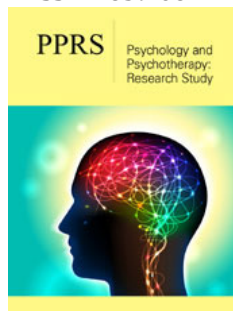


Understanding Students Mental Health Conditions During Pandemic: A Qualitative Study Among Infected Students of Rajshahi University

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic presents an unprecedented challenge to public health, especially mental health conditions. During covid-19 the students suffer with depression and anxiety in Bangladesh due to different social and professional uncertainty. This paper intent to explain the mental health condition of Covid infected students at University of Rajshahi in Bangladesh. Data of this qualitative research were collected through In-depth interviews and informal interviews. The study suggests that during covid infection respondent's mental health was faced tons of challenges with new social and behavioral experiences. Most of the respondents faced behavioral changes by community. New pattern of social relationship, unwanted fear, disrupted regular activities and rituals make the students mental conditions unstable.

Keywords: Mental health; Fear; Disrupted activities; New pattern of relationship; Covid 19

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Introduction

Corona virus, popularly known as covid-19, is an infectious disease caused by the SARS COV-2 Cascella et al. [1]. The WHO declared novel corona virus as public health emergency of worldwide concern in January 2020(COVID-19 Public Health Emergency Of International Concern (PHEIC) Global Research and Innovation Forum, n.d.). This virus was first reported in Wuhan, Hubei of China in late 2019 Huang et al. [2]. The novel coronavirus is from the same family as SARS and middle east respiratory syndrome corona virus Ji et al. [3]. Due to the rapid spread across the globe this virus is responsible for many infected people and multiple death Wang et al. [4]. According to World Health Organization, as of 20th January 2022, 338 million people have been infected and 5.56 million peoples death caused by this virus. Alike every other human, students around the globe are also included in these figures. The spread of this virus brings increased level in anxiety and psychological consequences Roy et al. [5].

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to contribute to his or her community. Again, Mental health refers to cognitive, behavioral, and emotional well-being. It is all about how people think, feel, and behave (Mental Health: Definition, Common Disorders, Early Signs, and More, n.d.). Corona virus has great impact on people in different cultural context. Rumors and unauthenticated information regarding outbreak in social media created fear, anxiety and stress among people Kumar A et al. [6]. The Covid also inspected the fear of being infected and perceived discrimination towards infected that contributed to the psychological distress

during pandemic Xie et al. [7]. For example, the people of Wuhan, where this virus first reported, were subjected to stigmatized, considered infectious and blamed for spreading the virus Ren et al. [8]. This indicates, covid has impacted on infected psychological and emotional wellbeing Baloran [9]. In Bangladesh, a cross-sectional study among university students during covid-19, found that about 47 percent of the students reported mild to extremely severe depression levels and 69.3 percent reported mild to severe levels of psychological impacts due to the pandemic Khan et al. [10]. The anxiety rate was 71% among Bangladeshi students due to the uncertainty of examination and job market Das et al. [11]. However, in this context, this paper is aimed to explain the mental health condition of covid infected students of Rajshahi University, Bangladesh. The specific objectives of this study are double folded - firstly, to know the experiences of graduate students from being Corona virus positive to till tested negative and finally, to explain how those experiences impacted their social, psychological, and emotional well-being.

Methodology

Primarily this is qualitative research conducted among the tertiary students in a Bangladeshi University. In-depth interviews and informal interviews are used to collect data in this study. The study took place in Rajshahi University Campus from 15th October 2021 to 15th January 2022. During this period, thirty in-depth interviews have been conducted with covid infected students in research area. All the respondents were selected through purposive sampling. Some ethical considerations were strictly maintained for this research. All the respondents were informed about the objectives of the study and their consent was taken before taking interviews. Since the pandemic is still going on, we had ensured precautionary health measures like being masked ourselves, maintaining social distance etc. All the respondents were informed that none of them will be in any kind of danger for being participated in the study. And We ensured them that, they will be anonymous in the study. All the interviews were audio recorded and translated into English. A thematic approach was used for analysis. Different sub themes were identified during analysis. Themes were triangulated using data from observations and interviews. Their lived experiences were interpreted manually [12,13].

Results and Discussions

New behaviors, fear and social relationship

This study found behavioral changes of community towards infected students. According to the most respondents' view, if a person becomes sick, he/she gets the sympathy or care from the people surrounded by him. That's what they have been experienced in their society before the pandemic. But, in terms of covid illness, respondents didn't get that usual behavior. Rather, they observed behavioral changes from community. For example, one respondent (Age: 24, Sex: Male) said, "One day, I, along with my father, went outside of my home to go to hospital, while walking on the road, suddenly I realized that everyone was looking at us and the way they looked at us, It seems like they were seeing ghosts". (Indepth Interview:2021)

Another respondent (Age: 22, Sex: Male) said that he was treated like an alien by the community surrounded by him. Again, another respondent (Age:23, Sex: Male) said that the experiences he faced by community after being covid positive Causes mental sufferings to him. Moreover, infected students faced experiences which results in feeling themselves 'inferior cast' in the society. One respondent (Age: 24, Sex: Female) said, "After observing some symptom of covid among us, one day, I, along with my husband, went to the road aiming to go hospitals to test covid-19, everyone was moving away from us in the road. I was so surprised in that time, and we felt like we're inferior caste in the society". (Indepth Interview:2021) Another respondent (Age: 21, Sex: Male) said that because of the behavioral changes by neighbors he felt like he is the main reason behind spreading infection.

