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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT OF SOCIAL DISTANCING AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

This paper focuses primarily on the psychological effects due to social distancing. As the outbreak of COVID-19 ensues, questions are being raised for the safety and security of people suffering from various psychological issues like depression, anxiety, loneliness and so on. While such issues are being deliberated upon, we are urged to deliberate on how isolation can affect mental health in general, especially among younger people. The goal of this paper is to address the mental effects on adolescents who might be even more ill-equipped to deal with psychological issues. It also deals with career and work-related issues that students have to worry about due to social distancing. The research methodology used in the paper includes questionnaires, surveys and literature review to understand the perspective of individuals. The paper shall also be open for further discussion on similar issues in the face of a global pandemic.

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Introduction:-

The following research focuses on the psychological effects due to social distancing among adolescents of age 13 to 20. During the outbreak of COVID-19 people are forced to keep a social distance among each other.

What is SOCIAL DISTANCING?

Social distancing, also called 'physical distancing' which means keeping space between yourself and other people outside of your home. To practice social or physical distancing:

1. People have to stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arm's length) from other people.
2. Gathering in groups is not allowed in public or office spaces.
3. People have to stay out of crowded places and avoid mass gatherings.

Social distancing in addition to COVID-19 has led to an alarming state of distress among people of all age groups. Since prehistoric age human beings are social creatures and "...have evolved over millennia to rely on complex social interactions with those within our own species" (Khan). This has been a vital part of our evolution and forms the basis of most societies. It is believed by psychologists that human interaction is important for mental health and for the body to thrive.

Loneliness is not just a feeling; it is a biological warning from your body to seek out other people. With the onset of a pandemic that restricts us to the confines of our home, it is especially those stranded or living alone who are missing out on an "essential human connection(s) - touch" (Khan). Human touch releases a hormone in the body called oxytocin. Dr. Amir Khan notes in this article for Al Jazeera, "It is oxytocin that triggers the bond between a

mother and an infant, and it may also play a role in recognition, sexual arousal, trust and anxiety.” Some additional research has also shown that lower levels of oxytocin have resulted in higher levels of stress and anxiety.

The current scale of Social Distancing is unprecedented and may lead to significant and lasting negative psychological effects. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and a recent review of studies about quarantine during infectious disease outbreaks, social distancing can lead to a higher prevalence of:

1. Anxiety
2. Depression
3. Anger
4. Loneliness
5. Feelings of frustration
6. Boredom

At the same time, social distancing could carry some benefits for certain individuals, such as an increased sense of well-being from time spent with family or the ability to focus on self-care, and a greater sense of altruism as individuals learn to view social distancing as a way to protect others from illness and harm.

Methodology:-

In this research paper, I plan to understand and elucidate more on the psychological issues faced by people due to social distancing. I aim to focus on the problems that adolescents are facing during lockdown and to suggest some possible ways to improve the condition of people. For the following research I shall use a survey method with the help of a questionnaire designed specifically for the people between 13 to 20 years of age.

It is very important to understand the psychological and social effect on people due to social distancing as it influences the mental health of the youth of the world. The following phenomenon also has a direct and significant impact on the economy of the world.

With the following research, I hope to determine some possible ways to overcome the situation faced by every individual and also to verify the various psychological and mental issues that the people are experiencing nowadays. I also aim to make the following research open ended for other discussions due to ethical questions.

A survey in the form of a questionnaire is the best approach as it includes questions based on the secondary research conducted on topics of isolation and mental health. Additionally, the on-going COVID-19 pandemic is being dealt with in India with strict lockdown regulations. Hence, a questionnaire circulated online is our most viable option. The following questionnaire also makes it easier for the respondents to answer the queries without being concerned much about any technicalities. The limitations of my discovery can be brought down to two factors: First, the pandemic prevented methods such as psychological testing and observation. We can only rely on the responses which may or may not result in accurate conclusions. Second, the sample of respondents, aged between 13-20, may be reluctant to share certain information or may treat the survey with varying levels of interest or sincerity.

