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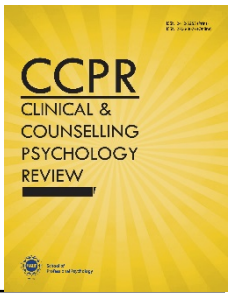

Social Isolation, Mindfulness, and Mental Wellbeing among Covid-19 Survivor University Students

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Social Isolation, Mindfulness, and Mental Wellbeing among Covid-19 Survivor University Students

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Abstract

This study explains the relationship between social isolation, mindfulness, and mental well-being among Covid-19 survivor university students. Data were collected from 200 Covid-19 survivor university students (*Men* = 94; *Women*= 106) from Punjab Pakistan. Results found high social isolation to be linked with low mental well-being, however, a significant positive relationship between mindfulness and mental well-being was found. Further, social isolation and mindfulness emerged as significant predictors of mental well-being. This research sheds light on the significance of mindfulness, and social connections in daily life, especially during periods of isolation during Covid-19. Present findings have implications for psychologists, counselors, mental health practitioners, teachers, and parents.

***Keywords**:* Covid-19 survivors, mental well-being, mindfulness, social isolation.

Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic has caused a huge disturbance in every sphere of life due to increased death rates and socio-political, psychological, and fiscal consequences (Asif & Sattar, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic is remarkably stressful for all ages particularly young students (Brooks et al., 2020; Karen et al., 2020), and has been linked with suicidal ideation among students (Lee, 2020). Social isolation is a condition wherein a person has limited social belonging and an absence of physical contact with others (Cornwell & Waite, 2009; Alspach, 2013). Covid-19 became lethal, wave after wave and whilst it became tough for infected students to engage in a healthy lifestyle including physical activities, and maintaining social networking (Brooks et al., 2020). Studies support high social isolation to be linked with the poor emotional well-being of individuals during the Covid-

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19 flare-up around the world (Pancani et al., 2020; Clair et al., 2021; Pietrabissa & Simpson, 2020). Mindfulness has been visualized as promoting the well-being of people as it helps to regulate healthy behaviors which may enhance the level of attention and acceptance. Students with high levels of mindfulness are less inclined to be overwhelmed by anxious feelings during the time of social isolation, or quarantine during Covid-19 infection (Belen, 2020; Antonova et al., 2021; Keng et al., 2011). Research has linked mindfulness with decreased stress, fear, and mental pain among individuals during the time of the global pandemic (Garfin et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2021).

Mental well-being is described as the experience of an individual feeling good, functioning well, and coping with the challenges of life (Ruggeri et al., 2020). Nicholson (2012) has highlighted the negative effects of limited social interactions on health behaviors, and psychological and physiological states. Niedzwiedz et al. (2021) investigated psychological distress among Covid-19 infected patients and reported the presence of psychological distress even after 7 months of the infection among participants. It was also found that younger participants of the younger age group showed greater psychological distress as compared to the other age groups. Wang et al. (2021) investigated the acute psychological impact of Covid-19 among isolated patients and reported depression (53.48%) anxiety (46.30%), and insomnia (42.01%) among Covid-19 patients. A study by Olufadewa et al. (2020) reported that infected individuals with Covid-19 reported high anxiety, nervousness, guilt, fear, and worry. Similarly, Asif and Sattar (2020) advocated the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental well-being of university students in Pakistan where it was shown that 26.66% of participants had mild, 27.15% moderate, and 17.04% severe anxiety symptoms. Baloch et al. (2021) investigated the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and ensuing proceedings of lockdown, quarantine, and social distancing among students, where results revealed that among 494 participants, 125 showed minimal to moderate anxiety levels, 45 showed severe anxiety levels and 34 students were experiencing an extreme level of anxiety (25%, 9.1% & 6.9% respectively).

