Mental Health Assessment of Young Adults in the Current Pandemic Situation.

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ABSTRACT

The Covid19-pandemic had adversely affected various aspects of an individual's life. It curtailed a sense of uncertainty, and reflected on the serious mental health crises faced by human beings - especially adolescents and young adults. Keeping this in the foreground, this study assessed the mental health of young adults by critically analyzing the correlation of Well-Being with some of the psychological variables, namely - Loneliness, Suppression of Thought, General anxiety (GAD), Resilience and Self-Esteem. The study incorporated a sample size of 134 young adults (45 males and 89 females) aged between 18-25, recruited via purposive sampling. The data was collected with the help of questionnaires. The scales used to measure the variables were the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale, UCLA Loneliness Scale Version 3, White Bear Suppression Inventory, PGI Well Being Measure, The Coping Competence Questionnaire and the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7 GAD-7. The data was treated using Pearson correlation coefficient and further Z-test was administered to find results concerning different genders. In Pearson's Product Moment Correlation test, the mentioned psychological variables were correlated with Well-being. Positive moderate correlation was found between Self-Esteem and Well-being, and Resilience and Wellbeing. Negative moderate correlation was found between General Anxiety Disorder and Well-being, Loneliness and Wellbeing, and Suppression of thought and Wellbeing. The Z-Test results, did not show any significant difference in scores of the psychological variables between males and females, which indicated that a sense of togetherness under difficult times was experienced by the entire population in general, barring any gender difference. The level of well-being of the sample was observed to be 7.95 (the range being 0-20), which was extremely poor.

 $\textbf{\textit{KEYWORDS:}}\ \ \textit{Young adults, well-being, anxiety, coping, self-esteem, suppression of thought and lone liness.}$

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I. INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem refers to the extent to which an individual believes himself or herself to be competent and worthy of living. Rosenberg (1965) stated that self-esteem refers to an individual's overall positive evaluation to the self. He also added that high self-esteem consists of an individual respecting himself and considering himself worthy. In a similar way, Sedikides and Gress (2003) stated that self-esteem refers to individual's perception or subjective appraisal of one's own self-worth, one's feelings of self-respect and self-confidence and the extent to which the individual holds positive or negative views about self. Young adulthood comprises of adjustments to new patterns of life and social expectations where they are expected to play new roles and to develop new attitudes, interests and values to complement these new roles. These adjustments make early adulthood a unique period in the life span but also an arduous one. As adults, they are expected to make these adjustments for themselves; seeking help from some experienced source might make them seem to be immature. To avoid being considered in that way, they hesitate to turn to others for advice and help when the adjustments seem to be too

difficult to cope with successfully alone. (1) A research conducted on subjects ranging from 17-23 years implied that an optimum level of self-esteem and high collective self-esteem prevents depression and instead amplifies the positive aspects of personality. (2) Another study examined how narcissism and self-esteem are manifested on the social networking Web site Facebook.com in the young adults. The results revealed that individuals higher in narcissism and lower in self-esteem were related to greater online activity as well as some self-promotional content. (3) It has been observed that low self-esteem relates to concurrent and later feelings of loneliness in adolescence. A path analysis study, that observed the mediator effects of self-esteem and humor style on the relationship between shyness and loneliness, showed that self-esteem and humor style partially mediated the relationship between shyness and loneliness. The final model also revealed the presence of a significant path starting from shyness through self-enhancing humor and self-esteem to loneliness.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), anxiety is defined as an emotion that is characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure. People with anxiety usually have recurring intrusive thoughts and concerns and they often tend to avoid situations of worry. Anxiety is defined as the persistent and excessive worry or distress that is present even in the absence of a stressor. The current Covid-19 lead people to quarantine themselves and the recurrent lockdowns has caused people to be completely inactive, however, giving rise of unnecessary thoughts leading of worries and anxiety due to the uncertainty they are facing in almost every aspects of their lives. Young adults and people belonging to other age groups are becoming the victims of GAD showing various symptoms of irritability or frustration, sleeplessness, nausea, fatigue etc.