Here is a sample copy of the questionnaire that was distributed among 35 respondents:

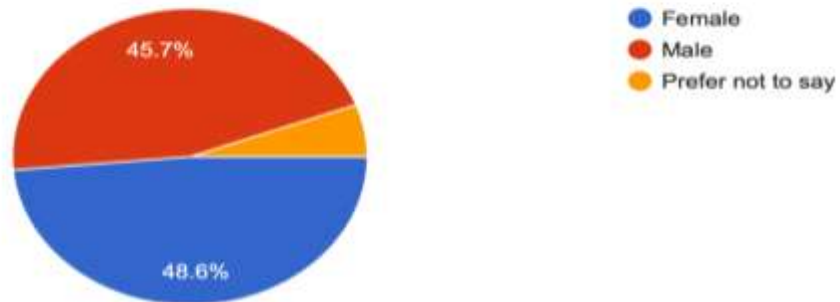
- Age Group *
 - 18-20
 - 15-17
 - 14-12
 - Other
- Gender *
 - Female
 - Male
 - Prefer not to say
 - Other
- Are you a

<input type="radio"/>	Student
<input type="radio"/>	College going
<input type="radio"/>	Employed
<input type="radio"/>	Other
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	During lockdown what do you prefer doing in leisure time? *
<input type="radio"/>	Social Media
<input type="radio"/>	Netflix
<input type="radio"/>	Sleeping
<input type="radio"/>	Reading books
<input type="radio"/>	Talking to friends
<input type="radio"/>	Other
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Are you able to concentrate on studies? *
<input type="radio"/>	Yes
<input type="radio"/>	No
<input type="radio"/>	Maybe
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	How do you feel about the social distancing phenomenon? *
<input type="radio"/>	Lonely
<input type="radio"/>	Frustrated
<input type="radio"/>	Anxious
<input type="radio"/>	Bored
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Are you worried about your health and safety? *
<input type="radio"/>	Yes
<input type="radio"/>	No
<input type="radio"/>	Maybe
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Are you worried about the impact of COVID-19 on your career? *
<input type="radio"/>	Yes
<input type="radio"/>	No
<input type="radio"/>	Maybe
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Do you feel that the extra time you get is helping you in some way? *
<input type="radio"/>	Yes
<input type="radio"/>	No
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	How do you feel about studying online and work from home? *
<input type="radio"/>	Stressed
<input type="radio"/>	Relieved
<input type="radio"/>	Exhausting
<input type="radio"/>	Other:
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	How is your sleeping pattern affected during lockdown? *
<input type="radio"/>	Sleeping more
<input type="radio"/>	Sleeping less
<input type="radio"/>	Unable to sleep
<input type="radio"/>	Disturbed hours of sleeping
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Has your screening time affected you? *
<input type="radio"/>	Negatively
<input type="radio"/>	Positively
<input type="radio"/>	Not in any way
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Do you feel that social distancing has affected your mental health in any way? *

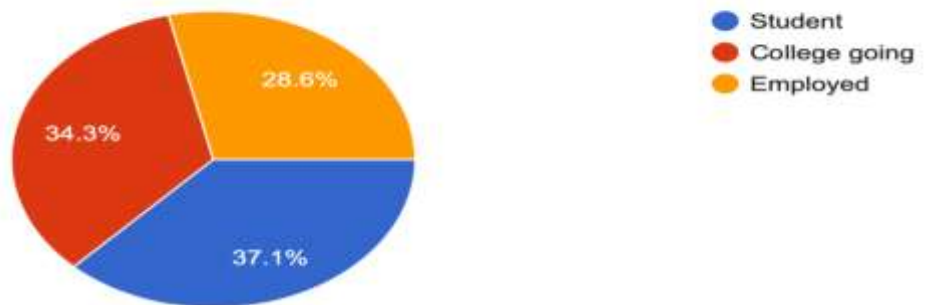
Result:-

The following pie-charts demonstrated the responses we received in each category or question of the survey. The 22nd question, which was of open-ended nature has been represented by summarizing the inputs of each respondent into four groups.

