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### Quality of life and mental health of people during pandemic Covid-19 in India

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#### Abstract

The year 2020 has been full of crises till date as the world is experiencing pandemic COVID-19. The pandemic out-break started in 2019 in Wuhan, China and later spread throughout the world confining the whole human population down in their homes. The outbreak of the virus is not only dangerous to our physical health targeting our immune system but is adversely affecting the quality of life and mental health of people. It has not only locked the business and companies out of service but has also limited the options of survival. This asymptomatic virus has not spared any socio-economic class or age. All section of society be it the business class, the student body, the housewives or the serving class have been equally affected by the virus. Due to the strict and sudden lockdown all over the country, people find it difficult to fulfil their basic needs which in turn are deteriorating the living conditions and quality of life placing high pressure on their mental health. Quality of Life can be said as a condition of life perceived by individuals. It is the combination of both objective as well as subjective constructs like health, food, living conditions along with satisfaction, happiness, and emotional and social well-being. Under the umbrella of quality of life, not only physical health but mental health also plays an important role. Mental health is the overall health of an individual including psychological, emotional, behavioural and social well-being.

Thus, in the present paper researchers aim to discuss the perceived quality of life and mental health of people during the time of pandemic COVID-19 in context to the Indian scenario. The sample of the study consist of 80 participants ranging from 20-40 years and consists of the housewives, service class people, business person, and students. The structured interview was conducted viva video conferencing with each participant further discussing the responses in paper. The schedule carrying 20 open ended questions was used. The questions and the responses are discussed further in the paper. Also, we tried to seek various coping mechanisms used by different samples under study to give a better understanding about the participant population in India.

**Keywords:** quality of life, mental health, Covid-19, India

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#### Introduction

Coronaviruses are an enormous group of infections which may cause sickness in people or animals. In people, a few coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory contaminations going from the normal virus to increasingly serious malady, for example, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). It is the irresistible infection brought about by the most as of late found coronavirus. This new infection and ailment were obscure before the episode started in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. This quick pestilence transformed into an aggregate war to spare the whole human development. Aside from China, global network at the same time makes progress toward the prompt relief and protections of individuals. On February 11, 2020 World Health Organization authoritatively declared for new name for the novel coronavirus as COVID-19 and communicated worries that the infection would extend around the world. On March 11, 2020, WHO has proclaimed the circumstance as pandemic (WHO, March 11, 2020) and this is the principal pandemic causes by an infection from the Corona family. The indications of COVID-19 are similar to SARS scourge, for example fever, hack, dyspnoea, and so on. This pandemic has not only affected the physical health of

individuals but has also degraded the quality of life and mental health. People are not only afraid of sickness but are also fearful of isolation and other related psychological problems. Ahmed *et al.*, (2020) <sup>[1]</sup> in their research on “Epidemic of COVID-19 in China and Associated Psychological Problems” talked about the impact of COVID-19 on the psychological health of people. The results of their study revealed higher rate of anxiety, depression and harmful use of alcohol among the participants. The result also showed that the risk of mental illness is high for the people falling under the age range of 21 to 40 years. Holmes *et al* (2020) conducted the study on “Multidisciplinary research priorities for the COVID-19 pandemic: a call for action for mental health science”. They discussed the risk of anxiety, depression and self-harm, consequences of lockdown and social isolation on mental health, impact of media coverage about COVID-19 and the various immediate and long term intervention strategies.

