



The Impact of Covid-19 On Students' Mental Health and Reading Habits: A Study at Vivekananda Colleges in Puttur Taluk, Dakshina Kannada District, Karnataka, India

Dr. Dayanandappa Kori

Information Scientist, University Library, Doctor Harisingh Gour Vishwavidyalaya Sagar (A Central University),
Madhya Pradesh, India PIN: 470001,
E-mail: koridh@gmail.com

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The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted education, forcing academic institutions to close and switch to online learning. The study was conducted at three institutions: Vivekananda Degree College, Vivekananda Law College, and Vivekananda College of Engineering and Technology, all located in Puttur Taluk, Dakshina Kannada District, Karnataka, India. The data was collected through an online Google form questionnaire shared on WhatsApp groups. It attempts to interpret and explain the patterns and trends scientifically revealed through data analysis, which uses SPSS software for practical interpretation. The findings suggest that stress during COVID-19 negatively impacted mental well-being while feeling safe at home had a positive effect. Pre-existing mental health was the most substantial positive influence. The study highlights the strong influence of reading habits and mental health on students' academic performance and well-being during the pandemic. The study calls for supportive interventions to enhance mental health and foster academic growth in future crises.

Keywords: COVID-19, Information-Seeking Behaviour, Mental Health, Reading Habits, Impact of Covid-19 On Students.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a considerable impact on the mental health of students. The most common stressors experienced by students were financial problems, feelings of loneliness, the challenge of studying from home, uncertainty about when the pandemic will end, and the fear of contracting COVID-19. Economic issues were a significant source of stress for many students. As a result of their mental health, students struggle to complete their academic-related tasks. The present study examines the Impact of COVID-19 on students' mental health and reading habits at Vivekananda Colleges, Puttur taluk, Dakshina Kannada district, Karnataka, India.

2. Review of literature

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant negative impact on mental health, with studies by Raihan¹ showing increased anxiety and depression and calls for improved mental health support, while Roever² *et al.* highlight the importance of vaccination. Furthermore, Hamdan Mansour³ *et al.* suggest training healthcare workers to address patients' mental health needs better. Abdulai, R.T. and Baffour Awuah, K.G⁴. Their study offers a starting point for

understanding the complex relationship between COVID-19 and sustainability. Overall, the pandemic has led to increased mental health challenges, underscoring the urgent need for enhanced support, the role of vaccination, and the training of healthcare professionals to meet these needs. The long-term effects of the pandemic on sustainability have also been explored.

3. Objectives of the study

- Analyze Reading Habits and Preferences
- Assess Stress and Anxiety Levels
- Evaluate the Impact on Mental Health and Well-being
- Identify Challenges in Accessing Information
- Identify Factors Hindering Reading Habits
- Investigate the Interference of Mental Health in Academic Tasks
- Provide Recommendations for Support

4 Scope and limitation of the study

The research was conducted among students at three institutions: Vivekananda Degree College, Vivekananda Law College, and Vivekananda College of Engineering and Technology, all located in Puttur Taluk, Dakshina Kannada District, Karnataka, India.

It attempts to interpret or explain the patterns and trends scientifically revealed through data analysis, which uses SPSS software for practical interpretation. The present study is focused and limited on these specific colleges.

5. Research methodology

The data was collected from November 9, 2020, to December 2, 2020, using an online Google Forms questionnaire shared in the students' WhatsApp groups. The sampling method used in this study was random sampling.

5.1 Questionnaire design

While creating the questionnaire, the investigator collected insights from various sources. The design process involved integrating and synthesizing ideas from these references to ensure the questionnaire was comprehensive and effective in gathering relevant data. By blending theoretical knowledge with subject matter expertise, the questionnaire was meticulously crafted to capture the essential information required for the study.