Thus, being inactive and lack of social interaction with other social figures has led people to create unrealistic and unnecessary scenarios of the already existing uncertain environmental situation, which highly contributes to anxiety that effects the overall well-being of an individual.

As WHO defines, wellbeing is "a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". Psychological well-being comprises of positive relationships with the environment, personal mastery, autonomy, a feeling of purpose and meaning in life, and personal growth and development.It is attained by achieving a state of balance which is influenced by both challenging and rewarding events in live. In the given scenario, due to the lack of proper physical exposure in the social environment, the adolescents and the young adults might face difficulties to establish their identities. This conflict of identity vs. role confusion causes unrest which gradually affects the psychological wellbeing. Also, with the restrictions due to the pandemic, people of this age group are missing out on a lot of physical activities which would help them achieve a balance in their lives. In a study, positive association was established between emotional wellbeing and the extensity of participation in sports and robust recreational activities among adolescents. The results showed that vigorous exercise has complimentary effects on emotional state. According to another survey conducted in USA, several young adults claim that social media helps them to find connection, support, and inspiration during times of depression, stress, or anxiety. According to them, it helps them to keep a balance of their mental wellbeing. This suggests that even during this air of uncertainty during the pandemic, the young adults tend to find solace in the virtual world to feel connected and in a way, they try to build their identity in this virtual social environment. Another major factor which has been affecting the wellbeing of the young adults in this current scenario is the fear and anticipation of the virus which could affect them and their environment and the uncertainty of the forced quarantine. In a survey study which attempted to assess the knowledge, attitude, anxiety experience, and perceived mental healthcare need among adult Indian population during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was found that the subjects had a moderate level of knowledge about the COVID-19 infection and an adequate knowledge about its preventive aspects. The attitude towards COVID-19 showed peoples' willingness to follow government guidelines on quarantine and social distancing. The sleep difficulties, paranoia about acquiring COVID-19 infection and distress related social media were reported in 12.5 %, 37.8 %, and 36.4 % participants respectively. The perceived mental healthcare need was about 80% which clearly showed that people are willing to attain psychological wellbeing.

Loneliness is the state of solitude or being alone. It refers to the negative feelings that can occur when the need for social connection is not fulfilled. Isolation and loneliness are comorbid words where both affect the wellbeing and mental health of the individual. Loneliness is described as the social pain—a psychological mechanism which motivates individuals to seek social connections. The causes of loneliness are varied which includes social, psychological, and environmental factors. The death of someone significant in a person's life can also lead to feelings of loneliness. For e.g., in the Covid-19 situation, detachment from friends and the extended family members has led to loneliness. Chronic loneliness is a term to describe loneliness that is experienced over a long period of time. The symptoms of chronic loneliness are, decreased energy, feeling foggy or unable to focus, insomnia, interrupted sleep, or other sleep issues, decreased appetite, feelings of self-doubt, hopelessness, or worthlessness, feelings of anxiousness or restlessness, substance misuse, increased desire to binge-watch shows or movies. Loneliness has a wide range of negative effects on both physical and mental health, including: alcoholism and drug use, altered brain function, Alzheimer's disease progression,

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antisocial behavior, cardiovascular disease and stroke, decreased memory and learning, depression and suicide, increased stress levels, and poor decision-making. Long term feelings of loneliness and social isolation can also reduce cognitive skills, such as the ability to concentrate, make decisions, problem-solving, and even change negative self-beliefs and it can ultimately lead to depression. Therefore, the lack of social connection and detachment in quarantine has led to feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Suppression of thought commonly refers to the act of deliberately trying to rid the mind of unwanted thoughts (24). Thought suppression is the conscious attempt to not think about something. More than two decades of experimental investigation of this topic reveal that this mental control strategy can be successful for short periods of time. But for the most part, the strategy is not simply ineffective but rather produces the exact opposite of the intended outcome.

