



## COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND MENTAL HEALTH OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS' STUDENTS

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**ABSTRACT** We are living in troubles times. The covid -19 pandemic appeared as a global health crisis that has caused huge mental and physical health challenges. . When covid-19 was declared a pandemic, no one imagined the changes it would bring. The covid-19 situation has actually changed the normal life. Pandemic is a triggering event, with which the people could not cope. Specific population groups have been affected by COVID-19 in different ways. The lockdown and social distancing norms have badly affected the level of mental health of secondary level students. Pandemic situation introduced new norms in domain of educational activities. These new norms have affected the way of teaching and learning in negative ways and become the immediate source of mental illness. In the present paper, author tried to point out the source of mental health in teaching learning activities during lockdown and social distancing situation.

**KEYWORDS :** Covid-19 Pandemic, Mental Health, Secondary Level Students.

### INTRODUCTION

Life is full of ironies in the realm of health. Uncertainty is certain about the health of man. Health is determined by a complex interaction among genetic, psychological, social and cultural factors. Both mind and body are important determinants of health and illness. We are in the last quarter of 2020, a year that has had a tremendous impact on every individual and social group around the globe emotionally, physically and mentally. Problem in any of these domains may lead to stress and later anxiety disorder or depression. Our belief, attitudes and behavior contributes significantly to initiate or prevention of illness. When the coronavirus appeared in small numbers, unplanned nationwide lockdown were clamped down with a lot of haste. The pandemic and the lockdown have altered all sense of time. The initial twenty one day pandemic induced lockdown that hardly gave people time to make arrangements was draconian. It imposed restriction on movement, affected livelihoods and was involuntary (telegraph, 1 October).

This year the covid-19 pandemic has unleashed a complex global crisis with long-term implication for public health and especially mental health front. The covid -19 pandemic appeared as a global health crisis that has caused huge mental and physical health challenges. The physical effects of coronavirus on body is easily identified and determined. However, the effects of virus on onus's mental health have not been measured easily. There has been very little concern expressed over the effects on mental health. In addition to endangering human health, covid-19 imposes irreversible psychological impacts on human societies. This borderless crisis faced by international community today asserts the fact that no individual can fight this pandemic in isolation. When covid-19 was declared a pandemic, no one imagined the changes it would bring. Covid has pushed back timelines. Specific population groups have been affected by COVID-19 in different ways (policy brief). "Children's emotional state and behavior has been affected during lockdown induced confinement" (Orgiles, 2020). Children, including adolescent are at particular risk of abuse during the pandemic. "Adolescent and young people are also an at-risk group in the present crisis, as most mental health condition develop during this period of life" (UN). Almost every young person has had to adjust to dramatic changes in their education, routine and home life. Some have experienced bereavement or other traumatic experience during the lockdown period (YOUNG MIND). What students planned to achieve in a certain number of years will now take more time. For instance, schools and colleges have been closed, examinations have been postponed and family's economic prospects have been curtailed. For the batch of 2020—school pass outs, the year has been full of challenges, chaos and confusion. Students are upset and confused. The pandemic is reshaping career plans for many and put the dreams and ambitions at stake. So pandemic augmented mental illness. A study was conducted on young people for mental health needs living in the united kingdom reports that 80 % respondent agreed that the coronavirus pandemic had made their mental health worse and further 41% accepted that pandemic made their mental health "much worse"(young mind).That is why; mental health is in a shambles. And now the pandemic has come along with intensity of our mental and emotional woes, our social cleavage and our confidence deficit.

### Mental health

Psychologically, mental health is mental ability or ego strength, dependability, trust and lack of impulsivity. Mental health is a process to help people achieve a better understanding of their health needs and avoid the risks of specific unhealthy behaviors and to identify technique to reduce or eliminate unhealthy behaviors and to promote the adoption of the lifestyles. Mental health is the concept of "risk" that is inherently global, referring to the ways that respect no "nation state" boundaries. "Mental health has large intrinsic value as it relates to the core of what makes us human". "Mental health conditions are disturbances in a person's thinking, feeling, or behavior (or a combination of these) that reflect a problem in mental function. They cause distress or disability in social, work, or family activities" (Morin, A). Though mental health impacts on individuals, families and society immensely; it is one of the most neglected areas of health. "Mental illnesses are health condition involving changes in emotion, thinking or behavior (or a combination of these). Mental illness are associated with distress and problems functioning in social, work or family activities-----Mental health is the key foundation for emotions, thinking, communication, learning, resilience and self-esteem. Mental health is also key to relationship, personal and emotional well-being and contribution to community or society" (American Psychiatric association).

In pandemic, "reality of life" is in question. The emerging mental health issues related to covid -19 global events may evolve into long-lasting health problems, isolation and stigma. Nothing is immune from corrosive effects of mental health.