5.2 College Surveyed for the Study

Table 1 shows the study population, including students from three institutions: Vivekananda Degree College, Vivekananda Law College, and Vivekananda College of Engineering and Technology, all located in Puttur. Data was collected using Google Form responses, resulting in 557 participants from Vivekananda Degree College, 4 from Vivekananda Law College, and 45 from Vivekananda College of Engineering and Technology. This brings the total study population to 606 students across the three institutions. This broad representation aims to comprehensively understand student experiences and perceptions across educational and geographic backgrounds.

6 Data Analysis and Interpretation

6.1 Gender of the Respondents

As shown in Table 2, the respondents' gender is quite clear: out of the 606 respondents investigated for this study, the overwhelming majority, 414

(68.3%), were females. In contrast, about 192 (31.7%) were found to be males. Interestingly, a majority of the students are female, significantly outnumbering their male counterparts.

6.2 Reading Preferences

Table 3 shows the reading preferences during College/Institution. The data indicates that most students prefer to read for 1 to 2 hours while in college, with 264 students (43.6%) falling into this category. Following that, a notable group of 203 students (33.5%) reads for 30 minutes to 1 hour, indicating that nearly three-quarters of the respondents engage in reading for up to 2 hours. A smaller portion, 113 students (18.6%), report reading for 2 to 3 hours, and only 26 students (4.3%) dedicate 4 or more hours to reading. These findings suggest that most students maintain moderate reading habits, with only a small fraction (4.3%) engaging in extended reading beyond two hours.

6.3 Effect of Reading Habits

The results presented in Table 4 reveal that reading habits predominantly positively impact the respondents. A significant 57.9% of individuals acknowledge that their reading habits support their studies, which aligns with the notion that regular reading can enhance academic performance by improving comprehension, critical thinking, and knowledge retention. Moreover, 22.8% of respondents feel a sense of pride in their reading habits, reflecting strong intrinsic motivation and personal satisfaction from intellectual engagement. Interestingly, 16.5% of respondents believe that reading helps them express themselves better in class, reinforcing that reading

Table 1 — College Surveyed for the Study

S No	College Name	Responses
1	Vivekananda Degree College, Puttur	557
2	Vivekananda Law College, Puttur	4
3	Vivekananda College of Engineering and Technology, Puttur	45
	Total	606

Table 2 — Gender of the respondents

S. No	Gender	Frequency	Percent
1.	Male	192	31.7
2.	Female	414	68.3
	Total	606	100

Table 3 — Reading preferences during college

S. No	Hours	Frequency	Percent
1	30 minutes- 1 hours	203	33.5
2	1-2 hours	264	43.6
3	2-3 hours	113	18.6
4	4 hours and above	26	4.3
	Total	606	100.0

Table 4 — Effect of reading habits

S. No	Effect	Frequency	Percent
1	Express me well in Class	100	16.5
2	Support my Studies	351	57.9
3	It makes me feel Proud	138	22.8
4	It makes me feel bored	17	2.8
	Total	606	100.0

enhances communication skills by expanding vocabulary and improving articulation; however, 2.8% of respondents feel bored by reading. Overall, the findings emphasize the role of reading as a beneficial habit for academic success and personal development while acknowledging that individual preferences and experiences can vary.

6.4 Hindrances to Reading Habits

The data in Table 5 highlights respondents' main hindrances to reading habits. The most significant hindrance, reported by 48.2% of participants, is a lack of motivation, indicating a struggle to maintain regular reading habits. The second most common issue, reported by 28.7% of respondents, is a lack of reading materials at home, suggesting that limited access to books and other reading resources may contribute to declining reading habits. 16.7% of respondents pointed to an unsupportive home environment as a hindrance. A smaller proportion, 6.4%, mentioned insufficient library resources as another barrier. Overall, these findings demonstrate that external factors, such as access to materials, a conducive environment, and personal motivation, significantly influence the development or decline of reading habits.

