

**Research Article**

## **Covid-19 and Implications on Mental Health of Students**

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Date of Submission: 23/02/2023; Date of Acceptance: 27/02/2023

### **ABSTRACT**

The Covid-19 pandemic, and the subsequent lockdowns, caused chaos across the world in 2020. Apart from being primarily a disease, it also had social, economic and psychological implications. The objective of this paper is to understand the psycho-social and mental health effects of the pandemic on people, more categorically on university students, medical students, international students, young refugees, and to understand financial suffering of people. The paper uses a literature review method to analyze and report the findings.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Mental health, Students, Refugees

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent health measures had tremendous effects on the mental health and well-being of individuals around the world. Young people who are in early adulthood period are at greatest risk for mental illness, with 75% of mental problems appearing at this timeframe. Young people experience greater degrees of solitude and social isolation, and are much less certain to have steady jobs, and are still developing skills in judgment and emotion regulation. These variables have added to the disproportionate effect of the pandemic on young people, especially those with pre-existing mental health issues (Bell et. al., 2023). The severe acute disease coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV2), which causes coronavirus 2019 (Covid-19), has affected about 481 million people globally as of March 2022, and led to the death of around 6 million of them according to World Health Organization. Apart from respiratory system, Covid-19 can affect the neurological systems also (Bai et. al., 2022). The Covid-19

epidemic is still a cause of stress and has significant effects on mental health. Along with the possibility of acquiring and dying from the virus, the increasing Covid-19 death count, continued economic uncertainty, loneliness brought on by social exclusion, and other changes to our way of life combine to provide the ideal environment for mental health to deteriorate. High levels of emotional anguish are being experienced by one in five American adults, and the numbers of reports of domestic violence, contacts to mental health assistances and fatal drug overdoses have all gone up since the year prior to the pandemic. Since around September 2020, one-quarter of US adults struggled to pay their expenses, with approximately one-sixth having borrowed cash from friends or relatives and one-third having pulled monies from their savings and retirement accounts. These increased stressors contributed to sleeping problems, spikes in alcohol or drug use, and the health deterioration of people with chronic diseases, which increased fatigue and decreased desire to monitor and manage health and well-being (Ellison et. al., 2021). The study attempts to explain how and in what way Covid-19 pandemic has adversely affected on the mental health of university students, international students, medical students, immigrant refugees and also led to the deterioration of financial status of people.

### **Effect on mental health of university students**

In a longitudinal study conducted among students of public affairs in four universities of Jordan by Yaghi (2022), reported that the coming of online education due to Covid-19 pandemic has affected the ‘mental health’ of students. In comparison to the pre-Covid-19 times, the students reported that they suffered from constant anxiety and stress at higher levels. Psychological well-being is typically referred to as mental health, and any deficits or imbalance in this case is referred to as mental disorder. Unlike anxiety, poor mental health is often the consequence of external factors which affect an individual psychologically, socially, emotionally and so on. Contrarily, anxiety is persistent worrying about something, anxiety generally manifests itself as phobias, for instance, fear of a disease like Covid-19. In other words, it can be inferred that both mental health and anxiety issues can be increased by the environment created by the pandemic. Subsequently, the study stated that 66% of the students, out of the total 6,242 students who were the samples of the study, reported poor mental health after the start of the pandemic. In the context of causality of the worries, due to exposure to involuntary online education, the study found three categorical dimensions. First, students were worried with instruction by the teacher in-class. Although previously they were instructed within classrooms and the students were able to connect and communicate properly with their teachers, but because of online education this thing was lost and their relationships with teachers became impersonal. Apart from this,

students also lost the chance of working in close proximity with their colleagues, non-teaching staff and so on. Teachers cannot be held responsible for all mental health issues, but they can take some steps to promote students' mental health, such as shortening class periods, making sure everyone can hear and see the teacher, and spending more time explaining class materials. Second, students were worried with the level of supervision and socialization with others. They were concerned about finishing internships, having insufficient office hours, and only learning a limited number of specialized public skills such as giving a speech, debate, and negotiation and so on. Third, students were worried about their future employment. Students were concerned about developing a strong enough relationship with their professors to be able to ask for recommendation letters. Students were also worried about their chances of getting job in a bleak environment created by the pandemic wherein, business and industry were not functioning in their full capacity. Again, some students' employability may be affected by the inadequate training they receive during internships. Subsequently, researchers have found that students who participate in online learning opportunities during a pandemic may not emerge with the same level of preparedness and coaching as their peers who did not participate in online learning. The study also reported that the levels of stress was found to be significantly connected with the number of years spent in college, so that fourth-year students, for instance, experience more mental anguish than second-year students. Further, students may develop personality disorders and phobias in the future resulting from the isolation and movement restrictions imposed on students by lockdown measures.