Rationale

Studies have suggested that mental well-being has been devastated by Covid-19 in terms of social and emotional consequences (Saladino et al.,

2020; Khan et al., 2021; Browning et al., 2021). Understanding the fact that being in quarantine during Covid-19 is considered a critical and stressful stage for students because there are a lot more other pressures going on in their lives i.e academic stress, workload, absence of loved one support, etc. Along with that, individuals with pandemic infections experience elevated psychological problems, which may include stress disorders, anxiety, and long-term mental distress (Moradi et al., 2020). This highlights the need to address the mental health, particularly of survivors. The current study sheds light on the significance of mental well-being which can be improved by performing different mindful activities throughout the pandemic. By identifying the predictors of mental well-being, the study can enhance awareness of mindfulness and promote wellness among Covid-19 survivor students. Amid the pandemic, many students have experienced a loss of control along with rapid challenges in emotions. Awareness regarding mindfulness may help engage with what's happening without minimizing or catastrophizing, without being in denial or being overwhelmed (Keng et al., 2011). The indigenous literature on this topic is generally limited. This study may be helpful in contributing literature on social isolation, mindfulness, and mental well-being among Covid-19 survivor university students. Improving mindfulness in daily life may help Covid-19 survivor students to focus on the present moment and also to reduce the negative effect of fear, and mental distress which is associated with the covid-19 pandemic. Given the importance of social isolation and mindfulness and its possible ramifications on students' well-being, it is necessary to determine the presence of this phenomenon and its potential consequences on the mental health of students in Pakistan during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Objectives

The current study was intended to find out

- The relationship between social isolation, mindfulness, and mental well-being among Covid-19 survivor university students.
- To examine social isolation, and mindfulness as predictors of mental well-being among Covid-19 survivor university students.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the current study are as follows:

- High social isolation is correlated with low mental well-being among Covid-19 survivors.
- High mindfulness is likely to be related to high mental well-being among Covid-19 survivors.
- Social Isolation and mindfulness are likely to predict mental well-being among Covid-19 survivor university students.

Method

Research Design

Correlation research design was used for the current research. The sample consisted of 200 Pakistani Covid-19 survivor university students(*M* = 94; *F* = 106), aged 18-32 years (*M* = 23.6, *SD* = 2.37) who participated online in this study. The sample size was determined by G-power analysis.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Students both men and women, 18 years and above who experienced Covid-19 infection in the second or third wave were included in the study. Students studying in English medium programs were included in this research. Participants were approached online from different cities in Punjab. Individuals diagnosed with any other physical disease or psychological disorder by mental health professionals were excluded from the study. Asymptomatic people were also excluded.

Operational Definitions

Social Isolation

Social isolation is defined as the absence of social networks and infrequent social contacts It is an objective state of being cut off from a normal social network (Alspach, 2013).

Mindfulness

According to the "Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale" (MAAS). It is a core characteristic of awareness long believed to enhance the well-being of a person (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Mental Well-being

It is explained as a positive condition of psychological and emotional health. It demonstrates the way that a person can adapt to stressors around him and is able to work intellectually and effectively in such a way that is considered productive and useful (Gillam, 2018).

Assessment Measures

Lubben Social Network Scale

This scale assesses the number, frequency, and perceived social support related to friends, and family. It measures social isolation on a 6-point Likert scale. Every item is scored from 0 to 5 however, the total scores lie between 0 to 30. A score of 12 or lower indicates "at risk" for social isolation. The Cronbach's alpha value for the scale is calculated as 0.95, which was high enough. The test-retest reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.86 (Lubben, 1988).

Mindful Attention Awareness Scale

This 6-point Likert scale that has 15 items were used to measure mindfulness. The scale is designed as unidimensional, highlighting attention/awareness as its essential aspect. It measures how frequently or infrequently an individual has such experiences or feelings. The answers according to what an individual feels will reflect the experiences. High scores indicate a higher level of dispositional mindfulness. Scale's reliability is Cronbach's α = .89–.98 and test-retest r = .35–.52 (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

The Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale

This scale was used to measure the mental well-being of the study participants. This scale focuses on positive aspects of mental health. The scale uses a 5-point Likert scale where the scores in it range from 14 to 70 points (Tennant & Hiller, 2007). Higher scores reflect higher levels of mental well-being. The scale has test-retest reliability and with the reliability of Cronbach's alpha scored up to 0.98.

Demographic Form

A self-constructed semi-structured demographic form was used to gather the personal information of the participants. (i.e. Gender, age, marital status, occupation, education level, etc.).

