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RESEARCH ARTICLE

EFFECT OF COVID-19 ON RELATIONSHIPS: A STUDY ON YOUTH OF DELHI NCR

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ABSTRACT

The impacts of COVID-19 have been felt by people of all age groups with illness, unemployment and the government's response of lockdown to curb the transmission of the virus disrupting many aspects of daily lives. Largely hidden from our understanding is the impact of this pandemic on vulnerable youth and families in the community. The major concerns that arise in the context of family and relationship patterns are possibly the changed way of thinking and the factors affecting it. How will that affect the way people design, communicate, build and run the experiences in their daily lives?

The answers to these questions will lie in the way people react and how individuals, families and social groups develop creative innovation or new ways to live and communicate. Thus, the major objective of this paper would be to study the various attitudinal changes among members of a family especially the youth. This paper would try and study the implication of the pandemic by considering the published literature in the area and also by surveying the youth Delhi NCR.

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INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is the biggest global event and challenge of our lifetimes and the present generation. As such, it is changing human attitudes and behaviours today and affecting the relationships within families. The affect has been majorly psychological and the need to respond to the changing psychological needs would not end even when the virus's immediate threat eventually recedes. The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown phase is disrupting the daily lives of people across the world. Human behaviour is one of the most important factors dictating the severity of pandemics for both the spread of the disease and the psychological impacts it causes, such as anxiety, stress, isolation, and ambiguity. So, in such a situation, the exploration of ways of staying connected with loved ones becomes really vital. Epidemics are basically forms of external stress for families and other relationship institutions. It is interesting to note that epidemics are factors of stress and angst especially for those who are severely affected both mentally and physically.

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People across the world are trying to maintain social connections with distant family and friends through phone calls, chats and video calling in an effort to reduce feelings of depression, isolation, stress, etc. Besides reducing anxieties such connectivity offers additional sources of assurance and support allowing people to provide care to friends and family largely. It is a fact that social distancing and staying at home are key factors to reducing the transmission of COVID-19, but these safeguards have somewhere disrupted the daily routines of every member of the family unit. The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak is intensely affecting the social relationships and what is worth giving a thought is that are people feeling more or less connected to each other especially within families? From this point several other concerns arise like the attitude of youth and their relationship with their family members and does the changing relationship within the family structure in any way is affecting their well-being and health. These are some of the concerns that needed to be understood especially in this vulnerable situation of the pandemic. This paper is thus about studying relationships: how the pandemic is influencing how connected people feel to others especially the youth with their family members. Interestingly, the way people are connecting during this lockdown period of pandemic is incredibly moving because human beings are inherently social beings, and this deep drive for connection has become somewhat beautifully and painfully apparent in crisis times like this pandemic.

Put differently, the present lock down situation of pandemic have left some people feeling isolated both psychologically and physically while some people are experiencing more connected within their families, neighbourhood and larger social linkages. So, this paper is an attempt to study how the subsequent lockdown period due to COVID-19 have influenced the lives of people especially the youth and what are the factors that are making them feel connected or disconnected with other members of the family.

LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the most significant positive sides of the pandemic lockdown is that a number of studies have been done in a short while studying the social unit and relationship structure, which otherwise is not given much weight age. Several researches have been done for understanding the socio- psychological impacts of the pandemic on people who are the most psychologically vulnerable. In a study undertaken by University of Georgia (2020), it was found that the way young adults are connecting with their families during this crisis situation is incredibly moving (University of Georgia, 2020). The study further elaborates that if the present pandemic lockdown period goes on for few more months, then the long-lasting effects of social isolation could be quite severe and prolonged as it is simply impossible to totally decode the actual effects of social isolation during such a pandemic situation where factors like mental stress and agony is comparatively much higher (University of Georgia, 2020). Although there is little knowledge or little exploration had been done about how epidemics might shape the long term outcomes in relationships, still there are apprehensions that this will affect the relationship and attitudes of people quite adversely. Some interesting studies have been done in the context of relationships and separation rates following several disasters (including both man-made and natural) in the past. For instance, post Hurricane Hugo, divorce rates increased subsequently whereas in contrary post the 9/11 terrorist attacks divorce rates declined tremendously (Nakonezny *et al.*, 2004; Cohan *et al.*, 2009). Such researches give an insight in understanding about the divergent effects and differences in a crisis situation. In the present period of social distancing people have mostly started to rely more on their immediate social circles that is somewhere developing a sense of obligation in them (Wilkins, 2020).

