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Mental health assessment of students during COVID-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The current study intended to assess the mental health of students during COVID-19. In this context, the study was conducted among the students of SKUAST-K. A descriptive survey method was used to carry out the study. Under the jurisdiction of SKUAST-K, Shalimar, Srinagar, Faculty of Fisheries was selected by purposive sampling method. The target population of the study comprised of the students of Faculty of Fisheries, Rangil, Ganderbal with total population size of 193. The sample of study constituted 100 students. Stratified random sampling method was used for current study and the samples were taken proportionally with the total number of undergraduate and postgraduate students, with 62 U.G students, 25 masters students and 13 Ph.D. students respectively. A self-administered questionnaire was formed to gather information from the respondents. The data collected was analysed using standard statistical tools like descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage and inferential statistics such as Chi-square test. SPSS version 20.0 and PAST 4.0 was used for data analysis. The results from the study indicated that majority of the respondents had risk and fear of getting infected with COVID-19, were worried about their family members, had fear of losing their relatives or friends due to COVID-19. Besides, the students expressed that they had lost concentration and interest in their studies, faced anxiety over uncertainty about their academic calendar, were concerned that the COVID-19 outbreak would affect their exam performance and felt that the pandemic had left an impact on the careers of current year university graduates.

Keywords: Coronavirus, COVID-19, Pandemic, Students, Mental Health, Lockdown.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health at individual level refers to the state of wellbeing in which individuals of any population realize their own ability to cope up with normal life stress and work effectively to contribute to their own community [1]. The COVID-19 pandemic, apart from the physical health related signs and symptoms, poses serious threats to mental well-being and consequent changes in behaviors. The COVID-19 has been enormously stressful, and the student population has not been spared during this unprecedented period. The pandemic can possibly influence college students physically, scholastically, monetarily and mentally. In a brief timeframe, college students' lives have drastically changed as they have been approached to leave grounds, conform to new living conditions, and adjust to web-based learning platforms. The change to web-based learning, especially in courses that were not initially intended for online conveyance probably has intensified pressure among students. Courses intended to involve high levels of communication and hands-for encounters such as practicums, labs, as well as creative performance have an unmistakable drawback concerning the assessment of students [2].

A few students may experience issues with admittance to computers and the web at home [2,3]. Extra difficulties incorporate worries about their well-being, soundness of relatives, and stress over funds, especially among the individuals who support themselves by working in businesses seriously affected by delayed closures like retail or the service industry. As indicated by an overview by the loan management website, Student Loan Hero, 4 out of 5 college students are confronting monetary challenges because of the COVID-19 pandemic [4]. Further, most college students are not qualified for instantaneous monetary assistance under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act [5].

College students' emotional well-being has been an increasing concern with a significant number of students encountering mental distress [6]. Mental health issues can essentially worsen students' scholarly achievement and social connections influencing their forthcoming profession and individual opportunities. The fast spread of COVID-19 and social distancing measures imposed across the country are estimated to further influence the psychological well-being of the populace, incorporating college students [7].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Location of study area

The location of study was Faculty of Fisheries, SKUAST-K, Rangil, Ganderbal.

Research design

The present study employed a descriptive research design that used a survey strategy for data collection. The research aimed to accurately and systematically describe a population, phenomenon or situation and used a wide variety of research methods to investigate one or more variables.

Sampling procedure

Selection of college

Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Kashmir, Shalimar, Srinagar, comprises of 7 colleges/faculties and out of these 7 colleges, Faculty of Fisheries was selected for the study by purposive sampling method.

Selection of respondents

Population of study

The target population of the study comprised of the students of Faculty of Fisheries, Rangil, Ganderbal with total population size of 193.

Number of selected respondents

The sample of study constituted 100 students. Stratified random sampling technique was used for the study. Samples were taken proportionally with the total number of undergraduate and postgraduate students, with 62 students from U.G, 25 students from masters and 13 students from Ph.D. respectively.

