

Last but not Least: Psychological Impact of COVID-19 Trauma on Perceived Academic Performance and Psychological Well-Being

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Abstract

The overall functioning and emotional stability of a person are referred to as their psychological well-being, and these are highly correlated, especially in the context of post-COVID-19. Adolescents must establish stronger bonds in relationships, learn to accept the changes and challenges, and overcome obstacles, stresses, and uncertainties in order to achieve psychological well-being, which will automatically elevate academic performance. For this reason, the current study investigated the impact of COVID-19 on the academic performance of adolescents and how psychological well-being helps the students overcome this situation. The 226 adolescents in the age group- having COVID-19 traumatic stress were selected using COVID (2020), The Ryff's model of psychological well-being scale (2006), and the Academic Performance Self-assessment Scale. The results of the correlation analysis would be analyzed using Pearson's Correlation. The implication of the study is that any studies regarding young adolescents and their psychological well-being are very important, especially in the context of COVID-19 traumatic stress. It is very salient to understand how academic performance and psychological well-being are correlated and how COVID-19 traumatic stress affects it. Since academic performance and psychological well-being are interrelated, we can enhance it by identifying the COVID-19 traumatic stress among

adolescents, and thus the results will immensely contribute to the field of educational psychology and clinical psychology.

Key words: Academic Performance, Psychological Well-being, Late Adolescents, COVID-19 Trauma.

Introduction

In the present scenario, one of the important areas of research is the academic performance of adolescents and they have come to understand the various factors that influence students' overall outcomes both inside and outside the classroom (Williams, 2018). Academic performance/success and psychological well-being are intertwined with each other and through the lens of psychological well-being we can understand and promote academic success a little more deeply (Huppert, 2009). The current study focuses on examining the impact of COVID-19 on the academic performance of adolescents, with a specific emphasis on the role of psychological well-being in overcoming the challenges posed by the pandemic. It is very evident that COVID-19 affected very badly to the academic performance and the psychological well-being of the students.

When examining mental well-being, certain researchers have described it as an individual's quest for happiness, contentment with life, the presence of positive emotions, and the lack of negative emotions (Diener, 2000). On the other hand, other scholars have proposed that well-being is more closely linked to a person's sense of purpose in life, self-acceptance, realization of one's potential, and feelings of competence (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

Adolescent well-being appears to have its own developmental quirks and is very different from that of later ages (Viejo, Gómez-López, & Ortega-Ruiz, 2018) and also which is a period where they normally experience some level of stress and it is a normative developmental phenomenon (Shankar and Park, 2016; Wang, Degol, & Henry, 2020). But COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these naturally occurring stresses and it impacted them very negatively both physically, mentally, and psychologically (Fegert et al., 2020). There are several studies that show how mental illnesses among adolescents develop over time (Magsodi et al., 2010, Power, 2010, Bayera et al., 2010). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health issues have become more prevalent among children and adolescents in recent years (Bayera et al., 2010).

In various countries, research has revealed that during the initial stages of the pandemic, there was a notable rise in mental health issues among adults. Additionally, data from 12 longitudinal studies and one repeated cross-sectional study have demonstrated that depressive symptoms among adolescents increased when comparing the period before the pandemic to the period during it (von Soest et al., 2022). Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, a survey conducted on a population-based level examined the mental health of students after the crisis (Cao et al., 2020). As a result of the global lockdown, the academic environment faced significant disruptions. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reported that universities were compelled to close on a large scale, resulting in the suspension of scheduled activities and student accommodations. All interactions were transitioned to online platforms, causing a significant upheaval in students' academic lives (UNICEF, 2020). Also, it was discovered that a significant portion of students (159; 82%) expressed worries about how the COVID-19 pandemic would affect their academic performance (Son et al., 2020). The fear of achieving lower grades and experiencing delays in completing their studies were additional factors contributing to the heightened stress levels among students during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ikbar et al., 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about unprecedented challenges for adolescents, significantly impacting their academic performance and psychological well-being. To understand and address the impact of COVID-19 traumatic stress on academic performance and psychological well-being among adolescents, it is crucial for future research to delve deeper into the underlying mechanisms that mediate and moderate this relationship. By gaining a comprehensive understanding of these factors, educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals can design effective interventions to support adolescents during these challenging times and promote their overall well-being and academic success.