Family connection through technology certainly changes the nature of contact and confines the prospects for quality time with parents and other family members. The spread of COVID-19 has lead families spending considerably greater amounts of time together at home showing an increased usage potential to virtual communication modes for connecting with the larger community (Boseley & Landis-Hanley, 2020). COVID-19 and its allied effects is truly an unmatched event in the lifetime of young adults, who have never experienced or witnessed such a situation before. This situation has wide-reaching implications across the nation including all age groups. Dakin, (2020) has observed that one of the numerous challenges that most of the families are facing due to COVID-19 pandemic is discovering new ways of living together while letting go of their old expectations from each other. The study also explained that COVID-19 pandemic is offering an important chance to strengthen familial bonds helping in developing a sense of unity.

It is a fact that in a family, every member requires a sense of stability and familiarity in their lives that helps in fostering the feelings of family intimacy. It is an unprecedented fact that COVID-19 has disrupted lives of millions of people across the world with severe mental and psychological crisis. With the expansion of the present epidemic, younger adults have been found to be mobilizing new ways of solidarity, creativity and humanity. It is also the young adults who are amongst those highly affected by the present crisis in context of mental and physical health (Dakin, 2020). Besides the health factors, the learning and professional engagement, civic development have also been impacted for the youth who are facing utmost disruptions and changes caused by the pandemic and lockdown.

The positive side as explained in the study by Dakin, (2020) is that this situation can be seen as a significant opportunity for strengthening familial bonds and for developing a sense of unity among the members. Families need a sense of stability and familiarity as these factors foster feelings of closeness within a family. Research studies done in this short while also state that there are certain vital lessons to be learnt about social responsibility and social solidarity (Syvertsen, 2020). This particular study suggests that if people try and rediscover the interconnectedness within relations then there would be opportunities for deepening connections in the coming times (Syvertsen, 2020). Gable *et al* (2004) asserts that when families spend worthy time together, it helps in creating and strengthening the family as a unit that in turn can alleviate many depressing and stressful factors. Quality of individuals' social relationships is directly associated not only to mental health but also to both sickness as well as mortality (Holt-Lunstad, Smith & Layton, 2010). Undoubtedly, normalcy in the lives have been largely interrupted with this unforeseen situation but this situation has also given scopes for contemplating on relationship aspects in any individual's life.

Research Objectives

The major objectives of the study are as follows:

- To study the various attitudinal changes among members of a family especially the youth.
- How the pandemic is influencing connectivity factor among the youth with their family members?
- Does the changing relationship within the family structure in any way is affecting their well- being?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the present research study, survey method was adopted to investigate the impact of COVID-19 lock down on the relationship of youth with their family members. For the research paper, quantitative method was used to collect data from multiple sources in order to obtain information related to relationships, family and youth. The study was conducted in the National Capital Region of Delhi, India. A surveyed was conducted to collect the data; the sample comprised of 100 various individuals from Delhi NCR. The questionnaires were distributed online among the respondents via Google Forms. This survey consisted of a variety of close-ended questions with multiple choice answers. The questionnaire also incorporated few questions related to the demographic

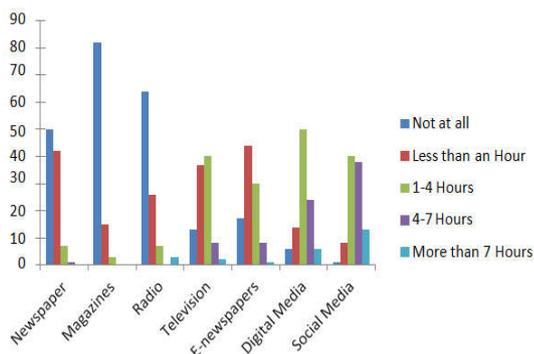
profile of the respondents as age and family structure. The survey used had both using quantitative as well as qualitative tools. The analysis of data collected has drawn the following conclusions on the topic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of the Respondents: The data represents the demographic profile of the students from Delhi NCR. The females of Delhi NCR outnumbered males and were ready to share their views on relationships with their family members. Among the 100 youth, 66% were females while males were only 32% and 2 of them preferred not to disclose their biological orientation. More than one third of the youth are living in nuclear family structure (77%) while 21% are enjoying their stay in a big extended family type. Only 2% are staying with either their father or mother i.e. single parent family structure.

