

A Study on Psychological Well-being among Adolescents of Assam during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Over the past two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has thrown humanity into a maelstrom of difficulties. Globally, COVID-19 has had a profound effect on people's lives, particularly those of children and teenagers. The aim of the current study is to examine the association of psychological well-being with parenting styles, perceived stress and loneliness among school-going adolescents of Assam during the COVID-19 pandemic. A total sample of 200 school-going adolescents was selected through convenient sampling from the Dibrugarh district of Assam. The standardised scales, such as the Parental Authority Questionnaire, Perceived Stress Questionnaire, UCLA Loneliness Scale, and Psychological Well-being Scale, were used. The results of the study revealed that a significant relationship existed between dimensions of parenting styles, perceived stress, loneliness and psychological well-being among the school-going adolescents. Moreover, regression analysis showed that permissive parenting style and perceived stress significantly predicted psychological well-being. While positive parenting guarantees children's and teenagers' developmental outcomes, maintaining a better psychological state throughout the COVID-19 pandemic may seem challenging. Therefore, in addition to improving the quality of the home environment, parents should recognize the feelings of their kids, provide them with information that is appropriate for their age, and give them access to psychosocial help.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, parenting styles, perceived stress, loneliness, school-adolescents, psychological well-being

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The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has unleashed a tsunami of challenges for humanity. COVID-19 has greatly impacted the lives of individuals worldwide, particularly children and adolescents. The virus was found in a fish market in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 (Chen et al., 2020). The virus has influenced billions of individuals worldwide in various ways, including psychologically, physically, and socially. In India, 56,342 positive cases were recorded in 2020. Beyond the virus's physical health repercussions, the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have a significant impact on mental health, particularly among teenagers and young adults who are at high risk. According to a UNICEF estimate from 2016, young people aged 10 to 19 account for 16% of the global population. Adolescence is divided into three stages: early adolescence (ages 10-14), middle adolescence (15-16), and late adolescence (17-19). Adolescents are certainly the most impacted segment of the population, and they are vulnerable to stressful conditions due to the fast-changing environment of the twenty-first century. Smoking, drug usage, psychosomatic problems, alcohol addiction, and other bad habits are common among adolescents (Ryff, 1995; Heaven, 2001). Adolescents in Assam, like those across India, confront major challenges in terms of mental health and psychological well-being. According to research, a significant proportion of Assam's adolescents suffer from mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and stress. For example, a study conducted in the Kamrup (Metro) area discovered that 22.2% of adolescents showed symptoms of sadness, 24.4% experienced anxiety, and 6.9% exhibited indicators of stress (Saikia et al., 2023).

The quality of connections among family members, particularly with parents, is the most influential element in teenagers' psychological well-being (Shek, 1997; Sastre & Ferriere, 2000; Van Wel et al., 2000). According to Diana Baumrind (1971), parenting styles are essentially characterised as authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. (i) Authoritarian

parenting style, in which parents provide their children warmth, love, and acceptance to encourage them to be more self-sufficient. Parents who exhibit this style pay attention to their children and provide love, warmth, limits, and fair discipline. (ii) Authoritarian parenting style, in which parents place significant demands on their children while providing little in return (Huver et al., 2010). Authoritarian parents place high demands on their children rather than nurturing and open communication. (iii) Permissive parenting style, in which parents are forgiving and only intervene when there is a significant problem.

Stress, physical health, social engagement, popularity, and peer closeness are all important elements in determining teenagers' psychological well-being. Many adolescents experience stress when they perceive a situation to be hazardous, complex, or difficult and do not know how to deal with it. Psychological stress is a distressing emotion that occurs when a person's potential is exceeded by the demands of his or her situation. Excessive mental stress is linked to poor health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. Similarly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, teenagers suffer increased stress and are more likely to experience negative emotions and higher levels of mental distress (Qi et al., 2020; Magson et al., 2021). According to Gupta et al. (2020), inattention, clinginess, and distraction were the most common psychosocial and behavioural issues among children and adolescents during the pandemic.