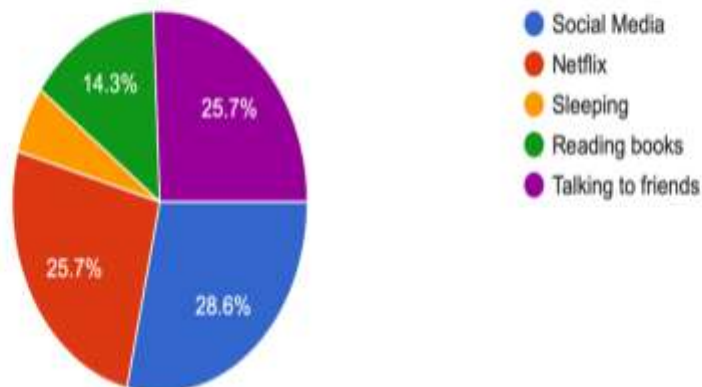
Gender
35 responses



Are you a
35 responses

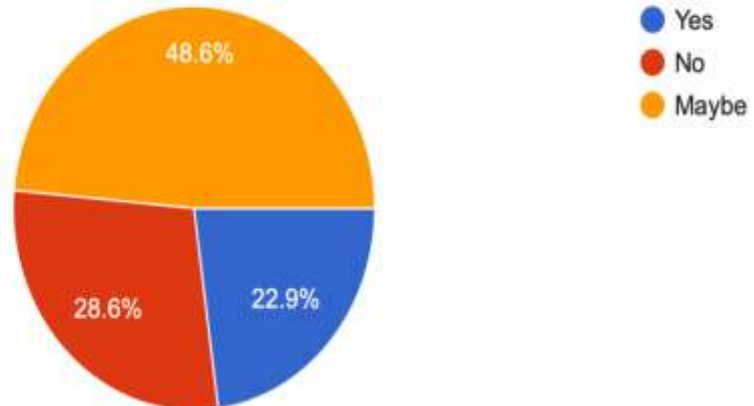


During lockdown what do you prefer doing in leisure time?
35 responses



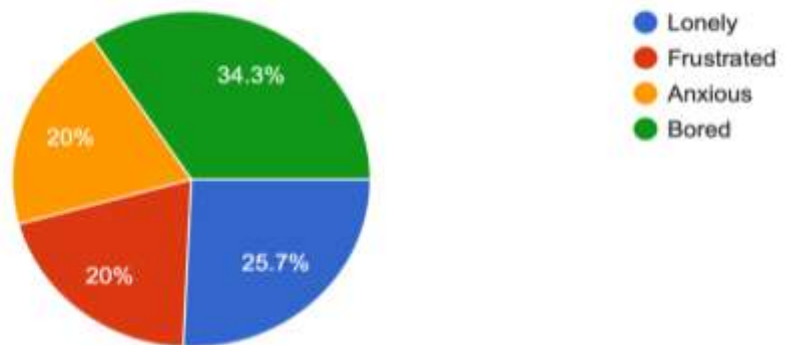
Are you able to concentrate on studies?

35 responses



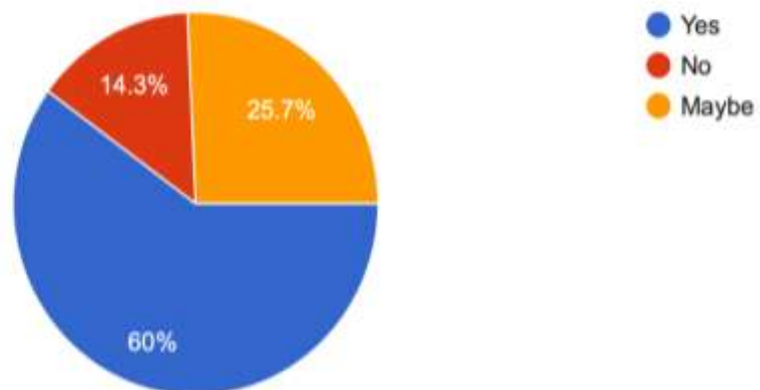
How do you feel about the social distancing phenomenon?

