



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF COVID-19 AND SOCIAL ISOLATION NORMS ON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN DELHI NCR, INDIA

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Abstract

Adolescence is identified as a transition phase where individuals undergo dramatic changes in terms of their cognitive growth. During this time, the heightened awareness of personal and sexual identity leads to greater prioritization of social interaction and popularity. Self-esteem and confidence are measured on the basis of one's social value which can have both positive and negative impacts. In this paper, we study how individuals going through this complex phase of psychological development are dealing with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. With schools and other educational institutes remaining shut down and social distancing norms established, they are undergoing a phenomenon that has not been experienced by previous generations. Studies on isolation often show psychological outcomes such as low mood, poor sleep quality, impaired immunity and cognitive decline, among other symptoms. In this regard, this paper aims to identify the effect of COVID-19 on high school students of Delhi NCR in India, determining their psychological state and analyzing its impact on academic and interpersonal goals. There is also an attempt to predict repercussions of the same in the foreseeable future. Results are based on a questionnaire that will be distributed among high school students, and the discussion and analysis will be drawn based on an interpretation of the same.

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Introduction:-

Since its outbreak in Wuhan, China towards the end of 2019, the coronavirus pandemic has spread to every corner of the world, evoking a health crisis of a scale which was last witnessed during the Spanish Influenza of the 1920s. The epidemic reached India in the month of March, 2020 with the government announcing a nationwide lockdown with almost immediate effect. The lockdown restricted the movement of the country's 1.3 billion strong population, slowing down the rate of infection. After two months of lockdown, the unlock process began by gradually lifting restrictions on places with little to no cases. The country was divided into three zones, marked red, yellow and green, with green zones having the least restrictions although precautionary measures continue to be intact.

Throughout this time, schools and colleges, among other educational institutes have remained shut and classes are being conducted online. This has put most teenagers or adolescents under strict social isolation. Despite not being the age group at the highest level of risk, they can still be carriers that infect the more vulnerable sections of the

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population. For this reason, their movement has been highly controlled and monitored. However, this leaves a question of how they are coping with the situation in terms of their mental and physical well-being?

To explore the extent of this impact, we have taken six focus areas, based on which this study will be carried out:

COVID has had a detrimental impact on the mental health of students

As high school students who are getting ready to enter the collegiate world, academics are a stressful and pressurizing point that is often the center of focus in their senior year. Coupled with the rapid spread of the coronavirus pandemic, it has fostered an extensive amount of fear and anxiousness in students. According to a study conducted by The University of Sheffield, 40-50% of young people feel significantly more anxious with the ongoing pandemic, in comparison to pre-outbreak.¹ Students are plagued with uncertainty and are forced by circumstance to study for exams and apply for colleges, while being quarantined.

Being accustomed to a social and interactive learning environment, transitioning to an e-learning platform while being confined to their homes has instilled distress across students of all ages. Adding onto their academic induced anxiousness, being isolated from their social environments has left a lingering sense of loneliness. An increase in isolation and loneliness in the quarantined in China showed the consequent increase in the prevalence in depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorders and insomnia.²

Academic pressure on 12th Graders

With the uncertainty that the pandemic brought along, high school seniors have felt the pressure to keep their academics in pristine conditions, despite the unconventional, and less than optimum modes of learning. They must retain their performance, if not improve it. Many were in a period of confusion, with their final board exams to be determined, or college application processes halted. The forced shift to a virtual platform has left a risk of students becoming passive learners, with a loss of interest in their academics and loss of focus in their classes.³ Many students are unable to learn efficiently on virtual platforms, inevitably impacting their grades.

Pressure to be productive all the time

To retain a sense of normalcy, students are throwing themselves into their academics to remain “productive”, to not lag behind in any manner - global pandemic or not. This burst of productivity is fueled by the assumption of returning to ‘normal’ once everything is over. However, a realistic approach makes it evident that the global pandemic has forever changed the world. “While it may feel good in the moment, it is foolish to dive into a frenzy of activity or obsess about your scholarly productivity right now. That is denial and delusion. The emotionally and spiritually sane response is to prepare to be forever changed”⁴ By forcing themselves to do an extensive amount of work, students are under immense pressure to handle the anxiety brought about by COVID-19 and academics, resulting in an abandonment of their mental health.

Pressure of College Applications

The entirety of Grade 12 is dedicated towards boards, with the end goal being that of college. COVID-19 hit the education sector the hardest during the most crucial time of the year: board season. With thousands of seniors stuck in a limbo of uncertainty about boards taking place, entrance exams and college admissions - it stimulated growing apprehension. Additionally, with standardized testing such as the SAT/ACT being cancelled multiple times, students are concerned about their applications. Furthermore, one study shows that there has been a near 30% increase in apprehension about the strength of their applications being impacted from the inability to participate in extracurriculars.⁵ Those interested in applying abroad for their undergraduate degree are now worried about their admissions, scholarships and the finances required for an education from prestigious foreign universities.

