Effect of closure of educational institutions due to COVID-19 lockdown on overall subjective well-being of Indian adolescents: An Evidence from a cross-sectional survey

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Background: Many people faced an unprecedented challenge due to COVID-19 pandemic across the world. Adolescents were confined to their homes due to the National closure of educational institutions under lockdown (since mid-March 2020). These closures have also exposed adolescents to several risk factors including unhealthy living habits including physical and mental health issues.

Objective: This study aimed to understand the determinants of subjective well-being of adolescents during COVID-19 pandemic in India.

Methods: The cross-sectional survey was used to study the effects of prolonged social isolation coupled with the challenges of home-schooling/online classes on adolescent’s subjective well-being and resilience skills. The adapted survey was reviewed by experts at PHFI, WHO SEARO, and WHO country office for India and tested with participants (n=1596) from schools and colleges across various states of India. This study utilized advanced statistical approaches including heat-map, multivariate decomposition and decision tree (supervised machine learning technique) to understand the contributing risk factors of subjective well-being.

Results: Of the students who were dissatisfied with their general life during the pandemic, nearly 63.4% felt sadness followed by other feelings, i.e., bored (around 60.5%), loneliness (63.7%), and anxiety (62.2%). The odds (odds ratio) of dissatisfaction were lower among the adolescents who belonged to richer socio-economic status, compared to those who belonged to poor sections of the society. The students who felt sad/bored/loneliness/anxious, were two times more likely to be dissatisfied with their general lives, compared to those who didn’t have such negative feelings.

Conclusions: Adolescents are vulnerable and require careful consideration by their caregivers and healthcare system adaptations to allow for overall well-being including mental health support despite the lockdown. The current study suggests declining subjective well-being among Indian adolescents when compared to pre-pandemic to lockdown levels. Students with unemployed father and poor economic strata of the society were more dissatisfied. The level of dissatisfaction among female-student below 18 years was more as compared with their male-counterparts. This study highlights the need for innovative strategies for adolescents and parents to adopt and promote overall subjective well-being especially during public health crisis such as the COVID 19 pandemic.