During the pandemic, adolescents were negatively impacted by a series of lockdowns induced by school closure interruptions, including limited access to mental health support and peer communication. Evidence from several nations has shown a link between increased loneliness and suffering during the pandemic. For example, one-third of parents of children aged 3 to 18 in Spain and Italy claimed that their children felt lonely following the installation of

quarantine measures (Orgiles et al., 2020). Shen et al. (2020) found that, compared to adults, the pandemic may have more long-term harmful repercussions for children and adolescents. The nature and extent of the impact on this age group are determined by a variety of vulnerability factors such as developmental age, current educational status, having special needs, pre-existing mental health conditions, being economically disadvantaged, and having a child or parent quarantined due to infection or fear of infection. Parenting becomes crucial in this context because it has a dynamic impact on children and within families.

In such a situation, psychological well-being becomes imperative. Psychological well-being (PWB) refers to one's overall psychological happiness and health, including emotions of accomplishment and pleasure in life. Research indicates that the quality of family interactions, especially with parents, has a significant impact on teenagers' psychological well-being (Shek, 1997; Sastre & Ferriere, 2000).

Significance of the study

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly influenced the well-being of all persons, particularly those aged 15-29. Adolescence is a stage in which numerous psychological elements primarily influence an adolescent's well-being, which has a long-term impact on people. Globally, 10-20% of adolescents suffer from mental health conditions, making them more susceptible to acquiring mental health illnesses (Bruining et al., 2021; WHO, 2020). Due to the multiple physiological, psychological, and social changes that occur during adolescence, the risk of development of stress and loneliness is higher in adolescents (Laursen & Hartl, 2013), especially during pandemics where numerous negative changes have occurred such as (social distancing, home quarantine) may have an impact on adolescent's which may lead to feelings of

loneliness (Cacioppo& Patrick, 2008). Therefore, the objective of the study was to determine the significant predictors of parenting styles, perceived stress, and loneliness on psychological well-being among the school-going adolescents of Assam during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Method

Participants

To address the study's objective, a sample comprising one hundred (N=200) senior secondary school adolescents was chosen from the Dibrugarh district of Assam. Both boys (n=100) and girls (n=100) are from the 12th standard and are within the age group of 16 -19 years. The data was collected through a convenient sampling technique from September to November 2021.

Measures

Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991): PAQ was developed using Baumrind's (1971) three parenting styles, i.e., permissiveness, authoritarianism, and authoritativeness. The questionnaire contains 30 items; each parenting style has 10 items. According to Buri (1991), the Cronbach coefficient alpha value of the sub-scale ranged from 0.87 to 0.74. Furthermore, content, criteria, and discriminant validity were all significantly high.

Perceived Stress Questionnaire (Levenstein et al., 1993): Levenstein et al. (1993) developed the perceived stress questionnaire, which is a self-report scale consisting of 30 items. The items are scored on a four-point scale, with answers ranging from seldom (1) to usually (4). This scale has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88 and a reliability of 0.88.

UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell & Cutrona, 1978): This scale comprises a 20-item questionnaire designed to assess both subjective experiences of loneliness and social isolation. It is a four-point rating scale in which respondents select O for "I often feel this way," S for "I sometimes feel this way," R for "I rarely feel this way," and N for "I never feel this way." The items are assessed in reverse, so the higher the score, the greater the loneliness. The coefficient alpha of this scale ranges from 0.89 to 0.94.

Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff & Keyes, 1995): Ryff and Keyes (1995) developed this scale, which consists of an 18-item self-report scale that participants score. This scale has six dimensions: self-acceptance, environmental mastery, life purpose, positive relationships with others, personal progress, and autonomy. The psychological well-being scale is a 7-point Likert scale with responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree for each question (1=strongly agree to disagree 7=strongly). Cronbach's alpha for this scale is 0.63, and reliability is 0.88.