This study also found that most of the students tried to hide or literally hidden the news of being infected from their neighbors. Because there was an ongoing covid infection phobia in the community. One of the respondents (Age: 23, Sex: Male) said, "when I came to know about being infected, I hide that news to ensure my family didn't face any stigmatization by the community". Another respondent (Age 25, Sex: Female) said that he used to live in a semi urban place near her university campus in Rajshahi. She, along with her husband, were tested positive in their rental house. Again, they both also hide their infection news from their nearer apartment and of owner. She said, "I was in fear of thinking how my neighbors or flat owner reacts once they got to know about our infection. I was thinking like what if owner tell us to leave the flat". (In depth Interview:2021)

Adaptation with changing relationship and wellbeing

This study suggests, traditional concept of social relationship has been asked a lot of question during covid-19. Covid weakens some core point of cultural norms existing in respondents' society. One respondent (Age: 23, Sex: Male) said "Our familial relationship with my uncle got worse just because of covid. After hearing the news of our infection, my uncle came to our home to meet us. But, since all the members of my family were infected, to avoid further infection and as part of maintaining social distance from community we told him to go back and explained the effects of meeting with us physically. Then after nearly one and a half month when we all healed from covid. One day I, along with my mother tried to reach him over the phone but he rejected our phone call every time and since then he never communicated with us. Rather, he starts avoiding us. That's how our relationship with my uncle got unusual". (Indepth Interview:2021)

Another respondent (Age:22, Sex: Male) told us that, he was in his mess (Monthly rental room where students live) for isolation which is far away from home. One day, his mother said that one of his uncle was coming to near his mess for some familial work. Hearing the news of his uncle's arrival to Rajshahi he was expected to meet him maintaining physical distance. But his uncle didn't communicate with him. He further said that, since then he never communicated with his uncle. Such incidents indicate that, covid causes the breakdown of some core values and norms like

being kind and sympathetic towards ill people in the community and eventually it brings mental sufferings to the respondents.

Psychological wellbeing of the students during COVID

Disruption in regular activities

Covid brought up disruption in regular activities among the respondents we interviewed. One of the respondents (Age: 24, Sex: Male) told that, he was getting bored and suffering from loneliness after passing two days in quarantine. Another respondent (Age:21, Sex: Male) said "Before being infected, I used to play cricket every day in evening. It was a part of my regular activities. During isolation whenever it was about to becoming evening, I felt like I should break this prison and go out to play cricket". (Indepth Interview:2021) Another respondent (Age: 22, Sex: Male) said, "it was challenging for to wash my hands frequently and control my cough during masked". This indicates, it was not an easy task for the respondents to adopt into the newly instructed healthy measures like 'Isolation', washing hands frequently and wearing masks. Such experiences suggest that disruption made by covid brings up so many challenges towards infected respondents which causes mental sufferings to them.

Resisting from participating in rituals

Most of respondents didn't able to participate in religious rituals like Eid-ul-Fitr, Eid-UL-Adha, and Jhuma prayers because of being infected and to avoid further infection. One respondent said "I was so depressed for not being able to participate in Eid-ul-fitr prayer. We hardly get the opportunity to perform eid prayers in a calendar year. But because of being infected, I couldn't participate in Eid-ul-fitr prayer after fasting over three weeks in Ramadan Month". (Indepth Interview:2021) Another respondent (Age: 22, Sex: Male) also missed the opportunity to perform Eid-UL-Adha because of being infected by covid. He even was far away from his family in eid day. Again, another respondent (Age: 24, Sex: Male) said "I was regular in performing religious rituals which called Jhumma, a special prayer for Muslims on Friday prayed on mosque publicly. But during this covid situation I had to stay at home on Friday because of my illness. Therefore, during Jhumma I used to look out from the window and saw people including my relatives moving towards our village mosque." (Indepth Interview:2021)

Fears, rumors and challenges

This study found that, respondents were too much concerned over their family's safety and spreading the infection by themselves inside their homes which brought up stress to them. One respondent (Age: 20, Sex: Female) said, "I have a niece living in my home. I used to play with her regularly. But after being covid positive I resist myself getting even close to her in fear of infection. I felt her so badly". (Indepth Interview:2021) Another respondent (Age: 24, Sex: Male) said, "I was always in fear of my father. He was a diabetic patient and used to take physiotherapy. I was thinking If he gets infected, covid will affects him severely. I along with my mother both was infected. So, there were no one to look after him and at the same time I was in tension of spreading infection into him from

us". (Indepth Interview:2021) Again, another respondent (Age: 22, Sex: Female) said, "I'm very much fond of with my father. Since, I'm his only daughter, in terms of any illness, It's my father who was supposed to stay beside me. But this time, I resisted him from coming close to me in fear of infection". (Indepth Interview:2021)

