

Original Paper

Effect of Pandemics on the Psychological Well-Being of University Students; A Case of Covid-19 on A Sample of Kampala International University Students in Uganda

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Abstract

The study was set out to examine the effect of pandemics on the psychological well-being of university students; a case of covid-19 on a sample of Kampala International University students in Uganda. The purpose of the study was to examine the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the psychological well-being of Kampala International University students in Uganda.

The study design comprised a combination of descriptive research designs and both qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed. A sample size of 50 was used. Data was collected using self-administer questionnaires, interviews, and a review of related literature.

The study findings revealed, 5(10%) of the respondents strongly disagreed, 3(6%) disagreed, another proportion of the respondents 17(34%) agreed and the majority of the respondents 25(50%) strongly agreed that students completely get absorbed in whatever they're doing. This information implied that engagement is about being completely absorbed by present work. When we are occupied in particular activities that play to our strengths, we can feel a state called flow. When we are in flow, we reach our peak and we feel less anxious this was key to maintaining a balanced psychological state during the covid-19 era. According to the study findings, 9(18%) strongly disagreed, 12(24%) disagreed, 4(8%) were not sure, 16(32%) agreed and the rest of the respondents 9(18) strongly agreed with the statement that positive relationships are a crucial part of our sense of wellbeing and happiness during lockdown. Those people who maintain strong and positive relationships are generally happier in life. 20(57.3%) of the participants were in agreement that students enforced to stay home for longer periods resulted in psychological distress 11(31.3%) were in disagreement and 4(11.4%) remained neutral. Therefore, staying home for a long period of time during the COVID-19 lockdown exacerbated psychological distress among university students such as stress, loneliness, anxiety, fear, depression, panic, and so on

The study concluded that the prevalence of COVID-19 risk perception among students on the Kampala International University campus is high, which positively translated into higher levels of compliance with COVID-19 protocols deployed on the various Kampala International University campuses.

The study recommends that comprehensive psychological support programs should be developed collaboratively in providing services to reduce psychological distress following the crisis and improve coping skills. A better understanding of the psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on university students could contribute to design more effective interventions that improve mental health in this population.

Keywords

COVID-19, Pandemics, Lockdown, Psychological well-being, multi-dimensional

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 virus infection was declared a pandemic by the WHO on the 11th of March 2020 [1]. The pandemic spread rapidly in Asia, Europe, America, and then Africa [2]. Uganda reported its first case in March 2020. The government of Uganda declared that from midnight of Sunday 22nd March 2020, all passenger flights entering and leaving Uganda were banned. Only cargo planes were allowed in and out of Entebbe International Airport. Also banned were entries into Uganda by anyone other than truck drivers, by land or water. Pedestrians were also prohibited from entry into the country from the neighboring countries. On 25th March 2020, all public passenger transport was suspended, non-food stuff vending in public markets was closed to the general public, and food vendors were cautioned against making unnecessary trips to and from home [3].

At the height of the pandemic, nearly 90% of students worldwide were affected by the closure of their institutions of learning [4].

There has been a call for a better understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on student psychological status [5]. Since the outbreak of Covid-19, research has shown the psychological impact of the pandemic on university students and discussed the coping solutions. For instance, disruptions in academic processes due to Covid-19 pandemic have increased student anxiety [6], especially for those without adequate social support [7]. According to the research done by Najjuka [8]. On the Ugandan university students, the prevalence of mental symptoms was high, with three-quarters of the sample having symptoms; anxiety was highest, followed by depression, and then stress.