Taking into consideration the novel problems faced by the society, individuals are adhering to denial and are consciously trying to avoid the gravity of the situation and are behaving as if nothing is out of order. However, this particular method of dealing with anxiety is not a viable option.

A study by panel James A.K. Erskine, Lia Kvavilashvili and Diana E. Kornbrot shows the result that in samples, the use of thought suppression was best predicted by rumination and trait anxiety. In addition, young participants had significantly higher WBSI scores than older adults but this age difference disappeared when controlling for low levels of anxiety and rumination in older adults. This threat incurred by the pandemic has been subjectively perceived by people. However, the general consensus is pretty firm. The situation is very grave and produces higher levels of anxiety leading to higher suppression of thoughts.

Younger adults and adolescents experience tough times like – loss of job, not being productive, unable to focus, losing a sense of purpose in life due to the current scenario. These are anxiety provoking stimulus which regulates a person to supress the same thoughts and lead a normal life.

Resilience is defined as the developable capacity to rebound or bounce back from adversity, conflict, and failure or even positive events, progress, and increased responsibility"; a stable trajectory of healthy functioning after a highly adverse event"; and the ability to bounce back from adversity, frustration, and misfortune"; There are various interventions practiced during childhood and early adolescents to make an individual high in resilience. Intervention efforts are promoted with two primary aims – 1. Reduce risk factors that be decrease or inhibit the growth of resilience and 2. To promote and build resilience in children and early adolescents. Hence, despite the interventions, situations or circumstances like the current ongoing Covid-19 pandemic becomes a strong agent which hampers a person's resilience to a great deal. This tough time brings in the concept of uncertainty and disrupts the sense of routine that we were a part of earlier. Not knowing what will happen, good or bad is for a fact very dangerous concerning the mental health of individuals and reduces a person's ability to bounce back as there the essence of predictability and anticipation is missing. Individuals, especially adolescents and early adults engage in faulty coping strategies like substance abuse. Getting into the heck of a substance can give short-term satisfaction but is detrimental in the long run.

A study by P. A. Gooding, A. Hurst, J. Johnson & N. Tarrier conducted in 2002 titled "Psychological resilience in younger and older adults" concludes that the young adults had more resilience related to social support. Poor perceptions of general health and low energy levels predicted low levels of resilience regardless of age. Low hopelessness scores also predicted greater resilience in case of young adults. But, in the contemporary world with the advent of virtual social media platforms and especially amidst the pandemic where social distancing is promoted. Social support is a difficult asset to have for the younger adults and hence the sense of resilience in low in them. Individuals who are immune supressed are also vary of the ramifications caused by the deadly virus and are always sceptical about the smallest of health issue and are hence, suffering from severe anxiety.

A paper by Robbie Gilligan in 2006, titled Adversity, resilience and young people: the protective value of positive school and spare time experiences states the importance of spare time and schools in building resilience. Taking into consideration the pandemic again, schools have been shifted to online platforms in which it has lost many of its core essence like socialising with friends, engaging in physical activities etc and as a result schools and colleges is unable to play a vital role in building a child's or an early adolescents' resilience. However, due to the presence of abundance of spare time, these individuals are engaging in activities which they like and are also developing new and varied interests. Due to technological advancements, there are various courses, programmes and learning options available very easily to us and they are becoming the foundation stone for building resilience of young adolescents and children.

Despite taking into account all the tough situations adhering us, one factor cannot be eliminated, that is adaptability. All individuals have the inherent capacity to optimally adapt to the surrounding environment.

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II. METHODOLOGY

SAMPLING AND DATA COLLECTION:

In the present study Purposive sampling technique has been used to collect data from the samples. The sample has been further divided into sub-groups of male and female.

Inclusion criteria: The criteria on the basis of which data were collected from the subjects are: - 1) The age must range between 18 to 30 years.

- 2) People who reside in urban areas.
- 3) Places which have individuals affected with corona virus in last five months and had strict Governmental lockdowns.
- 4) Has easy access to internet, social media and daily news.
- 5) Individuals who are either doing online classes from home or work from home.