Procedure

The present study's aim was to assess parenting approaches, perceived stress, and loneliness among school-going students during the COVID-19 pandemic and their impact on their psychological well-being. Data collection began after receiving consent from the principals of the respective schools. After obtaining consent, data were collected through a standardised questionnaire and physical visits to schools. After obtaining permission from schools, boys and girls were chosen and briefed to complete surveys. Any doubts or confusion were cleared right away.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The total number of participants was 200, with 100 school-going adolescent boys and 100 school-going adolescent girls.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Selected Socio-Demographic Variables (N=200)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>Frequency (%)</i>
Gender	1.50	.501	200	Boys	100 (50)
				Girls	100 (50)
Educational Stream	1.98	.802	200	Science	70 (35)
				Commerce	60 (30)
				Arts	70 (35)
				General	51 (25.5)
Social group	2.85	1.23	200	SC	15 (7.5)
				ST	50 (25)
				OBC	82 (41)
				Others	2 (1)
				Hindu	174 (87)
Religion	1.16	.442	200	Muslim	20 (10)
				Christian	6 (3)
				Buddhism	0
				Others	0

Table 2

Correlation Coefficient among different Parenting styles, Perceived Stress, Loneliness and Psychological Well-being (N=200)

Variables	Permissive	Authoritarian	Authoritative	Perceived stress	Loneliness
Permissive	1				
Authoritarian	-.60**	1			
Authoritative	-.13	.22*	1		
Perceived stress	-.68**	-.60**	.29**	1	
Loneliness	-.67**	.61**	.19**	.82**	1
Psychological well-being	-.51**	.42**	.22**	.63**	.52**

Note: **= $p < .01$, *= $p < .05$

Table 3

Prediction of Psychological Well-being by different Parenting styles, Perceived Stress and Loneliness (N=200)

Variable	B	SE B	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1				.30	.30
Permissive PS	-.410	.187	-5.47***		
Authoritarian PS	.144	.186	1.88		
Authoritative PS	.138	.257	2.25*		
Step 2				.41	.10
Permissive	-.160	.200	-.198*		
Authoritarian PS	.011	.179	.154		
Authoritative PS	.054	.244	.939		
Perceived stress	.497	.071	6.01**		

Step 3				.41	.00
Permissive PS	-.163	.204	-1.99*		
Authoritarian PS	.014	.183	.191		
Authoritative PS	.053	.246	.913		
Perceived stress	.512	.092	4.7***		
Loneliness	-.022	.116	-.217		

Note: ***= $p < .001$, **= $p < .01$, *= $p < .05$

Discussion

Pearson's correlation coefficient in Table 2 illustrates a significant negative relationship between permissive parenting styles and psychological well-being ($p < 0.01$) among the school-going adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The previous study, which is in line, by Francis et al. (2021) found a negative relationship between permissive parenting style and psychological well-being among adolescents. In addition, a significant positive relationship existed between authoritarian parenting styles and psychological well-being ($p < 0.01$) among the school-going adolescents. The previous study of Francis et al. (2021), who suggested in their study that a positive relationship existed between authoritarian parenting style and psychological well-being, is in line with the result. This parenting style contributes to the warm and steady growth of the child. Moreover, it can be seen that a significant positive relationship exists between authoritative parenting style and psychological well-being ($p < 0.01$). The study's results are consistent with previous studies by Parra et al. (2019), who indicated that authoritative parenting approaches increased well-being and positive temperament features like effortful control, which backs up this conclusion. As a result of this parenting style, children will experience warmth, attentiveness, guidance, and clear goals and boundaries.

Furthermore, a significant positive relationship was observed between perceived stress and psychological well-being ($p < 0.01$) among the school-going adolescents. The findings contradict the previous findings of Kumar et al. (2020), who suggested that perceived stress negatively correlated with the dimensions of psychological well-being among emerging adults in India. Similarly, a negative correlation was found between self-perceived stress and psychological well-being (Heizomi et al., 2018). The pandemic situation of COVID-19 has heightened dread and worry, leading to stigmatisation and anxiety (Guan et al., 2020). Despite experiencing a heightened stress level, school-going adolescents in this study managed to keep their psychological well-being throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This study revealed a significant positive relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being ($p < 0.01$) among school-going adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study's findings align with the prior studies conducted by Ishaq et al. (2018), who found a relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being in university studies.

Table 3, Hierarchical regression was carried out to identify the predictors of psychological well-being based on different parenting styles, perceived stress, and loneliness among school-going adolescents. Table 7. In the first (Model I), different dimensions of parenting styles, such as permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative, were included, where R^2 was found to be 30% and the variables significantly contributed to the model ($F = 28.52$, $p < .001$ level). Dimensions of parenting style, such as permissive parenting, significantly contributed to psychological well-being at (.001). The study's result is in line with the prior study conducted by Yadav et al. (2021). Azman et al. (2021) reported that a permissive parenting style for both mother and father significantly predicted psychological well-being among adolescents.