Data collection

The study was completed by scheming a well-designed questionnaire. Each question was set up cautiously with the help of experts. To facilitate the respondents, the researcher personally visited the sample students and distributed the questionnaire to the fishery students for primary data collection, requesting the students to participate in the study, explaining the object of the study and providing directions on how to answer the questionnaire. The respondents were assured about keeping their identity confidential. The questionnaire comprised of the questions related to the mental health of the students due to the pandemic. The questions were close ended (Yes/No).

Data analysis

The data collected was tabulated into the coding sheet (Microsoft Excel was used for tabulation of data) and then appropriate analysis of data was made. The standard statistical tools and approaches used in the study were descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage and inferential statistics such as Chi-square test. Data analysis was carried out with the statistical software's namely SPSS-Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, version 20.0 and PAST 4.0.

RESULTS

Assessment of mental health status of students during COVID-19 pandemic

The following questions were asked to the respondent students to assess their mental health during COVID-19.

Risk and fear of getting infected with COVID-19

The data presented in Table 1 revealed that around 66.67% of the male respondents and over 73.97% of the female respondents felt that they were experiencing the feeling of risk and were in fear of getting infected with COVID-19.

Worry about someone in the family getting infected with the coronavirus

Around 55.56% of the male respondents and almost 83.56% of the female respondents said that they were worried about someone in their family getting infected with the coronavirus. The Chi-square results revealed that statistically, there was a significant difference between male and female respondents with respect to the statement, are you worried that someone in your family will get infected with the coronavirus ($p < 0.01$).

Fear of losing relatives or friends due to this pandemic

Over 70.37% male respondents and 90.41% female respondents had fear of losing their relatives or friends due to this pandemic. The Chi-square results revealed that statistically, there was a significant difference between male and female respondents with respect to the statement, do you have fear of losing your relatives or friends due to this pandemic ($p < 0.05$).

Unable to experience any positive feeling at all due to COVID-19

About 55.56% of the male respondents and 56.16% of the female respondents felt that they were not able to experience any positive feeling at all due to COVID-19.

Unable to be enthusiastic about doing things

Almost 81.48% male respondents and 63.01% female respondents stated of not being able to be enthusiastic in doing their things.

Lost concentration and interest regarding studies

62.96% male respondents and 80.82% female respondents said that they had lost concentration and interest regarding their studies due to COVID-19 pandemic.

Difficulty in falling asleep and having recurring thoughts

51.85% of the male respondents did not agree that they faced difficulty in falling asleep and were having recurring thoughts due to COVID-19 pandemic, however, 57.53% of the female respondents agreed that they faced difficulty in falling asleep and were having recurring thoughts due to the pandemic.

Experiencing sudden attack of fear or anxiety due to COVID-19

59.26% of the male respondents were of the opinion that they had not been experiencing sudden attack of fear or anxiety due to COVID-19, however, in case of female respondents, around 53.42% said that they were experiencing sudden attack of fear or anxiety due to COVID-19.

Getting suicidal, self-harm or aggressive behavioral patterns due to COVID-19

Around 92.59% of the male and 93.15% of the female respondents did not agree with the statement that they were getting suicidal, self-harm or aggressive behavioral patterns due to COVID-19.

Feeling bored, sad, wanted to cry during the confinement

Among the male respondents, 66.67% and among the female respondents, 68.49% expressed that they felt bored, sad and wanted to cry during the COVID-19 confinement.

Anxiety over uncertainty about the academic calendar and other college activities

Nearly, 74.07% male respondents and 71.23% female respondents said that they were facing an anxiety over uncertainty about their academic calendar and other college activities.

COVID-19 pandemic has an impact on the careers of the current year university graduates

Around 96.30% male respondents and 98.63% female respondents felt that COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the careers of the current year university graduates.

Concerned that the outbreak will adversely affect the exam performance

70.37% male respondents and 83.56% female respondents were concerned that the COVID-19 outbreak would adversely affect their exam performance.