Exclusion criteria: The criteria on the basis of which individuals were excluded are: -

- 1) Doesn't fall between the age range of 18 to 30 years.
- 2) He / she or any of their family members have suffered from corona virus in last five months.
- 3) Doesn't have access to internet, social media or daily news.
- 4) Who were associated with any kind of emergency and medical services.
- 5) Has any major physical / psychological disorder.

Data were collected from total 134 individuals, then the sample was divided into two sub groups of 89 females and 45 males.

DESCRIPTION OF TOOLS:

Data has been collected from the individuals for the following variables – self – esteem, loneliness, anxiety, resilience, thought suppression and well-being.

Firstly, an information schedule was provided to collect the basic information about the individuals. The schedule asked for age, gender, socio-economic background, education level, brief past history and other basic information required for the study.

Rosenberg's Self – Esteem Scale has been used to measure self-esteem, this scale has an internal consistency of 0.77 and alpha coefficients ranging from 0.72 to 0.87. To measure loneliness, UCLA Loneliness Scale Version 3 has been used. The internal consistency varies somewhere between .89 to .94. Anxiety has been measured with the help of GAD (Generalized Anxiety Disorder – 7 item scale), which has an internal consistency of .89. Resilience has been assessed with the help of The Coping Competence Questionnaire, having a reliability ranging from .62 to .77. Thought Suppression was assessed with the help of White Bear Suppression Inventory (WBSI) having an internal consistency of .87 to .89. Lastly, PGI Well Being Scale has been used to assess well-being, test-retest reliability was measured applying K.R. 20 formula and was found to be 0.98.

III. RESULT

This research study aimed at assessing the mental health of young adults by examining six variables --Well-Being, Loneliness, Suppression of Thought, General anxiety (GAD), Resilience and Self-Esteem. Data was collected from the sample using the questionnaire tools. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and z-test, were the two tests incorporated to statistically analyse the collected data. In Pearson's Product Moment Correlation test the variables loneliness, suppression of thought, general anxiety (GAD), resilience and self-esteem were correlated with well-being.

Z SCORE

VARIABLE	Z SCORE
SELF-ESTEEM	0.837234900209201
WELL-BEING	0.43
LONELINESS	1.33
GAD	1.23
RESILIENCE	0.09
SUPRESSION OF THOUGHT	1.30

CORRELATION

VARIABLE	CORRELATION
SELF-ESTEEM& WELL-BEING	0.499
GAD & WELL-BEING	-0.38
LONELINESS& WELL-BEING	-0.27
RESILIENCE & WELL-BEING	0.29

SUPRESSION OF THOUGHT& WELL-BEING	-0.31

There was a positive moderate correlation between Self-Esteem and Well-being which is 0.50 and between Resilience and Wellbeing which is 0.29. There was a negative moderate correlation between General Anxiety Disorder and Well-being which is -0.38 and between Loneliness and Wellbeing which is -0.27, and between Suppression of thought and Wellbeing which is -0.31. The z-test was done between male and female and the result for self-esteem is 0.84, for well-being is 0.43, for loneliness is 1.33, for general anxiety disorder is 1.23, for resilience is 0.09 and for suppression of thought is 1.30 which are not significant.

IV. DISCUSSION

After statistical analysis of the collected data, the level of well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic was observed to be 7.95 (the range being 0-20) which indicates that, the overall well-being of young adults in the population is remarkably poor. Well-being of individuals and in this case young adults is a contentious subject and is crucial for the country's development. If the people of a particular country are not happy and mentally healthy, its population reflects negative emotions of distress, dysfunctionality, danger and lacks effectiveness. Generally, the development of a country is measured by its gross domestic product (GDP) index, but slowly this stance is shifting, as experts are advocating to measure a country's GNH, i.e. Gross National Happiness (United Nations, Sustainable Development Agency). Well-being, as discussed earlier is a complicated variable and not merely the absence of any particular bodily disease (WHO). Additionally, tough times like this pandemic, where individual's mental health is been tested incessantly as a result of the uncertainty faced by them, its composite nature keeps on increasing.

