



# Association between fear of covid 19 and depression among the students enrolled in higher education – mediating role of parents in mental health

**Dr. Jignya Shah**

Asst. Professor, Department of Hearing Impairment, Faculty of Disability Management and Special Education, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute, Coimbatore, TamilNadu, India.

Email – msgjs21@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Every parent wants their child to flourish, succeed and have a happy life. But life comes with challenges, often out of our control and unexpected. The Coronavirus, a disease (COVID-19) has influenced the life and living of people across the world. The COVID-19 pandemic has created psycho-emotional chaotic condition amid in rise of mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and fear among its citizens. Depression is a mood disorder affecting both the mind and the body. The impact of pandemic has seen among the millions of students in India from pre-primary through secondary levels of education. Current scenario, depression is recognized as a disturbing problem amongst undergraduates and university students affecting level of motivation, concentration, mood and feelings of sense worth.

The Spearman correlation coefficient showed a significant association between Fear of COVID – 19 and Depression among the students in higher education. Majority of girls indicated severe depression whereas moderate among the boys. The findings identified psychological impacts among the participants, suggesting the vital need to promote mental wellbeing and strengthening the role of parents to address mental health who are the primary stakeholders in making decisions for their children.

**Key words:** Depression, Fear of COVID – 19, Higher education, Gender, Role of parents.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

COVID-19 pandemic has affected entire sectors along with psychological and emotional situation in the life of individuals across the globe. Countries around the world have noted a sharp rise of mental health problems like anxiety, depression, stress, sleep disorder and fear among its citizen particularly for younger children (Uy et al., 2022). The disclosure to 'misinformation' shared through social media was one of the contributing factor to the development of anxiety, depression and other mental health problems among the population of different age. This has created devastating and challenging crisis for public health worldwide i.e. depression among people of all ages. Fear or tension or distress arises from the expectation of some threat whose source is mainly unknown or unclear (Balkelani, 2008 as cited in Al-kreimeen et al., 2022). The uncertainty due to pandemic has created a threat for students who constitute important element in the community (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008) and key determinants in the economic growth and success of every country (Cuijpers et al., 2019). Hysenbegasi et al., (2005) stated that depression might cause problems for the future occupations of students by delay access or difficulties in choosing a career and leading to psychological, social and physical problems for students during and after their academic life (Field et al., 2012).

The major problems seen among students' depression was poor self-assessment, lack of pleasure and interest in everyday life along with the problems in eating and sleeping and suicidal thoughts (Arslan et al., 2009). It has many negative effects associated with personal, cognitive, and emotional problems including decision making and problems of time management (Chen et al., 2013); poor academic achievement and low level of exam performance (Hysenbegasi



et al., 2005); decreased attention, drug abuse and negative effects on everyday work and achievements (Sobocki, et al., 2007).

### **1.1 MEDIATING ROLE OF PARENTS IN MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL BEING:**

Parents and caregivers are accountable for the health and wellbeing of their children. Children are dependent on their parents to prevent and address mental health problems. Children may suffer when the knowledge and skills of their parents is insufficient (Johnston et al., 2015, Morrison et al., 2019). Adolescence is the transitional period from childhood to adulthood (Naushad et al., 2014). It is also a stage of emotional instability that makes individuals vulnerable to depression (Beck, 1979). The issue of mental health of students has been observed not only in developed and non-developed but also modern and traditional societies (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008). The state of emotional instability results from difficulties in establishing self identity and self-esteem leading to conflicts within family and peer groups. During the academic life young individuals face many contradictions and obligations to succeed, determining bright futures and stirring young minds especially at university level (Arslan, et al., 2009).

According to the report of ASER (2023), the impact of pandemic has seen among the millions of students in India, covering wider gamut from pre-primary through secondary levels of education. Depression, anxiety, and stress are considered major indicators for mental health. The presence of these symptoms have a negative effect on an individual if not identified early or addressed timely (Wang et al., 2020). The emerging literature on the critical situation of global pandemic caused by COVID-19 found that more research is needed on the possible predictors of depression, health and wellbeing of the students in higher education. The focus of the current study was on university undergraduate students who constitute a highly vulnerable population to find out association between depression among college students and the fear of COVID -19.