A better understanding of the psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on university students could contribute to design more effective interventions that improve the well-being of students in higher institutions

1.1 Problem Statement

The psychological well-being of university students has been greatly affected during the coronavirus period. Bowman [9] pointed out that psychological well-being makes a contribution to many outcomes in a student's life, including improved physical and mental health, increased life satisfaction, and

increased social support. Psychological well-being research has largely focused on college students and young adults in developed countries and, there has been little research on the self-reported psychological well-being of student adolescents, particularly in developing countries [10]. The outbreak of COVID-19 and measures attempting to deal with the pandemic such as quarantine, social distancing, suspension of schools, and physical social networks have led to diverse psychological problems like fear, anxiety, depression, and sleep problems [11]. Previous studies have indicated a relatively high prevalence of depression and anxiety among university students [12]. In a study conducted at KIU and other three universities in Western Uganda, the prevalence of depression among university students ranged between 4.0 and 80.7%, it has been much higher among students during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic [08]. Furthermore, according to this study more than three-quarters of university students are having mental symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress during COVID-19 in Uganda.

Covid-19 pandemic emerged at the end of 2019, therefore literature on the effect of pandemics on the psychological wellbeing of students seems quite limited, it is considered important by the researcher to investigate and understand the effect of COVID 19 on the psychological well-being of students during COVID 19 period. Since the evolution of the pandemic is uncertain and effects on psychological well-being may be long-term, it is crucial to study the most effective interventions at the school level, identifying the most vulnerable groups and planning for long-term psychological services to control and reduce fear, and psychological problems [13]. There is therefore need to establish the status of the psychological well-being of students during the covid-19 period hence measures and strategies to attenuate the COVID-19 effects on the psychological well beings of the students.

1.2 Study Objectives

- 1) To examine the multi-dimensional psychological well-being levels amongst university students during the COVID-19 period at Kampala International University
- 2) To explore the factors that affect psychological well-being of university students during the COVID-19 period
- 3) To explore the students' perceptual experiences towards COVID 19 at Kampala International University

2. Literature Review

2.1 Psychological Well-being

It is the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively. Sustainable well-being does not require individuals to feel good all the time; the experience of painful emotions (For example, disappointment, failure and grief) is a normal part of life, and being able to manage these negative or painful emotions is essential for long-term well-being.

Psychological well-being is, however, compromised when negative emotions are extreme or very long lasting and interfere with a person's ability to function in his or her daily life [14]. Psychological

well-being is usually conceptualized as some combination of positive affective states such as happiness (the hedonic perspective) and functioning with optimal effectiveness in individual and social life (the eudaimonic perspective). As summarized by WHO (2009), Psychological well-being is about lives going well.

It is the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively. By definition therefore, people with high PWB report feeling happy, capable, well-supported, satisfied with life, and so on; Uyeki TM (2014) review also claims the consequences of PWB to include better physical health, mediated possibly by brain activation patterns, neurochemical effects and genetic factors.

Psychological well-being (PWB) is defined as one's level of psychological happiness/health, encompassing life satisfaction, and feelings of accomplishment. At the risk of being dualistic and separating physical well-being from PWB, it is helpful to note that physical well-being encompasses physical health, including disease status, fitness level, and ability to perform activities of daily living (ADL). PWB encompasses the person's perspective on life, including not only perceptions of physical health but also of self-esteem, self-efficacy, relationships with others, and satisfaction with life. A monistic perspective, wherein it is recognized that physical well-being and PWB are integrally interrelated, is preferable [15].

2.2 Corona virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Corona viruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several corona viruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS).

Corona viruses belong to the Coronaviridae family in the Nidovirales order. Corona represents crown-like spikes on the outer surface of the virus; thus, it was named as a corona virus. Corona viruses are minute in size (65–125 nm in diameter) and contain a single-stranded RNA as a nucleic material, size ranging from 26 to 32kbs in length. The subgroups of the coronavirus family are alpha (α), beta (β), gamma (γ) and delta (δ) coronavirus. The severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV), H5N1 influenza A, H1N1 2009, and Middle East respiratory syndrome corona virus (MERS-CoV) cause acute lung injury (ALI) and acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) which leads to pulmonary failure and result in fatality [16].