The pandemic has resulted in worldwide lockdown and the same has been implemented in India to check its spread. The phase has created a stressful environment all over the world resulting in an uncomfortable surrounding. Social distancing, curfews, limited access to resources and sense of being down at one place for long

time has created disturbances at many levels of behaviour and mental health. Zhang & Ma (2020) <sup>[19]</sup> studied the “Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and quality of life among local residents in Liaoning Province, China”. The result of the study revealed that the pandemic is perceived as the stressful situation by the sample. Addition to this result, support from family and friends through social networking sites, calls and other ways of communication proved to be helpful in dealing with the same. Lau, Chi, Cummins, Lee, Chou, & Chung (2008) <sup>[14]</sup> in their research on “The SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) pandemic in Hong Kong: Effects on the subjective wellbeing of elderly and younger people” revealed that subjective well-being is negatively associated with low education and unemployment. They stated that no particular age was associated to the infection; in fact, the major association of pandemic was with terrestrial region. The pandemic has not only locked people down but has also increased the rate of unemployment in the country. Almost every sector, be it public, private, or daily wagers has faced recession. Reneflot, & Evensen (2012) <sup>[17]</sup> wrote an article on “Unemployment and psychological distress among young adults in the NORDIC countries”. They discussed the relationship between the unemployment and distress. They stated that unemployment increases the psychological distress and lower the mental health status resulting in poor functioning of individuals.

The lockdown in pandemic has also limited the physical activities of people. The researches have revealed that less physical activity than needed leads to the bluer moods and mood swings. It also results in fatigue leading to mild sadness or gloominess. The results of the study conducted by Leleikienė, Požėrienė, & Rėklaitienė (2018) <sup>[15]</sup> entitled as “Relationship between the Quality of Life and Physical Activity in Patients with Depression Disorder” state that physical activities are an important factor to improve the mental health of the general population as well as of the population suffering from any mental problems. Testa & Simonson (1996) <sup>[18]</sup> defined and assessed the quality of life keeping the physical functioning, distress, well-being and work performance of an individual in their study on “Assessment of quality-of-life outcomes”. The result of the study indicates that the domain defined above clearly depicts the quality of life to satisfaction.

The pandemic has not just affected the physical health of people but has also distorted the perceived Quality of Life of people. Quality of Life is determined by both objective as well subjective factors. Felce & Perry (1995) <sup>[7]</sup> in their study “Quality of Life: Its definition and measurement. Researches in developmental disabilities” has proposed the model that integrates the subjective as well as objective indicators of quality of life. They suggested that both the physical as well as mental conditions are relevant in the discussion of quality of life. It indicates how much an individual is sound, agreeable, and ready to partake in or appreciate life occasions. This is intrinsically equivocal, as it can depict both to the experiences of individual has in life and to the day to day environments wherein people get themselves. Consequently, quality of life is exceptionally abstract. While one individual may characterize personal satisfaction as per riches or fulfilment with life, someone else may characterize it regarding capacities (e.g., being able to carry on with a decent life as far as enthusiastic and physical and mental well-being). It can be

academic satisfaction as well as good employment that define the idea of quality of life to much extend for an individual. Baumann, Ionescu, & Chau (2011) <sup>[2]</sup> in their study “Psychological quality of life and its association with academic employability skills among newly-registered students from three European faculties” suggested that improved quality of life positively affects the acquisition of skills that increase employability. Quality of life is just not satisfactory health but it is a shelter to other important factors like happiness, mental health, education, employment, relationship, etc. Camfield & Skevington (2008) <sup>[4]</sup> on “Subjective Well-Being and Quality of Life” have discussed theoretical, definitional and methodological concept of well-being and quality of life.

Quality of life is a vast concept and is subjective in nature, thus, it can be defined by the construct that is most relevant to an individual or the situation or in the given period of time. Hofstede (1984) <sup>[11]</sup> conducted a study entitled as “The cultural relativity of the quality of life concept”. He stated that the cultural relativity of the quality of life depends on power, distance, individualism, masculinity/feminism, and uncertainty avoidance. The results also suggested that the occupational and industrial democracy also plays an important role in determining the quality of life of an individual. Farquhar (1995) <sup>[6]</sup> comprehensively discussed the definition and concept of quality of life in the study “Definitions of quality of life: A Taxonomy.” The Researchers defined quality of life under four major heads; they are global, component, focused and combination respectively. Ferrans & Powers (1985) <sup>[8]</sup> attempted to define quality of life as an umbrella term in their study “Quality of life index: development and psychometric properties”. They listed out factors which together make the concept of quality of life. The factors are physical health and functioning, family and friends, standard of living, occupation and education, and mental health. In their study they evenly focused on the objectivity of scale as well as the subjective experiences exclusive to the participants.