### **Effect on International Students**

Similarly, it is well known that international students' mental health were adversely affected by Covid-19 pandemic, in this context, study by Kivela (2022) on international students found that owing to the fact that international students lack local assistance programs and constitute a higher-risk subset of the population. The study was aimed at evaluating the mental health consequences during Covid-19 pandemic through two cohorts of students with stress issues studying in Leiden University in the Netherlands. The first cohort study was carried in 2020 and the second cohort was carried out in 2021. And the study found that there was an increase in the prevalence of major mental health issues among the class of 2021 compared with year 2020. These findings corroborate the previous researches showing an increase in various mental health concerns during the epidemic, including anxiety and sadness. The authors noticed a tendency of increased mental health issues among overseas students like increased anxiety, work stress and loneliness. There are a variety of reasons for which international students may have higher mental health issues than local students. And

these problems are aggravated by Covid-19. Relatively, young individuals who relocate overseas and are on their own are subject to distinct stresses. At the same time, prospective students abandon their accustomed environment and social support networks, which diminishes their adaptability. Again, students attempting to adapt into a new culture may experience social isolation and disconnection, and for some, who faces racial discrimination may further impede this process. Studying abroad requires a larger financial contribution than studying in one's own country, and this increases pressures for success. International students encounter challenges that local students do not face. It has also been found that international students have elevated levels of melancholy, anxiety, and stress, as well as lower life satisfaction, and are less inclined to utilize university counseling services. These concerns were amplified by the pandemic and social exclusion measures, and students were more worried about the health and safety of loved ones at home while accessing a foreign and unfamiliar health-care system. Their research findings revealed a rise in international students' discontent of Covid-19.

### **Effect on Medical Students**

Medical education across has been equally affected by the Covid-19 outbreak. The alterations brought by Covid-19 had a big effect on medical students' mental health because they were already prone to having low psychological well-being. Mittal (2021) examined the adverse effect of Covid-19 pandemic on mental health and curriculum of the international medical community and evaluated the effects of Covid-19 curriculum revisions. In order to stop additional viral exposure and transmission, medical institutions gradually switched to online instruction starting in March 2020. Students adjusted rapidly to spending lengthy hours on Zoom after having classes and activities in-person. However, a study reported that the majority of respondents, that is, 64.7% in a sample of 3,348 medical graduates representing 13 medical schools differed that virtual learning can be effectively implemented. The majority of students, that is, 54.8% also objected of the use of online education for clinical curricular aspects. Similarly, another poll of 234 medical pupils revealed that since adopting web-based learning, 56.2% of students had experienced a reduction in studying time and work productivity. Covid-19 also affected on medical students' opportunities to gain clinical skills and complete residencies. The Association of American Medical Colleges advised all medical schools to discontinue all student clinical training that involved direct patient care in March 2020. According to a US research that polled 741 medical students, the majority of students, that is, 74.7%, said the pandemic had considerably disturbed their education, whereas just 61.3% thought they could continue with their regular clinical rotations. If they had to go back to the clinical setting, 83.4% of students said they

would be willing to take the risk of contracting the virus. Medical students' everyday learning in both classroom and clinical settings were significantly affected by the pandemic, along with their belief in themselves as future doctors and the specialties they were considering to pursue. According to a survey of 337 students studying allopathic medicine, 20.2% of participants believed that the pandemic will have an effect on their decision regarding a specialization, making them unable to study specialties in which they intended. A number of exams must be passed to demonstrate one's proficiency before graduation from medical school. Unfortunately, the pandemic has caused these tests to be repeatedly delayed. According to a study of 2,661 medical students, the large percentage of students, that is, 59.9%, wanted the exit tests to be postponed because they were intimidated and had lost faith in their capacity to one day become effective doctors. Another survey of 440 medical undergraduates revealed that 44.3% of undergraduates had their apprenticeship placements delayed, whereas 77.3% had their elective courses cancelled. Covid-19-caused placement changes were found to have the biggest effect on students' readiness. Since the beginning of the pandemic, medical students' anxieties significantly increased. A study of 741 medical students from across the United States of America utilized a seven-point Likert scale to assess student anxiety. And found that since the pandemic began, there has been a statistically important rise in self-reported emotive weariness and breakdown compared with before the outbreak. Medical students who took the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale 21 Items, before and throughout the pandemic, demonstrated an increase in the occurrence and degrees of nervousness and stress. Other researchers have revealed that medical students experienced symptoms of depression. In a survey of 530 medical graduates, 44.1% felt emotionally distant from family and friends, whereas 38.1% informed feeling despairing, weary, or emotionally inattentive during quarantine period. Moreover, females report greater negative mental health outcomes than males. When measuring emotional stress among Australian medical students using Kessler-10 (K10) model, ladies had considerably higher K10 scores than males. Further, a study in Morocco which examined 549 medical pupils discovered that women reported more than men of having severe anxiety, sadness, insomnia, and distress symptoms.