Reduction of social contacts due to COVID-19

Almost 92.59% male respondents and around 86.30% female respondents felt that due to COVID-19, there is a reduction of social contacts.

Subjected to cigarette smoking and drug abuse owing to the coronavirus pandemic

Approximately, 88.89% of the male respondents and 98.63% of the female respondents stated that they had not been subjected to cigarette

smoking and drug abuse owing to the coronavirus pandemic. The Chi-square analysis revealed that statistically, significant difference was observed between male and female respondents in response to the statement, do you feel you have been subjected to cigarette smoking and drug abuse owing to the coronavirus pandemic ($p < 0.05$).

Experienced becoming a victim of verbal abuse (threats, humiliations) with people around you

77.78% male respondents and 84.93% female respondents said that they did not experience becoming a victim of verbal abuse (threats, humiliations) with people around them.

Succeeded in the deliberate control of your excess media consumption around COVID-19 by the use of social media, television, internet

Nearly 70.37% male respondents and 61.64% female respondents felt that they had succeeded in deliberate control of their excess media consumption around COVID-19 by the use of social media, television, internet.

Hopeful that the corona crisis will soon be over

Around 96.30% of the male respondents and 97.26% of the female respondents were hopeful that the corona crisis would soon be over.

Table 1: Assessment of mental health status of students during COVID-19 pandemic

S. No.	Statements	Frequency (%)				Chi-square	p-value
		Male (N=27)		Female (N=73)			
		Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)		
1.	Do you feel that you have the risk and fear of getting infected with COVID-19?	18 (66.67)	9 (33.33)	54 (73.97)	19 (26.03)	0.521	0.470
2.	Are you worried that someone in your family will get infected with the coronavirus?	15 (55.56)	12 (44.44)	61 (83.56)	12 (16.44)	8.475	0.003
3.	Do you have fear of losing your relatives or friends due to this pandemic?	19 (70.37)	8 (29.63)	66 (90.41)	7 (9.59)	6.208	0.012
4.	Do you feel you are not able to experience any positive feeling at all due to COVID-19?	15 (55.56)	12 (44.44)	41 (56.16)	32 (43.84)	0.002	0.956
5.	Have you not been able to be enthusiastic about doing your things?	22 (81.48)	5 (18.52)	46 (63.01)	27 (36.99)	3.089	0.078
6.	Have you lost concentration and interest regarding your studies?	17 (62.96)	10 (37.04)	59 (80.82)	14 (19.18)	3.446	0.063
7.	Are you facing difficulty in falling asleep and having recurring thoughts?	13 (48.15)	14 (51.85)	42 (57.53)	31 (42.47)	0.701	0.402
8.	Have you been experiencing sudden attack of fear or anxiety due to COVID-19?	11 (40.74)	16 (59.26)	39 (53.42)	34 (46.58)	1.268	0.260
9.	Are you getting suicidal, self-harm or aggressive behavioral patterns due to COVID-19?	2 (7.41)	25 (92.59)	5 (6.85)	68 (93.15)	0.009	0.922
10.	Have you felt bored, sad, wanted to cry during the confinement?	18 (66.67)	9 (33.33)	50 (68.49)	23 (31.51)	0.030	0.862
11.	Are you facing an anxiety over uncertainty about your academic calendar and other college activities?	20 (74.07)	7 (25.93)	52 (71.23)	21 (28.77)	0.078	0.778
12.	Do you feel that COVID-19 pandemic has an impact on the careers of the current year university graduates?	26 (96.30)	1 (3.70)	72 (98.63)	1 (1.37)	0.547	0.459
13.	Are you concerned that the outbreak will adversely affect your exam performance?	19 (70.37)	8 (29.63)	61 (83.56)	12 (16.44)	2.143	0.143
14.	Do you feel that due to COVID-19, there is a reduction of social	25	2	63	10	0.738	0.390