6.5 Stressed or anxious due to various factors

Table 6 shows the factors contributing to stress or anxiety among respondents, allowing multiple responses per participant. The most frequently cited reason for stress was studying from home (27.1%), highlighting the challenges of remote learning, including lack of engagement, distractions, and difficulty in maintaining focus. Financial issues (24.3%) were another major source of stress, indicating economic struggles during the pandemic, such as loss

Table 5 — Hindrances to Reading Habits

S. No	Hindrances	Frequency	Percent
1	Lack of a Conducive Home Environment	101	16.7
2	Lack of motivation to read	292	48.2
3	Lack of reading materials at Home	174	28.7
4	Inadequate sources in the library	39	6.4
	Total	606	100.0

Table 6 — Stressed or anxious due to multiple factors

S. No	Reasons	Frequency	Percent
1	Financial issues	147	24.3
2	Feelings of loneliness	140	23.1
3	Family/friends catching COVID-19	65	10.7
4	Studying from home	164	27.1
5	Uncertainty of when COVID-19 impacts will end	125	20.6
6	Catching COVID-19	51	8.4
7	Not feeling stressed/anxious	151	24.9
8	Others	82	13.5

of income or increased financial burdens. Feelings of loneliness (23.1%) were also a significant concern, reflecting the impact of social isolation and reduced in-person interactions on mental well-being. Uncertainty about when COVID-19 impacts will end (20.6%) further contributed to anxiety, showing that unpredictability regarding the future remained a persistent stressor. Fear of family or friends catching COVID-19 (10.7%) and personal fear of contracting COVID-19 (8.4%) were notable stress factors, demonstrating health-related concerns. Interestingly, 24.9% of respondents reported not feeling stressed or anxious, suggesting a degree of resilience or effective coping mechanisms among some individuals. Meanwhile, 13.5% cited other reasons, which may include academic pressures, workload, or personal circumstances beyond the listed options. The findings indicate that educational and financial concerns, along with social isolation and uncertainty, were the most significant factors contributing to stress and anxiety among respondents during the pandemic.

6.6 Safe Felt Since the Beginning of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Table 7 illustrates respondents' perceptions of safety since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most respondents (58.6%) reported feeling 'very safe,' suggesting a strong sense of security despite the ongoing pandemic. A significant portion (32.3%) acknowledged that although they do not feel as safe as they usually would, they still experience a moderate sense of safety most of the time. In contrast, a smaller group (3.1%) expressed concerns about frequently feeling unsafe, while 5.9% reported a constant feeling of insecurity. This distribution highlights that while the pandemic has affected overall safety perceptions, most respondents have found ways to feel secure. It also emphasizes the varying degrees of safety concerns among individuals, which may be influenced by personal health, environment, or external factors such as government measures and social support systems. Future studies could investigate the factors contributing to these differing perceptions and explore how safety concerns have evolved.

Table 7 — Safe felt since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic

S. No	Statement	Frequency	Percent
1	Very safe, as safe as I could feel.	355	58.6
2	It's not as safe as usual, but it's pretty safe most of the time.	196	32.3
3	I am not nearly as safe as usual; I feel that I am not safe quite often.	19	3.1
4	I feel that I am not safe all the time	36	5.9

Table 8 — Before covid-19, mental health and well-being

S. No	Rating	Frequency	Percent
1	Excellent	151	24.9
2	Very good	206	34
3	Good	228	37.6
4	Less than good	20	3.3
5	Poor	00	00

Table 9 — Mental health and well-being of social distancing rules.

S. No	Rating	Frequency	Percent
1	Excellent	87	14.4
2	Very good	137	22.6
3	Good	272	44.9
4	Less than good	95	15.7
5	Poor	15	2.5

Table 10 — Feel adjusted to physical distancing/ social distancing/studying from home rules.