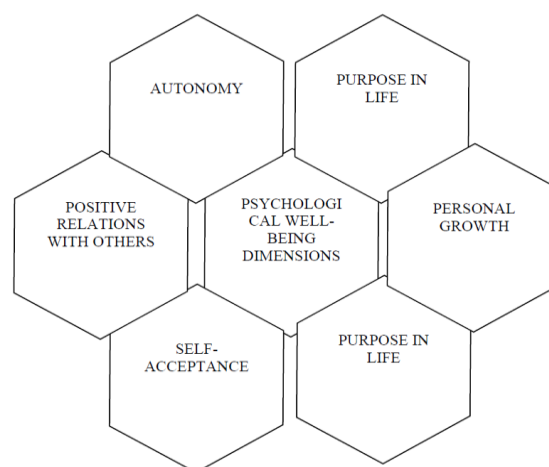
Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is defined as an illness caused by a novel coronavirus called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2; formerly called 2019-nCoV), which was first identified amid an outbreak of respiratory illness cases in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. According to World Health Organization (2020), it was initially reported to the WHO on December 31, 2019. On January 30, 2020, the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global health emergency. On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, its first such designation since declaring H1N1 influenza a pandemic in 2009 [17].

2.3 A Multidimensional Approach to Well-being

Given these benefits of positive education, universities need to consider how to best build and support student well-being. Researchers in the field of positive psychology have suggested that well-being is best characterized as a profile of indicators across multiple domains, rather than as a single factor [18]. There are both theoretical and practical reasons for approaching well-being as a multidimensional construct across valued life domains [18]. On the theoretical side, well-being is an abstract construct that includes both feeling good and functioning well. Well-being cannot be defined by a single measure, but is comprised of various aspects that are more readily measured. Unidimensional measures such as life satisfaction are strongly affected by a person's mood at the time, and ignore other aspects of well-being. In fact, multidimensional measures of well-being are only moderately correlated with life satisfaction [18].

2.4 Ryff's Model of Psychological Well-Being

One comprehensive and frequently cited model of psychological wellbeing is the model of Ryff (1989). Our study utilizes Ryff's 42-item psychological well-being Scale (PWBS), which is based upon her model of psychological wellbeing across six dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (Ryff, 1989). The development of the six dimensions in Ryff's model of psychological well-being stems from the theories of Maslow, Rogers, Jung, Allport, Erikson, Buhler, Neugarten, and Jahoda as PWB encompasses self-actualization, fully functioning, individuation, maturity, psychosocial development, life fulfillment, personality change, and criteria for positive mental health [19]. The PWBS and its dimensions have been validated in multiple languages and cultures. Kallay and Rus (2014) translated the PWBS into Romanian. Though the model did not fit perfectly, they found evidence of a cross-cultural convergence of psychological well-being, especially in the dimensions of personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.



Source: [20].

3. Research Method

The study design comprised of a combination of descriptive research designs and both qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed. A sample size of 50 was used. Data was collected using self-administer questionnaires, interviews and review of related literature. Qualitative approach was used to capture students' views, attitudes and experiences during covid 19 period. The study constituted 50 respondents. It comprised of 05(five)University Management, 23(twenty-three) Students, 15(fifteen)Academic teaching staff, 07(seven)non-teaching staff. Data was categorized according to the similarity of responses given and then properly recorded, coded, edited, analyzed and different themes were developed

4. Discussion of Study Findings

4.1 Examining the Multi-dimensional Psychological Well-being Levels amongst University Students during the COVID-19 Period at Kampala International University

The findings revealed that there are different experiences of university students. 8(16%) disagreed, another proportion of the respondents 42(84%) agreed that students completely get absorbed in whatever they're doing. The information implied that engagement is about being completely absorbed by a present work and students who were fully engaged in different work/tasks, enjoyed a stable psychological state.

According to the study findings, 9(18%) strongly disagreed, 12(24%) disagreed, 4(8%) were not sure, 16(32%) agreed and the rest of the respondents 9(18) strongly agreed with the statement that positive relationships are crucial part of our sense of wellbeing and happiness during lockdown.

