



## A STUDY TO ASSESS THE MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL SKILLS OF FIRST YEAR COLLEGE GOING STUDENTS POST COVID-19

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### ABSTRACT

Mental health is immensely affected by the environment around us. COVID-19 pandemic had a vast global effect on about 1.6 billion students at its peak. It impacted their psychological well-being, specially the recent first year college students, who have been at home isolated for about two years and are now coming back to their social lives. Social skills allow individual to interact influentially and to abstain from undesirable responses. This study aimed at assessing the mental health and social skills of first year college students. It is a descriptive study involving 200 students, age group 19 to 23 years, both male and female of different streams coming from urban and rural areas. The tools used was the Kundu's Neurotic Personality Inventory and Novotni Social Skill Checklist. The findings show that 27% of the students have no neurotic tendencies, 42% are slightly neurotic, 26% are moderately neurotic, 6% are highly neurotic. Social skills were poor in students who were highly and moderately neurotic. Thus, lack of social skills can pose serious risks to mental health. The importance of such findings is to facilitate policy makers to consider development programs for enhancing the social skills of students along with academic curriculum. Given the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and social relationships, it is crucial to prioritize examining these issues in research, policy, and the development of interventions to support the well-being of individuals, particularly college students, during times of crisis.

**KEYWORDS :** COVID-19, Mental Health, Social skill, Students, Neurotic Personality.

### INTRODUCTION

Mental health is affected by the environment around us. The recent COVID-19 pandemic had a vast global effect on about 1.6 billion students at its peak (UNESCO, 2021), and it also affected their academics (UNESCO, 2021). As a result of the pandemic, college students experienced a long duration of quarantine. It was also physical isolation from their peer group, teachers, and family members, and they were forced to adapt to a virtual way of learning (Jad et al., 2022). Due to COVID restrictions, the colleges had to quickly change from off-line mode to online remote learning using laptops and mobiles. Most affected were the teachers and staff, students, and their families, who experienced lots of different challenges, which included high levels of stress and anxiety that have led to the degradation of the mental health status of students (Smith et al., 2021). Mental health has been of increased concern since COVID-19 (Sara & Int, 2018).

Corona has impacted the psychological well-being of the susceptible groups, including recent first-year college students who have been at home isolated for about two years and are now coming back to their social lives. According to Hans Eysenck's (1967) theory of personality, neuroticism is interlinked with low tolerance for stress or aversive stimuli (Norris et al. 2007). Neurotic personality refers to a personality trait characterized by emotional instability, anxiety, and a tendency to experience negative emotions such as fear, worry, and sadness. Studying the social relationships of individuals with neurosis is crucial as it can shed light on how psychiatric illness may impact a person's capacity to form and sustain relationships. Additionally, social connections may act as a buffer against psychiatric distress in the midst of challenging life circumstances (McKenzie et al. 2018). Studies have suggested that social isolation or a lack of social support can

contribute to the onset or exacerbation of neurotic disorders, even in the absence of significant life stressors. Thus, it is important to examine the role of social relationships in the etiology and treatment of neurotic disorders. When fear arises, people experience stress. Perceived stress is an individual response or experience to a stimulus, threat or event in different circumstances, which is one of the gateways to several mental health disorders, such as anxiety, depression, phobia, post-traumatic disorder and even psychotic disorders (Candrian et al. 2008; Wongpakaran et al. 2014; Banjongrewadee et al. 2018; Banjongrewadee et al. 2020).

The assessment of mental health profile and social skills help in the understanding the mental health of the students. Physical distancing during COVID has created social and emotional disbalance in life. Re-learning and coming to normalcy would be easy for some but not for all. Many would have lost their skills to adjust to new normal during COVID-19. With colleges starting full time, coming to college regularly, again socializing, studying for exams, etc. can be an extra burden for those who have lived in fear during COVID and had no contact with peers. Hence this study will help in understanding the areas where help can be provided and in general the ways in which mental health and social skills can be advanced.

### Objectives

1. To assess the mental health profile and social skills of first year college students in Nagpur region.
2. To evaluate the psychological and social effects of the pandemic on the first-year college students in Nagpur region.