### **1.2 STUDENT GENDER AND DEPRESSION:**

The prevalence of depression in the general population, indicated higher in females than that of males (Piccinell & Wilkinson et al., 2000). While reviewing the gender differences and the prevalence of depression in students, it is proven that gender is a major factor with regard to depression among students. Depression may involve feelings of being sad, weak, disappointed, frustrated, despairing, helpless, and hopeless (Sarason et al., 2002). Many students after pandemic found it difficult to live and achieve their ambitions, goals because of the challenges and difficulties faced often out of control, unexpected and are something needs to be work through efforts. This has directly impacted on their emotional state, success, and ambition (Al-kreimeen et al., 2022).

### **1.3 AIM OF THE STUDY:**

The aim of the present study was to examine the association between Fear of COVID – 19 and Depression among the students enrolled in higher education.

## **2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

- To study the association between Fear of COVID – 19 and Depression among the students enrolled in higher education.
- To study the association between Fear of COVID – 19 and Depression among the girls enrolled in higher education.
- To study the association between Fear of COVID – 19 and Depression among the boys enrolled in higher education.

### **2.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

1. What is the association between Fear of COVID – 19 and Depression among the students enrolled in higher education?

### **2.2 HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY:**

- There exists no significant association between Fear of COVID – 19 and Depression among the students enrolled in higher education.
- There exists no significant association between Fear of COVID – 19 and Depression among the girls enrolled in higher education.



- There exists no significant association between Fear of COVID – 19 and Depression among the boys enrolled in higher education.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

#### 3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN:

Research design for the study was Quantitative, Survey type. The sampling technique used was non probability - Purposive sampling. The data was collected from the total of 64 students (32 girls and 32 boys) studying in higher education aged 18 to 22 years, covering Mumbai, Suburb and Thane districts of Maharashtra.

#### 3.2 PROCEDURE:

Two tools were used namely Beck’s Depression Scale and fear of COVID -19 Scale to collect the data. The instructions were given in English. As a part of data collection, researcher contacted the selected colleges providing higher education in Mumbai, Suburb and Thane districts. The students enrolled in higher education (First year, second year, third year) degree courses in colleges were contacted to participate in the study by visiting them personally. All the participants were requested to read and identify their responses for both the tools namely Fear of COVID – 19 and Beck’s Depression Inventory. They were asked to complete both the tools by choosing appropriate options by putting tick mark against it in appropriate columns. The students were also instructed to complete the tool without leaving a single statement unanswered.

The number of students, their gender and age was reported as a part of demographic data. The raw data collected was entered separately in Microsoft Excel Sheet. As a part of ethical concern, telephonic consent from the selected students was obtained. Also the students were provided with the right to refuse to participate or can withdraw from the study at any time. The confidentiality of the name of the students, name of the higher education colleges enrolled for and the related information given were maintained.

#### 3.3 PROCEDURE OF STATISTICAL ANALYSIS:

The tool used was ordinal scale, a non parametric test Spearman correlation was used to see association between fear of COVID – 19 and depression among the students enrolled in higher education.

### 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

Table1: Fear of Covid -19 and depression among the students enrolled in higher education.

Fear of COVID 19	Boys			Girls			Spearman correlation	Significance
	Depression			Depression				
	Mild	Moderate	Severe	Mild	Moderate	Severe		
	0	21	11	0	14	18	.849	Significant

Spearman correlation test was used to analyse the data (0.849 at 0.05 level) indicating a strong correlation between Fear of COVID -19 and depression among the students enrolled in higher education signifying girls with severe level whereas boys with moderate level of depression. The studies on depression among students (Chen et al., 2013) reported that depression is a prevalent problem and continues to increase in the student (Sarokhani et al., 2013) at different educational levels from high school, college and university level (Arslan et al., 2009) where 50% of the university students had moderate levels of stress-related mental health concerns, including depression (Regehr, 2013). Due to pandemic, the emergency has put the world to face many real and unavoidable yardsticks and facts which were previously unknown. All these factors led to many complicated issues, increased fear and anxiety among the students about their future (Zayed, 2020). The probable reason found was that the older adolescents and youth became anxious about cancellation of examinations, exchange programs and academic events (Lee, 2020). These factors have affected the youth with the feeling of not reaching the standard of performance set for them. As a result, the undergraduate students had feeling of disappointment, despairing and psychologically unsecure (Murad, 2021) which made them more stressed, anxious, and depressed than the overall population (Guo et al., 2020). The other probable reason was that due to lockdown, the need for timely employment has caused uncertainty and delay to take up familial responsibilities. This has increased long



term adverse consequences on adolescents (Singh et al., 2020). Additionally, inability to adapt to challenges and adverse events (Aburn et al., 2016) lead to severe level of depression among the students in higher education.