Stress of Virtual Classes

An essential component of school is the hands-on, social and interactive environment that it fosters. Physical interaction between teachers, and students is ideally a part and parcel of the classroom. While virtual classes are a

¹ [Young men most likely to break lockdown rules, mental health study shows - Latest - News](#)

² [Social isolation in Covid-19: The impact of loneliness - Debanjan Banerjee, Mayank Rai, 2020](#)

³ [Covid-19: 4 negative impacts and 4 opportunities created for education](#)

⁴ [Why You Should Ignore All That Coronavirus-Inspired Productivity Pressure](#)

⁵ [How Will Covid-19 Affect the Next Round of College Applicants? Here's an Early Look](#)

forced necessity to try to narrow the gap in education as much as possible, it comes with its own set of disadvantages. The method of interactive and integrative learning in physical class cannot be replicated in a virtual one, leading to lower levels of concentration, a lack of interest in academics, and stress induced through the involuntary shift to e-learning.⁶ Additionally, the change to virtual classes creates the issue of the digital divide: especially in India. Having more than 35 crore students in India, a large section belong to low income families that do not necessarily have access to internet or devices to attend virtual school for - leading to a widening gap in their education and furthering their anxiety about their education.

Overview of long term effects

One thing is for certain, COVID-19 has left a permanent imprint in the world: 'normal' will have to be redefined coming out of the pandemic. Even if the virus itself is controlled in the foreseeable future, it will have lasting impacts on humanity, especially the generation that is coming of age amidst such a crisis. "The uncertainty of a new and relatively unknown infection increases the anxiety, which gets compounded by isolation in lockdown."⁷ Humans are inherently social animals, and the sustained period isolation will lead to inevitable long term effects. COVID's impact on mental health can be sustained, with a sharp increase in anxiety, depression and other psychological problems arising. There will have to be a heavy reliance on mental health professionals to be sensitive to the needs of those quarantined and to adhere to their personal and psychological needs.⁸

Keeping in mind the various parameters discussed above, the study aims to identify and analyze the way the socio-emotional and academic aspects of high school students in India has been impacted with the onset of the global pandemic.

Methodology:-

The purpose of this study is to identify the level of impact that COVID-19 has had on adolescent high school students of Delhi NCR in India, and to determine their psychological state and analyze its impact on academic and interpersonal aspects. The methodology used in this study is quantitative methodology. The quantitative data obtained will provide the information on the students' general well-being, the pressure felt by them and how COVID-19 has impacted their mental health. It also covers the six focus areas that have been discussed in elaboration in the previous section of the text. Based on these data, this study also aims to predict any future repercussions of the experiences students are undergoing in the midst of this pandemic.

This project utilizes the questionnaire method of survey. Accordingly, the investigator has created a questionnaire pertaining to the field of investigation and sent it to respondents to collect relevant information and insight from them. The questions are pre-set before being sent to the respondents.

The survey method was chosen due to its various merits and suitability to the nature of research. It provides wide coverage, hence allowing for a truly representative sample for the relevant group or population. It is an economical method as it requires minimal time, money and labour. Data is original as inquirers are directly involved in the collection of it. Additionally, the survey is free from bias of the investigator as questions are interpreted by the respondents in their own way. Survey also maintains the anonymity of respondents thus encouraging them to be truthful. Lastly, questions are simple, short and easy to understand.

However there are disadvantages of the same. The questions in a survey are fixed and no on the spot adjustments are possible. If a question is misunderstood by a respondent, then an incorrect or misleading result can be produced due to lack of clarification. If a respondent says something interesting then this cannot be followed up with further questions on the subject as a survey is a predetermined set of questions and allows no scope for further conversation. Due to the standardised nature of a survey, it cannot be personalised for a respondent. Moreover, respondents may not feel motivated enough to take the questions seriously resulting in ingenuine responses. Lastly, if there is a change in situation, the survey will be unable to capture the same.

While carrying out the survey, the investigator was able to collect responses from the required demographic easily due to the convenient nature of the survey method. Furthermore, it was extremely economical as it required no

⁶ Covid-19: 4 negative impacts and 4 opportunities created for education

⁷ Social isolation in Covid-19: The impact of loneliness - Debanjan Banerjee, Mayank Rai, 2020

⁸ Social isolation in Covid-19: The impact of loneliness - Debanjan Banerjee, Mayank Rai, 2020

additional costs. However, there were problems faced in clarifying the open-ended queries as selected respondents were unsure about what all to include in their response.

A sample of high school students was chosen from the age range of 13-18, for all genders. The sample selected was of urban, educated middle and upper class Indians primarily from the Delhi-NCR region.

A questionnaire was prepared using Google Forms consisting of 19 questions, with 17 close-ended questions and 2 open-ended queries. A blanks sample of the same in given below:

9/27/2020

Impact of COVID-19 on the Mental Health of High School Students

Impact of COVID-19 on the Mental Health of High School Students

This survey attempts to study how high school students, who face various academic and social pressures, are dealing with a pandemic that isolates them from peers and the academic and social environment of school.