### Covid 19 and Mental Health

The covid-19 pandemic has added to the concerns regarding mental health .All in all, covid-19 produces undependability, impulsivity and family income instability that are predictive of pre-mature mental problems. Such psychosocial factors affect a whole host of health behaviors. The immediacy of events like covid-19 created a general sense of helplessness. "There are 5.4 million cases of covid-19 in India" (Mathai, G). Covid -19 produced negative impacts on student's mental health. Children are constantly exposed to the latest pandemic news and statistic via, TV, computer or Smartphone. "Widespread misinformation about the virus and prevention measures and deep uncertainty about the future are additional major sources of distress."(UN). These contribute to their anxiety. They make assumption that if the whole world is dying of covid -19," will they too". Human body is unable to cope with this induced fear and start a "flight or fight responses" with release of biochemical, and hormones. In turn, these produce various physical manifestations, called "panic attack". A panic attack usually resolves on its own. Panic disorder or panic attack may run in families. People with recurrent panic attack are more likely to be depressed, suicidal and have a tendency to abuse alcohol or drugs. Panic attack stop as suddenly as they start. They can recur at intervals. Constant stay at home, loss of school friends and outing has precipitate attacks. These stressors are now common and widespread. It is natural that such panic attack will spread too. Usually, these attacks are temporary. If stressor persists then the symptom can

progress to general anxiety disorder. Students permanently have excessively unrealistic worry, restlessness, irritability, headache that were the source of mental illness.

### Students and mental health

In this year, pandemic had perpetrated a psychological and emotional crisis on school going children. Globally, youngest are uncertain about their future career prospects and fearful about life. Children have been struggling with anxiety disorder and not enjoying home because of separation from peer. Hurlock explained that adolescents have tendency to take life through rose-tinted glasses. They nurture unrealistic aspiration, not only for themselves but for friends and families. Disruption or intervention in aspiration is primary cause for the heightened emotional and mental disturbance. "The social consequences of the pandemic may affect brain health development in young children and adolescents and cognitive decline" (U N). The present pandemic disrupt the educational aspiration of secondary and higher secondary students. There can be no argument about reducing stress on young minds battling unprecedented interruption on account of the covid -19 crisis. Children have been inundated with news items and information on online classes. That new phenomenon is causing anxiety towards learning of class syllabus. It is clear the covid-19 crisis had led to increased stress. To adapt and to deal the post-pandemic learning world, "blended learning" and "new normal" are two phrases that have been circulating in academic domain. But is this 'normal'? Will it ever be 'normal'? Severe disruptions to learning, compounded by the health crisis, have led to deterioration in young people's mental well-being like possibly suffering from anxiety, stress or depression. The covid situation has actually changed the normal life. Children are on verge of revolt against pandemic induced isolation and voluntary quarantine situation. The trauma, parent's economic insecurity is important factors that contribute to mental health. Due to dynamic nature of the current situation, the most relaxed and stress free period of student's life has now been plunged into an abyss of uncertainty, deadliness, stress and pressure. Covid -19 causes emotional detachment, difficulties with sleep and concentration. This is the reason that many feel they are currently at a disadvantage. Almost every student has his/her dream and future planning. Unfortunately, the times have forced them to changes their dreams as well as career. Emotional balance is an essential element of mental health. It should be promoted in the child. The child must be allowed to confront a reasonable number of unpleasant emotional experiences along with an abundant supply of pleasant ones. So it is necessary of experiencing both pleasant and unpleasant emotion. "The environment should be controlled to ward against an excess of either the pleasant or the unpleasant" (Hurlock, 2016). Hurlock suggested that whenever it is possible to do so, prepare the child for an unpleasant emotion in advance—before it is aroused and gets out of control. It is a well-known psychological principle that any stress situation can be met better if person is prepared for it ahead of time.

### School Environment and Mental Health

Child in school IS a member of class that is an important group. How the child intermixes with members of the class will affect his educational performance. "The need to know the environment is basic. It may be regarded as one of the important motivators of behavior" (Stones, E). The general atmosphere of the group is surprisingly important. "The 'bonding' among students happens outside the classroom in the play-ground or during break time—all that is missing now" (Mazumdar, J). This atmosphere is very susceptible to influence by the teacher. Class in form of groups brings out the virtues of cooperation. The cooperative class group produces a greater sense of responsibility, produces more diverse contribution, more attentive to one another, more friendly and enjoyed themselves more. The achievement and success of child is linked to other more socially and educationally desirable end. Teacher sets realistic educational goals and achievement of which will provide the necessary reinforcement. In cooperative lines organized class, the success of one child will positively reinforcing to the other children and the positive effect of the group, group success will produce a more favorable situation for future achievement. In this way, teacher can introduce the cooperative atmosphere. Through Class organization, the teacher can arrange things so that the interests of the group are the interest of each individual child rather than these interests being mutually opposite. Schools are not only for learning and writing examination, but also for enjoying the friendship and leisure time. The nature and composition of social group in which a child find himself can have quit important

effect on his development. The school is built on pillars of 'care' and 'responsibility' to students, parents and society at large. School has the responsibility of inculcating and grooming the personality of our students to be responsible citizens of the society. Care for the society is something which is intricately imbibed and emphasized in school functioning.

