

# ADOLESCENCE DURING THE PANDEMIC: AN EXAMINATION OF PEER RELATIONSHIPS AMONG STUDENTS DURING COVID 19

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## ***Abstract:***

*The study aims at finding the peer relationship among adolescents during Covid 19. The results of the study show that most students creatively adapted to the online mode for maintaining their friendship. They tried to overcome the feeling of isolation by keeping connected with their classmates and friends through the phone and other social media.*

***Index Terms - Adolescence, Peer -relationship, Covid 19 Pandemic***

## **COVID PANDEMIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING**

The year 2019 saw the outbreak of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19). It has had a significant impact on people's lives, affecting their work, study, and travel [1] It has posed unprecedented and unique challenges for people from all walks of life [2]. The most significant thing is that the pandemic hit the basic nature of human life. Man is a social being. His very existence is dependent on his relationship with his fellow beings. The pandemic changed the very way of human interaction. In the wake of the spread of the virus, most governments have implemented strict public health regulations, including social distancing. This change has been abrupt and has also been of uncertain lengths. The social isolation has extended into several months, and the rules for social distancing seem to be ever evolving [3]. The subsequent home quarantine and social distance requirements have had its dire effects. History has shown that similar disease containment measures, including quarantine and isolation, have had a negative impact on psychological well-being. Physical isolation checks the disease but has dire effects on peoples' social interaction. However, restricted physical-social interactions imposed by the pandemic resulted in overuse of digital devices for socializing. In times of social distancing the overuse may not have negatively affected the wellbeing as the digital media was the only way to stay connected [4]. Reduction in social connections because of physical distancing is a matter of concern, as research has proven the vital role of social connection for keeping social and emotional well-being. The COVID-19 has imposed a host of consequences on health and well-being worldwide [5]. Adolescents form an important victimised group in the epidemic [6].

## **ADOLESCENTS AND COVID 19**

Adolescence is the phase of life between childhood and adulthood, from ages 10 to 19. This is a unique stage in the life of a human being for laying the foundations of good health [7]. Adolescents experience rapid physical, cognitive and psychosocial growth [8]. This influences the way they feel, think, make decisions, and interact with the world around them. Adolescence is a sensitive period for social development with an increased need for social connections [9]. Coping with the present situation and following the current restrictions on top of this can be especially difficult for children and adolescents since these circumstances can be experienced as being incongruent with their developmental tasks [10]. The challenges and consequences of COVID-19 might therefore have a tremendous impact on their health-related quality of life and mental health.

Disasters and crises have often less highlighted consequences on vulnerable sub-groups, including those often overlooked, such as adolescents and youth. The COVID-19 pandemic is no exception. Both parents and teens report adverse mental health effects of the pandemic on adolescents, including symptoms of anxiety and depression. For most adolescents, the physical restrictions have decreased in-person social interaction. They have also led to increased adaptation problems in adolescents. Adolescents and young people are at lower risk of critical COVID-19 symptoms, but the strict confinement orders demanded significant changes in daily routines and social interactions. The closing of schools and classes switching to the online mode have forced students to quickly adapt to new remote learning environments. This was in addition to the uncertainties about their studies and academic future. Also, co-curricular and out-of-home leisure activities like hanging out with friends came to a sudden stop leaving adolescents with limited opportunities for face-to-face social contact. The only means of communication were online social networks and instant messaging apps. These may have connected the with their friends but there are reports that COVID-19 confinement has increased the risk of social isolation and loneliness among the youth. Disrupted peer relations have had its toll on the mental health of adolescents. Research showed that adolescents worry about the COVID-19 crisis and are overly concerned about their schooling restrictions and peer relationships. Additionally, adolescents reported the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health, learning, friendships, and family relations. Stress, related to the COVID-19 spread and social distancing, was found to be associated with loneliness and depression. Recent studies showed a high level of depression and anxiety in adolescents in different pandemic periods.

The greatest impacts of COVID 19 have stemmed out from closure of schools, being in the house with family members, and unable to see friends and peers. Adolescents have different developmental needs than adults. Teenagers are at the stage in life when they value peer relations more than their own family. So, COVID-19 social distancing has had a different emotional impact on them than on adults [11]. Some adolescents may fail to understand the impact of the pandemic. Lockdowns and other social restrictions have cut the opportunities for face-to-face relationships. This widespread social disruption has increased the risk of poor mental health.

Peer relationships are an absolute necessity for healthy cognitive and social development and socializing. Peer relationships have been the most affected in the pandemic.

Research studies have confirmed that peer relationships are vital for healthy development, especially in the adolescent period. Peer relations are the pegs which hold together our social and emotional life, in fact our very existence.

## **THE POWER OF PEER RELATIONSHIPS AMONG STUDENTS**

Research have shown us that friendships and positive peer relationships boost social-emotional well-being, academic advancement, and career success for young people [12]. Peer relationships also have a significant impact on making academic and career decisions

Friendships are essential for developing social competencies. Positive peer relationships also provide a safe space for individuation. These relationships help them to bring out their unique skills and talents. Their friends provide them with immediate feedback through informal talks and body language that can help them to understand the dos and don'ts of social behaviour.

Peer relationships help to find out a range of critical social emotional skills, such as empathy, cooperation, and problem-solving strategies. It may also contribute negatively to social emotional development through bullying, exclusion, and deviant peer processes [13]. School based social emotional learning programs supply a solid basis for promoting healthy social emotional development and creating of positive peer cultures. Lockdowns and school closures have deprived adolescents of typical social interactions. Covid 19 has revealed the importance of school as an arena to create and sustain peer relationships and friendships.

