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Topic: Impact of the COVID-19 Lockdown

Guest Editor:

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For Better or for Worse? Latent Transition Analysis of Children and Young People's Mental Health Profiles Across two Years of Covid-19 Pandemic

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Background: COVID-19 and the related public health measures have led to major disruptions to families, with different pressures arising for children and young people (CYPs) over time. However, little is known about long-term recovery patterns.
Aims: This study aimed to examine longer-term consequences on CYPs' mental health and identify who is and is not 'bouncing back'.
Methods: Parent-reported SDQ data for 3,073 CYPs (aged 4-16) from the Co-SPACE study were analysed. First, we employed latent profile analysis to reveal hidden profiles across conduct, emotional, attentional symptoms and their impact. Second, we used latent transition analysis to investigate movement among profiles across four waves between March 2020 to March 2022. Third, we used multinomial logistic regression to predict profile and transition membership based on family and background characteristics.
Results: We identified three mental health profiles (high, medium, low), with the majority of CYPs (72-77%) classified as having low emotional, conduct, attentional symptoms and impact. CYPs who had high mental health symptoms at the beginning of the pandemic (~9%), they were less likely to recover and tended to have persistent difficulties across sub-scales. CYPs with pre-existing mental health diagnosis, SEN and neurodevelopmental diagnoses were less likely to recover after the first national lockdown, whilst adolescents were less likely to recover longer-term.
Conclusions: CYPs showed different rates of recovery, with the majority experiencing low symptoms and impact over-time. Yet, these findings emphasize the need to consider resilience and recovery patterns for the small proportion who were the most impacted by the pandemic.

Pandemic Anxiety, Mental Health, Social Media Use and Coping Strategies Among Indian Students During COVID-19 Lockdown

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Background: India experienced a complete lockdown for almost 70 days and an unlocking period of a year during the pandemic. The strict restrictions of movement, social interaction and online education resulted in restlessness, loneliness and mental health issues, paving the way for problematic use of the internet and social media.
Aims: This study investigated the pandemic anxiety, mental health, loneliness and its impact on social media use of Indian students and identified the different coping strategies within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.
Methods: An online survey fetched 590 responses from Indian students and was analysed using inferential statistics.
Results: A paired t-test revealed significantly longer hours of social media use during the COVID-19 pandemic than the hours spent before the pandemic. Mental health parameters, depression, anxiety, and stress significantly predicted hours spent on social media and internet gaming compared to loneliness and pandemic anxiety. Results report that non-Hindu students suffered from more pandemic anxiety than Hindu students. The top five coping strategies are speaking to friends via phone, using social media, watching TV, cooking food, and socialising with friends online.
Conclusions: In crisis conditions like the pandemic, proactive measures should be adopted to protect the mental health of young students by providing them with creative space for social media use. India's diverse socio-cultural context should be studied further to explain the differences among various socio-demographic segments in their mental health needs and the use pattern of digital platforms to support mental health equity and development.

The Moderating Role of Self-Esteem on the Association Between Loneliness and Social Media Use Among Filipino Students During the COVID-19 Lockdown

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Background: The strict COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in the Philippines mandated a shift to a fully online mode of learning for all students and restricted the mobility of young people outside their homes. Consequently, many have experienced loneliness due to diminished social connection, and resorted to increased social media use.

Aims: This study investigated the moderating role of self-esteem on the influence of loneliness on social media use of Filipino students within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

Methods: An online survey was conducted, and data were collected from 332 students (mean age = 20.05; SD age = 1.16) in the Philippines.

Results: Findings showed that loneliness is significantly negatively correlated with self-esteem but both are not significantly correlated with social media use. Age is significantly negatively correlated with social media use, with younger people using social media for longer hours. Self-esteem was found to moderate the negative relationship between loneliness and social media use among Filipino students. Further, paired t-test revealed that significantly longer hours of social media use were spent during the COVID-19 pandemic than before the onset of the pandemic.

Conclusions: These findings provide an insight on how an intrapersonal resource such as self-esteem could moderate the influence of loneliness on a potentially problematic social media use among young people during a public health crisis that presented challenges to youth's social and emotional development. Implications for enhancement of self-esteem and other mental health resources are discussed.

