted by their mental health. People's mental health can also be influenced by outside influences in their relationships and daily life. A person can preserve their capacity to enjoy life by taking care of their mental health. This entails striking a balance between their obligations, pursuits, and attempts to develop psychological resilience. Anxiety, despair, and stress can interfere with a person's routine and have an impact on their mental health. Doctors understand that many mental health issues have physical roots, even though they frequently use the term "mental health."

Over 40% of mental health illnesses in young people (those between the ages of 10 and 19) are anxiety and depression. Additionally, according to UNICEF, among adolescents (ages 15 to 19), suicide is the fourth most common cause of death globally, after TB, traffic injuries, and interpersonal violence. Suicide is the most common cause of death for young people in that age group in eastern Europe and central Asia, and it ranks second in western Europe and North America.

Though it may not be as deadly in children and adolescents as it is in adults, COVID-19 causes significant psychological anguish in this age range. Parental anxiety, disturbance of daily routines, increased family violence, and home confinement with limited or no access to peers, teachers, or physical activity are all contributing factors to adolescents' acute and chronic stress. According to Taylor & Asmundson (2020), "COVID Stress Syndrome" is very

common in some people during this current pandemic. It is characterized by xenophobia (the fear that foreigners may be infected), fear of touching contaminated objects or surfaces, fear of infection, seeking reassurance, and traumatic stress symptoms related to COVID (such as nightmares and intrusive thoughts related to infection).

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Everyone now faces additional obstacles and difficulties as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. 2020 is a year that no one will ever forget in their lives. Many of us lost our homes, jobs, loved ones, etc. Both the economy and mental health have declined as a result of the pandemic. People with substance addiction and those who were already experiencing psychological discomfort or any form of mental illness have found it difficult (Kennedy et al., 2020). The immediate disparity between professional responsibilities and personal life resulted in negative mental health impacts for workers. Collaborating became particularly challenging due to disrupted internet connections and the limitation of having only one device at home while multiple individuals were working. There have been instances where employees resorted to using abusive language due to the difficulty of finding a quieter place to work at home. Young adults have experienced losses in academics or employment (Fauzi & Paiman, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in significant disruptions to mental health services globally. A recent WHO survey indicates that mental health services have been compromised, as many individuals are experiencing various forms of psychological distress. A recent survey involving over 100 countries has highlighted the adverse effects of the pandemic on mental health. A review identified substantial disruptions to essential emotional well-being services. This overview, conducted across 130

countries in the six regions of WHO from June to August 2020, examines the impact of COVID-19 on the delivery of mental, neurological, and substance use services, the types of services that have faced interruptions, and how nations are adapting to meet these challenges (Khajanchi et al., 2021). A study conducted by Brooks et al. (2020) and published in the Lancet examined numerous earlier studies and highlighted the impact of quarantine on the mental well-being of individuals. Consistently, the majority of studies indicated adverse psychological effects such as symptoms of post-traumatic stress, confusion, and anger. Factors contributing to stress included extended durations of quarantine, anxiety about infection, feelings of helplessness, frustration, boredom, lack of supplies, insufficient information, financial difficulties, and social stigma. In the present study, the following research questions are addressed:

- i) What are the perceptions of individuals towards Covid-19 pandemic?
- ii) What are the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic on the individuals' mental health in India?
- iii) How do the individuals maintain mental health during Covid-19 pandemic?

### 3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### 3.1 GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

The area of the study has been chosen in Kolkata, West Bengal. Kolkata is one of the populated cities in West Bengal. It is the capital city of West Bengal.

#### 3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

In the present study qualitative approach has been adopted. The main reason behind choosing qualitative approach is that it aims to delve deep into the phenomenon in order to explore. The primary purpose of the present study is to explore the experiences of the participants regarding the impact of Covid-19 on mental health. Qualitative approach helps to explore the experiences of the participants.