35 responses



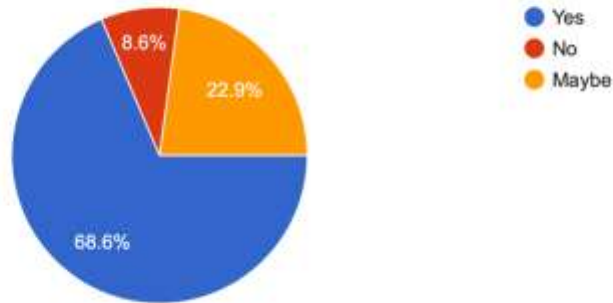
Are you worried about your health and safety?

35 responses



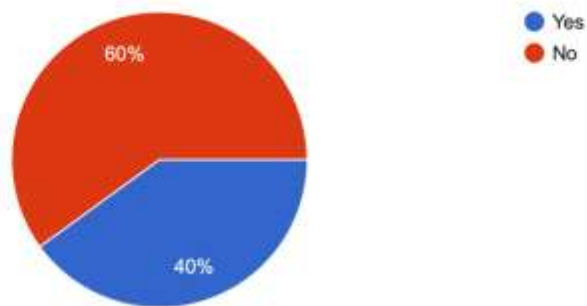
Are you worried about the impact of COVID-19 on your career?

35 responses



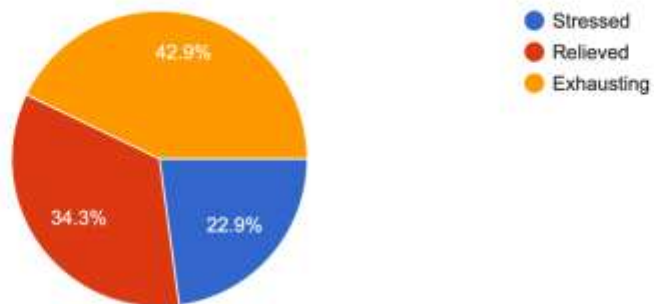
Do you feel that the extra time you get is helping you in some way?

35 responses



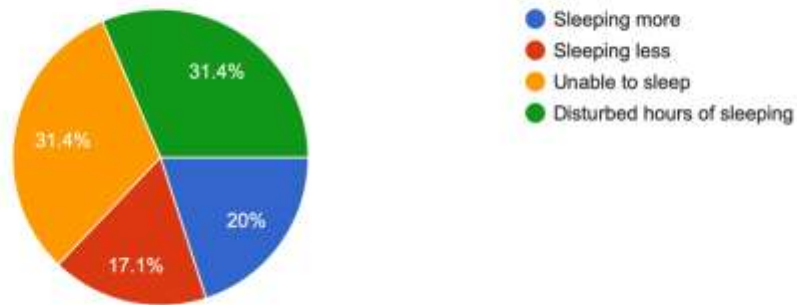
How do you feel about studying online and work from home?

35 responses



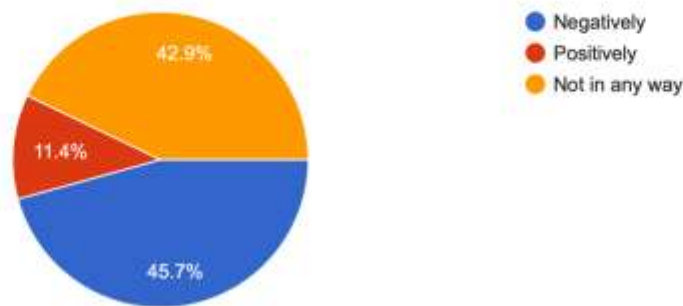
How is your sleeping pattern affected during lockdown?

