

# ANALYSIS OF PHYSICAL, MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING OF HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS DURING PANDEMIC-RELATED LOCKDOWN AND MEASURES FOR HOLISTIC FITNESS AND RESILIENCE

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## ABSTRACT

The recent COVID-19 pandemic-related lockdown brought about unprecedented changes all over the world. Apart from changes in life styles, sweeping changes have occurred in all areas of human activity. Education is one sector where sudden changes have occurred, mostly in a manner forced by circumstances. While the forced lockdown ensured that most educational campuses in India remained closed for more than a year, online teaching and conduct of online examinations were the new order of the day. In places where educational campuses opened, introduction of blended hybrid online and offline teaching strategies brought about changes in the scenario. These sudden changes, coupled with economic and other constraints caused by the pandemic-related lockdown affected the mental and physical health and emotional wellbeing of the student community which is discussed in the communication. The survey of under-graduate students and their parents revealed overt changes in physical and mental health and behavioral patterns in children which, if things continued in the present manner, would be difficult to control in future in the interest of mankind. Some solutions and mitigation measures to address the problems faced by students; generated with the help of professional expertise to alleviate the lockdown related issues and problems and for better resilience, are dealt with in the communication.

**Key Words:** resilience, pandemic-related lockdown, students, survey, COVID-19

## INTRODUCTION

The recent COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdown for over a year, has drastically altered life and brought about unprecedented radical changes all over. These are more felt in countries with huge populations such as India which have to grapple with their population issues in addition to pandemic related issues. Apart from adversely affecting life styles, many sudden changes with potentially far reaching consequences have occurred in all areas of human activity; the unparalleled global pandemic having affected humanity in many more ways than one can think of. Besides causing monetary instability, general insecurity and widespread displacement of families, many of whom have migrated to their native places, the current pandemic-related lockdown has affected physical and mental health, especially the emotional

wellbeing of student community. Among the various affected sections, education is one such sector where exceptional, unparalleled and abrupt changes have taken place, mostly in a manner forced by circumstances. While the lockdown has effectively ensured that all educational campuses remained closed for conventional teaching activities for over one year, virtual teaching and online examinations have been the new order of the day. Even in places where educational campuses reopened post-lockdown, blended and hybrid teaching brought about massive changes in the Indian education sector and learning scenario.

The closure of educational campuses effectively eliminated physical activities and interactions amongst students which were offering a great learning experience for harmonious survival. Loss of physical social interaction at this crucial stage of life arguably could affect societal behaviour at some later stage. All these sudden changes, coupled with economic and many other socio-civic constraints brought about by the pandemic related lockdown have affected the emotional, mental and physical health of students which is the topic of the present investigation. As reported by many, feelings of loneliness, social isolation, suicidal tendencies and aggressive behavior among youth are on the rise during lockdown (Singh *et al.*, 2020; Son *et al.* 2020), and so is obesity among children (Jia *et al.*, 2021). In the given scenario, the compulsory resort to online modes of teaching and examinations as part of ‘mission begin again’ and mission ‘break the chain’ are also affecting the student community, effects of which are apparently in need of investigation and professional help. A survey of literature revealed dearth of literature available on the topic of investigation from the Indian subcontinent and gaps in region wise consistency of the same all of which inspired start of this work with objectives as mentioned below:

1. To investigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic-related lockdown on the emotional, mental and physical health of students
2. To analyze the impact of lockdown on studies and behavioral patterns of students
3. To investigate the impact of online learning mode on student community
4. To suggest solutions to the problems faced by the student community as reported in their responses, as measures for resilience

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The survey method was used in the study to gather information from 125 voluntary participants. Both online as well as physical surveys were conducted. The study was carried out in two stages.

In the first stage, two online surveys for students and their parents were conducted simultaneously but separately. Google survey forms with questions related to the objectives of study were circulated online through social media. Physical surveys of few respondents from easily accessible areas were conducted, ensuring compliance of guidelines in this respect issued by authorities. The responses received from the respondents were analyzed.

In the second stage of the investigation, solutions and mitigation measures to address the various problems faced by students were generated with professional help from counselor and fitness and yoga experts, to alleviate the lockdown related problems faced by the student community. The solutions and resilience measures were informed to all respondents and to the student community in general through social media.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Two surveys for student and parent groups were conducted at the same time but separately for both groups in order to get review from both generations. Student respondents, coming from Junior College to Under-Graduate classes, were in the age group of 15 years to 23 years; the average age of student participants being 18.7 years. 72.5% of respondents in the student group were female while 27.5% were male. Parent respondents were in the age group of 35 years to 56 years; the average age of respondents being 40.6 years. 47.8% of respondents in the parent group were female and 52.2% were male.