This study found that, respondents had a fear of demise after being infected. One respondent (Age: 24, Sex: Male) said, I along with my grandfather tested together after observing some symptom among us. we both had tested positive and after passing some days suddenly one day I heard that, he is no more in this world. Hearing the news of my grandfather's death I got so depressed". Another respondent (Age:23, Sex: Male) said, "during my isolation one of my neighbors got infected and died of corona, I got so worried after knowing that" This study found that, news update regarding covid in various social networking sites, news agency, satellite television channels caused psychological sufferings for most of respondents we interviewed. Study also suggests that rumors in social media causes psychological sufferings towards the respondents. One respondent (Age: 24, Sex: Female) said, "Daily figure about death and infection rate of covid was too frightening for me that at once I stopped watching television". (Indepth Interview:2021)

Another respondent (Age: 24, Sex: Male) said, "I was afraid of rumors in Facebook rather than covid. I used to google in internet to know how this virus effects lungs and when people die of this virus". He also said that fear of this corona virus was too for him that it always seems like he's about to die. This study found; respondents struggled a lot in getting proper medication. At the same time, because of similarities with covid it was hard to get the treatment of any kind of fever, cough or cold caused by regular flu. One respondent (Age: 23, Sex: Female) said "after passing two or three days of being infected, one night, I was suffering from asphyxia severely and I was taken to near hospital for the oxygen. When I reached at the covid unit of hospital, hardly I had seen any doctors and nurses in covid unit. Everything seemed haunted to me there". Another respondent (Age: 22, Sex: Male) said, "My village was in very rural area. Since it was nearly impossible to consult a doctor physically, I used to try for the telemedicine, but the operator's network was too weak to talk over the phone for telemedicine service". Such incidents suggest, respondents faced some challenges in getting proper medication and consultation during covid and eventually it brings mental sufferings to them.

New social experiences which impacted emotional wellbeing

Different new social experiences due to the covid situations make the students mental life difficult. According to the respondents the students come up with new experiences which have great impact on their emotional wellbeing. These are -Maintaining Social distance from family members, losing loved ones, Celebrating religious rituals away from family, Maintaining social distance from family and others was a foremost measures respondents had to take after being infected. It went against their existing socio-cultural norms since it was common in their society to meet a family member during illness. One respondent (Age: 24, Sex: Female) said, "I, along

with my husband, both were infected in my house. The only person except us was there our five years old child. It was so hard for us to maintain social distance from him. Because he wouldn't be able to understand what social distance is. He used to cry now and then to come close to us. Since there were none to look after him, I even had to feed him several times after being infected. Observing all these experiences I feel like crying." (Indepth Interview:2021)

Another respondent (Age: 22, Sex: Female) said that she was very much fond of with her father. But, after being infected, she couldn't even get close to him. That hurts her emotionally. Death figures caused by covid suggests, many people around the world lost their family members and loved ones so among my research respondents too. In the field it is observed that due to covid many people lost their loved ones which impacted emotional wellbeing of them. Addressing the worst experience of life, one 24 years old female student said, "I was a pregnant woman of eight months while I got infected by covid. So, after passing several days in isolation from my family, one day I felt like my children stopped moving inside my belly, I went to meet with a gynecologist and after completing some diagnosis doctors told me that, my conceived baby has dead. Suddenly for a second, I felt like I'm nowhere in this world. My baby was supposed to come into my hand within two months but covid took him away from me". (Indepth Interview:2022)

This study also found, respondents celebrating religious rituals like eid-ul-fitr, eid-ul-adha, etc away from family due to covid. It is noted that in the research area there is a culture and age-old tradition to celebrate these religious festivals with family members, for this celebration university stay closed and the students come back to their One respondent said, "I was in my mess during isolation which was far away from my home. On Eid-ul adha day, my parents joined with me in messenger video call. They were literally crying for me to go back my home. Seeing my parents crying together I also cried that day. I knew, at that time that was the right decision to stay away from them. But still, it made me so much emotional". (Indepth Interview:2022)

Conclusion

This study suggests, during covid infection respondent's mental health was faced a lot of challenges with physical health. We've found, most of the respondents tried to hide or hidden the news of being infected from the neighbors to avoid behavioral changes by community. Receiving sympathy and physical care from the surrounding community to recover from the illness was expected in the respondents' society before covid-19. But, according to the

most respondents' view, with this covid infection, all the customs and cultural norms broke down which brought up sufferings to the infected students social, Psychological and emotional wellbeing. Apart from that, experiences like rumors and update regarding covid in various social networking platform, news agency, satellite TV channels, being isolated from the family and community, struggles in getting proper medication, fear of death all these causes sufferings the mental health of respondents.

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