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**ACADEMIC PAPER:  
FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH DURING  
COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>1.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>FACTORS</b>	
2.1.	Lockdown consequences	3
2.2.	Financial stress	4
2.3.	Pre-pandemic High Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) severity	5
2.4.	Economic instability impacting the mental health	6
<b>3.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>7</b>

## **Introduction**

The novel coronavirus is an unprecedented global war, where humanity is facing the same enemy (HAJI WAHAB & Othman, 2021b). In the age of globalization, humanity must cope with this pandemic on a continuing basis. Currently, the entire world is trying to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic, and the World Health Organization (WHO) classified COVID-19 as a virus that poses a threat to human life on March 12, 2020. As of early May 2021, there were over 152 million cases of people infected with the virus, affecting countries all over the world, with the United States reporting the greatest rate of infections, over 32 million, with over 577,000 deaths. This virus was first discovered in China on December 31, 2019, and has since killed over 3.2 million people across the globe (WHO, 2021).

The invisible enemy that humans are confronted with nowadays has affected numerous industries across the world, including the education sector. The worldwide higher education environment has transformed dramatically in recent months as a result of the virus's spread (Aristovnik et al., 2020). The majority of students throughout the world have been affected as schools and institutions around the world have decided to close operations in order to reduce the spread of this deadly virus. Many countries have taken significant measures to reduce COVID-19 transmission among their populations, such as closing primary and secondary schools, factories, universities, colleges, and other public venues.

These changes play an adverse role in the life of students. To curb the spread of the pandemic, to prevent the gathering of people is a very important task. So the closure of the educational institutions has become very important to reduce the spread. Since the start of the pandemic, the students have not been able to attend schools or universities in the normal way for two years. Though this is the best possible solution, this method of study for a long time impacts the mental health of the students. A study among Dental Medicine students at Harvard School revealed that the move to e-learning has worsened their learning with increased stress, decreased engagement, and the same perception level of class attendance. (Chen et al., 2020) Also, because of the lockdown, the students cannot go out of their houses to hangout with their friends and also play outdoor sports like cricket, football, hockey etc. This makes them feel isolated and lonely. They become stressed staying in the home and also monotony strikes them as they constantly have to

depend on only virtual interaction. As a result a student may suffer from lack of concentration, sleep and anxiety disorders and many more mental illnesses. These are the common problems faced by all the students irrespective of socio-economic conditions. But for the students living in lower developed countries, it only adds more to their already existing sufferings. Some of them can't get the access to virtual education because of the lack of availability of digital services. They don't even get their proper treatment in case of any illness. Poverty is the main factor that hampers their normal life. Some of them even are deprived of their basic rights as citizens because the financial situation of the government is not good enough to support the population. As a result, suicide, stress, isolation and anxiety has increased to a great extent among the students around the globe. In this article, we are highlighting some of the important factors affecting the mental health of the student such as lockdown consequences, financial stress, pre-pandemic High Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) severity, and economic instability.

## **Factors affecting students' mental health during COVID-19 pandemic**

### **1. Lockdown consequences**

Some students may have worse effects on their mental health during the lockdown due to their studies. This may be a result of them not having any time for themselves. Some lecturers would assume that the students have more time for themselves which is why some lecturers would go out of their way to do a class even when at night, something no lecturers would ever do before the pandemic. This also leads to the students not having a boundary between their work life and the free time. Our home used to be our escape from work or studies, however that is no longer the case anymore as our home is the only place we're allowed to do our work. This disrupts their daily routines and habits, the activities they would normally do at their homes as an escape. This would hinder their mental health and makes it almost suffocating to always be worrying about their studies.

Imposing restrictions would also worsen the problem as well as the students are being locked up at the one and only place they have to think about their studies. As I mentioned before, our home used to be our escape from our studies, however things have changed and our homes are now the place where we have to work. Therefore, the students require a place where they could escape from the suffocating grip of their work. Unfortunately, they are not allowed to go anywhere.