S. No	Rating	Frequency	Percent
1	Excellent	81	13.4
2	Very good	115	19
3	Good	285	47
4	Less than good	93	15.3
5	Poor	32	5.3

6.7 Before Covid-19, Mental Health and Well-Being

Table 8 presents data on mental health and well-being among respondents before COVID-19. Mental health and well-being were classified into five categories: Excellent, Very Good, Good, Less Than Good, and Poor. Specifically, 151 respondents (24.9%) rated their mental health as Excellent, 206 (34%) as Very Good, and 228 (37.6%) as Good. A smaller proportion, 20 respondents (3.3%), reported their mental health as Less Than Good, while no respondents rated it as Poor. The findings indicate that pre-COVID-19 was linked to generally positive mental health among respondents, likely due to stable socio-economic conditions, less global uncertainty, and regular social interactions.

6.8 Mental Health and Well-Being of Social Distancing Rules.

Table 9 provides respondents' mental health and well-being since COVID-19 and the implementation of social distancing rules. 272 (44.9%) respondents opined Good, followed by 137 (22.6%) respondents who said that very good, 95 (15.7%) respondents said less than good, and 87 (14.4%) said that Excellent. In contrast, 15 (2.5%) of respondents opined poor. Since the onset of COVID-19 and the implementation of social distancing measures, the mental health and well-being of respondents have noticeably declined compared to the pre-pandemic period.

6.9 Physical Distancing/Social Distancing/Studying from Home Rules

Table 10 provides the feel of the respondents who have adjusted to physical distancing/ social

Table 11 — Feeling before the lockdown started

S. No	Rating	Frequency	Percent
1	Very stressed	46	7.6
2	Stressed	97	16
3	Neither stressed nor calm	293	48.4
4	Calm	135	22.3
5	Very calm	34	5.6

Table 12 — Stressed feel at the moment.

S. No	Rating	Frequency	Percent
1	Excellent	24	4
2	Very good	51	8.4
3	Good	304	50.2
4	Less than good	179	29.5
5	Poor	48	7.9

Table 13 — During COVID-19, mental health interfered with the ability to complete study-related tasks.

S. No	Rating	Frequency	Percent
1	Extremely often	34	5.6
2	Very often	130	21.5
3	Somewhat often	281	46.4
4	Not so often	128	21.1
5	Not at all often	33	5.4

distancing/studying from home rules: The majority (47%) reported feeling "Good" about their adjustment, indicating a moderate level of comfort with these changes. 19% rated their experience as "Very good," and 13.4% found it "Excellent," suggesting that a considerable proportion of individuals adapted well. However, 15.3% rated their adjustment as "Less than good," and 5.3% reported it as "Poor," highlighting challenges faced by some in adapting to these new norms. Most respondents adjusted positively, but a significant minority faced difficulties, highlighting the need for additional support mechanisms to facilitate the transition.

6.10 Feeling before the lockdown started

Table 11 provides the stress felt before the lockdown started; 293 (48.4%) respondents opined that they were neither stressed nor calm, followed by 135 (22.3%) respondents who said they were calm. 97 (16%) respondents opined that they were stressed, and 46 (7.6%) said they were very stressed. In contrast, 34 (5.6%) respondents reported being very calm. The data shows a range of emotional responses before the lockdown. While many individuals were calm or neutral, a significant number experienced stress, indicating a need for targeted interventions.

6.11 Stressed Feel at the Moment

Table 12 provides the stressed feeling at the moment; 304 (50.2%) respondents opined good, followed by 179 (29.5%) respondents who said less than good, 51 (8.4%) respondents who said very

good, 48 (7.9%) who said poor, and 24 (4%) who said excellent.

6.12 During COVID-19, Mental Health Interfered with the Ability to Complete Study-Related Tasks.

Table 13 provides the following information on how often respondents' mental health interfered with their ability to complete study-related tasks during COVID-19: 281 (46.4%) respondents opined that it happened somewhat often, followed by 130 (21.5%) respondents who said very often, 128 (21.1%) respondents who said not so often, and 33 (5.4%) who said not at all often. In contrast, 34 (5.6%) respondents said extremely often.

