



Problems Faced by the University Students during CoVID-19

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic impacted most countries around the globe and there are specific reports on the impact of the pandemic on students. The present study had been conducted on 227 students of Himachal Pradesh University, who are pursuing online education during COVID-19. The main focus of the study was to find out the problems faced by Himachal Pradesh university students during covid-19 for which an Online Survey was conducted. Here open-ended responses were collected from the university students regarding the most serious problems they faced during COVID-19 through Google form sent via social media i.e. WhatsApp. To accomplish this Objective, qualitative data from the open-ended responses were analyzed using content analysis with an inductive approach. Findings of the study showed that 23% of university students reported internet connectivity and 20% students reported lack of face to face interaction with teacher/supervisor and peers as the most serious problem they faced during COVID-19. Similarly, practical/ research related problems were reported by 13% of the participants and 9% university students found inappropriate study material/books and lack of library facility during lockdown. The prevalence of problem with online classes, time management, improper environment for study, carelessness/lack of concentration were reported by 7%, 6%, 5% and 2% respondents respectively. Pressure/fear/stress/frustration/ boredom/isolation as a serious problem was stated by 7% of the sampled students, whereas 4% of university students reported health issues/eye strain using computer as the most serious problem they faced during COVID-19. 2% of university students considered missed opportunities/worry about future as the most serious problem they faced during the pandemic.

Key Words: Problems; COVID-19; University Students

1. INTRODUCTION:

According to a UNESCO report, COVID-19 affected nearly 68% of the global student population in the first week of June 2020. The COVID-19 outbreak has affected approximately 1.2 billion students and youth worldwide as a result of school and university closures. Several other countries have also introduced localized closures, affecting millions of additional students. In India, more than 32 million students have been affected by various restrictions and nationwide quarantine of COVID-19 (Wikipedia). University students around the world have faced numerous problems due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These problems have significantly impacted their education, mental health, and overall well-being. Many universities had to switch to online or remote learning to adhere to social distancing guidelines. This sudden transition posed challenges for students who were not accustomed to online learning, lacked necessary technology, or faced difficulties in staying motivated and focused without in-person interactions with professors and peers. Students faced limited access to libraries, research facilities, and other on-campus resources necessary for their studies. This could impact the quality and depth of their research and assignments. The pandemic highlighted existing inequalities in access to technology and the internet. Students from lower-income backgrounds may not have had access to the required devices or stable internet connections, exacerbating disparities in educational opportunities. Social isolation resulting from lockdowns and reduced in-person interactions with peers and professors can lead to feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression among students. For international students, attending online classes according to their university's time zone might mean attending classes during odd hours in their home countries, leading to disrupted sleep patterns and increased stress. Many universities had to alter their assessment methods, including exams and



assignments, due to the challenges of remote learning. This shift could impact the authenticity and fairness of evaluations. The pandemic led to a reduction in internship and job opportunities, affecting students' chances to gain practical experience and secure employment after graduation. Some students faced financial difficulties due to job losses within their families or the need to support themselves during the pandemic. This could impact their ability to afford tuition, housing, and other essentials.

The combination of academic stress, isolation, uncertainty, and other pandemic-related factors has led to an increase in mental health issues among university students. Many students have reported heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and stress. Students missed out on the traditional college experience, including extracurricular activities, sports, social events, and face-to-face interactions that contribute to personal growth and development. Even when universities resumed in-person classes, they often needed to implement hybrid or blended learning models to maintain physical distancing. Adapting to these new formats required further adjustments from students. To address these challenges, universities and institutions have worked to provide support services, such as virtual counseling, online academic resources, and flexible grading policies. However, the long-term impact of these challenges on the education and well-being of university students is an ongoing concern. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted most countries around the globe and there are specific reports on the impact of the pandemic on students (e.g., Aristovnik et al., 2020; Tasso et al., 2021). Most studies have focused on the assessment of the general level of anxiety and depression associated with the pandemic (e.g., Barzilay et al., 2020; Horesh & Brown, 2020; Salari et al., 2020). Savage et al. (2020) studied the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of UK university students and systematic review by Salari et al. (2020) found that the prevalence of anxiety was 31.9% and depression to be 33.7% .

2. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

Over the last few years, since the breakout of COVID-19, hundreds of studies were published documenting the pandemic's associated distress among different populations. However, more specific knowledge is needed, regarding the unique needs and responses of at risk populations to tailor effective services for support. The emotional burden of the pandemic on university students has been getting increased attention (Tasso et al., 2021). A survey administered online of nearly 33,000 college students across the US during the fall 2020 semester indicated that half of the students reported on depression and/or anxiety (Healthy Minds Network, 2021). Understanding the challenges students face during the pandemic provides valuable insights into their mental, emotional, and physical well-being. This knowledge can help universities and educators tailor their support services to address specific issues. By identifying the specific problems students are encountering, universities can provide targeted support to help them cope with these challenges. This might include mental health resources, academic accommodations, or access to technology for remote learning. Identifying the problems faced by students during the pandemic can highlight disparities in access to education. This knowledge can be used to promote more inclusive educational practices and bridge the gap between different groups of students.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS:

Participants and Procedure:

The present study had been conducted on 227 students of Himachal Pradesh University, who were pursuing online education during COVID-19. The main focus of the study was to find out the most serious problems faced by Himachal Pradesh University students during COVID-19.

Measures:

To study the most serious problems faced by Himachal Pradesh University students during COVID-19 an Online Survey method was used. Here open-ended responses were collected from the university students regarding the most serious problems they faced during COVID-19 through Google form sent via social media i.e. WhatsApp. To accomplish this Objective, qualitative data from the open-ended responses were analyzed using content analysis with an inductive approach.

4. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA:

Each response was coded separately and reviewed for agreement. The participants were asked about the most serious problem they faced during COVID-19 and the results were summarized in Table 1.



Table 1
Problems Faced by the University Students during Covid-19

Sr. No.	Problems	Response	% age
1.	Internet Connectivity	52/227	23%
2.	Problem with Online Classes	15/227	7%
3.	Inappropriate Study Material/Books/Library	20/227	9%
4.	Lack of face to face Interaction	45/227	20%
5.	Practical/ Research Related Problems	29/227	13%
6.	Time Management/Class Timing	14/227	6%
7.	Missed Opportunities/Worry about Future	5/227	2%
8.	Carelessness/Lack of Concentration	7/227	3%
9.	Pressure/Fear/stress/Frustration/Boredom/isolation	16/227	7%
10.	Improper Environment for study	12/227	5%
11.	Health Issues/Eye Strain	9/227	4%
12.	Travelling	3/227	1%

23% of university students reported internet connectivity and 20% students reported lack of face to face interaction with teacher/supervisor and peers as the most serious problem they faced during COVID-19. Similarly, Practical/ Research Related Problems was reported by 13% of the participants and 9% university students found inappropriate study material/books and lack of library facility during lockdown. The prevalence of problem with online classes, time management, improper environment for study, carelessness/lack of concentration were reported by 7%, 6%, 5% and 2% respondents respectively. Other serious problems were pressure/fear/stress/frustration/boredom/isolation for 7% of the sampled students. whereas 4% of university students reported health Issues/eye strain using computer as the most serious problem they faced during COVID-19. 2% of university students considered missed opportunities/worry about future as the most serious problem they faced during the pandemic.

5. DISCUSSION:

The success of online learning is dependent largely on how well it is embraced. Moving forward while anticipating teaching issues, perhaps technological or network issues, and instituting a robust feedback mechanism is crucial. The key is to accept the fact that things may not be as flawless as we would like them to be, despite our best efforts, and meeting challenges with resilience. Academic work is considered a source of anxiety in a normal situation (Shehadeh et al., 2020); the online learning process is normally accelerated and requires commitment on the students' part. The analysis of existing research on the aforementioned problems revealed several opportunities to identify new trends in the development of distance education during the pandemic (Galimova et al., 2019; Ulyanina, 2020). Research into the problems faced by university students during COVID-19 can contribute to the academic understanding of the effects of crises on education. It can also serve as a foundation for future studies on related topics. The insights gained from studying student problems during COVID-19 can be valuable for universities when planning for and responding to future crises. It helps institutions be better prepared to support students in times of uncertainty. Higher education institutions can play a fundamental role in assisting students to cope with a variety of mental health difficulties and should provide psychological services, either face to face or remotely using innovative modules of telemedicine (Sundarasan et al., 2020). Data on the problems faced by university students during COVID-19 can be used to advocate for policy changes at the governmental level. This could involve advocating for financial support, internet access initiatives, or mental health resources.

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