	contacts?	(92.59)	(7.41)	(86.30)	(13.70)		
15.	Do you feel you have been subjected to cigarette smoking and drug abuse owing to the coronavirus pandemic?	3 (11.11)	24 (88.89)	1 (1.37)	72 (98.63)	4.870	0.027
16.	Do you feel you have experienced becoming a victim of verbal abuse (threats, humiliations) with people around you?	6 (22.22)	21 (77.78)	11 (15.07)	62 (84.93)	0.714	0.397
17.	Do you feel that you have succeeded in the deliberate control of your excess media consumption around COVID-19 by the use of social media, television, internet?	19 (70.37)	8 (29.63)	45 (61.64)	28 (38.36)	0.651	0.419
18.	Are you more hopeful that the corona crisis will soon be over?	26 (96.30)	1 (3.70)	71 (97.26)	2 (2.74)	0.062	0.801
Total		294 (60.50)	192 (39.50)	839 (63.86)	475 (36.14)	NA	

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the mental health status of the students of Faculty of Fisheries during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The questions asked to the students to assess their mental health during COVID-19 have been discussed below.

Risk and fear of getting infected with COVID-19

From the data presented in Table 1, the results indicated that majority of the male and female respondents felt that they were under risk and fear of getting infected with COVID-19 infection. The possible reason could be that the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak started all of a sudden and began to spread rapidly worldwide at a fast rate with huge death rates being reported, as the disease being highly contagious, thereby leaving a feeling of risk and fear among the students of getting infected with this virus. The results are in line with Zhang and Ma, 2020 and Son *et al.*, 2020 [8,9].

Worry about someone in the family who gets infected with the coronavirus

Majority of the male and female respondents were worried about someone in their family getting infected with the coronavirus. This is for the reason that since the coronavirus can easily get contracted and the working members in the family need to venture out of their homes for doing their work, makes them more prone to the virus and thereby leaving other members of the family worried as if whether they would get infected with the virus. The results have been supported by Son *et al.*, 2020; Mekonen *et al.*, 2021; Elmer *et al.*, 2020 and Saraswathi *et al.*, 2020 [9-12]. The Chi-square results revealed that statistically, there was a significant difference between male and female responses with respect to the statement ($p < 0.01$).

Fear of losing relatives or friends due to this pandemic

Majority of the male and female respondents had fear of losing their relatives or friends due to this coronavirus pandemic. Since, large number of death cases were reported worldwide due to this viral infection, leaving a huge impact on the people and students, and also the older and immunocompromised people in their respective families being more vulnerable and having underlying health conditions were at increased risk in catching the virus, thereby causing a worry of concern and fear among those students that they will lose their family members, loved ones or friends due to this pandemic. The findings are in line with Son *et al.*, 2020; Mekonen *et al.*, 2021; Elmer *et al.*, 2020 and Saraswathi *et al.*, 2020 [9-12]. The Chi-square results revealed that statistically, there was a significant difference between male and female responses with respect to the statement ($p < 0.05$).

Unable to experience any positive feeling at all due to COVID-19

A greater part of the male and female respondents was not able to experience any positive feeling at all due to COVID-19. The most

probable reason for this could be the fear of contracting the virus and being more stressful due to imposed lockdown, since the students were confined at their homes and were left with nothing much to do and also there was uncertainty about what is likely going to happen, thereby not having any positive feeling at all. The results are in agreement with Mekonen *et al.*, 2021 [10].

Unable to be enthusiastic about doing things

Major portion of the male and female respondents indicated of not being able to be enthusiastic in doing their things. The possible reason could be that the home environment not being suitable for them to study or doing their other works due to the disturbances and distractions caused by other family members and younger siblings in contrast with their learning or workplace environment i.e. college where they can study and learn better. Also, the stress and hopelessness caused by hearing the daily news and updates surrounding the novel coronavirus could also be another possible reason. The findings have been supported by Mekonen *et al.*, 2021 [10].