**Research Methodology**

This was quantitative descriptive research. The sample size is 200. Sampling technique used is simple random sampling technique. Male and female college students in Nagpur region who are in 1st year belonging to B.B.Sc. Nursing, GNM, BAMS, BPTH, BE, and Pharmacy were taken for this study. The age group was between 19 to 23 years. Permission was taken from the respective college principals. Students with major psychiatric illness or with major illness in the family members were excluded from this study. Then the students were explained about the research. Informed consent was taken and questions answered. Kundu's neurotic personality inventory was given to the students. Total students who were given the questionnaire were 225. But the forms returned were only 212. Some were incomplete and finally 200 were selected who had completely answered the questionnaire. To avoid bias, the Novotni social skill checklist was given to the teachers of these students and they answered the checklist.

**Tools**

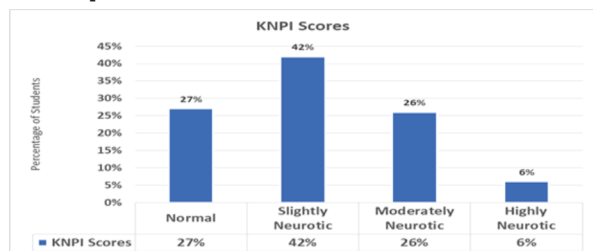
1. Novotni Social Skills Checklist—Self-Report Version. It is a self-administered rating scale. It covers a variety of areas related to a person's social behavior including basic manners, verbal and nonverbal communications, communication roadblocks, organization skills, self-control, knowledge, relationships, and self-care.
2. Kundu's Neurotic Personality Inventory. This was developed by Dr. Ramanath Kundu, Department of Psychology, University of Calcutta (1965). It has 66 statements describing behaviour which may be identified as neurotic. Each of the statements has to be responded to on a 5 numerical response category.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Table 1: Frequency And The Percentage Of The Demographic Variables Of Students.**

S.No	Demographic Characters	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Age	19 years	116	58%
		20 years	56	28%
		21 years	21	11%
		22 years	6	3%
		23 years	1	1%
2.	Course of Study	GNM	30	15%
		B.BSc	40	20%
		B.Pharm	30	15%
		Engg	40	20%
		BAMS	30	15%
		B.Pth	30	15%
3.	Gender	Male	87	43%
		Female	113	57%

The above table indicates the frequency and the percentage of demographic variable. The students of age group 19 are 58%, students of age 20 are 28%, 21-year students are 11%, 22-year-old students are 3%, and 23-year-old students are 1%. In this study the GNM students are 15%, B.BSc Nursing are 20%, B.Pharmacy are 15%, engineering students are 20%, BAMS students are 15%, physiotherapy students are 15%. In this study 43% are males and 57% are females.



**Graph 1: Percentage Wise Distribution Of Students According To Neurotic Tendency.**

Graph. 1 shows the neurotic tendency among students. Students with no neurotic tendency is 27%, slightly neurotic are 42%, moderately neurotic are 26% and highly neurotic are 6%.

**Table 2: Association Of Gender With Neurotism**

Gender	Neurotism				Total	K2-value
	Normal	Slightly Neurotic	Moderately Neurotic	Highly Neurotic		
Male	20 (10%)	37 (18.5%)	23 (13.5%)	7 (3.5%)	87(43.5%)	2.55 P=0.45, non-significant
Female	33 (16.5%)	47 (23.5%)	29 (14.5%)	4 (2%)	113(56.5%)	
Total	53 (26.5%)	84 (42%)	52 (26%)	11 (5.5%)	200 (100%)	

The above table shows association of gender with neurotism. As p=0.45, there is no association between gender and neurotism.

**Table 3: Association Of Stream With Neurotic Tendency**

Stream	Neurotism				Total	K2-value
	Normal	Slightly Neurotic	Moderately Neurotic	Highly Neurotic		
Ayur-veda	7 (3.5%)	12 (6%)	8 (4%)	3 (1.5%)	30 (15%)	15.47 P=0.41 Non-significant
B Pharm	8 (4%)	14 (7%)	5 (2.5%)	3 (1.5%)	30 (15%)	
BSC(N)	10 (5%)	16 (8%)	11 (5.5%)	3 (1.5%)	40 (20%)	
Engineering	17 (8.5%)	12 (6%)	10 (5%)	1 (0.5%)	40 (20%)	
GNM(N)	6 (3%)	13 (6.5%)	10 (5%)	1 (0.5%)	30 (15%)	
Physio-therapy	5 (2.5%)	17 (8.5%)	8 (4%)	0 (0%)	30 (15%)	
Total	53 (26.5%)	84 (42%)	52 (26%)	11 (5.5%)	200 (100%)	

Table 3 shows the association of stream and Neurotism. As p=0.41, it can be said that stream of study has no association with neurotic tendency.