35 responses



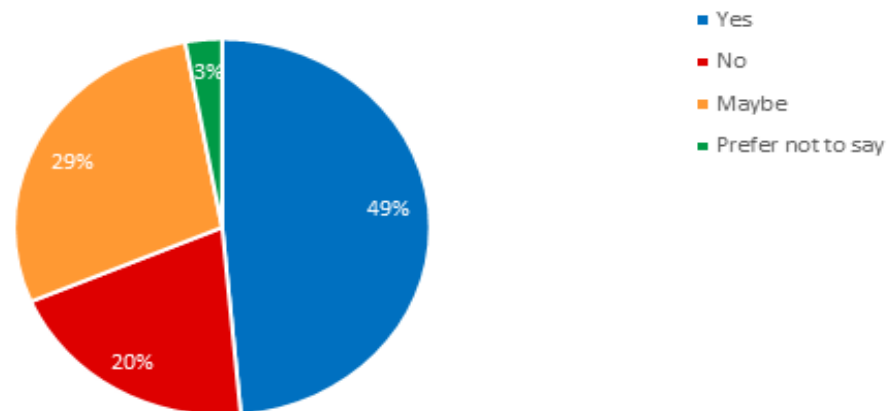
Has your screening time affected you

35 responses



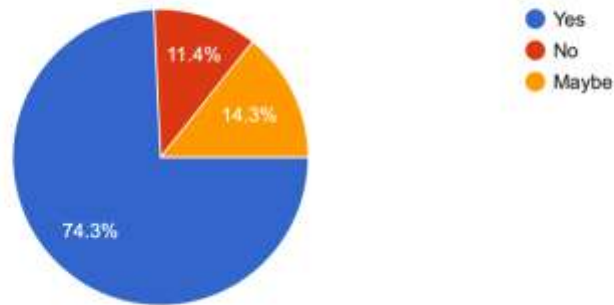
Do you feel that social distancing has affected your mental health in any way?

35 reponses



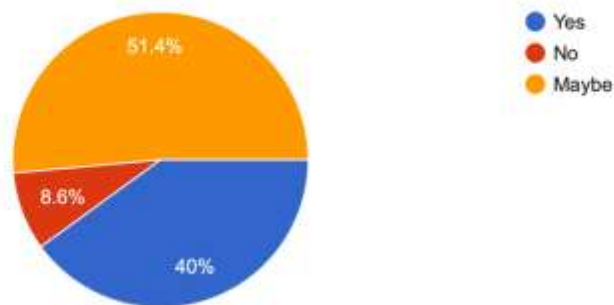
Are you worried about the impact of COVID-19 on the economy?

35 responses



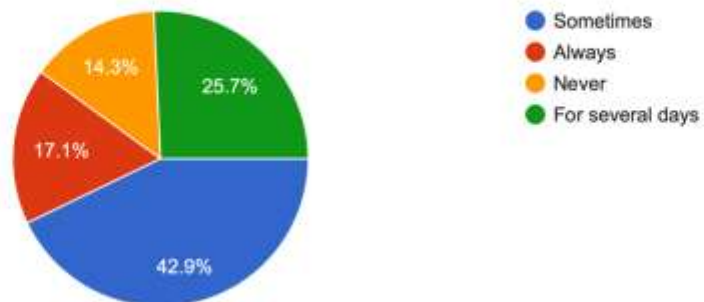
Do you feel safe by staying at home?

35 responses



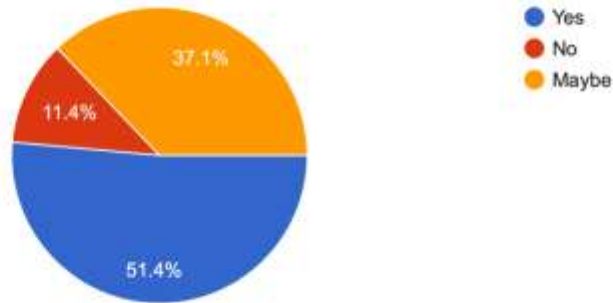
Are you worried about your examinations in school or any tests you had to take ?