There is no health without mental health and therefore, mental health is the backbone of quality of life. An individual can only perceive his/her quality of life as positive, when he/she is at the right state of mental health. Connell, O' Cathain, & Brazier (2014) <sup>[5]</sup> studied the quality of life and mental health under their study entitled as “Measuring quality of life in mental health: Are we asking the right questions?” They suggested that mental health and physical health are important factor in improving the quality of life of the individual. Mental health doesn't mean the absence of sadness, frustration, anger, irritation or any other negative emotions, but it is the way we cope up from these negative emotions. Flanagan (1978) <sup>[9]</sup> laid down factors that affect the quality of life in “A research approach to improving our quality of life”. The factors that improve or hamper the quality of life are physical and material well-being, relation with other people, social, community and civic activities, personal development and fulfilment, and recreation. Guyatt, Feeny, & Patrick (1993) <sup>[10]</sup> explained the concept of health-related quality of life under the light of psychological health, physiological domain and responses towards role functions and emotional well-being in their study “Measuring health-related quality of life”. Social relationship and environment play an important role in defining the perceived quality of life and mental health. If an individual has a standard living but has poor relationships, he/she

won't perceive his/her life to be of quality. Similarly, no other area can fulfil the place of comfortable and congenial environment. In their paper "Mental health promotion in public health: Perspectives and strategies from positive psychology", Kobau *et al.*, (2011) [13] has discussed the role of positive emotions and social-environmental factors. They comprehensively defined the role of broadening and building the positive emotions, regulating the negative emotions and the role of resiliency and optimism in improving the mental health among public. The corona virus spread when an individual comes in contact with the virus physically, it can be any person who has been infected, and it can be any surfaces which carry the virus. To control the number of cases, government has taken certain measures, among which the most important is the lockdown of whole population. The stress resulting from the lockdown is in turn leading to low mental health and negatively perceived quality of life. Bovier, Chamot, & Perneger (2004) [13] studied the "Perceived stress, internal resources, and social support as determinants of mental health among young adults". The results clearly depicted that mental health is risked when perceived stress is high. It also suggests social support is an important factor in coping with stress among young adults. Thus, the concept of quality of life and mental health is not specific to one instance of life but it can be seen from various angles and it is not the concept of an individual but results from an individual and his/her Surrounding. Murrell & Norris (1983) [16] studied Quality of life as the criterion for need assessment and community psychology. The findings of their study showed that mental health and employment are positively related to the quality of life. They stated that human interact with factors in the environment resulting in quality of life of that human. Therefore, in this research paper, the Researcher's have discussed the different angles of quality of life and mental health during the time of pandemic COVID-19 and has also discussed the various ways people are using to cope from the stress and other mental health problems in India.

### Method

The data were collected through structured interview via various means of communication, such as traditional telephonic interviews, what's app call, duo, zoom etc with the help of a schedule. A total number of 80 people were interviewed ranging from the 20-40 years. The sample was selected through convenient sampling falling under socio-economic status and demographical region. The sample consists of professionals (accountant working with private firms), business persons, housewives, and students (currently in final year of graduation). The participants were informed about study and important aspects covering the research area. Also, their consent was received and proper time was arranged for conducting the interview. They were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and they participated by their own will. For the purpose of data collection an open-ended schedule containing 20 questions in form of structured interview was used. These questions were further divided into four domains: physical health, psychological and mental health, social relationships and environment, each carrying 5 questions. The average time of the interview was 30 minutes for each participant. The responses are further discussed in the discussion section.