All respondents shall remain anonymous, please feel free to answer honestly.

*** Required**

1. Gender *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other: _____

2. Age *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 13
- ☐ 14
- ☐ 15
- ☐ 16
- ☐ 17
- ☐ 18

9/27/2020

Impact of COVID-19 on the Mental Health of High School Students

3. Class *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Grade VII
☐ Grade VIII
☐ Grade IX
☐ Grade X
☐ Grade XI
☐ Grade XII

Rate the statements in the following section:

4. You have been feeling depressed or lacking in motivation since the onset of the pandemic *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

5. Your anxiousness has increased because of COVID-19 compared to earlier *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

9/27/2020

Impact of COVID-19 on the Mental Health of High School Students

6. As a high school student, you feel pressured to maintain your grades *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

7. Academic pressure during the pandemic has had an impact on your mental health *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

8. You are feeling pressured to be more productive during the lockdown period *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

9. Are you worried the pandemic's impact on your college applications? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Somewhat

9/27/2020

Impact of COVID-19 on the Mental Health of High School Students

10. Has the cancellation of standardized testing (e.g. SAT/ACT) made you feel more nervous about applying to colleges? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Somewhat

11. Do you feel more anxious about applying to colleges due to a lot of extracurriculars getting cancelled? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Somewhat

12. Have you been able to keep up with your academics through virtual classes? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Somewhat

13. What are the problems you have faced in attending online classes?

9/27/2020

Impact of COVID-19 on the Mental Health of High School Students

14. Are you feeling too burdened with assignments?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe

15. What other courses or activities have you been taking online outside of school work?

16. Have you stayed in touch with your social group virtually during the lockdown? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Somewhat

17. Has the lockdown made you feel isolated from your friends/family? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Somewhat

9/27/2020

Impact of COVID-19 on the Mental Health of High School Students

18. Has the isolation contributed to any feelings of anxiousness or low moods? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Somewhat

19. What are some ways you have been coping with the pandemic? *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Meditation/Yoga
☐ Eating and Drinking Responsibly
☐ Talking to friends/family
☐ Exercise
☐ Social Media
☐ Busying yourself with work
☐ Engaging in hobbies
☐ Talking about your feelings

Other: ☐ _____

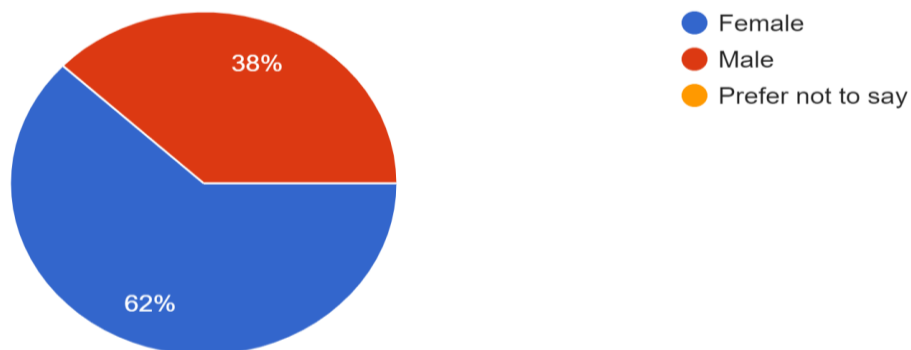
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Google Forms

Result :-**Q1.**

Gender

50 responses

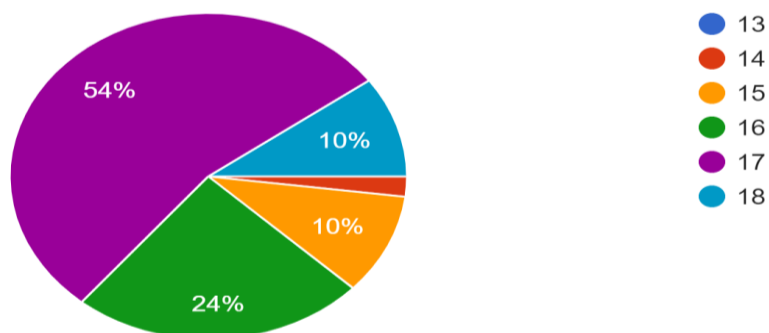


Response	Percentage
Female	62%
Male	38%
Prefer Not to Say	0%

Q2.

Age

50 responses

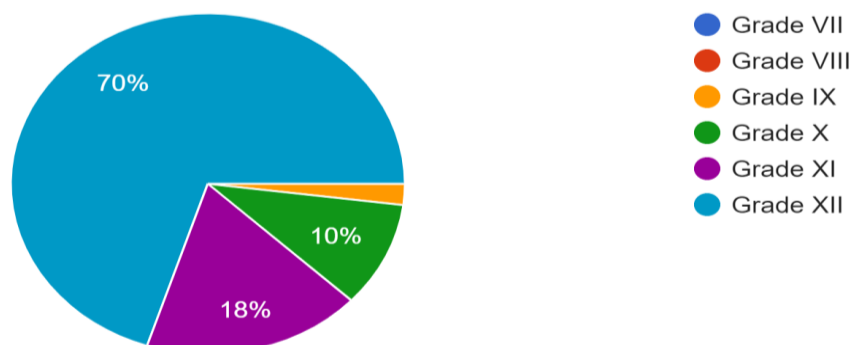


Response	Percentage
13	0%
14	2%
15	10%
16	24%
17	54%
18	10%

Q3.