Those students who maintained strong and positive relationships are generally happier in life. The study findings are in line with [20]. who asserts that Positive emotion, assessed by reported feelings experienced over the past few weeks, was generally associated with many of the outcomes, including life satisfaction, hope, gratitude, school engagement, physical vitality, and physical activity. 20(57.3%) of the participants were in agreement that students enforced to stay home for longer period resulted in psychological distress 11(31.3%) were in disagreement and 4(11.4%) remained neutral. Therefore, staying home for a long period of time during the COVID-19 lockdown exacerbated psychological distress among university students such as stress, loneliness, anxiety, fear, depression, panic, and so on

4.2 Exploring the Students' Perceptual Experiences towards COVID-19 at Kampala International University

The study intended to establish whether female students perceive a higher degree of risk than male counterparts and according the finding, 5(10%) of the respondents strongly disagreed, 1(2%) disagreed, and 4(8%) were not sure. 3(6%) agreed and the majority of the respondents 37 (74%) strongly agreed that female students perceive a higher degree of risk than male counterparts. This, therefore, means that Students' risk perceptions of COVID-19 are influenced by several factors such as sex, age, level of study/education, COVID-19-related knowledge, and the use of professional platforms and social media.

According to finding, 37(60%) of the respondents agreed. However, 02(4%) were not sure while 11(22%) were in disagreement. This implies that students who used free media websites, or community information platforms as their main media information sources had a higher degree of perceived risk level. Therefore, seems the dire economic situation was more prominent in students' risk assessment than the risk of the disease. One respondent put it: *"I don't fear it anymore. The current situation has proven that we need to coexist with it because people are dying from mental illnesses, police brutality, lack of food and access to health care services instead."* Female respondent-18-25 years. The study findings revealed that, 30(60%) of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that they get upset when they think about the Coronavirus (COVID-19) whereas 20(40%) disagreed. This implies that COVID-19 mortality and morbidity have increasingly become a hard pill to swallow by students. One young female respondent said: *"Am not scared anymore because I don't see anyone dying, or no one in Uganda coming out to say how it all was, usually there are people among the many who will come out to speak sincerely and tell people to keep safe"*.

5. Conclusions

The researcher found out that anxiety, depression, and a desire to acquire skills to manage the transition to college have been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. It gives an idea that due to overstay at home, positive relations with family members, roommates and partners are getting affected. Talking about Environmental Mastery (Ryff, 1989), students are desperately wanting to get back into normal life. Their psychological well-being is getting affected as most of them faced difficulty in coping up with the new environment and they are tired of the Covid-19 situation. While some of them tried to do something productive, others also felt that 2020 was a year wasted from their life. Due to these issues, environmental mastery was a difficult customer for them to deal with. As most of the students were anxious about the situation, their psychological well-being could be affected negatively. Only 21% of students think that maintaining a healthy lifestyle and psychological well-being was not a difficult task for them during Covid-19 while 79% of students think it is a difficult task. Along with this, students were more concerned about their job, career, and education than contracting Covid-19 which is also a concern area for personal growth. Stress and anxiety increased drastically among the students due to their academic, social life and career dissatisfaction during Covid19.

In the present study, we can conclude that although university students are not COVID-19 high-risk groups, they were psychologically affected by the pandemic. According to our findings, University students are a COVID-19 mental health vulnerable group that requires immediate attention and psychological support. It is important that universities set up support groups and have professionals help with counseling department to affected students.

The study concludes that the prevalence of COVID-19 risk perception among students on university campuses at Kampala International University is high, which positively translated into higher levels of

compliance with COVID-19 protocols deployed on the various Kampala International University campuses. On the contrary, non-altruistic attitudes and views held by students who have low COVID-19 risk perception could, unfortunately, manifest in high-risk behaviors that could counter the mitigation measures against the spread and transmission of COVID-19 on Kampala International University campuses and similar settings in Uganda. Continual reassurance of students about a better future and hope for disease alleviation should be a common theme in institutions. Failure to protect young people's mental health and capitalize on their vitality may result in long-term loss of future productivity.

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