Gender	No. of Respondents
Female	66
Male	32
Prefer not to say	2
Total	100
Family Type	
Single Parent	2
Nuclear	77
Extended	21
Total	100

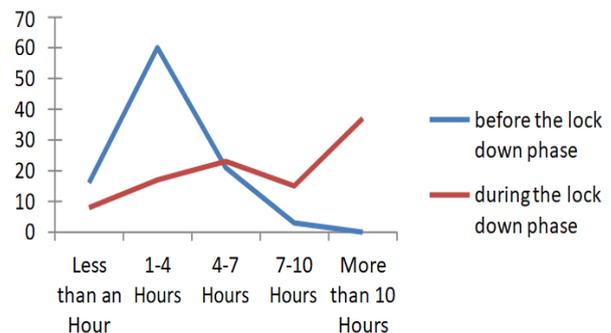
Media Habits of the Respondents: The data reflects the media habits of the college students from Delhi NCR during the lock down phase. Online platforms i.e. digital and social media took the first place, as more than three fourth of the youth of Delhi NCR are spending either 1-4 hours or 4-7 hours of their daily hours on it. Social media platforms are the first preference as 13% of the youth are spending more than 7 hours of their day on it while 38% more than 4 hours but less than 7 hours and 40% between 1 to 4 hours.



Surprisingly, one respondent is not on any of the social media platform. Online medium turned out to be the second most favourite media among the youth with 6% spending more than 7 hours whereas 24% between 4-7 hours and half of the respondents 1-4 hours in a day. On the contrary, 6% of the youth of Delhi NCR are not at all on online media. Television took the third place with more than one third spending most of their time on watching television. 40% of the respondents are spending 1-4 hours daily while 37% less than an hour and 8% between 4-7 hours while 2% more than 7 hours in a day. Next are e-newspapers on which almost 75% of the respondents spend their daily time. Among them 44% spend less than an hour on reading e-newspapers while 30% around 1-4 hours whereas 8% spend

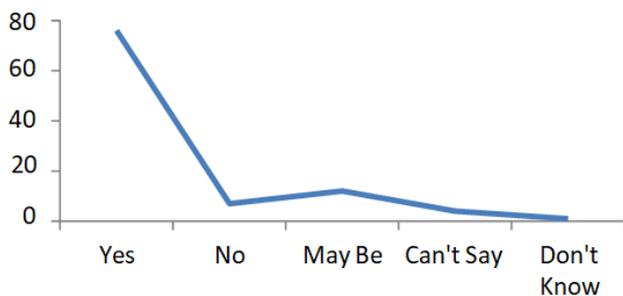
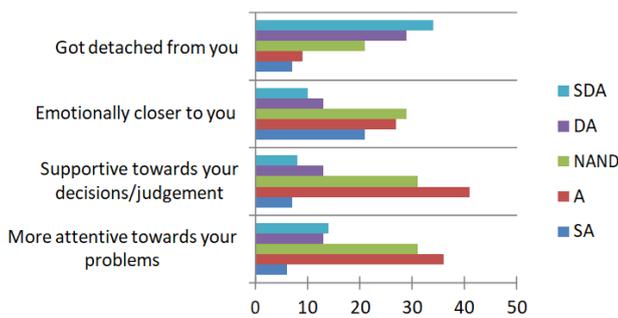
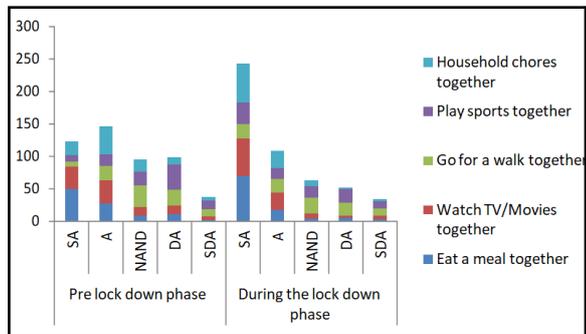
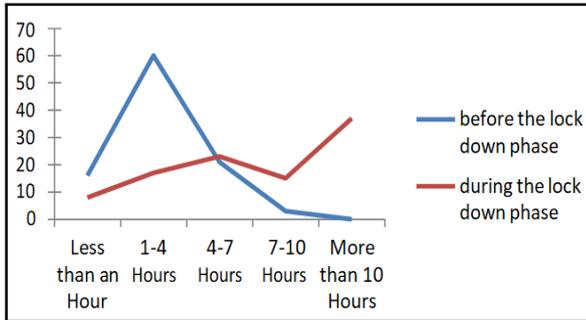
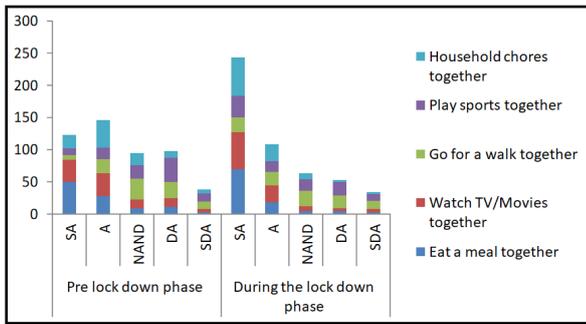
4-7 hours shuffling through various e-newspapers. Radio the most popular mass medium, took the next place with only 36% spending their time listening to radio and only 3% spending more than 7 hours daily. Almost one fourth i.e. 26% spend less than 1 hour daily on the radio. We can see fire and ice ratio in terms of newspaper reading during lock down phase, as only 50% of the college students are reading newspapers that too with 42% spending less than an hour on it and 7% 1-4 hours while only 3% are spending 4-7 hours on reading newspapers on a single day. Magazines took the last place with only 18% of the respondents are reading them every day.