Another factor that affects the student's mental health is the digital divide (Sifat, 2020a). This correlates very closely with the lockdown restrictions. This is due to the fact that not everyone has a decent computer hardware or internet connection to ease them attending online classes. Some students are forced to use gadgets that are borderline e-waste to catch up with their classes. Before the pandemic, these students could have just simply gone to a nearby cyber cafe to work on their assignments as these cyber cafes are equipped with decent computer workstations.

Not only that, some countries, especially developing countries lack the sufficient internet speed for students to attend their online classes. Having a good nationwide internet speed is important as students may need it for other purposes such as researching. This would be very mentally

draining in order to wait for many minutes or even hours just to load a page in order to learn something that is crucial, or having awful buffering when listening to an online lecture.

Some of the problems stated could be fixed in a short time however the effects would last a very long time. Providing decent computer hardware or improving the nation's internet connectivity would most definitely be useful for the students. Governments should also consider lifting some restrictions such as opening cyber cafes so students could have a comfortable place to work.

## **2. Financial Support**

Another factor that affects students' mental health during COVID-19 pandemic is financial support. Even before the pandemic, financial support was one of the most pressing concerns for most students. According to a research by Pew Research Center in 2019, six out of ten parents with children aged 18 to 29 stated they financially aided their children in the previous year, particularly with regular expenses such as education fees, rentals, transportation, meals and bills. In comparison to the 1980s, today's youth are highly dependent on their parents for financial support. In the 1980s, by the age of 22, or much younger, one-third of young individuals had achieved their financial independence.

Thus, consistent financial assistance among students is one of the most crucial factors that must be addressed in relation to the current COVID-19 pandemic (HAJI WAHAB & Othman, 2021b). According to the "2020 University Students Financial Survey" conducted by WalletHub; more than 13 million university students are concerned about their financial future. The report also added that over 6.4 million university students claimed their parents already provide credit card assistance to help them with their daily expenses.

Many students today are anxious about education loans, registration fees, accommodation costs, study materials, student job loss, anxieties about their future financial condition, education, and career (Brooks et al., 2020b). Furthermore, some of them have begun to look for alternative ways to fund their education, such as seeking freelancing opportunities, looking for high-demand jobs, and so on.

All parties, including universities, governments, financial institutions, and education loan organisations, should collaborate to support students in a variety of ways by providing them immediate case assistance and temporary loan relief. Financial help and general living expenditures for underprivileged students should be taken into account by universities (Sahu, 2020). This ensures that the problem of financial aid for university students may be effectively addressed and controlled.

### **3. Pre-pandemic High Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) severity**

The severity of pre-pandemic High Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is also a factor affecting student mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. ADHD is a mental illness that affects people's behaviour. These persons may appear agitated, have poor concentration, and act on impulse. Some of them may also suffer from common symptoms such as sleep and anxiety disorders. Thus, ADHD is known to have a long-term impact on the well-being of youth.

Youth who have pre-existing mental health concerns, such as ADHD, are highly vulnerable. These people who may have suffered in the past may be surprised by the rapid lifestyle shift during the pandemic, and due to their mental health difficulties, they may be ill-equipped to adapt. Unlike ordinary people, they may be able to deal with situations more effectively and be mentally and physically always prepared. According to study using the COVID-19 Adolescent Symptom and Psychological Experience Questionnaire (CASPE), cognitive challenges have an impact on positive pre-pandemic ADHD slopes (Porter et al., 2021). As a result, higher levels of pre-pandemic ADHD symptoms were connected to worse reports of cognitive and emotional well-being during the early phases of the pandemic.

The added stress of coping with abrupt lifestyle changes adds to the stress of youth with ADHD. Majority of people have been stranded at home since the movement control order (MCO). Thus, there are several distractions of doing everything online at home, and no one can truly focus on one thing. Because of that, students with ADHD require more and more care at home, and they can also be a distraction for others. As a result, most family members who are unable to regulate their emotions may become enraged with them, causing the ADHD patient to become increasingly stressed. Based on the socioeconomic (SES) factor, during the early stages of the

pandemic, better parental education indicated a higher degree of well-being among youth (Porter et al., 2021). As a result, students with ADHD need more attention from those around them, and it all depends on how people, particularly family, handle those situations.