All students (100%) reported increase in levels of boredom and anxiety and decrease in their levels of confidence. Results are in agreement with Aristovnik et al (2020), Islam et al (2020) and John & John (2021). 42.4 % student respondents reported gaining weight during lockdown, 16.3% reported weight loss during the same period while 41.3% reported no change in body weight. The results are presented in Fig.1. With advent of online mode of teaching during lockdown, a new challenge and dimension has emerged for educational institutes which were till beginning of lockdown, following the conventional modes of class room teaching and in this respect most students reported having problems on coping with this sudden change. While their overall academic scores and performances improved in the current system of online examinations, 65.6% students reported a negative impact on their studies, 22.2% reported no impact while 12.2% reported a positive impact of online teaching on their studies. The results depicted in Fig. 2, agree with those of Gonzalez et al (2020) and Mahdy (2020). While researchers claim students to be ready for online education (Muthuprasad et al., 2021), the present investigation points the other way. A majority of 71.7% student responders reported

their being dissatisfied with online mode of education while only 28.3% responders registered satisfaction which is reflected in Fig.3.

Respondents from the parent group reported a general increase in levels of laziness (in 60% of respondents), aggressiveness (65% of respondents) and loss of interest (35% of respondents) in their observations about their children during lockdown. 5% reported an increase in level of studiousness of their children; the outcomes are shown in Fig. 4. Increased tendencies of students becoming short tempered, introvert, alienated, losing their power of imagination, being addicted to mobile phones, falling prey to social media were also observed in the survey. Fake and unconfirmed posts on social media were reported by students as a major factor for giving them an inferiority complex. Sengupta (2020) reported several problems affecting students during lockdown which, if not addressed properly, had the potential to cause social disturbances at a later stage. The findings of surveys conducted during the present study indicated a ‘not so good’ impact of lockdown on students.

The solutions generated with the help of counselors, fitness and yoga experts for the various problems and issues mentioned by students, as means for alleviation of the same were as mentioned below:

1. Regular exercises for fitness
2. Regular practice of Yoga for mental and physical wellbeing especially breathing exercises such as *Ujjai* and *Pranayam*
3. Dialogue between elders, parents and their children
4. Positive interactions between peers
5. Seeking professional help in case of feelings of depression
6. Taking up a constructive hobby in lockdown
7. Positive thinking for better resilience and bounding back

The solutions were informed to students and all respondents and implementation of these would result in stronger youth with better resilience capacity.

## CONCLUSION

The investigation highlighted the serious nature of the negative impact of pandemic-related lockdown on physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing of students which are apparently ignored and might result in consequences of serious nature in future if not attended to. Implementation of mitigation measures would ensure better resilience.

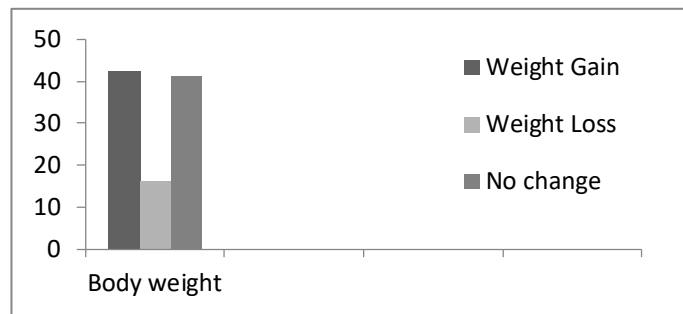
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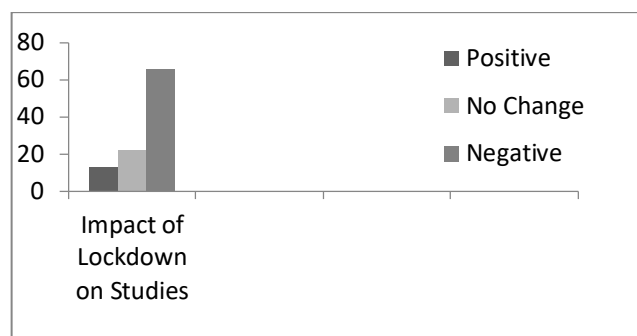
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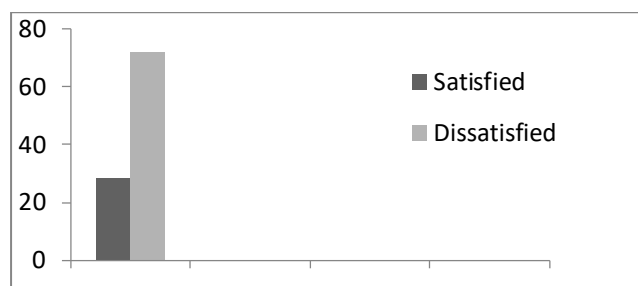
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**Fig. 1:** Responses regarding changes in body weight of students during lockdown



**Fig. 2:** Responses on impact of lockdown on studies of students



**Fig. 3:** Student satisfaction on online mode of teaching



**Fig. 4:** Parents response on increased levels of studiousness, loss of interest, laziness and aggressiveness in their children