Class

50 responses

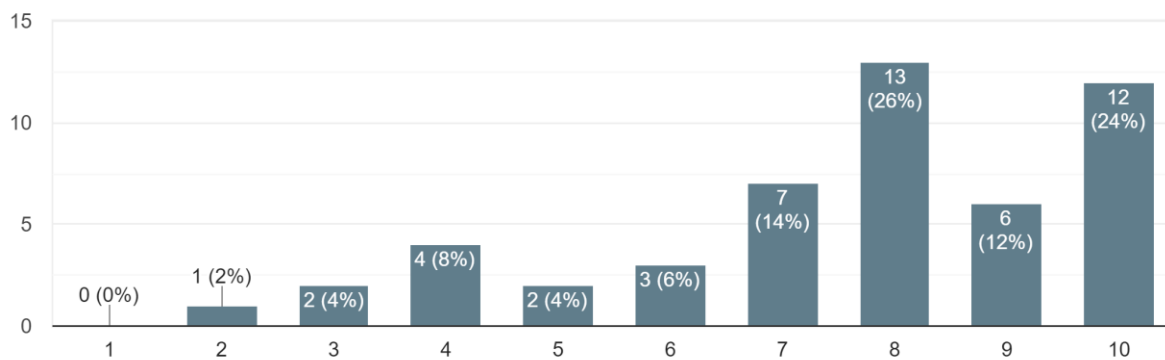


Response	Percentage
Grade VII	0%
Grade VIII	0%
Grade IX	2%
Grade X	10%
Grade XI	18%
Grade XII	70%

Q4.

You have been feeling depressed or lacking in motivation since the onset of the pandemic

50 responses



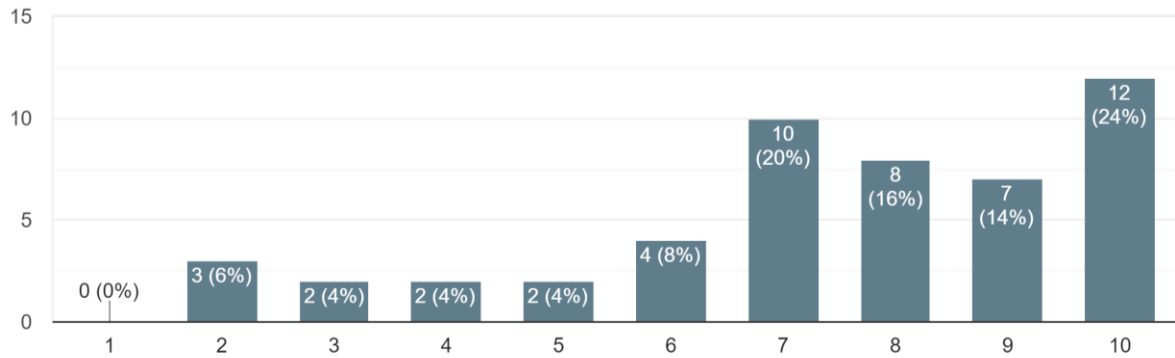
Rating	Percentage
1	0%
2	2%
3	4%
4	8%
5	4%
6	6%
7	14%

8	26%
9	12%
10	24%

Q5.

Your anxiousness has increased because of COVID-19 compared to earlier

50 responses

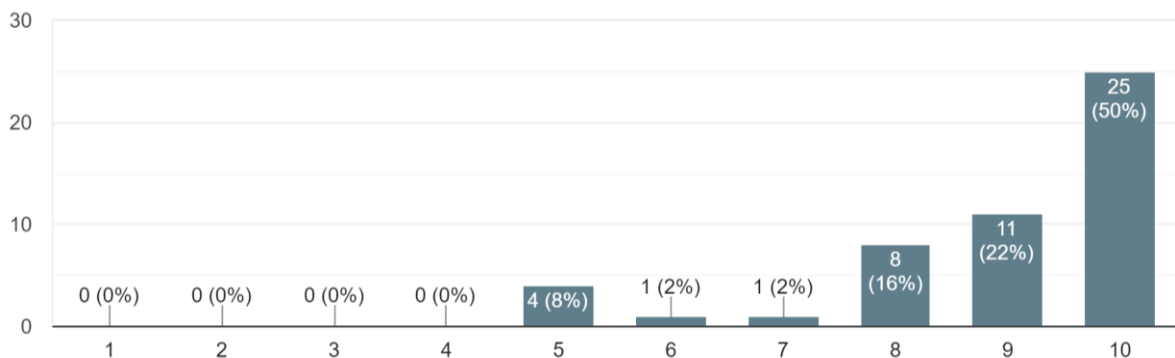


Rating	Percentage
1	0%
2	6%
3	4%
4	4%
5	4%
6	8%
7	20%
8	16%
9	7%
10	24%

Q6.