### Covid-19 and Entertainment

The pandemic has forced children to be inside homes for months and the feeling of not being heard can be very dominant in the absence of school and friend. Due to lockdown, engaging children round the clock inside the home may sometimes become difficult for parents. The children, the age group of three years to twelve years can find it very difficult to stay round the clock in a controlled situation, not meeting their friends and peers, not strolling in the neighborhood park, not doing most of the things they like. In such situation, it is very important to keep children engaged with some other than prescribed homework and learning. Attending online classes and absence of human teachers have already become tedious for many children. Entertainment for children has become dependent on technology and digital version. We should try to break with this virtual entertainment or digitalization of entertainment. With physical activities getting restricted during lockdown, it is essential to induce love for the traditional games like hide and seek . Story session should be organized by parents. For engaging the children with different kind of board games like ludo, carom chess and puzzles, parent's spare time for children, encourage children for making snacks in kitchen, assist them whenever they need the guidance. This will also ensure that they learn to cook not as a hobby but as a skill and the skill can turn into a hobby any day. It is perfect time to learn new ways of making crafts using whatever is available at home, like making book marks, painting pots or using card board to make house for the doll. Parents must be less strict I allowing the children to access their computer, laptops, mobiles and help them to down load their favorite cartoons and have fun with their favorite character.

### Covid-19 and examination

The cancellation of board examination due to the ongoing pandemic has left many students in limbo. Students are concerned that the decision to cancel board examination and marking them on an average will hurt their future. The uncertainty involved in how students are going to be marked has become a cause of severe distress. The decision of marking students based on internal examination, though seem just, but has not produce a sense of relief. On the contrary, it has added to their worries. Students have been left in lurch. They are perplexed by the uncertainty of future. High achievers are in dark, they feared to be average, and anxious about the mark, they will finally score. Many students are extremely upset losing the chance of proving them self. The last six months have been frustrating, with no clarity what so ever. Due process of exams was disturb and changed under new normal. New examination's dates will trigger more anxiety for prospective examinees. For example, Bengal secondary board postponed "selection test" for this year. The exams are conducted by individuals' school and those passed in the selection test are allowed to appear for secondary and higher secondary. Because of pandemic situation, students are unable to go school, so this decision has been taken. This situation is causing a lot of stress. The court's anger is warranted and stems from the concern that such dilly-dallying only adds to the anxiety of students already stressed on account of the interruption in the academic calendar because of the pandemic. There is mass scale miscarriage of dreams and expectation of the students.

### Suggestions

We cannot deny the significance of values in human life. Values are important in managing mental health-related problems. Cultivation of values improves emotional and mental health. Values such as patience, tolerance, self-control, serenity, wisdom, courage, integrity need to be cultivated in order to cope effectively mental health problems. First of all, we should make difference between pandemic induced and chronic mental illness. Further, current situation oriented guidance and counseling from the teachers and parents will be highly beneficial to students. Avoid unsubstantiated news about covid-19 and educational matters that causes depression. Take practical and well planned step to face challenges. Do not discuss about the 'covid-19 cases', 'infected families', 'victims', repeated media images of severely ill people, dead bodies and coffin that add to the fear. Amplify positive and hopeful stories and positive images of who have experienced covid -19.

Participate in meditation activities. Meditation is an effective method to integrate body-mind- soul and heart to our true self. "Meditation has tremendous healing effects among those who are suffering from mental health problem" (Husain, A).For dealing stressors, students must not resort negative way of coping ,like spending more time on addictive behaviors such as on line gaming. Develop one's own belief system. Everywhere, there is something to feel sad or deep perturbed. How we manage our emotions, maintain equanimity and continue on uncertain way of life depends on our own belief system that we choose. Our unhappiness comes from our rage and despair about how things are happening in the world. Rage and anger are essential emotions for survival and change. We cannot control the external world, but we can control our perception of it. Life is a confusing mixture of sadness and joy and of success and failure.

## CONCLUSION

We have been living in troubles times. Covid -19 impacts lives and livelihoods together. A pandemic also affects individuals and society and initiates anxiety, disruption, stress and xenophobia. Isolation, social distancing, closure of educational institutes and entertainments sources have confined students to stay in homes. These restrictive measures have affected the social and mental health. Covid -19 is not a disease of two weeks in all cases. To keep in mind that the current situation will not go away overnight and students should focus on longer term educational ability rather than short term responses. It is leaving behind foot prints in patients even after they have recovered. Parents, teachers and social workers should come together to respond to the mental health and psychosocial consequences of the covid -19 pandemic. The covid-19 outbreak has cropped up a gap in public health and healthcare system. The consequences are a alarming. Only half of India's population can avail of even the most rudimentary health services and over seventy percent of health expenses are borne by citizens themselves. The accessibility and affordability of health system ought not to be compromised at the time of pandemic. Mental health is as important as or even more important than physical health, because the latter is conditioned by the former. Teachers and parents may help them to see their problem objectively and realistically. The pandemic had presented an opportunity to teach children life's lesson like discipline, responsibility and integrity. We have been waiting anxiously for any positive sign that there will be an end to the pandemic that has killed more than 1.2 million people worldwide. The effects of covid-19 pandemic on student's mental health is as important as knowing its transmission and management. It is important to note that we should not just adopt but also promote covid -19 appropriate behaviors across society, within families, among neighbor and in our schools and colleges.

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