#### 3.3 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

Since in this study qualitative approach has been adopted, a convenient sampling method was utilized. To gather insights on perceptions towards Covid-19 pandemic and mental health, data was obtained from individuals who have undergone severe crises related to mental health as a result of Covid-19 pandemic in Kolkata, West Bengal. A total number of 15 respondents were interviewed out of 18 in order to collect comprehensive data for this research. The respondents were chosen from the researcher's personal network using convenient sampling methods. Though initially 18 respondents agreed to be interviewed, later on 3 participants left due to personal reasons. All the participants, chosen for the study, were adult and aged between 21 and 25. Most of them were associated with study. Some of them are employed in private organizations. A brief detail of the participants is given below:

**TABLE 1: BRIEF DETAILS OF THE PARTICIPANTS**

Participants (Pseudonyms)	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Present Status	Interview timing
Participant 1 (Mrs. A)	Female	21	Unmarried	Student	15 mins
Participant 2 (Mr. B)	Male	21	Unmarried	Student	13.02 mins
Participant 3 (Mr. C)	Male	22	Unmarried	Student	20 mins
Participant 4 (Mrs. D)	Female	24	Unmarried	Student	22 mins
Participant 5 (Mr. E)	Male	24	Unmarried	Employed	21 mins
Participant 6 (Ms. F)	Female	24	Unmarried	Student	19 mins
Participant 7 (Ms. G)	Female	25	Unmarried	Employed	22 mins

Participant 8 (Ms. H)	Female	21	Unmarried	Student	13 mins
Participant 9 (Ms. I)	Female	21	Married	Student	15 mins
Participant 10 (Ms. J)	Female	25	Unmarried	Student	11 mins
Participant 11 (Mr. K)	Male	25	Unmarried	Employed	11 mins
Participant 12 (Ms. L)	Female	25	Married	Student	12 mins
Participant 13 (Ms. M)	Female	24	Unmarried	Student	10 mins
Participant 14 (Mr. N)	Male	23	Unmarried	Student	10 mins
Participant 15 (Mr. O)	Male	22	Unmarried	Student	12 mins

### 3.4 INSTRUMENTS

Since qualitative approach has been adopted in the present study, semi-structured interview was the most suitable technique for collecting in-depth data from the respondents. For conducting the interview an interview schedule was prepared consisting of pre-determined questions for fulfilling the requirements of the data related to the study. The interview schedule contains four sections:

- Demographics of the participants
- Perceptions towards Covid-19
- Impacts of Covid-19 on mental health
- Coping strategies

### 3.5 DATA COLLECTION

The process of data collection the present study took place between the months of May, 2021 and August, 2021. Using

a convenient sampling technique, the samples were chosen. Since Covid-19 was prevailing during that period, it was not possible to collect data from all the participants face-to-face. So, most of the participants (n=9) shared their experiences through online interviews. However, some of them (n=6) agreed to share their feelings face-to-face. The inclusion criteria for the study were adult youths and either students or working professionals. Experiences of all the participants were recorded using a Samsung phone.

### 3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Proper data analysis is an integral part of any research related study. However, in case of qualitative research the data analysis process is quite different from quantitative research. The most popular method of data analysis in qualitative research is thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involves the following stages:

**TABLE 2: STAGES OF THEMATIC ANALYSIS (BRAUN & CLARKE, 2006)**

	Phases
1.	Familiarisation
2.	Coding
3.	Initial theme generation
4.	Reviewing and developing themes
5.	Refining, defining and naming themes
6.	Producing the report

After collection of data, the data were transcribed

properly. It was translated from Bengali to English as well.

From the entire data, several codes were generated. Out of the codes, categories were selected. Finally the categories helped to produce themes. On the basis of the themes the reports were produced.