Methods

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 226 students selected from different schools in Kerala. All the respondents were between the age group of 13 to 18 years (Mean age = 18 years). The convenience sampling method was used by the researcher to collect the data.

Measures

COVID19 Trauma Scale. Assessed participants’ traumatic stress related to COVID-19.

Psychological Well-Being Subscales. Assessed various aspects of psychological well-being, especially in relation to COVID-19 trauma and related issues.

Academic Performance Scale. Evaluated participants’ self-assessment of academic performance. Along with the demographic characteristics sheets, three other questionnaires were given to the respondents.

Procedure

A survey method with a quantitative research design was used. Demographic characteristics were collected, and participants completed questionnaires assessing COVID-19 trauma, psychological well-being, and academic performance. Non-parametric statistics were used due to non-normal distribution in some scales.

Results and Discussion

The Cronbach’s alpha for the COVID-19 Trauma scale indicated an internal reliability of .89 of the nine items. Similarly, Cronbach’s alpha was calculated for both Psychological well-being scale ($\alpha = .82$) and the Academic Performance scale ($\alpha = .83$), both of which indicated very good internal reliability.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the participants (N= 226)

	Frequency	Percent	Mean (SD)
Gender			
Male	103	46%	
Female	121	54%	
Age			17.77 (.63)
14	1	.4%	
15	4	1.8%	
16	6	2.7%	
17	23	10.3%	
18	190	84.8%	

Education qualification		
8 th Grade	1	.4%
10 th Grade	23	10.3%
12 th Grade	75	33.5%
UG	125	55.8%

The Shapiro-Wilk test of normality indicated that the except for PWB subscales on Autonomy ($W = .98, p = .15$) and Positive Relations with Others ($W = .98, p = .09$), all the other scales did not meet the criteria for normal distribution, $p > .05$. Hence nonparametric statistics were used to analyze the data.

Table 2

Spearman Correlation on the subscales of COVID trauma, Psychological WellBeing and Academic Performance

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
COVID_Factor1 (1)	-								
COVID_Factor2 (2)	.50**	-							
COVID_Facor 3 (3)	.57**	.56**	-						
PWB_Subscale1 (4)	.15	.39**	.22*	-					
PWB_Subscale2 (5)	-.02	.15	-.06	.39**	-				
PWB_Subscale3 (5)	.03	-.04	.01	.24**	.25**	-			
PWB_Subscale4 (6)	.18*	.45**	.29**	.55**	.27**	.43**	-		
PWB_Subscale5 (7)	.17	.37**	.26**	.67**	.24**	.38**	.56**	-	
PWB_Subscale6 (8)	.17	.37**	.25**	.41**	.24**	.33**	.72**	.42**	-
AP_Total (9)	-.07	-.09	-.15	-.14	-.11	.13	-.05	-.04	-.20*

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; COVID19_Factor1= Fear of Present And Future Infection; Factor 2:= Economic Stressors; Factor 3= Isolation and Disturbed Routine; PWB= Psychological Wellbeing; PWB_Subscale1 = Self-Acceptance; PWB_Subscale2= Purpose in Life; PWB_Subscale3= Positive Relations With Others; PWB_Subscale4= Personal Growth; PWB_Subscale5 = Environmental Mastery; PWB_Subscale6= Autonomy; AP= Academic Performance

Table 2 indicates the relationship between the different subscales of COVID-19 Trauma scale, Psychological well-being subscales, and the Academic Performance scale. The results indicated a statistically significant relationship between COVID19 Trauma subscale of Fear of Present and the PWB subscale of Personal Growth, $r = .18, p < .05$.