Respondents Time Spend With Family: The statistics represents the comparison between the times spends by the youth of Delhi NCR with their family members' pre and during the lock down phase.



The data clearly depicts that the family time together has increased tremendously during the lock down phase. 37% of the respondents agreed that now during the lock down phase they are spending more than 10 hours with their family members which none of the students have ever done before. Similarly, 15% of the youth have the same opinion that they spend almost 7-10 hours daily with their parents while earlier only 3% used to spend that much time with their family members. Nearly one fourth of the youth i.e. 23% are now a day's spending 4-7 hours with their family members while earlier this much time was spend by 21% of the youth. 17% of the youth is spending 1-4 hours whereas only 8% are spending less than an hour with their family members during the lock down phase.

Youth and Relationships: The graph shows the various activities that the youth practice with their family members. Since the lock down is imposed and every support for household chores stopped, the family members have come closer and started helping each other with performing their part of doing household chores. It can be observed that there is a shift in doing the household chores together before and during the lock down phase. 60% of the youth strongly agree that they are now performing the household chores together with their family and 26% agreed to it while 9% think that it is same and 5% either disagree or strongly disagree to it. On the other hand before the lock down phase, just 21% strongly agreed for being a help in household chores to their family while 43% agreed and 17% totally denied it. Next major shift is watching television or movies together i.e. spending their free time together and getting entertained. 81% of the youth are in agreement that during lock down phase they are spending more time together while watching television or movies. Of these 57% strongly agreed and 26% agreed while 9% totally refuted and disagreed to the watch television or movie together with their family members.



On the other hand during the pre-lock down phase 69% are in agreement they used to watch television together with their family members while 18% denied the same and 13% neither agreed nor disagreed to it. With the announcement of lock down and everyone is confined to their homes and tired of watching television or being on online media, youth also consented to spend their time with their family by playing various sports especially indoor sports.