We cannot ignore the impact of the pandemic on our children and the youth who sum up to a huge population. They are our future. In their health and well-being lies the health and well-being of our next generation. Closure of schools and switching over to the online mode of education have been the biggest impacts of Covid-19 on children, young people and their parents [14]. Studies and academic progression have been disrupted and the challenges parents/guardians face in trying to balance work and child-care was a big task.

However, one point to be noted is that the pandemic brought out the significance of the digital media in keeping people connected. People including the adolescents turned to the social media, messaging applications and video conferencing platforms during the pandemic induced lockdown. These platforms provided them with an opportunity to stay connected.

The Covid times have sensitised parents, practitioners, and policymakers towards the importance of young people's mental health. Youth with better mental health are physically healthier, demonstrate more socially positive behaviours and engage in less risky behaviour. Conversely, youth with mental health problems, such as depression, are more likely to engage in health risk behaviours. Furthermore, youths' mental health problems pose a significant financial and social burden on families and society in terms of distress, cost of treatment, and disability.

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of mental health in a way no event has ever done in the past. Humans are social animals and being deprived of social interaction for such a long period of time is like fish being taken out of water. It is sure to have its dire effects. Children are among the worst affected in this regard, with remote schooling schedules. This has brought about significant changes in their behaviour. Parents all over the world have raised concerns about their child's peer relationships and mental health and well-being.

## OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To find peer relationships among adolescents during COVID 19 times.

## METHODOLOGY

The study followed the Descriptive Survey method. The data was collected online through google form.

## POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The population of the study was students of Standard Eight, studying in schools following the curriculum of the Kerala State Board of Secondary Education.

## SAMPLE

The sample of the study consisted of twenty students of Standard Eight of SHGHS, Ramapuram, Kottayam district.

## TOOL USED

A questionnaire on Peer Relationships was prepared using Google form to collect data from the sample.

## ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Percent analysis was used for analysing the data. The study focussed on the peer relationship among students during COVID 19 pandemic period, especially during the lockdown days.

**Table: Question wise analysis of the questionnaire on adolescent peer-relationship during Covid 19**

Sl.No.	Question	Yes (%)	No (%)
1.	Did you miss your friends during the lockdown period?	73	27
2.	Were you able to contact your friends during the lockdown period?	93	7
3.	Did you contact your friends during lock down?	100	-
4.	Did you phone your friends?	90	10
5.	Did you WhatsApp your friends?	90	10
6.	Did you experience any break in your relationship with friends?	36	64
7.	Did you feel uncomfortable while talking to your friends?	23	77
8.	Did you contact your friends every day?	70	30
9.	Did you call your friends or message your friends to share your feelings?	76	24
10.	Did you share any study materials among your friends during the lockdown days?	80	20
11.	Were you able to understand and solve the problems of your	83	17

	friends?		
12.	Were you able to keep your friendship during the lockdown?	75	25
13.	Do you feel online classes helped to keep friendship?	70	30

It is seen from the table that:

1. Seventy-three percent students missed their friends during the lockdown period, while twenty-seven students did not miss their friends.
2. Ninety-three percent students were able to contact their friends during the lockdown period; seven percent students were not able to contact.
3. All students contacted their friends during the lock down.
4. Ninety percent students phoned their friends while ten percent students did not phone their friends.
5. Ninety percent students contacted their friends through WhatsApp while ten percent students did not.
6. Thirty-six percent students felt their friendship was broken during lockdown days; sixty-four percent students did not feel any break in their friendship.
7. Twenty-three percent students said they felt uncomfortable while talking to their friends seventy-seven percent students did not feel uncomfortable.
8. Seventy percent students contacted their friends every day while thirty percent students did not contact their friends every day.
9. Seventy-six percent students called or messaged their friends to share their feelings while twenty-four percent students did not call or message their friends to share their feelings.
10. Eighty percent students shared study materials among their friends during lockdown days. Twenty percent students did not share their study materials.
11. Eighty-three percent students were able to understand and solve the problems of their friends. Seventeen percent students were not able to do so.
12. Seventy-five percent students claimed that they were able to support their friendship during the lockdown days while twenty- five percent students felt they were unable to keep their friendship during the lockdown.
13. Seventy percent students believed online classes helped keep friendship. However, thirty percent students felt online classes did not help to keep friendship.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of the study show that most students were able to stay connected with their friends during the lockdown days. They resorted to their cell phone and WhatsApp messaging service to connect with their peers. The phone and the digital media helped to keep the friendship of the students to a great extent. Most students believed online classes helped to support their friendship. Digital connectivity may have alleviated loneliness and increased social connectedness among people [15]. The students could have used the digital media as a coping tool to deal with stress generated by Covid 19 confinement. Social connection is one of the strongest predictors of well-being, thus potentially affecting the mental health of a person. Research conducted to understand the impact of digital social interactions, during Covid 19, on well-being has shown both positive and negative effects. Social media can help

adolescents support and develop peer relationships across distance [16]. Results of studies on impact of social media on peer-relationships during Covid 19 suggest that positive online experiences may mitigate loneliness during physical isolation.

## CONCLUSION

The study shows that students creatively adapted to the new situation generated by the pandemic. They tried to keep their friendship through the online mode. It may have alleviated their feelings of separation and kept them connected. The study also reinforces the adaptable nature of man when faced with obstacles.

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