The results indicate Psychological well-being subscale of Self-acceptance had a statistically significant relationship with both COVID-19 trauma subscale of Economic stressors ($r = .39, p < .01$) and COVID-19 trauma subscale of Isolation and Disturbed routine ($r = .22, p < .05$). Academic Performance was not significantly correlated with any of the other subscales, $p > .05$. There were significant relationships between the subscales of the Psychological Well-Being scale. The strength of the relationship was at 95% and 99% confidence intervals indicating a strong association between the various subscales of the PWB scale.

Discussion

The present study sought to examine the intricate interplay between COVID-19 traumatic stress, psychological well-being, and academic performance among adolescents aged 13 to 18. Strong internal reliability was established for the measurement tools employed, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.89 for the COVID-19 trauma scale, 0.82 for the Psychological well-being scale, and 0.83 for the Academic Performance scale, thereby supporting the credibility of the study's outcomes. The study's participants exhibited a diverse demographic makeup, with 46% male and 54% female representation, and a notable majority (84.8%) in the 18-year-old category. Educational qualifications ranged from 8th grade to undergraduate level, ensuring a robust and varied sample.

Spearman correlations, as illustrated in Table 2, unveiled intriguing relationships between distinct subscales. COVID-19 Trauma factors, including Fear of Present and Future Infection, Economic Stressors, and Isolation, and Disturbed Routine, exhibited varying degrees of correlation with both Psychological Well-being subscales and Academic Performance.

A significant positive association emerged between the COVID-19 Trauma subscale Fear of Present and Future Infection and the Psychological well-being subscale Personal Growth ($r = 0.18, p < 0.05$), implying that experiencing pandemic-related fear might foster personal growth. This finding concurs with existing research indicating that challenges can stimulate personal development and resilience. Research across nations showed a significant surge in adult mental health problems during the pandemic's early phase. Furthermore, findings from 12 longitudinal studies and one cross-sectional study

indicated heightened depressive symptoms among adolescents when comparing pre-pandemic and pandemic periods (von Soest et al., 2022).

Moreover, the Psychological Well-Being subscale of Self-acceptance displayed meaningful connections with the COVID-19 Trauma subscales of Economic Stressors ($r = 0.39, p < 0.01$) and Isolation and Disturbed Routine ($r = 0.22, p < 0.05$). These results suggest that a stronger sense of self-acceptance could potentially counteract the detrimental effects of economic stressors and disruptions stemming from isolation and disrupted routines.

Remarkably, no significant correlations surfaced between Academic Performance and other subscales, hinting that although psychological well-being and COVID-19 traumatic stress may influence specific aspects of adolescents' lives, they might not directly impact self-assessed academic performance.

The study's robustness lay in its meticulous measurement of COVID-19 traumatic stress, psychological well-being, and academic performance, contributing to a nuanced understanding of their dynamics amid the pandemic. Notably, the identified relationships underscore the potential of interventions targeting self-acceptance and personal growth to bolster adolescents' well-being amidst COVID-19-induced stressors. While insightful, the study acknowledges limitations, including potential response bias due to self-report measures and the cross-sectional design's limitation in establishing causal links.

Future research directions may encompass longitudinal studies to explore temporal relationships between variables and delve into mechanisms whereby psychological well-being factors interact with COVID-19 traumatic stressors, potentially unveiling protective factors minimizing the pandemic's adverse impact on adolescent well-being.

This study reveals intricate connections between COVID-19 traumatic stress, psychological well-being, and adolescent academic performance. Findings underscore the significance of nurturing psychological well-being to cope with pandemic-induced challenges. These insights enrich discussions on youth mental health and guide future interventions in the face of unprecedented global stressors.

Conclusion

This study unraveled intricate connections among COVID-19 traumatic stress, psychological well-being, and academic performance among

adolescents. While significant associations were identified, the study accentuated the significance of nurturing psychological well-being as a coping mechanism in the face of pandemic challenges. These findings indicate that the stressors from COVID-19 are significant and have an impact on the well-being of adolescents. Unless measures are taken to deal with these stressors, it can lead to impairments in the effective functioning of the youth. Counsellors, psychologists, and spiritual leaders in the Church or various organization also need to bring this issue out into the open so that society is aware of these issues and take action.

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