Rates of mood disorders and suicide-related outcomes have increased significantly among adolescents and young adults, and the rise of social media might be blamed (Jamie Rosenberg -Mental Health Issues on the Rise Among Adolescents, Young Adults). However, in this fullness of time, there is something more complicated than social media that equally challenges the conscience of this vulnerable population – the Global Pandemic. This is limiting everyone around, and especially these young, fresh and energetic souls.

Observing the mean scores of the variables tested in this study and comparing it on the basis of gender, it reveals that – males have higher scores on Suppression of Thought and Loneliness, which is supported from their poor scores on resilience and coping agencies thereby leading to reducing their well-being. This could be an outcome of younger men being a target of social media and video games or the 'alpha male' taking all decisions within the family, and hence, they develop a sense of alienation from the family structure (Rob Whitley, 2020). It could also be a result of the increased stress to work harder so that they can keep their job in the light of the Global Recession caused by the Pandemic. (The Economic Times).

Females had a higher score on anxiety when compared to males. It could be because of chemical imbalances and varying hormonal activities. Reproductive events across a woman's life are associated with hormonal changes, which have been linked to anxiety. But in addition to biological mechanisms, women and men seem to experience and react to stressful events in their life differently. Women tend to be more prone to stress, which can increase their anxiety. Also, when faced with stressful situations, women and men tend to use different coping strategies. Women faced with life stressors are more likely to ruminate about them, which can increase their anxiety, while men engage more in active, problem-focused coping. Other studies suggest that women are more likely to experience physical and mental abuse than men, and abuse has been linked to the development of anxiety disorders. (Olivia Remes, University of Cambridge). In this pandemic, where a quarantined life style has been implemented, work load on females have gone up. As they are biologically more prone to stress, the grave situation acts as generic factor for their increased levels of anxiety when compared to men. However, the differences of these variable between males and females were not found to be distinctively significant. This indicates that the pandemic had an impact on the mental health of the entire population of young-adults without any gender differentiation.

Erik Erikson in his well-liked theory on psychosocial development of human beings marked this period of transition from adolescents to young adults, as a stage where individuals endure a conflict called – Identity vs Role Confusion (5th of the 8 stages given by Erikson). This theory maintains that, as the adolescents grow, they try to take on responsibilities of their lives with the constant invigilation from people surrounding them. In this juncture, the individuals are highly confused and are unable to recognise their true self. The most common question that arises in this stage is 'Who Am I?', which they often fail to answer which leads to them experiencing immense distress. As a result, they constantly search for an identity of their own by engaging in productive activities, that will help them strengthen their vocational career. During this stage, the adolescents and the young adults don't want their identity to be depending on someone else. They expect to be taken seriously and be respected for their independent identity. However, this thought is challenged, when the person evaluates his/her accomplishments and roles in life. At the age of 18-22, it is practically not sensible to think to be completely independent and free, as most of the young adults are completing their education and are working

hard to build a career path (Carl E. Pickhardt, Psychology Today). Most young adults are confused about who they really are and what they want to do. It's a stage where the individuals are unsettled, are apprehensive about their future, are exploring new ideas, and learning constantly about new ways to live life. Hence, these young adults are very vulnerable and are susceptible to mental break downs and they need constant monitoring. (Canadian Mental Health Association, BC Division)

This pandemic has just pushed the boundaries of the mental health in the vulnerable population to the edges. Forcing people to stay away from each other, not allowing people to go out and socialise with others, in addition with other restrictive guidelines, have made these young adults more prone to suicidal thoughts. It has also increased their levels of distress and decreased their levels of productivity and thereby pushing them towards an existential crisis.