35 responses



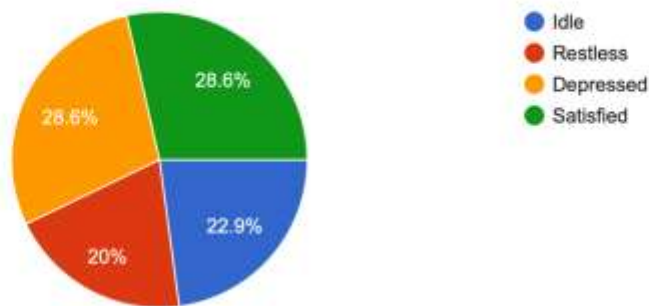
Are you worried about the impact of it on your family's health and safety ?

35 responses



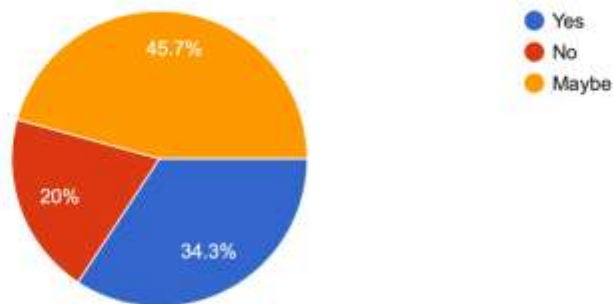
Has staying at home made you feel

35 responses



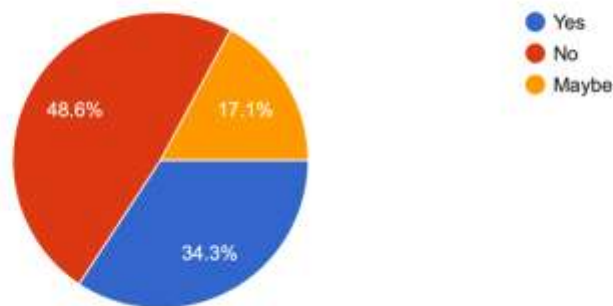
Do you feel that social distancing has helped you become close to your family?

35 responses



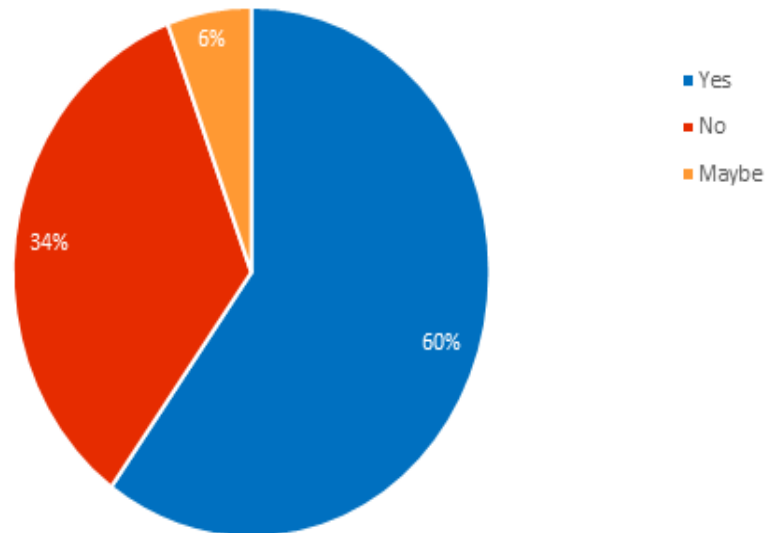
Do you feel any change in your perspective from lockdown?

35 responses



Has social distancing affected your friendships in any way?