Impact of Loneliness on Mental Health, Self-Esteem, and Academic Difficulties of Young People in the UK During the COVID-19 Lockdown

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Background: The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected the mental well-being of young people, disrupting daily routines and social relationships. Studies show that students experienced greater mental health difficulties as a result of social isolation. Young people reporting loneliness also show difficulties in academic achievement. Loneliness is a key factor in mental health problems, which was further exacerbated by the pandemic lockdown measures.

Aims: The impact of loneliness on academic performance and self-esteem is yet to be examined, therefore this study explored the extent to which loneliness predicted difficulties in academic performance, mental health and self-esteem.

Methods: Young people aged between 18-24 years (Mean=19.53, SD=1.32) completed an online questionnaire (n=1,197). The participants were largely from higher education institutions in the UK, including those in sixth forms, colleges, and universities. The self-reports assessed participants pandemic related anxiety, scores of loneliness, self-esteem and academic difficulties.

Results: As expected the results show that loneliness was positively associated with anxiety, and difficulties in academic performance. Moreover, loneliness was negatively associated with scores of self-esteem. Young people's scores of loneliness predicted scores of academic difficulties and poor self-esteem.

Conclusions: These results show that loneliness is a significant predictor of poor mental health, but also linked with poor self-esteem and poor academic performance. These results should be considered in relation to the geographical location of the participants, nonetheless, loneliness appears to be a key element in driving young people's mental health.

Cross-Cultural Adaptation of the COVID-19 Related Anxiety Scale for Children: Evidence From Pakistan

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Background: The COVID-19 Related Anxiety Scale is a recently developed scale to measure anxiety related to COVID-19.
Aims: Current study intended with cross-cultural adaptation of this COVID-19 Related Anxiety Scale for Children according to Pakistani context.
Methods: A total of 445 Primary School Children (56.9% boys and 43.1% girls; mean age =10.63 years; standard deviation =.713) were recruited from six primary schools from Rawalpindi District, Pakistan. In addition to the Urdu adapted version of the COVID-19 Related Anxiety Scale, the participants were asked to complete the following questionnaires: Pediatric Quality of Life Inventory (PedsQL-U), Center for Epidemiological Studies for Depression Scale for Children (CESDC), and a Socio-demographic form. These questionnaires were administered in group setting in schools.
Results: Initial analysis revealed good reliability (Urdu Version α=.83; English Version α=.82) as well as test-retest correlation coefficients after two weeks' time period (r=.92). The internal consistency of the scale was good, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83. Confirmatory factor analysis showed model provided a better fit similar to original model that is single factor model. Pearson's correlation of the adapted COVID-19 Related Anxiety Scale with CESDC indicated good convergent validity (r= 0.12**; p<0.01) and with PedsQL-U (-0.12*; p<0.05) showed good discriminant validity.
Conclusions: These findings supported the COVID-19 Related Anxiety Scale as a valid and efficient measure of COVID19 related anxiety Pakistani Children.

Pandemic-Related Stress Among Primiparous and Multiparous Women During Pregnancy

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Background: Maternal stress is considered by the World Health Organization (WHO) as one of the main problems that affect the health and well-being of women during the perinatal period. Prevalence of maternal stress has been reported to be above 24% during pregnancy. During the COVID-19 pandemic, maternal stress has been informed to affect woman´s mental health dramatically.
Aims: Study the impact of pandemic-related pregnancy stress and maternal psychopathology during the COVID-19 lockdown.
Methods: A cross-sectional study was carried out on a sample of 181 pregnant women aged between 18 to 40 years old in Spain. The Pandemic-related pregnancy stress (PREPS) scale, Prenatal Distress Questionnaire (PDQ), Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and the revised version of the Symptom Checklist-90 (SCL-90-R) were used to assess stress and psychological symptoms during the pandemic.
Results: Regarding the SCL-90-R, multiparous women showed an exacerbated psychopathological symptomatology. Those differences were marginally significant Interpersonal Sensitivity dimension (Primiparous: M=44.26, SD=31.95; Multiparous: M=52.72, SD=32.35, p=0.078). In respect to the PREPS, there were no significant differences, notwithstanding multiparous showed higher scores for "Positive Appraisal" items (M= 3.32, SD= 0.83 vs M= 2.96, SD= 0.81, p=0.004). Multiparous women showed higher mean scores for "Infection" dimension (M=3.55, SD=0.65 vs M=3.35, SD=0.70, p=0.042). Primiparous women showed slightly higher levels of distress than multiparous, PDQ (M=24.16, SD=3.79 vs M=24.06, SD=3.06); and lower mean scores of perceived stress measured though Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (M=25.95, SD=3.41 vs M=25.76, SD=3.79).
Conclusions: Multiparous women showed higher distress and higher levels of pandemic-related pregnancy stress than multiparous women.

