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Psycho-social and behavioural impact of COVID 19 on young adults: Qualitative research comprising focused group discussion and in-depth interviews

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ABSTRACT

A qualitative study comprising eight focus group discussions and two in-depth interviews were conducted to explore the social and behavioural changes in young adults during COVID pandemic. Common themes identified were changes in interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships, changes in health-related behaviour, lifestyle modifications and impact on academic and professional life.

1. Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic has been a public health crisis that has affected all strata of the society in a number of ways. Recently, researchers from different parts of the world have conducted a couple of studies to evaluate the effect of COVID 19 on the different behavioural aspects of human beings [1–3]. However, there is a dearth of comprehensive explorations about the socio-behavioural changes in the young population, which forms a larger proportion in any society. We conducted qualitative research to explore the social and behavioural changes in young adults during COVID 19 pandemic and to identify the differences among the various groups namely, college students, working individuals and housewives.

2. Materials and methods

The study was conducted in September 2020 after being approved by the ethics committee of the institution. The participants were selected by convenience and snowball sampling techniques. The FGDs and in-depth interviews were arranged for the participants who could converse in Hindi/English and had access to telephones and internet for in-depth interviews and FGDs respectively.

Two in-depth interviews and eight FGDs, each with four-five participants were conducted with a total of 39 participants. Each of the FGDs and in-depth interviews was moderated by one of the investigators. Each FGD lasted for about 45–50 min. In-depth interviews were also carried out over the telephone, each session lasting for about 20–25 min. The FGD/interview was guided using a set of questions (Supplementary, Table 1) to keep the participants focused on the purpose of the study. Participants were encouraged to add any additional information if required.

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Table 1
Themes and Subthemes.

College Students	Working People	Housewives
Theme 1: Changes in Personal Relationships	**Theme 1: Changes in Personal Relationships**	**Theme 1: Changes in Personal Relationships**
Subtheme 1a: Changes in relationship with family	Subtheme 1a: Changes in relationship with family	Subtheme 1a: Improved relations with family
Subtheme 1b: Changes in relationship with friends	Subtheme 1b: Changes in relationship with friends	Subtheme 1b: Changed norms for Social gatherings:
Subtheme 1c: More time to themselves	Subtheme 1c: More time to themselves	**Theme2: Changes in Health-Related Behaviour**
Theme 2: Changes in Health-Related Behaviour	**Theme 2: Changes in Health-Related Behaviour**	Subtheme 2a: Increased personal Hygiene
Subtheme 2a: Increased personal Hygiene	Subtheme 2a: Increased personal Hygiene	Subtheme 2b: Preventive practices:
Subtheme 2b: increase in preventive practice	Subtheme 2b: increase in preventive practice	Subtheme 2c: Increased concern towards health
Subtheme 2c: Increased concern towards health	Subtheme 2c: Increased concern towards health	Subtheme 2d: **Virtual consultations with doctors:**
Theme3: Lifestyle Modification	**Theme 3: Lifestyle Modification**	**Theme 3: Lifestyle changes**
Subtheme 3a: Healthier diet pattern	Subtheme 3a: Healthier diet pattern	Subtheme 3a: Healthier dietary habits
Subtheme 3b: increase in physical exercise	Subtheme 3b: increase in physical exercise	Subtheme 3b: Increased physical exercise
Subtheme 3c: Disorganised sleep pattern	Subtheme 3c: Disorganised sleep pattern	Subtheme 3c: Increase in screen time
Subtheme 3d: Increase in screen time	Subtheme 3d: Increase in screen time	**Theme 4: Increased burden of household chores**
Theme 4: Changes in Work life	**Theme 4: Changes in Work life**	Subtheme 4a: Increased number of family members at home
Subtheme 4a: Problem in travelling to the workplace	Subtheme 4a: Problem in travelling to the workplace	Subtheme 4b: Increased demand of children
Subtheme 4b: Imbalance between personal and professional life	Subtheme 4b: Imbalance between personal and professional life	Subtheme 4c**:** Absence of household help due to lockdown
Subtheme 4c: Fear of losing the job or salary cut	Subtheme 4c: Fear of losing the job or salary cut	Subtheme 4d: Family members acting as helping hand
Subtheme 4d: stress due to impact on business	Subtheme 4d: stress due to impact on business	