35 responses

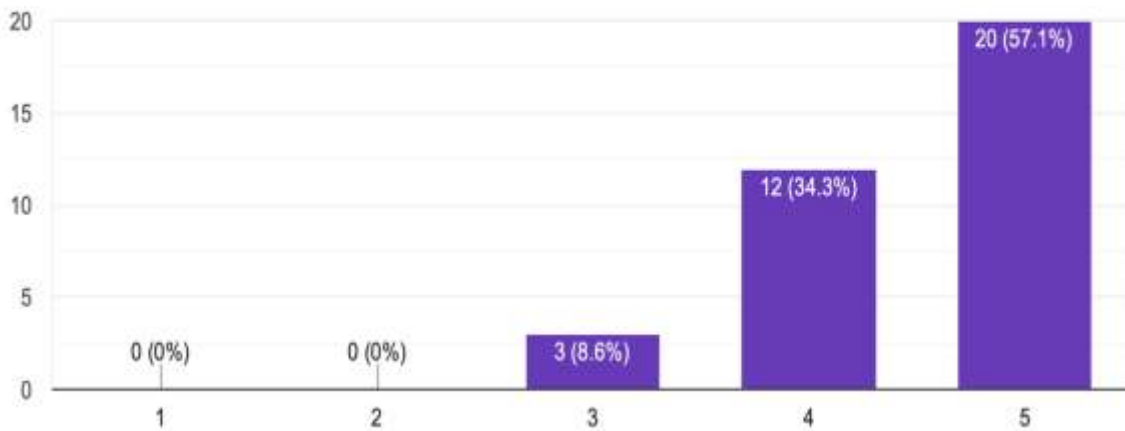


Can you suggest any way to improve the psychological problems experienced during lockdown?

1. Respondents 1, 3, 19, and 34 suggested exercises or other physical activities such as dancing to alleviate stress.
2. Respondents 2, 8, 10, 13, 22, 23, 27, 31 and 35 recommended recreational activities, hobby-building, etc.
3. Respondents 4, 7, 11, 12, 16, 17, 20, 21, 24, 29 and 32 suggested speaking to a therapist, friends or family members, and keeping a positive mindset.
4. Respondents 5 and 30 advised focusing on academic growth and studying, while respondents 6, 9, 14, 15, 18, 25, 26, 28 and 33 did not have any suggestions.

Lastly how would you rate this survey?

35 responses



Discussion:-

With the help of the findings in the questionnaire, I am able to approach the solutions that many people have come up with to improve one's mental health by engaging in some recreational activities like participating in community work, getting more involved with hobbies, practising things that one is passionate about or learning a new skill.

I analysed that most of the people are in a stressful condition regarding their and their family's health and safety and are also extremely depressed and suffering from boredom during the lockdown. The adolescents are also anxious about their further studies and career due to the economic impact of COVID-19.

But there is also a silver lining to this stressful condition. Due to social distancing people may not be able to maintain a physical contact with each other but with many of the social networking sites people have maintained a close contact with their friends and the significant social distancing and lockdown has somewhat made people's bond with their friends and family stronger.

Conclusion:-

To conclude I must contextualize that people indeed are facing various psychological issues due to social distancing which is having a deteriorating effect on the mental health of the adolescents as they are feeling depressed, lonely, and exhausting with the stay at home condition.

Also, the findings in the result section indicate that most people have not experienced any positive effect due to lockdown. I think that it is imperative for the people to understand the effect of social distancing on their mental health and acknowledge it. It is also important for students not to be too anxious about their career and further studies as it will have a negative impact on their psychological and physical health. I feel that social distancing might help people discover some new things about themselves despite the dire consequences of the current pandemic.

In order to improve the following situation, it is crucial for students to engage in satisfying hobbies and also not to engross themselves only in studying. It is a relief that although people are bored, depressed and restless with staying at home they have a feeling of safety. Nonetheless, it is important that the anxiety among students regarding their health should not have a negative effect on their mental health. Henceforth, I would like my readers to address the issues discussed in the following paper and also suggest some creative and innovative ideas to enjoy the extra time that has been awarded during lockdown.

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