Lost concentration and interest regarding studies

Major part of the male and female respondents had lost concentration and interest concerning their studies owing to the pandemic. This could be due to various sources of distractions such as distractions at home environment as home being a more suitable place to relax rather than to study, distractions or interruptions from the family members for doing household chores, lack of accountability, distractions due to social media, internet and video games. Online classes were also subjected to distractions due to lack of interactions and prolonged attention to a computer screen. The results are in corroboration with studies done by Kecojevic *et al.*, 2020 and Son *et al.*, 2020 [7,9].

Difficulty in falling asleep and having recurring thoughts

Greater number of the male respondents did not agree that they faced difficulty in falling asleep. However, greater number of the female respondents agreed that they faced difficulty in falling asleep and were having recurring thoughts due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This could be due to disruptions to their sleep patterns for example inconsistent timing to sleep and to wake up from day to day, increased hours of sleep and poor sleep quality. Also, the females were more stressful since they spent all of their time at home without venturing outside in contrast with males who even in lockdown venture out of their homes for some physical activity or buying some essentials. The findings are in line with Son *et al.*, 2020 [9].

Experiencing sudden attack of fear or anxiety due to COVID-19

Majority of the male respondents had not been experiencing sudden attack of fear or anxiety due to COVID-19. Conversely, majority of the female respondents were experiencing sudden attack of fear or anxiety due to COVID-19. This could be due to the more vulnerable nature of females to mental health issues as compared to males since

they stay at home most of the times, thereby having increased stress and anxiety issues.

Getting suicidal, self-harm or aggressive behavioral patterns due to COVID-19

Majority of all the male and female respondents revealed that they were not getting suicidal, self-harm or aggressive behavioral patterns due to COVID-19. The most possible reason could be attributed to the fact that they remained busy with their online classes and assignments given by their teachers, so they hardly had any time to think about such thoughts.

Feeling bored, sad, wanted to cry during the confinement

Maximum number of the male and female respondents expressed that they felt bored, sad and wanted to cry during the COVID-19 confinement. Despite the busy schedule of online classes, the students could not venture out of their homes due to the restrictions and could hardly meet their friends, peers or relatives. Therefore, they felt bored, sad and wanted to cry during COVID-19 crisis.

Anxiety over uncertainty about the academic calendar and other college activities

Most of the male and female respondents said that they faced anxiety over uncertainty about their academic calendar and other college activities. This could be attributed to the reason that the sudden outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown imposed countrywide led to closure of all educational institutions leaving the students anxious and confined to their homes. All the ongoing and forthcoming examinations were postponed and curriculum schedule was suspended owing to rapid spread of COVID-19 disease outbreak, leaving the students in a state of complete confusion and jeopardy as students didn't know when their pending exams would be conducted, when their classes would be resume back, when the educational institutions will open again, when the COVID-19 crisis will end, thereby creating a sense of anxiety and putting an uncertainty regarding their academic calendar and other college activities. The results are in corroboration with Baloch *et al.*, 2021^[13].

COVID-19 pandemic has an impact on the careers of the current year university graduates

Higher percentage of the male and female respondents felt that COVID-19 pandemic had left an impact on the careers of the current year university graduates. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a tremendous level of stress among the students and had a serious impact on the careers of this year's university graduates. They experienced major interruptions in teaching and assessment in the final part of their studies. Because of postponement of the final examination, there was uncertainty about what is going to happen as they were likely to graduate late. Also, the students who intended to pursue higher education abroad, who intended to prepare for public service examinations and other entrance exams had to change their plans owing to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The findings are in agreement with studies done by Elmer *et al.*, 2020; Saraswathi *et al.*, 2020 and Baloch *et al.*, 2021^[11-13].