**3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

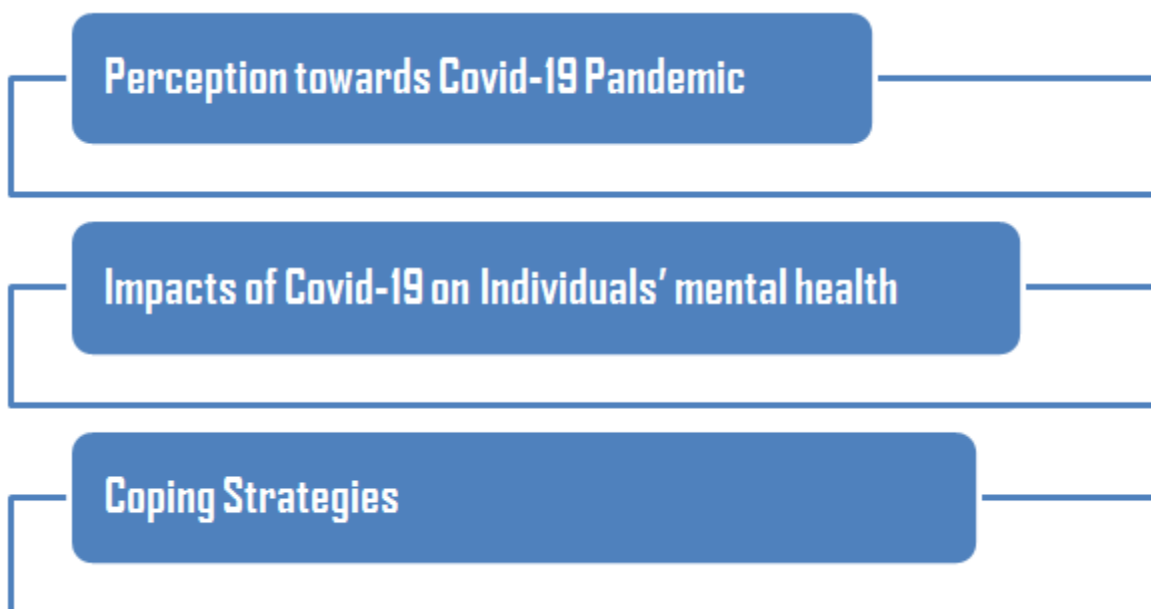
While conducting any research related study, maintaining research ethics is the responsibility of the researcher. The process of data collection is the vital stage where maintaining research ethics plays an important role. For considering the ethical issues, honesty, privacy, confidentiality etc. should be maintained. However,

informed consent has been sent to all the participants for gaining permission to participate in the study.

**3.8 FINDINGS**

Once the data collection process is over through interviews conducted with the participants (n=15), they were translated from Bengali to English verbatim. Demographic details of the participants are given in Table.1 briefly. The identities of the participants are kept confidential. The interviews were analyzed using the Nvivo-14 software version. After analysis of the data, the several codes were generated. From the multiple codes, categories and themes were generated.

**THEMATIC FOCI**



**4. RESULTS**

Once the data collection process is over, data were analyzed using thematic analysis process. The thematic analysis helped to develop themes out of the in-depth data collected on the real life experiences of the participants

during Covid-19 pandemic. However, after careful analysis of the data, three major themes are generated-

- Perception towards Covid-19 Pandemic
- Impacts of Covid-19 on Individuals' mental health
- Coping Strategies

**TABLE 3: LIST OF THEMES GENERATED FROM THE CATEGORIES**

Themes	Categories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perception towards Covid-19 Pandemic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curse</li> <li>• Hampered lifestyle</li> <li>• Disturbances in work and education</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impacts of Covid-19 on Individuals' mental health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impact on mental health</li> <li>• Impact on social relationship</li> <li>• Unstable decision</li> </ul>

- Coping Strategies

- Increased communication with family and friends
- Engaging in yoga, meditation etc.
- Leisure time

#### 4.1 PERCEPTION TOWARDS COVID-19 PANDEMIC

This theme has emerged out of several categories which have been created on combining several codes. However, the three major categories that have developed the theme are – i) curse, ii) hampered lifestyle, iii) disturbances in work and education

##### 4.1.1 CURSE

Most of the participants reported that Covid-19 came as a curse for them. They had to face several derogatory issues with the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic. The students reported that their study got spoiled. The working professional said that their working life was negatively impacted as soon as they were in contact with anxiety, stress and mental pressure resulted from the effect of the pandemic. Several of the relatives gradually started to suffer from the Covid-19. Even some of them had lost their nearer ones as well.

##### 4.1.2 HAMPERED LIFESTYLE

Majority of the respondents said that their lifestyle got hampered during the outbreak of the pandemic. The lock-down brought in several changes in their daily routine. They went to bed late night and gradually became late-riser.

*We could not even manage our routine properly. Our lifestyle got disrupted in many ways.* (P-1)

##### 4.1.3 DISTURBANCES IN WORK AND EDUCATION

Most of the respondents said that they faced lots of trouble in their work and education. They failed to do their study and work with full concentration.