As a high school student, you feel pressured to maintain your grades

50 responses



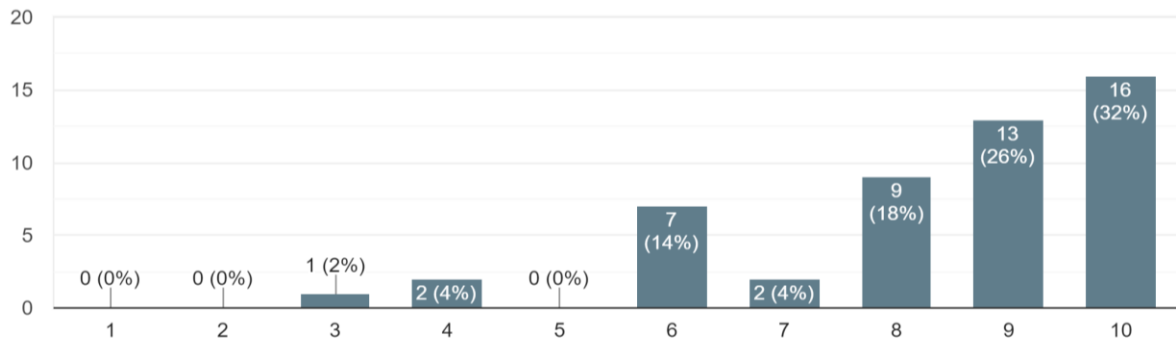
Rating	Percentage
1	0%
2	0%

3	0%
4	0%
5	8%
6	2%
7	2%
8	16%
9	22%
10	50%

Q7.

Academic pressure during the pandemic has had an impact on your mental health

50 responses

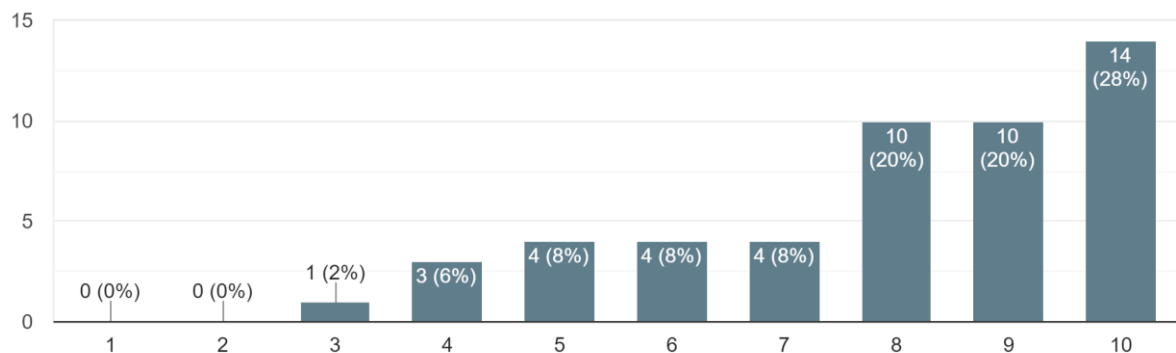


Rating	Percentage
1	0%
2	0%
3	2%
4	4%
5	0%
6	14%
7	4%
8	18%
9	26%
10	32%

Q8.

You are feeling pressured to be more productive during the lockdown period

50 responses

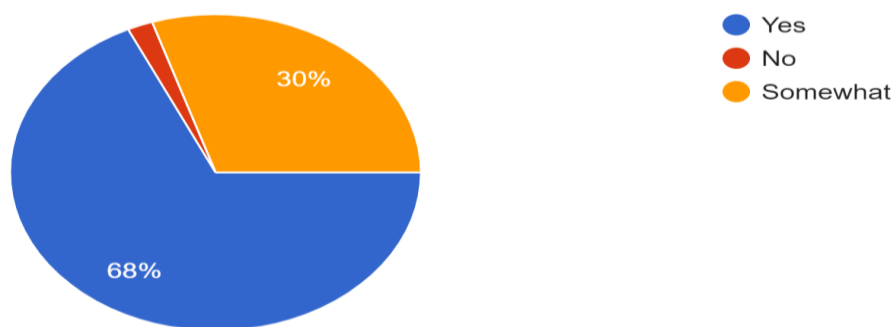


Rating	Percentage
1	0%
2	0%
3	2%
4	6%
5	8%
6	8%
7	8%
8	20%
9	20%
10	28%

Q9.

Are you worried the pandemic's impact on your college applications?