### **Economic Deterioration and Mental Health**

In a study carried out by Hadar-Shoval et. al. (2022) reported that there is a positive correlation between Covid-19-induced economic deterioration and poor mental health among men. The study evaluated this correlation with the intent of identifying populations that are more prone to experience mental health impairment. Their online survey with questions monitoring three mental health conditions—psychological distress, affective disorders, and affective eating—was completed by 1,807 participants

in total. Consequentially, women were shown to have more psychiatric impairment than men. More mental impairment was reported by males and females whose economic situation greatly declined as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak than by those whose situation did not significantly decline. However, men who experienced a severe decline in their economic circumstances reported high levels of mental health impairment, which was also true for women in a similar circumstance. Their research reveals that the pandemic had seriously damaged the mental health of men. The financial status deterioration that was induced by the job loss owing to the shutting of businesses and workspaces, sudden deployment on unpaid leave for an undecided period, and alterations in working times and surroundings and so on may have led to job insecurity by causing uncertainty. Numerous studies state that there is a correlation between employment uncertainty and psychological suffering. Men faced substantial psychological discomfort because of employment uncertainty, which were described using masculine standards and, more particularly, the breadwinner model, which states that men should provide the majority of household income. Changes in work and economic position as a result of the Covid-19 might pose a threat to men's masculinity, which had a negative effect on their mental health.

### **Effect on Young Refugees**

Nearly half of the world's total 26.3 million refugees are youngsters under the age of 18 years, a population regarded to be among the most vulnerable refugee categories. Due to Covid-19, school-aged refugee children confronted specific issues with disruption to their daily life, including timetable disruptions, loss of structure, shifting to remote schooling, idleness and separation from peers. In addition, language learning for young refugees via peer relationships with peers from the host nation is an essential aspect of their adaptation. With closure of schools, there was an interruption in the flourishing of such relationships, as disconnection from peers hinders the capacity to develop linguistically, leaving young refugees with linguistic barriers that hinder their capacity to incorporate into host societies. And these cause a potential source of psychological stress. In addition, the shift to electronic learning was difficult for certain refugee children due to substandard living conditions, lack of Internet access, or unstable network connectivity in countries with inadequate electricity. Moreover, the children who lacked computer skills or technological knowledge were not able to participate. In addition, as individuals spent more time at home, mental health professionals expressed concern about concealed child labor, forced marriages, exploitation and abandonment of children. These incidences have the potential to cause mental health difficulties in refugee children, particularly in light of the shutdown of religious institutions which earlier served as refugee mental health support mechanisms.

Researchers demonstrate that religious institutions offer planned activities and role models that improve the school and cultural adaptation of young refugees after relocation. During lockdowns, numerous refugee children had few alternatives to these facilities. This resulted in uncertainty over the end of schooling, giving the parents and children stress and anxiety. In the case of adult refugees, researchers found a continuing frequency of post-traumatic stress, anxiousness and depressed mood even prior to the pandemic. Subsequently, lockdowns revived terrible memories for refugees who had previously experienced war trauma. For instance, the emptiness and silence on the streets served as reminders for refugees of unpleasant memories, such as fleeing from opposing factions or the government. Then, several nations had a heightened military presence throughout the streets to implement stay-at-home restrictions in many locations. In Malaysia, this was the case with Rohingya refugees, who claimed to have flashbacks when they saw law enforcement in the streets. Lockdowns also brought back memories of life under repressive or perilous regimes wherein refugees might have encountered forced detention, incarceration or imprisonment coupled with helplessness, as well as psychological and physical torture. Lockdowns have also been socially isolating, which raised worries that now the stress brought on by little social interaction and solitude could be a trigger for earlier traumatic events. Lockdowns, in addition with triggers, exacerbated refugees' anxiety and tension as they struggled with adjusting to a new reality in their living circumstances (Kiteki, 2022).

## **CONCLUSION**

Therefore, it can be inferred that Covid-19 has severely affected the mental health of numerous groups of people. The university students were affected by sudden transition to online learning and impersonal student–teacher relation. The medical students suffered from inability to perform scheduled clinical trials, which were an essential part of their training period. Besides, they also doubted their capability as future doctors and were anxious about whether they will be able to procure a seat for their specialization courses after completing their graduation degree. Similarly, men's mental health was affected owing to loss of jobs because of lockdowns. As per societal norms, men are the breadwinner of the family, and when men are unable to fulfill it due to economic insecurities, it takes a toll on their mental health. Again, pandemic-induced lockdowns were also stressful for immigrant refugees in the sense that it reminded them of their past war trauma associated with empty streets, enforcement agencies on the streets. Moreover, with the closure of schools, refugee children were also deprived of the chances to learn the language of the host state. All these factors culminated to adversely affect the mental health of not only refugees but also all groups in the society.

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**How to cite this article:** Fatmi SN and Ahmed S, 2023. Covid-19 and Implications on Mental Health of Students, *Journal of Exclusion Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 32-39.