After the completion of audio-recorded discussions, the contents of the recorded files were transcribed verbatim in English and all the personally identifiable information was removed by the investigators. Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyse the data [4]. In the first step, researchers read through the text line by line to get familiarised with the data and to generate initial codes. These codes were then sorted into the potential themes and subthemes, and this step was conducted by two researchers

independently, to ensure reliability.

3. Results

Thirty-nine individuals participated in the study. The average age of the participants was found to be 28.54 ± 7.93 (Mean ± SD) years, out of which 16 were males and 23 were females. These participants consisted of college students, working individuals and housewives. The common themes generated in FGDs and In-depth interviews were changes in Interpersonal and Intrapersonal relationships, changes in Health-related Behaviour and Lifestyle modifications whereas themes such as Impact on academic life, work-life and household chores were pertinent to college students, working individuals and housewives respectively. The details of themes and subthemes are tabulated in Table 1.

4. Discussion

This study explored the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of young adults. We found that the pandemic had both a positive and a negative impact on their lives.

Changes in intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships were experienced by these individuals. Participants got the opportunity to explore themselves by indulging in various hobbies and got more time to spend with their family members, which had always lacked due to their busy schedules. This is in accordance with the findings of Fullana et al. and Zhang et al., 2020 [5,6].

Humans have an inherent need for social connection as it helps them deal with difficult situations, emotionally and psychologically. Therefore, the inability to move out of the house and socialise with their friends, relatives and colleagues, has caused a significant amount of distress. People have tried to cope with this distress by connecting virtually with their loved ones [7].

There has been a remarkable change in the attitude towards personal hygiene. Many got obsessed with the repetitive thoughts of cleanliness and using sanitizers, causing excessive distress, anxiety and impact on daily functioning. People are also following the preventive practice measures but since the lockdown has been lifted, some got callous [8–10].

Pandemic has certainly led to serious lifestyle modifications. The dietary pattern has become healthier for the majority of the participants as there is more consumption of home-cooked food in comparison to unhealthy food, as dining at the restaurants or online ordering of food has drastically reduced. Our study also explored the increase in physical activity in absence of domestic help. Apart from this, we found that the sleep cycle of all the participants has been impacted severely. COVID 19 pandemic has upended the sleep cycle of some individuals owing to the factors such as work-life imbalance, increased screen time and stress or fear of the pandemic [11].

The lives of the students have been impacted during this pandemic due to the culture of online classes as virtual classes do not seem to be a very effective substitute for the learning that occurs in physical classes [12]. There is also a fear of losing career opportunities in the near future due to the economic crisis.

Apart from college students, the working population is also unable to manage their professional and personal lives in this work from home culture. People are burdened with an increased amount of work regularly and are also expected to work in the odd hours. This finding is contradictory to a previous study where they found that more than half of the participants had a positive outlook for work from home culture [13].

Besides, people have been affected by the reports regarding COVID 19 in print, electronic and social media especially chemoprophylaxis and care of vulnerable groups like elderly and pregnant women [14]. The inconsistent reports regarding HCQ prophylaxis and vaccines have resulted in uncertainties among the mind of people [15,16].

This study provides a glimpse of the social and behavioural changes occurring in the lives of young adults during this pandemic. It provides insights about the lived experiences of these individuals, thus, enhancing our comprehension about what bothers them and how they are coping with it to improve the quality of their lives.

Ethics approval

The Ethical clearance was obtained from the Institute Ethics Committee, AIIMS, New Delhi. IEC-689/July 03, 2020, OP-15/August 07, 2020, Date: August 11, 2020.

Declaration of competing interest

There is no conflict of interests.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dsx.2020.12.039.

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