The young adults are at the peak of their life, and the actions taken by them at this phase acts as the basic framework of their career, if not the life as whole. Breaking out of the routine of school life and entering a competitive world might look very adventurous but once they start experiencing the challenges and uncertainty, stress takes over their highly functioning minds filled with aspirations and ideas. With this Global Pandemic on board, this peak phase of every individual has taken an unconventional turn. Although people are gradually coping with this online mode of functioning, the lack of accessibility to the conventional facilities and activities are taking a major toll specifically in this population. Many students have to compromise their career plans due to the recession and arduous travelling facilities caused by this pandemic. Not having the adequate knowledge of "what needs to be done", and the apprehensions of "what will happen in the coming months", or "how long will this aberrance sustain"- has a huge impact on the mental health of these individuals. It has been established earlier that, these individuals are significantly apprehensive about their careers and constantly suffer from various internal conflicts. However, under normal circumstances they had the option of engaging in productive activities to distract themselves from these distressing thoughts. This not only served as a recreation, but it also helped them ground themselves and have a sense of pride and accomplishment. However, staying at home with limited accessible activities to engage in, instigates a feeling of unproductiveness which thereby aids these fresh minds to drive into apprehensive and anxious thoughts about their future.

The young adults tend to socialise more effectively with people of the same age group because they relate their daily life activities more significantly than with the rest. In doing so, they engage in the process of catharsis, which consequently helps them to cope with their difficulties. By communicating thoughts, one also gets clarity about the ambiguous aspects of life. Self-introspection can sometime make clearer things vague as the person doesn't know where to draw a line. However, this is not the case when one unburdens their thoughts to their friends or loved ones. Being able to reflect on what is being said is a strong eye-opener for most of the young adults.

Socialising and going out also facilitates new ideas. One gets to explore new places, gain new experiences and live life. But unfortunately, all of these seem to be an unattainable dream now, due to this Pandemic - which practically has taken 'life' away from these young adults and has involuntarily enrolled them in a monotonous life schedule that gives rise to negative thoughts and decreases effectiveness and hampers the positive attitude of individuals.

In addition to the negative thoughts, not being able to go out, meet people, and explore the outside world, leads to the young adults into undertaking withdrawing/anti-social personalities and them suffering from apathy. This results in the rise in the level of Loneliness and Suppression of Thought in the young adults, which was observed in the present study after tallying the correlational scores.

As, loneliness and suppression of thought are inversely related with well-being of a person, the overall mental health is deemed to be very poor in these young adults.

However, there is an interesting observation to be made in here -- despite such adversities, the levels of anxiety and the sense of self-esteem of these individuals, is not as low as what it was expected it to be.

The primary reason for this could be that, individuals understand that almost the entire world population is sharing this suffering together as a whole. This aids in sustaining their poise and faith in themselves and in their capabilities. In addition to this, as the situation confronted by them is intense and anxiety provoking, individuals have been upfront and spontaneous in deploying their coping mechanisms against the stressors which consequently helps them to reduce their levels of anxiety. The coping mechanisms, however, could be healthy or unhealthy (Shadiya Mohamed Saleh Baqutayan, 2015). Lying in bed throughout the day, breaking out of the daily routine, sleeping extra without tiredness or fatigue, completely ignoring the intensity of the problem and being unreasonably happy with everything around are signs of unhealthy coping. On the contrary, taking up a new hobby or working on existing ones, engaging in recreational activities, spending quality time with family members, and indulging in other productive things are signs of healthy coping. The latter is a positively effective and suggested way to decrease the levels of anxiety. The former only supresses the anxiety provoking thoughts and they often get these distressing thoughts back in symbolic forms such as slip of tongues, bad dreams etc. Repressing anxiety provoking thoughts decreases a person's well-being in the long run.

V. CONCLUSION

To conclude the discussion, it is pertinent that the general well-being of young adults in the population is remarkably poor and the pandemic has just served as an impetus to the same. The conflict of Identity vs Role Confusion creates distress in the minds of these individuals and hampers their overall well-being. Uncertainty about life, lack of social support, monotonous life patterns, and unable to explore new things have all been equally responsible for the increasing levels of loneliness, suppression of thought and anxiety in these young adults, which consequently derails the mental health of the future of our country.

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