50 responses

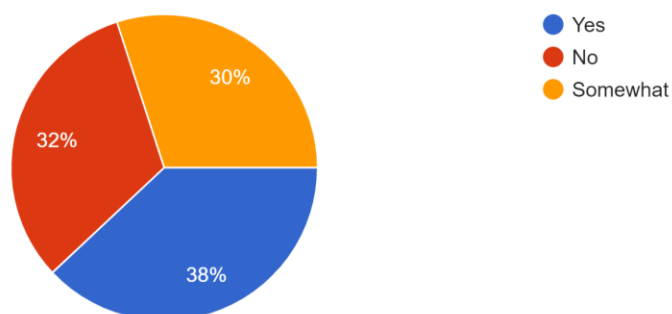


Response	Percentage
Yes	68%
No	30%
Somewhat	2%

Q10.

Has the cancellation of standardized testing (e.g. SAT/ACT) made you feel more nervous about applying to colleges?

50 responses

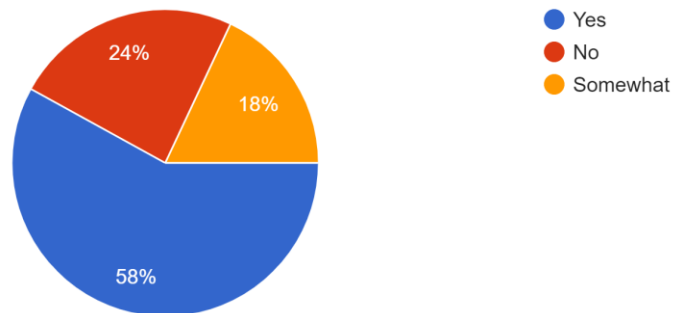


Response	Percentage
Yes	38%
No	32%
Somewhat	30%

Q11.

Do you feel more anxious about applying to colleges due to a lot of extracurriculars getting cancelled?

50 responses

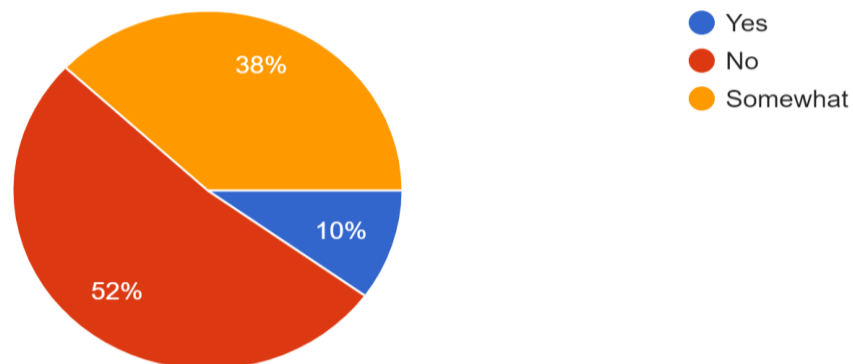


Response	Percentage
Yes	58%
No	24%
Somewhat	18%

Q12.

Have you been able to keep up with your academics through virtual classes?

50 responses



Response	Percentage
Yes	10%
No	52%
Somewhat	38%

Q13. What are the problems you have faced in attending online classes?

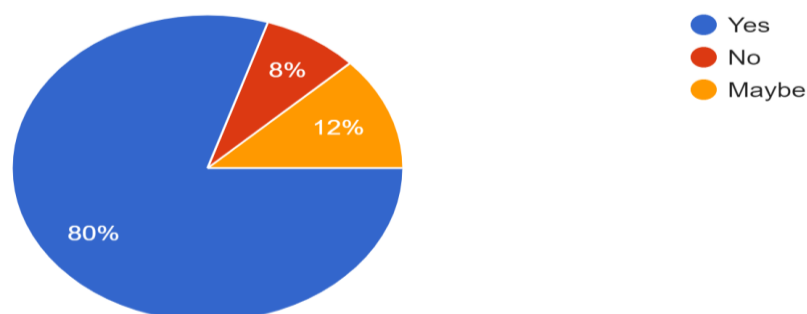
1. Will to not work
2. It's too draining
3. Exhaustion
4. Concentration is an issue, participation isn't the same as actual school.
5. Network issues
6. Headaches
7. Some teachers don't cooperate with students
8. Not able to cope up with all the stress and lagging behind a lot in studies
9. Less interaction, excessive screen time