Concerned that the outbreak will adversely affect the exam performance

Majority of the male and female respondents were concerned that the COVID-19 outbreak would adversely affect their exam performance. The sudden transition to online classes was the biggest perceived challenge. The students were concerned about unexpected changes in syllabus, quality of the classes, technical problems with online applications and also the difficulty of learning online. The students were also worried about their progress of research and class projects due to imposed restrictions to maintain social distancing and the lack of physical interactions with other students. The students were

uncertain about their grades under the online learning environment to be a major stressor. The results are in line with Son *et al.*, 2020; Saraswathi *et al.*, 2020 and Baloch *et al.*, 2021^[9,12,13].

Reduction of social contacts due to COVID-19

Most of the male and female respondents felt that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the level of social isolation and there is a reduction of social contacts. This could be due to confinement of the students at their homes because of COVID-19 restrictions being imposed as they were not allowed to venture out of their homes to maintain social distancing so as to reduce and slow down the COVID-19 disease spread. The overall interactions and face to face meetings with other people such as their friends and disruptions to their outdoor activities such as jogging, hiking had also decreased significantly and thereby affecting their mental health. The findings have been supported by Son *et al.*, 2020; Elmer *et al.*, 2020 and Baloch *et al.*, 2021^[9,11,13].

Subjected to cigarette smoking and drug abuse owing to the coronavirus pandemic

Major portion of the male and female respondents said they had not been subjected to cigarette smoking and drug abuse owing to the coronavirus pandemic. This could be possibly due to the reason that Kashmiris are very much accustomed to remain in the lockdowns due to the prevailing situations of the valley. Since years together, there have been frequent lockdowns in Kashmir and the students interviewed in the study have been born and brought up in such situations, where they have been put under lockdown more often and are therefore accustomed to such situations. Therefore, there was no need to consume cigarettes and drugs because of the pandemic. The Chi-square analysis revealed that statistically, there was a significant difference between male and female responses with respect to this statement ($p < 0.05$).

Experienced becoming a victim of verbal abuse (threats, humiliations) with people around you

Major part of the male and female respondents said that they did not experience becoming a victim of verbal abuse (threats, humiliations) with people around them. This is because the home environment of the respondents seemed to be safe as in their families such fights, verbal abuses, threats, humiliations did not happen.

Succeeded in the deliberate control of your excess media consumption around COVID-19 by the use of social media, television, internet

Majority of the both the male and female respondents said they had succeeded in the deliberate control of their excess media consumption. The students revealed that they avoided social media because the whole social media and mass media was overloaded with the news about COVID-19 and deaths around the country. So, in order to avoid that stress, students avoided surfing social media.

Hopeful that the corona crisis will soon be over

Majority of the male and female respondents were hopeful that the corona crisis would soon be over. Since the first wave of COVID-19 is over and efforts are being made worldwide by health authorities and government bodies to tackle the pandemic such as development of vaccines, creating mass awareness and maintaining social distancing to reduce the viral spread, therefore the students are optimistic and are feeling more hopeful that the corona crisis will end soon. The findings have been corroborated by Copeland *et al.*, 2021^[14].

CONCLUSION

The results from the study indicated that majority of the respondents had risk and fear of getting infected with COVID-19, were worried

about their family members, had fear of losing their relatives or friends due to COVID-19, were not able to experience any positive feeling and indicated of not being able to be enthusiastic in doing their things. Moreover, the students expressed that they had lost concentration and interest in their studies, faced anxiety over uncertainty about their academic calendar, were concerned that the COVID-19 outbreak would affect their exam performance and felt that the pandemic had left an impact on the careers of current year university graduates.

Greater number of female respondents faced difficulty in falling asleep and were experiencing sudden attack of fear or anxiety due to COVID-19. Maximum number of the respondents felt bored, sad and wanted to cry during the COVID-19 confinement and felt that there was a reduction in social contacts.

From the study, it was also reported that the respondents were not subjected to cigarette smoking and drug abuse owing to the pandemic, were not a victim of verbal abuse and also were not getting any suicidal thoughts due to COVID-19. Furthermore, both the male and female respondents were of the opinion that they succeeded in the deliberate control of their excess media consumption and were hopeful for the corona crisis to end soon.

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Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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