

# Psychological health of Indian youth during COVID-19: a study through three chronological surveys

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## Article Info

### Article history:

Received Aug 27, 2022

Revised Feb 15, 2023

Accepted Mar 6, 2023

### Keywords:

COVID-19

Difficulty score

Distress

Strength and Difficulty

questionnaire

Young adults

## ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic and its aftereffects have affected human lives psychologically, economically, and socially. The study examines the dynamics of mental health problems faced by young adults and the consequent effects on their daily lives during the pandemic period. Three surveys were conducted among colleges/universities going students in India during the time periods May-June 2020, October 2020-February 2021, and January-February 2022; using Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) 17+ self-reported extended version. Through 1,021, 743, and 932 responses in the three surveys respectively, the effect of the pandemic on the mental health (characterized by behavioral problems and social dysfunction) of respondents, categorized on basis of demographic variables and 'COVID-19' status was studied. Females were found to be more 'distressed' than during this period. There was no effect of age and family income. The 45% of the respondents in the Non-COVID group and 48% in the COVID-19 group had severe distress. With the passing of time, both the number of problem areas and the severity of problems faced by young adults increased thus affecting their day-to-day activities. The proportions of the respondents in borderline and abnormal categories were much higher both for difficulty and the impact scores of SDQ than the standard proportions.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of coronavirus-induced pandemic COVID-19 in late 2019 and early 2020 and its consequences have altered human life across the world forever. Apart from the physiological effects, the pandemic has affected human lives psychologically, economically, and socially. A number of preventive steps and policy decisions, such as lockdown, social distancing, and closure of academic institutions to check the transmission and spread of the disease, have further augmented these effects [1].

One of the most affected strata of society during the pandemic is the young adults studying in higher educational institutions. This group has reported psychological issues such as loneliness, depression, anxiety, and distress extensively not only due to the disease itself but also on account of lack of interaction with their friends and teachers during online classes, uncertainty about their studies and future careers, and loss of family income due to lockdown conditions [2]–[10]. Although mental health problems have been reported among young adults earlier also thereby affecting their academic performance as well as their social lives [11]–[17],