In Model II, the overall model remains significant ($F=36.20$, $p<.001$ level) with perceived stress with a permissive parenting style predicting psychological well-being. This result is consistent with the previous findings of Jirathikrengkrai et al. (2021), who suggested that perceived stress, resilience, social support, and coping strategies significantly predicted psychological well-being in late adolescents. Different types of stress have been reported to impact psychological and physical well-being, ranging from daily pressures to major life events (King et al., 2014).

In Model III, loneliness explained 41% (R^2 change=.000) of variance, even though psychological well-being did not predict loneliness significantly. It highlighted that loneliness did not significantly predict psychological well-being among school-going adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The current study's findings contradict the prior studies, which showed that loneliness is a predictor of psychological well-being. Tuason et al. (2021) reported that psychological well-being was significantly predicted by physical health, social loneliness, and emotional loneliness. One possible explanation for this might be that everyone was at home and may have received emotional support from family members, and were able to cope with the challenges of the pandemic. Even when peer relationships were limited, open communication and a stable family environment helped to build resilience, which may have lessened feelings of loneliness among school-going adolescents of Assam during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

During the initial phase of COVID-19, adolescents experienced a cloud of a novel or intensified stressor that affected their psychological well-being. The findings showed a strong connection between perceived stress and psychological well-being. Research has confirmed that

the spread of COVID-19 has lowered the mental health of adolescents (Hawes et al., 2021). Because stay-at-home constraints affected adolescents' peer networks during COVID-19, the results of this study also indicate that adolescents experienced a substantial degree of loneliness, especially adolescent girls.

However, the experience of psychological well-being is characterized by both positive and negative feelings among adolescents. Some might report benefits and adjust, while others experience sadness and dissatisfaction. In that situation, parental social support may have been a significant component of effective adolescent adjustment. The study's findings have shown that a significant relationship existed between parenting styles, such as permissive, authoritarian, authoritative and psychological well-being among school-going adolescents. Overall, the analysis of this study indicated that they have experienced hardship, including stress about academic performance, learning difficulties, socialization and adjustment problems. Therefore, the findings of the study provided a direction to the parents, teachers and school counsellors to provide better stress management skills for the school-going adolescents, providing adequate guidance and support to help them deal with loneliness, stressful situations in general, as well as in traumatic situations to maintain their psychological well-being.

Implications

According to my understanding, studies have been carried out to determine the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of adolescents globally. However, no studies have been conducted to determine the combined effect of parenting styles, perceived stress, loneliness, and psychological well-being among the school-going adolescents in the North-Eastern area of India. The study offers a fresh viewpoint on the body of research on the psychological health of

adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study revealed that adolescent girls' levels of felt stress and loneliness were much higher than those of adolescent boys. Despite their weak coping skills, they were able to retain a higher level of psychological well-being than the adolescent boys. This information may aid parents, teachers, or school counsellors in recognizing a child's risk of developing various mental health issues and initiating intervention programs. School counsellors should be employed in all schools, private or public, to ensure students' general well-being. Mental health awareness programs for both parents and children should be developed in order to gain an understanding of the psychological problems that children and adolescents confront. School meetings or family seminars might be used to raise awareness about the relationship between parenting styles and psychological well-being. Concerned authorities should implement mental health promotion interventions for adolescents in schools, with the assistance of mental health experts, such as the Bounce Back program and Bright Ideas for fostering resilience and coping skills, the Penn Resiliency Program for boosting optimism and preventing depression, and the Stress Inoculation training for preventing anxiety in children and adolescents.

Limitations

Some of the study's limitations involve consideration of a few samples, which may not be generalisable to the whole population. However, a longitudinal study with a larger sample would lead to a better understanding of the psychological well-being of adolescents during a traumatic situation like the COVID-19 pandemic. In the current study, the parenting styles of mothers were considered; in the future, the parenting styles of both parents can be used so that a conclusion can be achieved.

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