10. The internet is more unstable now, so the consistency of your classes essentially depends on how stable your internet is.
11. Network issue while the teacher is explaining or asking
12. Lack of concentration due to the continuous use of devices
13. Lack of attention and engagement, difficulty grasping concepts, monotonous routines.
14. Personal touch lacking
15. Staying at home means having certain responsibilities (whether it's as little as doing chores or as difficult as taking care of family members).
16. Online classes make it seem as if there's no other distractions/ priorities that people have.
17. Especially in times like this, taking care of one's mental health should be considered far more important than submissions that will not matter as much as health, years down the line.
18. Speaking from personal experience, schools aren't checking up on their students as much as they should, counsellors are not making an effort to make students feel comfortable enough to talk to them.
19. It comes off as if all teachers and schools expect are just submission and don't take into consideration their struggles and mental status.
20. I haven't understood things as efficiently as I would have at school and have struggled to ask teachers queries
21. Lack of motivation
22. Feeling of hopelessness
23. Lack of self worth
24. Growing fear of what a failure I've become
25. Not being able to cope with academics
26. Wondering what's the point of living in such a ridiculous cycle of education
27. Inability to focus
28. Network issues
29. Unable to pay attention
30. Increase in work load
31. Headaches due to screen time
32. Distraction, lack of proper internet
33. Disconnect between teacher and student so feel hesitant to ask doubts, easy to get distracted, harder for certain subjects to be taught online
34. Conceptual Understanding has been really unstable during online classes because there is only so many doubts you can ask and clarify during virtual school
35. More distraction while teacher is teaching. Not able to understand anything online even if i pay attention.
36. In the end I started feeling tired and my eyes gets started paining very hard
37. Bad connectivity, inconsistency, not taking anything seriously
38. Can't concentrate at all
39. It strains our eyes
40. Low attention span and problem concentrating, everything being too fast paced and the inability to keep up, increasing backlog

Q14.

Are you feeling too burdened with assignments?

50 responses



Response	Percentage
Yes	80%
No	8%
Maybe	12%

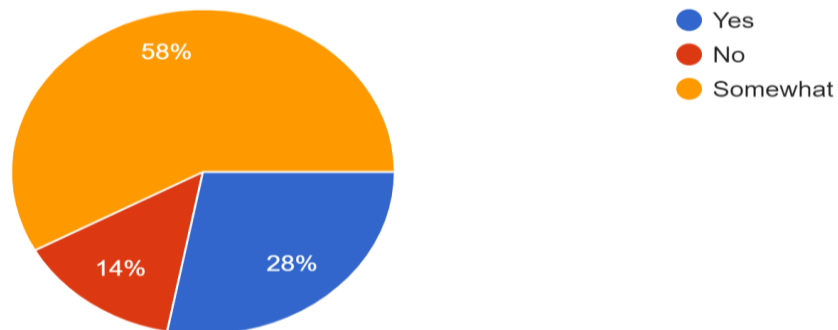
Q15. What other courses or activities have you been taking online outside of school work?

1. None
2. None
3. Tutions
4. A French Course, cooking course
5. Music classes, that's pretty much it
6. Dance, music, spanish
7. Voluntary teaching
8. None really
9. Workshops internships
10. Social projects, keyboard
11. Nothing
12. Tennis
13. NA
14. MUNs, instagram pages for awareness on certain topics, selling handmade crafts, conducting workshops for art
15. Read a subject related book, did an Excel course and listened to podcasts
16. MUNs
17. Council
18. YSP-A
19. Project Akanksha, Project Q
20. Supplementary classes (tuition)
21. Piano classes
22. Coaching/tuition
23. A remote internship + some volunteer work
24. Tuition
25. Nothing due to corona
26. Magazine editing/curation, MUNs, photography, music
27. Environment council
28. Sketch class, dance

Q16.

Have you stayed in touch with your social group virtually during the lockdown?

50 responses



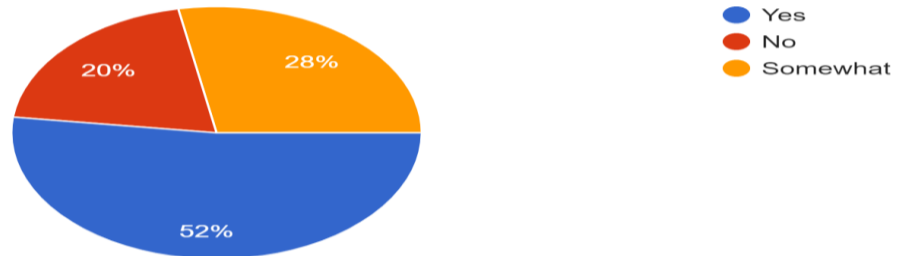
Response	Percentage
Yes	28%
No	14%

Somewhat	58%
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Q17.

Has the lockdown made you feel isolated from your friends/family?

50 responses

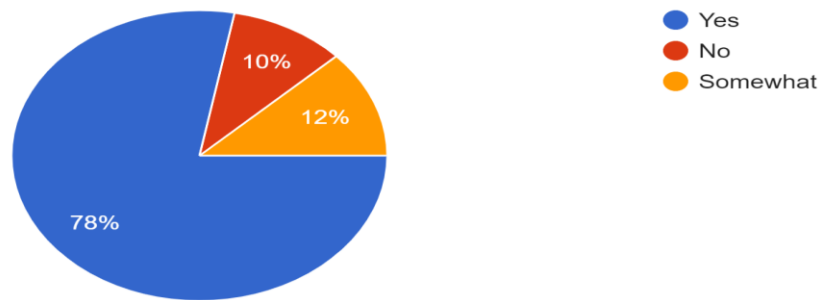


Response	Percentage
Yes	52%
No	20%
Somewhat	28%

Q18.

Has the isolation contributed to any feelings of anxiousness or low moods?