### Discussion

COVID-19 as discussed earlier in the paper is a virus which is asymptomatic in nature and target the immune system through damaging the respiratory system in the body. The symptoms of the virus are similar to any other virus that we encounter in our day to day life, but the consequences are far more serious and threatening. The pandemic COVID-19 has turned the world upside down and is still going on and has no intention to come to an end. The COVID-19 has forced the world to lock everything down and to shut the humans behind doors. It has not only affected the life of people who are infected but has also severely affected the life of nearly everyone. The world economy has tumbled down; the life of people has become restricted, fearful and limited. The whole situation has just not affected the life of people physiologically but has also thrashed the quality of life and mental health of people. Quality of life is the result of both objective as well as subjective factors of life which gives an individual satisfaction and happiness. It covers living standard, occupation, home, food, education, mental health, and emotional and behavioural stability under its umbrella. Mental health being an important concept of quality of life is the absenteeism of any kind of illness or disorder. It shed lights on the relationship between physical and emotional or cognitive health of an individual and it bridges the gap between mind and thoughts. In this paper, the researchers covered four domains namely, physical health, psychological and mental health, social relationship and environment. The sample of the paper is divided into four categories that is, business class, professionals (accountants), students and housewives. The age, socio-economic status and topography were kept base of the study and both males and females were covered equally in these three categories. Further each case was studied and discussed respectively.

The analyses of the study suggest that 60% of the sample is suffering from some or the other life style disorder. The female participants reported PCOD (Polycystic Ovary Disease) and thyroid where as males showed concerned about blood pressure and diabetes. Also, 70% of the sample stated that they regularly feel the muscle cramps, aches or stiffness all over their body which hamper their day to day activities. When asked about the physical health and sleep, 70% of the participants complain of lazy, lethargic and disturbed routine during lockdown resulting in disturbed sleep pattern leading to tiresome days. The participants stated that they are less productive and active during lockdown then usually they were before the same. Thus, the physical inactivity during pandemic is affecting the physical health as well as work of people.

Further the question inquired about the mental health of the sample. The analyses revealed that 82.50% of the sample reported the persistent negative thoughts during a day. They expressed their concerned about the pandemic and its effect on them and their families. 47% of the sample showed concerned about developing obsession and compulsion regarding washing hands and cleaning the surroundings of their own and others. They complaint about compelling others to follow a routine related to cleaning and washing even when no one from the family went out and nobody visited them. 63.40% of the sample responded that they have gradually become more irritated and unstable emotionally and behaviourally. Managing work from

home and staying at home for long has significantly affected their concentration and thought process. Also, 35% of the sample reported that they are relaxed as they are getting enough time to pursue their hobbies which otherwise they would have not got time for. They also stated that they are learning new things and about new habits which in turn are helping them to relax and rethink about their life and its meaning.

Quality of life and mental health are not lonely concepts; social relationship plays an important role in defining the quality of life and mental health of an individual. Social supports, being loved, sense of responsibility and satisfactory relationships together frame the life of an individual. The analyses in the study showed that 55% of the sample was not satisfied in their personal relationship due to differences in expression and communication but due to the pandemic followed by lockdown has helped them to unveil the differences and work on them with their family and spouses. 56% of the sample feel connected to their family, relatives and friends and believed that they have their support whereas, 44% stated that they feel the absence of physical contact of people and doubt the support they will receive when needed. They also revealed that using so much of phone has created a virtual environment which is not comfortable ground for everyone to interact. 45% of the sample showed concerned that they fail to maintain relationship on phone where as 55% were comfortable with the virtual contact and moral support received. On asking about social responsibility, 35% of the sample said that their social responsibility is to spread awareness among people regarding COVID-19 and its hazards, whereas 65% of them believed that feeding and charity matters the most during a time like this. They believed that during the time of falling economy, contributing or giving charity will help people survive.