Figure 1 shows the structural equation modeling. It depicts how stress during COVID-19 negatively impacts mental well-being, while feeling safe at home has a positive effect. Pre-existing mental health was the most substantial positive influence, suggesting resilience. Pre-existing stress and mental health

interference during COVID-19 also negatively affected overall mental health. Analyzing these elements and considering the study's context can help us understand the relationships and influences between the different factors.

6.13 Regression Weights

Table 14 shows the results of the regression analysis examining factors that influence mental health and well-being during COVID-19. Specifically, higher stress levels during COVID-19 predicted lower mental health and wellbeing ($\beta = -0.100, p = 0.019$), whereas feeling safer at home during the pandemic was associated with improved mental health and wellbeing ($\beta=0.191, p <0.001$). Moreover, individuals with better mental health and well-being before COVID-19 tended to report better outcomes during the pandemic ($\beta = 0.328, p < 0.001$), highlighting the continuity of pre-pandemic mental health status.

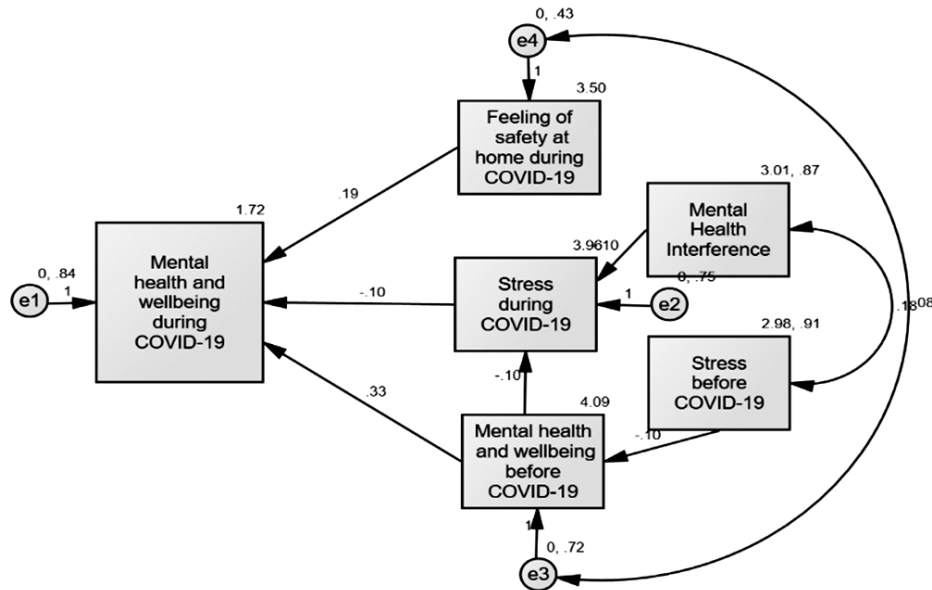


Fig. 1 — Structural equation modeling.

Table 14 — Regression weights

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Mental health and wellbeing during COVID-19	<---	Stress during COVID-19	-0.100	0.043	-2.338	0.019
Mental health and wellbeing during COVID-19	<---	The feeling of safety at home during COVID-19	0.191	0.057	3.321	0.000
Mental health and wellbeing during COVID-19	<---	Mental health and wellbeing before COVID-19	0.328	0.044	7.414	0.000
Mental health and wellbeing before COVID-19	<---	Stress before COVID-19	-0.097	0.036	-2.706	0.007
Stress during COVID-19	<---	Mental Health Interference	-0.101	0.038	-2.677	0.007
Stress during COVID-19	<---	Mental health and wellbeing before COVID-19	-0.095	0.041	-2.303	0.021

Table 15 — Model fit			
RMSEA	NFI	IFI	CFI
0.017	0.944	0.991	0.991

In addition, greater stress before COVID-19 was linked to poorer pre-pandemic mental health and wellbeing ($\beta = -0.097$, $p=0.007$). Finally, stress during COVID-19 was a significant predictor, suggesting that as these factors change, they correspond with reductions in stress levels during the pandemic. Overall, these findings underscore the importance of both prior mental health and the immediate context, such as home safety and stress experiences, in shaping wellbeing during COVID-19.

