

Evaluating the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on the psychological health of young adults in India

Alka Sabharwal¹, Babita Goyal², Vibha S. Chauhan³, Lalit Mohan Joshi⁴, Vaibhav Goyal⁵

¹Department of Statistics, Kirori Mal College, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

²Department of Statistics, Ramjas College, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

³Kirori Mal College, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

⁴Department of Statistics, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

⁵Department of Economics, School of Undergraduate Studies, Ambedkar University, Delhi, India

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 pandemic has affected the mental health of individuals, particularly young adults. Using the 'strength and difficulty questionnaire 17+ extended version', we studied the severity of psychological problems and the resultant distress in young adults; the relationship between the 'difficulty' and 'impact' scores; and the effect of distress in terms of a number of day-to-day activities affected during a pandemic. Data was collected from 743 college/university students (December 2020-February 2021) in India. Descriptive, relative frequencies, and nonparametric tests are applied here. Females were facing more psychological behavioral problems as compared to males as the p-value is less than 0.001. Males with age < 20 years were least affected by COVID-19. Day-to-day activities are affected by almost 45% of young adults because of distress. 'difficulty' and 'impact' severity bands were significantly different from the previous standard proportions. No significant association was there between 'difficulty' and 'impact' scores (p-value < 0.001). 53% of those contracting COVID-19 had severe distress as against 45% of those who did not. 46% of the respondents were in the 'abnormal' category and 59 out of 327 were facing 'a great deal' problems in more than two areas.

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Corresponding Author:

Babita Goyal

Department of Statistics, Ramjas College, University of Delhi

Delhi 110007, India

Email: goyalbabita@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus-induced COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented in recent history, with global impacts including high rates of mortality and morbidity. To break the chain of transmission, governmental decisions like isolation, social distancing, and closure of educational institutes and people staying in their homes negatively impacted individual's mental health [1]. Based on the household pulse survey, Kaiser Family Foundation found that during the pandemic, a larger number of young adults (ages 18-24) reported symptoms of anxiety and/or depressive disorder as compared to older adults [2]. The effect of COVID-19 on young people's mental health could be more damaging in the long run than the infection itself [3]. These findings are of critical importance and need immediate mental health interventions [4].

Early detection of psychological problems is the most challenging and important in tackling the problems. Psychological testing is done in general to screen for the presence or absence of common mental