Last and very crucial domain we covered in this paper is environment of individual. The questions cover aspects concerning matters of money to their physical and home environment. 55% of the sample is financially stable, whereas 45% of the sample stated that they have incurred heavy loss due to the pandemic followed by lockdown. They are tensed about the situation which might arrive if the lockdown further extend. While discussing about safety and security 50% of the participants revealed that they don't feel safe in the locality they live in due to the proximity of the houses and people, whereas the other 50% of them feel safe being among people. 47% of the participants responded that they have satisfactory home environment which doesn't need much attention. Communication, decision making and discussions are open and the environment is democratic in nature, whereas, 52% responded that they are not satisfied with their home environment in terms of discipline, open communication and decision making. They stated that due to lockdown they are able to give a close look to their environment and are trying to improve it. On asking about how they are utilizing their spare time 57% people revealed that they are able to pursue their hobbies as activities in the period of lockdown. They also suggested that they preferred scientific papers over news as there are loads of fake and negative news which create anxiety and stress in addition to negativity to keep them updated on the situation of pandemic COVID-19.

The overall analyses of the study suggest that 80% of the business sample has affected due to lockdown, they stated that pandemic has cost them a big loss and in turn they are more irritated due to

the tension and stress it brings economically. 60% of the professional or service class people responded that they have to work from home which is more stressful and uncomfortable due to disturbances and distribution of responsibility. According to them, monotonous routine is tiring and constant divided attention leads to mistakes and irritation. 70% of the students answered that no much difference has occurred as online classes and assignments are given on regular bases. Also they stated that disturbed sleep has resulted in physical pain and mental stress. 68% of the housewives were not much satisfied with their present condition as they have been over burdened with the chores concerning everyone in the family. They complained that they are unable to spend "me" time which is quite disturbing and stressful.

### Conclusion

The present study gives insight of the negative perceived quality of life and poor mental health of people in the time of COVID-19. The percentage of people perceiving their quality of life negatively is high then people trying to cope with it. Some of the people are stressed due to the financial strain caused by lockdown, while others are irritated and tensed due to the physical threat brought by the COVID-19. While some of the participants are using the quarantine as quality time to build better understanding of their own and of people around them. Exercising, practicing yoga and meditation, writing, learning to cook or any new musical instrument are some of the common ways used by people to use their time. Since it was a person to person interview, the discussion between the researchers and interview have been enlightening, the queries of all the participants were answered and they were counselled with the ways of coping and utilizing the quarantine effectively. Some of the suggestions which were discussed were sleep and diet routine, inclusion of easy exercises and stretching, spending quality time with family, significant observations regarding self, family and friends. Also, participants were free to openly discuss their views on the current situation and ask question for the same.

Therefore, the researchers can conclude that the pandemic has affected the life of almost every person irrespective of their age, gender, class or profession. Some of them are benefiting from the time given to them while most of them are finding it difficult to cope from the lockdown and its consequences.

### Limitations

1. The data was collected through structured schedule containing 20 open-ended questions, which give enough space to the subjectivity. Thus, an objective method can be used to assess the mental health and quality of life.
2. Convenient sampling was used due to the lack of mobility resulted from lockdown.
3. The study was conducted on very small proportion in comparison to the population facing the pandemic COVID-19. Therefore, the study can be conducted on larger population for better results.
4. As the open-ended questions were used through telephonic interview, the data is subjected to social desirability biases.
5. Other studies are also advised to include the manual labour class population as well which has been affected the most.

## Implications

1. As the study conducted was subjective in nature, gives deeper understanding of the participants and the impact pandemic is creating on them.
2. It can also be used as the base to conduct an objective study.
3. It gives us clear understanding of how the pandemic is not a place, gender or age specific.
4. It should be also kept in mind that precautionary measures such as lockdown and social-distancing methods also play an important role in the mental health of the participants other than facing a pandemic.
5. Lack of technical literacy has also led to lesser quality of life because many participants reported to be less productive because they are not used to be dependent on technology.
6. Manual labour and daily wage workers are among the hardest hit sectors of the society.
7. The government with the help of not for profit organisations should seek to develop and impart training programs for better mental health and teaching better coping strategies via television, radio, internet, etc.
8. There should be better health as mental health institutions for the general population.

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