Furthermore, persons with lower levels of ADHD prior to the pandemic report higher levels of cognitive anguish during the pandemic because of life-altering. Anxious thoughts, apprehensive anticipation, and memory problems are common in people with cognitive distress. Those with growing attention issues are worse equipped to cope with the pandemic's unexpected stress and lifestyle changes. A sudden life change affects a rise of health issues, mortality, and dropout rates among youth. There is also 30% reduction in total hours spent on studies to combat potential dropout and negative effects on learning (Boruchowicz et al., 2022). To summarise, ADHD should not be overlooked and must always be taken seriously to avoid further deterioration.

Pre-pandemic ADHD severity is one of the risk factors that influenced youth well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. As Blaire M Porter points out in the article, those who previously suffered from ADHD may need more community and educational support. During an outbreak, youth spend more time at home with their families, so families need to pay more attention to them with psychiatric consultation so that they can be constantly monitored at home.

#### **4. Economic instability impacting the mental health**

The Covid -19 virus has caused global casualties. The casualties have different impacts based on the socio economic condition of different countries around the globe. In the developing and underdeveloped countries, the effects of the pandemic added more to the existing problems of the people.

Most families in developing and underdeveloped countries face financial problems. Normally, they face difficulties in getting their fundamental rights. This pandemic furthermore increases that problem. This also affects the student. Sometimes, the families are bound to stop the education of their children. The students studying in universities also have to go through a lot of problems. Their right to avail basic rights are hampered.

As poverty and socioeconomic inequities are prominent in Low Middle Income Countries, and with poor coverage of adequately resourced healthcare and social safety nets, it is plausible to expect mental health problems in large sections of communities across Low Middle Income Countries. (Kola et al., 2021) There is a shortage of hospitals and treatment centers. So, to meet that shortage many government buildings including schools are converted into hospitals. This hampers the education system greatly. In Bangladesh, nearly half of students (42.8%) claimed that their lives were disrupted ‘a lot’ by the COVID-19 pandemic. More than one third (37.0%) believed that this pandemic had a ‘medium’ mental health effect on them. More than half of the students (57.0%) believed the COVID-19 would disrupt the health care system. (Sayeed et al., 2020) Besides, the family members of the students also may get affected which causes a bad impact on the mental health of the student. Sometimes, the only earning family is the one who gets infected with Covid – 19. Then it is almost impossible to provide the proper treatment which causes a great stress to the students.

Another problem that the students of underdeveloped and developing countries face is the lack of availability of digital services. Due to weak infrastructure, the developing and underdeveloped countries do not have developed industrialization. So these countries are not as technologically advanced as the developing countries. In spite of having all the digital services in the developing countries, still many students are being affected by mental health. So in the lower developed countries it creates a bigger impact on the mentality of the students. In developing countries, the student can avail many digital services for education. But the students in lower developed countries cannot avail them. Students in Low Middle Income Countries regularly face barriers to accessing online technology due to unequal digital landscapes that prevent youth from accessing the Internet and related virtual spaces. (Rahiem, M. D. H., 2020) Most of the students in the lower developed countries do not have a computer or a smartphone or a proper internet connection. For this reason, the students cannot avail the digital services for education. Their study period is wasted, which makes them feel a burden to oneself and the family. As such he is bound to get mentally ill.

## **Conclusion**

The pandemic has cost many lives around the world. Though, the side effects that are not seen through the naked eye is how it is affecting the mental health of millions of people affected by it, which in our case are students. We have put together a number of studies that further proves this claim. Every study talks about different aspects of how the pandemic mentally affects students. From the consequences of lockdown restrictions which disrupts the daily routine of so many students, how the pandemic is highlighting even more on how important it is to have a stable financial support during time of crisis along with how it leaves a devastating impact on mental health and the vulnerability of students that have an already existing mental health issues.

The COVID-19 virus will not be eradicated from the world anytime soon and the same goes for the lockdowns. Therefore, all of the mentioned issues will either be left untreated and have the possibility of worsening or the authorities have no other choice but to act and resolve this matter which often looked passed. Hopefully, the pandemic will open the eyes of the public of the ongoing invisible issue and collectively search for a solution for the other unseen issue that lies deep hidden in the heads of millions of people.

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