Procedure

First of all, permissions were sought for conducting the study and using tools. Consent was obtained from participants to participate in the study and the purpose of the study was explained to them. Participants were emailed questionnaires. All instructions and ethical issues were written in the online informed consent and questionnaires. Privacy and confidentiality were

guarded. Participants were informed about their right to leave the study at any point in time. They were also assured that their information shall only be used for research purposes. Participants were asked to fill out the questionnaires. Participants took 8 to 10 minutes approximately to fill in the questionnaires.

Results

Table 1

Psychometric Properties of the Study Variables (N=200)

Variables	*k*	*M*	*SD*	*α*	Skewness	Kurtosis
1. Lubben Social Network Scale	06	13.6	5.2	0.81	.82	-.50
2. Mindful Attention Awareness Scale	15	50.6	20.8	0.96	.29	-1.4
3. Warwick Edinburgh Mental-Wellbeing Scale	14	42.5	15	0.97	.26	-1.1

Note. k =Total no. of items, *α* = Cronbach's alpha, *M* =Mean, *SD* =Standard Deviation

Table 1 suggests that sample distributions are free of skewness and kurtosis value.

Table 2

Correlation Between Social Isolation, Mindfulness and Mental wellbeing among Covid-19 Survivor University Students (N=200)

Variables	*1*	*2*	*3*	*M*	*SD*
1. Social Networking	-	.21**	.24**	13.6	5.2
2.Mindfulness		-	.75**	50.6	20.8
3. Mental Well-being			-	42.5	15.1

Note. M = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation. ** $p<0.01$

Table 2 shows the highly significant relationship among variables.

Table 3

Multiple Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Social Isolation, Mindfulness and Mental Well-being of Covid-19 Survivor University Students (N=200).

Predictors	Mental Well-Being	
	ΔR^2	β
Model 1		
Social Isolation	.05**	.08**
Model 2		
Mindfulness	.51***	.74***
Total R^2	.58***	

Note. ΔR^2 = R square change value, β = standardized beta; ***p>.001.

Table 3 shows multiple linear hierarchical regression was carried out to see the predictors of mental well-being. Model 1 and Model 2 both turned out to be significant, also turned out to be significant.

Discussion

Overall results suggested that Covid-19 survivor university students with high social isolation exhibited poor mental well-being. In accordance with the present findings, Pancani et al. (2020) indicated prolonged social isolation to be linked with poor mental well-being during Covid-19. Similarly, Smith et al. (2020) found a significant correlation between high social isolation and low well-being in their study. Sadooghiasl et al. (2022) examined the effectiveness of mindfulness among patients with Covid-19 infection whereas the current study concluded that mindfulness helped to improve stress and mental well-being among participants. Further, Matiz et al. (2020) in an Italian sample found mindfulness to be linked with improved mental well-being, and also found it effective against the negative consequences of Covid-19. Additionally, Mahmoudzadeh et al. (2015) concluded mindfulness is correlated with high psychological well-being. Moreover, social isolation and mindfulness were found to be significant predictors of mental well-being (Klainin-Yobas et al., 2016). A possible

explanation for the similarity between previous research results and with present study results could be that the population was the same in studies as socially isolated people or students were selected in studies and usually, students in Pakistan face similar problems and have a similar mindset. Another possible reason would be Covid-19, which emerged as a global pandemic, and human responses to a pandemic can be similar. A study conducted by Nikopoulou et al. (2022) also helped to highlight uncertainty as another major positive predictor of mental distress among patients with covid-19 infection. Where severe symptoms of covid-19 infection among patients greatly impact their mental and psychological well-being (Imran et al., 2022). In the current study symptoms of stress, anxiety and insomnia were significantly present among hospitalized covid-19 patients. So there is a need to incorporate the severity of covid-19 symptoms in future research (Imran et al., 2022).

Limitations

Following are the limitations of the current study:

- Data were collected online and physical interaction was not possible due to the Covid19 pandemic.
- The research had to be completed in a short time span.
- It was difficult to find the relevant research material for the current study due to the dearth of literature availability.

Conclusion

Our study concluded that Covid 19 survivor students with high social isolation reported low mental well-being, whereas high mindfulness was found related to better mental well-being. While checking for predictors, social isolation and mindfulness emerged as significant predictors of mental well-being.

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