The result showed a strong correlation between Fear of COVID -19 and depression among the girls enrolled in higher education. The level of depression indicated by girls was of severe category. Green et al. (2003) indicated that adult students reported higher levels of symptoms of depression and found to be significantly more among females than males (Olsson et. al. 1997, Bhatia et al. 2007). According to WHO (2024), depression is about 50% more common among women than among men. The reason for female predominance to depression in the adolescent age group has been attributed due to differences in coping styles to COVID – 19 or hormonal changes during puberty (Angold, A. 1999).

The result of Fear of COVID – 19 and Depression among the boys enrolled in higher education showed a strong correlation with moderate level of depression among boys. The study conducted by Adewuya et al. (2006), found a significant difference among university students, with rates in female students two times greater than male students. The similar result was reported by Eisenberg, et al. (2007) and Ceyhan, et al. (2009) indicating a greater risk of depression in female undergraduate students as compared to male undergraduate students.

## 5. CONCLUSION:

The undergraduate students are vulnerable population deeply affected by the unintended consequences of the pandemic. Although there are known, effective treatments for mental disorders, the probable reason found was barriers to effective care and lack of investment in mental health care, lack of trained health-care providers and prevalence of social stigma associated with mental disorders. The present study found importance of mediating role parents in supporting child's ability to work through these challenges and nurture positive wellbeing and mental health. The study redirected to provide additional appropriate guidance and support in mental health along with career guidance for the undergraduate students. Also importance of early identification, prompt management involving the parents and experts to prevent long term mental health morbidity. A psychological intervention for depression may be given to individuals and parents by providing different strategies for stress management, problem solving treatment and strengthening social support to address mental health issues enabling parents and students to navigate the complexities of the modern world.

## REFERENCES:

1. Uy, J. P., Schwartz, C., Chu, K. A., Towner, E., Lemus, A., Brito, N. H., et al. (2022). Parenting under pressure: parental transmission and buffering of child fear during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Dev. Psychobiol.* 64:e22253. [https://doi: 10.1002/dev.22253](https://doi.org/10.1002/dev.22253).
2. Al-kreimeen, A. and Murad, O. (2022). Using Moodle in University Courses and Its Impact on Future Anxiety and Psychological Happiness. *The Electronic Journal of e-Learning*, 20(2), pp. 171-179.
3. Bayram, N., & Bilgel, N. (2008). The prevalence and socio-demographic correlations of depression, anxiety and stress among group of university students. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 43 (8), 667-672.
4. Ceyhan, A. A., Ceyhan, E., & Kurtyilmaz, Y. (2009). Investigation of University Students' Depression. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research (EJER)*, (36).
5. Hysenbegasi, A., Hass, S. L., & Rowland, C. R. (2005). The impact of depression on the academic productivity of university students. *Journal of Mental Health Policy and Economics*, 8 (3), 145.
6. Field, T., Diego, M., Pelaez, M., Deeds, O., & Delgado, J. (2012). Depression and related Problems in University Students. *College Student Journal*, 46 (1).
7. Arslan, G., Ayranci, U., Unsal, A., & Arslantas, D. (2009). Prevalence of depression, its correlates among students, and its effect on health-related quality of life in a Turkish university. *Upsala Journal of Medical Sciences*, 114 (3), 170-177.
8. Chen, L., Wang, L., Qiu, X. H., Yang, X. X., Qiao, Z. X., Yang, Y. J., & Liang, Y. (2013). Depression among Chinese university students: Prevalence and socio-demographic correlates. *PLoS One*, 8(3), DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0058379.
9. Hysenbegasi, A., Hass, S. L., & Rowland, C. R. (2005). The impact of depression on the academic productivity of university students. *Journal of Mental Health Policy and Economics*, 8 (3), 145.
10. Sobocki P, Lekander I, Borgstrom F, Strom O, Runeson B (2007). The economic burden of depression in Sweden from 1997 to 2005. *Eur Psychiatry*, 22(3): 146– 152
11. Johnston R, Fowler C, Wilson V, Kelly M. (2015). Opportunities for nurses to increase parental health literacy: a discussion paper. *Issues in Comprehensive Paediatric Nursing*. 38(4):266–81.