Half of the respondents agreed with 33% strongly agreed and 17% just agreed while 32% denied it, whereas only 28% consented to play sport with their family during the pre-lock down phase. Similarly, 44% of the youth agreed that they started going for a walk with their family member during the lock down phase whereas 32% disagreed to the same. On the other side, 30% said that they used to go for the walk with their family member pre lock down phase while 37% refused. Eating a meal together has always been followed in the Indian families. During the lock down phase 88% of youth agreed that they are eating the meal with their families while 78% used to do it even before the lock down started. Only 8% denied having food together during the lock down while 13% were not practicing it even before the lock down. The imposed lock down during COVID-19 has brought changes in the relations is what is presented through the data collected. Whether being emotionally closer to the family member or the family members have become more supportive towards their decision is the belief of half of the youth of Delhi NCR. Family members have become supportive towards the decisions of the youth is strongly agreed by 7% of the respondents and agreed by 41% of the respondents while 31% are not sure of it and 13% denied it with 8% strongly disagreed to the same. Likewise, family members have built up a stronger emotional connect with the youth is the belief of again 48% of the respondents. Of these, 21% strongly believe in it while 27% just believe in it. On the other hand 13% condemns it while 10% strongly condemns it and 29% are still confused about the same if lock down has strengthened the emotional connect or not with their family members. Next in the row is the bond between youth and their family members in terms of understanding their issues and problems. 42% gave their consent with 6% strongly in favour of while 36% agreed to it. On the other side 27% contradicted it with 13% disagreeing and 14% with strong confrontation and 31% neither agree or disagree that their family members have starting understanding their problems during the lock down phase. 16% of the youth of Delhi NCR approved that they got detached from their family members during lock down phase with 7% strongly agree and 9% agree while 63% disapprove of it and 21% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree to the statement that youth got detached from their family members during the lock down phase. The data depicts the perception of the youth of Delhi NCR regarding family as important institution to deal with emotional turmoil. More than one third of the respondents i.e. 76% are of the opinion that family plays an important part while 12% are not sure if family is an important institution or not and for 7% of the respondents family is not at all important to deal with any kind of emotional turmoils, they do not have faith on family as an institution. Only 1% of the youth does not want to answer it and said that she/he doesn't know about it.

FINDINGS

- The females (66) of Delhi NCR outnumbered males (32) and were ready to share their views on relationships with their family members.
- More than one third of the youth are living in nuclear family structure in Delhi.

- Social media platforms are the first preference of youth of daily during lock down phase followed by digital media, Television and e-newspapers.
- Surprisingly, one respondent is not on any of the social media platform and 6% of the college students of Delhi NCR are not at all using online media during lock down phase.
- The family time spend together has increased tremendously during the lock down phase.
- 86% of the youth agree that they are now performing the household chores together with their family during the COVID-19 lock down phase as compared to 64% of the respondents during pre-lock down phase while 5% disagreed.
- 83% agreed to the watch television or movie together with their family members during the lock down phase while 69% are in agreement they used to watch television together with their family members before the lock down. 9% totally refuted and disagreed to the watch television or movie together with their family members.
- Half of the respondents agreed to play sport with their family during the lock down phase. Similarly, 44% of the youth agreed that they started going for a walk with their family member during the lock down phase whereas 32% disagreed to the same.
- During the lock down phase 88% of youth agreed that they are eating the meal with their families while 78% used to do it even before the lock down started.
- Family members have become supportive towards the decisions of the youth is consented by 48% of the Delhi NCR youth.
- Family members have built up a stronger emotional connect with the youth is the belief of 48% of the respondents.
- 42% gave their consent that the lock down has strengthened the bond between youth and their family members in terms of understanding their issues and problems.
- 16% of the youth of Delhi NCR are of the opinion that they got detached from their family members during lock down phase.
- 76% of the youth of Delhi NCR are of the opinion that family plays an important part to deal with any kind of emotional turmoil.

Conclusion

It is an inevitable fact that human beings of all age groups have a vital need for belonging, and they are most likely to prosper during disasters or epidemics when they feel diligently associated with the others in a family or social groups. With the urgent need for social distancing to preventing the risk of spreading the virus, direct communication and face-to-face interaction has become a challenge increasing the dependency on other mediums of communication like mobile phones, chatting and video calling. The conclusion that is derived from the findings is that family ties and close relationships can survive any crisis situation like the present COVID-19 pandemic. Though such a situation brings in diverse challenges and adverse effects on families and behaviour patterns, proper communication and close ties can help individuals strive enhance relationships in many ways. The negative effects of pandemic situation are

many but looking at the positives this situation has given opportunities of bonding and understanding the needs and importance of family in the larger social structure. From our findings, we have gathered that youth have found new ways of engaging in constructive ways with their immediate family members and have also developed problem solving attitude when needed. Despite of the overwhelming presence of digital devices, young adults do take part in many enjoyable and memorable activities with the family members. The otherwise busy monotonous routine life had never given the scope to an individual to have that time for bonding and have somehow resulted in increased detachment with the family members. It implies that family is the most fundamental unit in any individual's life especially of the young adults who have discovered the someway forgotten connect with the family through daily chores or simple activities of watching television together or having a meal together. The urge to overcome the adverse effects of the lockdown situation together has strengthened the family ties and the young adults are making all possible investment in the longer-term emotional bond with their families.

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