**Table 4: Association Of Social Skills And Neurotism**

Association of Social Skills and Neurotism	K2-value	p-value	Significant/Non-significant
Association of Basic Manners and Neurotism	58.75	p=0.0001	Significant
Association of Verbal Communication Skills and Neurotism	5.77	p=0.016	Significant
Association of Non-Verbal Communication Skills and Neurotism	15.23	p=0.019	Significant
Association of Communication Roadblocks and Neurotism	13.38	p=0.038	Significant
Association of Organizational Skills and Neurotism	25.68	p=0.0001	Significant
Association of Self-Control and Neurotism	5.96	p=0.042	Non-Significant
Association of Neurotism and Knowledge	17.40	p=0.008	Significant
Association of Relationships and Neurotism	15.54	p=0.016	Significant
Association of Neurotism and Self Care	15.54	p=0.016	Significant

Table 4 shows that there is association between neurotic tendency and variety of areas related to a person's social behavior including basic manners, verbal and nonverbal communications, communication roadblocks, organization

skills, knowledge, relationships, and self-care. Self-control is the only area which has no relationship with neurotism.

## DISCUSSION

This study was undertaken among 1<sup>st</sup> year college going students to evaluate the psychological and social effects of the pandemic. Findings revealed that students with no neurotic tendency are 27%, while 74% of the students showed neurotic tendencies among which highly neurotic are 6%. Post covid neurotic tendencies have been found to increase among students. This study found an association between social skills and neurotism. Poor social skills are associated with higher neurotic tendency. It was also seen that age, gender, and educational streams have no association with neurotic tendencies. Among the social skills basic manners, verbal communication skills, non-verbal communication skills, communication roadblocks, organization skills, knowledge, relationships, and self-care have association with neurotic tendencies. There is no relation between self-control and neurotic tendencies. Overall, it is seen that good social skills lead to good mental health. But post Covid students suffered from poor social skills leading to neurotic tendencies. Many researches have brought out a strong correlation between social skills and mental health (Dour et al. 2013, Bekele et al. 2015). Strong mental health contributes to the development of social skills, empathy, and positive relationships with peers, teachers, and family members. It helps children develop effective communication skills, establish boundaries, and form healthy connections with others. Findings were similar in this study. In the transition from school to professional life, or studies, it is said that college has an important role to play in socialization and development of social skills. Alienation and isolation for nearly two years have impacted their social skills thus affecting mental health. Social skills help to cope with stress. Stressful event causing anxiety is reduced by supportive relationship. They provide care, information, resources, and feedback (Johnson and Johnson 1999). Thus, developing good social skills build confidence in one's ability which in turn helps in reducing neurotic tendencies. Post Covid, the alienation from outside world decreased the ability to socialize and retarded social skills and thus neurotic tendencies were found in 74% of the students post Covid.

## Limitations Of The Study

This was a small study done in Nagpur region of Maharashtra. The sample size was only 200. It only explored certain branches. More studies can be conducted across various areas and in students of different backgrounds.

## CONCLUSION

It is important to recognize that the pandemic has created significant stressors and challenges for students, including social isolation, financial difficulties, uncertainty about the future, and disruptions to their academic and personal lives. In the transition from school to professional studies, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> plays a very important role in socialization and development of social skills. The lack of socialization for more than two years has impacted their social skills thus affecting mental health. Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the importance of addressing the mental health impacts of public health crises and providing support and resources to individuals who are experiencing neurotic tendencies post pandemic. The study's findings highlight the importance of addressing the mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on students and providing them with the support and resources they need to cope with the challenges they are facing. Thus, this study highlights the importance of prioritizing mental health and well-being among college students, particularly during times of significant stress and uncertainty such as the COVID-19 pandemic and post pandemic in coming out of the new normal.

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