12. Naushad, S., Farooqui, W., Sharma, S., Mukthi Rani, Singh, R., & Verma, S. (2014). Study of proportion and determinants of depression among college students in Mangalore city. *The Nigerian Medical Journal*. 55(2): 156–160. doi: 10.4103/0300-1652.129657
13. Beck, A. T. (1979). *Cognitive Therapy of Depression*. New York: Guilford Press
14. ASER Report (2023) retrieved from <https://thewire.in/education/aser-2022-understanding-the-impact-of-covid-19-lockdown-on-indias-education-landscape>
15. Wang, X., Hegde, S., Son, C., Keller, B., Smith, A., and Sasangohar, F. (2020). Investigating mental health of US college students during the COVID-19 pandemic: cross-sectional survey study. *J. Med. Internet Res.* 22:e22817. doi:10.2196/22817.
16. Piccinelli, M. & Wilkinson, G. (2000). Gender differences in depression. Critical review. *Br J Psychiatry*. Dec:177:486-92. doi: 10.1192/bjp.177.6.486.
17. Sarason I.G, Sarason B. R. (2002). *Abnormal Psychology: The Problem of Maladaptive Behavior*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
18. Sarokhani, D., Delpisheh, A., Veisani, Y., Sarokhani, M. T., Esmaelimanesh, R., & Sayehmiri, K. (2013). Prevalence of Depression among University Students: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Study. *Depression research and treatment*.
19. Regehr C., Glancy D., Pitts A. (2013). Interventions to reduce stress in university students: a review and meta-analysis. *J. Affect. Disord.* 148 1–11. 10.1016/j.jad.2012.11.026
20. Zayed, H., 2020. Distance learning in facing new corona. [online] Available at: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/arabic/articles/news/distance-learning-versus/covid19>
21. Lee J. (2020). Mental health effects of school closures during COVID-19. *Lancet. Child Adolesc. Health*, S2352-4642(20)30109-7. doi: 10.1016/S2352-4642(20)30109-7.
22. Murad, O., 2021. Effectiveness of a cognitive-behavioral therapy program on reducing psychological stress and improving achievement motivation among university students. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 9(6), pp.1316–1322. <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2021.090621>
23. Guo, J., Zheng, P., Jia, Y., Chen, H., Mao, Y., Chen, S., Wang, Y., Fu, H., & Dai, J. (2020). Mental health problems and social media exposure during COVID-19 outbreak. *PLoS ONE*, 15(4), e0231924. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0231924>
24. Singha, S., Royb, D., Sinha, K., Parveenc, S., Sharmac, G. & Joshi, G. (2020). Impact of COVID-19 and lockdown on mental health of children and adolescents: A narrative review with recommendations. *Psychiatry Research*.293-113429 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113429>
25. Aburn G, Gott M, Hoare K.(2016). What is resilience? An Integrative Review of the empirical literature. *J Adv Nurs*. 72(5):980–1000. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.12888>.
26. Green, J. L., Lowry, J. L., & Kopta, S. M. (2003). College students versus college counselling center clients: What are the differences? *Journal of Student Psychotherapy*, 17(4), 25-37.
27. Angold A, Costello E. J, Erkanli A, Worthman C. M. (1999). Pubertal changes in hormone levels and depression in girls. *Psychology Med* 29:1043-53.
28. Adewuya, A. O., Ola, B. A., Aloba, O. O., Mapayi, B. M., & Oginni, O. O. (2006). Depression amongst Nigerian university students. *Social psychiatry and psychiatric epidemiology*, 41 (8), 674-678.
29. Eisenberg, D., Gollust, S. E., Golberstein, E., & Hefner, J. L. (2007). Prevalence and correlates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal among university students. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 77(4), 534-542.
30. Ceyhan, A. A., Ceyhan, E., & Kurtyilmaz, Y. (2009). Investigation of University Students' Depression. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research (EJER)*, (36).
31. Olsson G, von Knorring A. L. (1997). Beck's Depression Inventory as a screening instrument for adolescent depression in Sweden: Gender differences. *Acta Psychiatr Scand* 95:277-82.
32. Bhatia S. K, Bhatia S. C. (2007). Childhood and Adolescent Depression. *American Fam Physician*.75:73-80.
33. World health organization (2024). Depressive Disorder (Depression). Retrieved from [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression/?gad\\_source=1&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIyZH3tJz7hAMVEahmAh1pIAP6EAAAYASAAEgKnwPD\\_BwE](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression/?gad_source=1&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIyZH3tJz7hAMVEahmAh1pIAP6EAAAYASAAEgKnwPD_BwE)