6.14 Model Fit

Table 15 shows the model fit. It demonstrates an excellent fit, with an RMSEA value of 0.017, indicating minimal discrepancy from the observed data. The NFI value is 0.944, while the IFI and CFI values are both 0.991, exceeding the 0.90 threshold.

7 Further research

Future research could explore the long-term effects of academic stress and reading habits on student well-being and career development. It may be beneficial to compare digital reading platforms with traditional methods regarding cognitive and emotional engagement. Investigating socio-economic factors affecting access to academic resources and mental health is also essential. Cross-disciplinary approaches involving technology, psychology, and education could yield innovative solutions for improving reading habits and coping strategies. Finally, assessing interventions like mindfulness training or gamified learning may boost student resilience and academic performance.

8 Discussion of findings

The study offered valuable insights into students' reading habits, stress levels, and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most respondents (43.6%) reported reading for 1 to 2 hours daily, and 57.9% indicated that their reading habits were primarily beneficial for their studies. However, nearly half of the participants (48.2%) struggled with a lack of motivation to read, and 16.7% reported that their home environments were unsuitable for reading. Several factors influence stress levels among students. For instance, studying from home was a significant source of stress for 27.1% of respondents, while

financial issues affected 24.3%. Notably, 24.9% of participants reported experiencing no stress at all. Despite these challenges, a majority (58.6%) felt safe during the pandemic. Before COVID-19, 71.6% of respondents rated their mental health and well-being as either "good" or "very good." However, during the pandemic, with the implementation of social distancing measures, this figure dropped to 67.5%. 47% of participants rated their adjustment to physical distancing as "good." Prior to the lockdown, 48.4% of students reported feeling neither stressed nor calm, indicating a neutral emotional state. In the current context, 50.2% of respondents described their stress levels as "good," while 29.5% indicated that their stress was "less than good." Overall, the mental health challenges experienced during COVID-19 have significantly disrupted both academic performance and personal well-being, highlighting the profound impact of the pandemic on students' daily lives.

9 Suggestions

Creating supportive environments that foster motivation and engagement in academic activities is essential for enhancing students' reading habits and overall mental health, especially during challenging times like the COVID-19 pandemic. Educational institutions expand access to digital libraries and online resources to bridge the gap caused by limited physical access to learning materials. Providing readily available counselling services and stress management programs can equip students with effective coping strategies for mental health challenges. Encouraging physical activity and incorporating regular breaks can further reduce stress and improve focus. Furthermore, implementing financial assistance programs and establishing peer support networks can help address both economic and emotional barriers. Overall, tailored interventions that balance academic demands with personal well-being are crucial for supporting students' holistic development.

10 Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted education, leading academic institutions to close their physical campuses and shift to online learning. The present study findings indicate that stress related to the pandemic has negatively affected students' mental well-being, while a sense of safety at home has had a positive impact. Mental health prior to the pandemic emerged as the strongest predictor of

students' resilience during this challenging time. The study also highlighted several factors that hinder students' reading habits, such as a lack of motivation and unsupportive environments, emphasizing the need for improved support services. Despite these challenges, the findings underscore the importance of digital literacy and the critical role educators play in facilitating access to reliable information and fostering these essential skills. Overall, the pandemic has had a dual impact on students. On one hand, financial concerns and social isolation have increased anxiety and stress, making studying more difficult. On the other hand, while students have turned to digital resources for reading, they now face challenges like unreliable information and decreased motivation.

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