Teenage Pregnancy During the COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown: The Perspective of Filipino Teenage Pregnant Couples

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Background: Teenage pregnancy has health, social and economic consequences on young mothers and fathers. Although there was a downtrend in the previously high teenage pregnancy rates in the Philippines because of the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns that restricted the movement of young people outside their homes, the incidence of teenage pregnancy continued.

Aims: This study sought to understand the attitudes and motivations of Filipino teenage couples that influenced their intentions to become pregnant amidst the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six unmarried Filipino teenage couples (18 to 20 years old) who became pregnant during the pandemic.

Results: Thematic analysis identified six key themes in the teenage couples' views of their pregnancy in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic: (1) the pandemic lockdown presented more opportunities for sexual activities; (2) sex as a means of coping with stressors related to the pandemic lockdown; (3) limited access to contraceptives during the pandemic lockdown reinforces a general indifference to protected sex; (4) concerns for the safety and health of pregnant teenagers during the pandemic; (5) unintended teenage pregnancy affects their dreams for the future and obligations to their own family; and (6) implicit normalization of teenage pregnancy.

Conclusions: These findings highlight the need to address (1) the disjunction between teenagers' attitude to avoid teenage pregnancy and their need for sexual intimacy without the use of contraception; (2) young people's access to sexual and reproductive health information and services; and (3) community-based interventions on their sexual and psychological well-being.

Cognitive Appraisals of the COVID-19 Pandemic Among University Students in Singapore

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Background: Many young adults hold negative appraisals toward the COVID-19 pandemic due to significant stress related to health concerns, future uncertainty, resource constraints, and social constraints. An increased understanding of their cognitive appraisals is important to help them develop more adaptive appraisals of this disruptive worldwide health crisis, promote resilience and develop optimism, leading to improvements in overall mental health.

Aims: This study aims to understand the cognitive appraisals of Singaporean undergraduate university students with regards to COVID-19.

Methods: To elicit participants' thoughts on COVID-19, participants were asked to complete five sentences based on sentence stems related to COVID-19, as part of a wider online survey.

Results: The qualitative data was then analysed following the steps of reflexive thematic analysis. NVivo was used for open and axial coding of participants' responses to the incomplete sentences. Emerging themes include changes to lifestyle, the identification of COVID-19 as a worldwide shared experience, impacts on social life, and overall disruption.

Conclusions: The identification of these themes could help young adults to make sense of their experience through increasing their awareness of contributing factors of stress and help them to consider alternative perspectives. This research can also enable public healthcare interventions to be more targeted in their messaging, as well as to inform systems and policymaking in the event of a future pandemic.

Predictors of Post-Pandemic Growth

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Background: The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted the psychological well-being

of many individuals who may exhibit varying trajectories of coping. Several theories have identified important predictors of posttraumatic growth following an adverse event. However, few studies have investigated the possibility of psychological gains from coping with significant stress during the pandemic.

Aims: The study aims to test whether retrospective report of COVID-19 related stress was predictive of post-pandemic growth and examined the roles of dispositional optimism and perceived social support in moderating this association.

Methods: The study surveyed a sample of 2,364 university students online in Singapore from September to November 2023 and used structural equation modeling to analyze the data.

Results: Preliminary results show that post-pandemic growth was significantly predicted by COVID-19 stress, optimism, and perceived social support.

Conclusions: The identification of optimism and social support as significant predictors of post-pandemic growth highlights the importance of promoting positive psychological attributes and social connectedness during a pandemic. These mechanisms are also found to be associated with psychological gains during a worldwide health crisis.