*I failed to work with proper concentration in my office. Every time I suffered from depression.* (P-5)

#### 4.2 IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON INDIVIDUALS' MENTAL HEALTH

This theme has emerged out of several categories which have been created on combining several codes. However, the three major categories that have developed the theme are – i) impact on mental health ii) impact on social relationship and iii) unstable decision.

##### 4.2.1 IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

The major impact of Covid-19 pandemic is found on the mental health of the young people. Most of the respondents faced several issues related to trauma, stress, anxiety and depression. Often they found themselves alienated from the society. Those who are students were worried about their future. They started thinking that their future would become futile.

*Every day it seemed to me that I would not live any more. I was becoming scared of my family members.* (P-9)

*I and my family members were undergoing traumatic*

*situations.* (P-8)

##### 4.2.2 IMPACT ON SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP

Covid-19 pandemic, as the respondents reported, has exerted influence upon the social relationship as well. During that period most of the people stopped coming in physical contact with nearer and dearer ones. Maintaining social distancing was a major issue during that time.

*I felt that we are moving apart. The relationship among us was becoming fragile.* (P-6)

##### 4.2.3 UNSTABLE DECISION

Most of the participants of the study declared that there were unable to take proper decision during that time. Every time they had to face dilemma.

#### 4.3 COPING STRATEGIES

The third theme has emerged from the following three themes – i) increased communication with family and friends, ii) engaging in yoga, meditation etc., iii) leisure time

##### 4.3.1 INCREASED COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Most of the respondents reported that they increased their communication with their friends and relatives in order to come out of mental stress.

*Gradually we increased our communication with our friends and family members.* (P-10)

##### 4.3.2 Engaging in yoga, meditation etc.

Some of the participants chose to engage themselves in yoga, meditation and exercises. It reduced stress among them.

*I and my family members started practicing yoga every day.* (P-12)

##### 4.3.3 LEISURE TIME

A number of participants involved themselves in spending leisure time. They spent time in music, recitation, drawing, watching movies etc.

*Most of the time, I used to watch movies. Apart from this, I preferred playing musical instruments.* (P-15)

#### 5. DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted all of humanity. A particularly vulnerable demographic is young people, as they are in a critical phase of both physical and mental development where social interactions and active physiological changes are crucial. The hormonal shifts associated with puberty combine with the social dynamics of adolescence, making them especially sensitive to social standing, peer groups, and relationships. The pandemic

resulted in numerous restrictions, leading to school closures, limited outdoor activities, decreased social interactions, and changes in eating and sleeping patterns. These alterations disrupt the typical lifestyle of adolescents and hinder the satisfaction of their developmental needs, potentially leading to significant long-term physical and mental health issues.

Another new change that young people mentioned in their daily lives was the wearing of masks. The majority of research on mask wear's effects to date has focused on effectiveness rather than psychological effects. The teenagers had only ever worn masks as detrimental, most likely as a result of a lack of knowledge regarding its advantages in coronavirus defense. However, the inability to see the other person's entire face and the challenges in identifying emotions and non-verbal cues like eye contact, mimics, and gestures were cited by the youth as the main drawbacks of mask wearing. In social communication, facial expressions are crucial, but eye contact by itself is insufficient.

Adults spent the majority of their time at home during the study period and also work from home. Adults in these circumstances felt a lack of communication with other family members or friends despite spending a significant amount of time with family members—sometimes even too much, in their opinion. According to researchers, this may result in depression or anxiety. One of the biggest challenges for older kids, is not being able to see grandparents and other family members. These experiences can be explained by the fact that the primary developmental tasks of adolescence are strong peer identification and socialization, emotional separation from parents, and a sense of community.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on mental and physical health. Lockdowns, work from home policies, social distancing, and school from home policies became

the norm. This study of teenagers found that they primarily experienced negative emotions like sadness, boredom, loneliness, or rage. Participants in the study talked about their frustrating daily routine changes, primarily the loss of their favorite activities because of restrictions, and switching to a distance learning mode that was not very convenient or effective. However, talking to friends, family, pets, engaging in active leisure, and engaging in their favorite activities all aided them.

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