50 responses

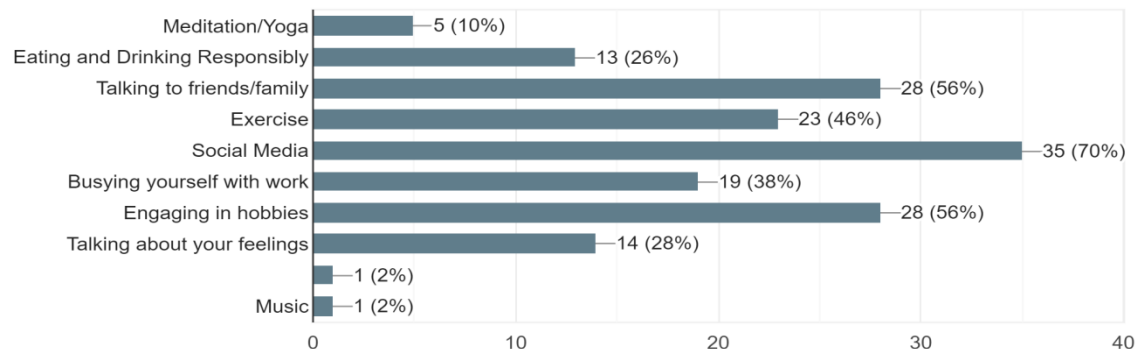


Response	Percentage
Yes	78%
No	10%
Somewhat	12%

Q19. (Multi-select Option)

What are some ways you have been coping with the pandemic?

50 responses



Response	Percentage
Meditation/Yoga	10%
Eating and Drinking Responsibly	26%
Talking to Friends/Family	56%
Exercise	46%
Social Media	70%
Busying Yourself with Work	38%
Engaging in Hobbies	56%
Talking About Your Feelings	28%
Painting (other)	2%
Music (other)	2%

Discussion:-

The demographic of the survey conducted consists of high school students across Grades IX to XII with the majority studying in Grade XII at 70% followed by Grade XI at 18%, Grade X at 10%, and finally, Grade IX at 2%. There is a split between females-males, the former accounting for 62% and the latter 38%. The age of the majority of the sample is between 16-17 (16 accounting for 24% and 17 for 54%). Hence majority of the respondents are currently in their final year, experiencing board examinations and college applications during the pandemic.

Q4. (Rating 1-10) You have been feeling depressed or lacking in motivation since the onset of the pandemic.

The majority of the respondents rated a score between 8-10 (accounting for 62%) indicating that with the onset of the pandemic, they have been feeling depressed and/or lacking motivation. Taking into account the isolation brought about through the pandemic, it can be deduced that being forced into a close quarter for an unexpectedly long period has led to feelings of sadness. The pandemic has worsened the already existing mental health problems and lead to a rise of cases among adolescents due to the unique combination of the public health crisis, social isolation, and economic recession. Moreover, economic instability has been correlated to increase in mental health issues.

Q5. (Rating 1-10) Your anxiousness has increased because of COVID-19 compared to earlier

The major portion of the sample rated between 7-10 on the scale for an increase in their levels of anxiousness during the pandemic. As high school students, especially Grade XI-XII, one tends to feel anxiety due to upcoming examinations and college applications. With the addition of unexpected and debilitating factors such as a forced quarantine, and social isolation as well as the traditional form of education being revamped overnight it has led to a rise in anxiety in the average high school student. The instability in school and the uncertainty of the future exerts pressure on the student. One's mental health and academic performance are correlated, and with mental health conditions evidently worsening due to the pandemic, it can be expected that the academic performance will be adversely impacted as well. Furthermore, studies conducted predict that COVID-19 will undo months of academic gains and widen the educational gap amongst students. This will inevitably contribute to more anxiety amongst students; thus, resulting in a dangerous cycle.

Q6. (Rating 1-10) As a high school student, you feel pressured to maintain your grades

An overwhelming portion of the sample rated academic pressure between 8-10 (88%) with 50% having chosen a 10. The forced shift to a virtual mode of education has witnessed mass difficulty in adaptation and has significantly contributed to academic pressure, in particular for Grade XII students. Being in the unknown about final board examinations, students are forced to maintain pristine grades throughout the unconventional academic year in case final examinations are not conducted. However, they are still required to receive final grades for college applications thus pressurizing them to preserve grades that attest to the standard set pre-pandemic, disregarding the current condition.

Q7. (Rating 1-10) Academic pressure during the pandemic has had an impact on your mental health

Sustained academic pressure at such a large scale will inevitably impact a student's mental health. A sizable portion of the respondents chose a rating across 8-10 (76%). High school tends to go hand in hand with academic pressure, however the pandemic adds in a new dimension unfamiliar to everyone and without adequate support offered. With the unfamiliar mode of learning, a disruption in routine and the fear instilled by the virus, all contribute to students' pressure to upkeep their academics. The pandemic inevitably places an unprecedented mental health crisis on students, urgently requiring attention and intervention.

Q8. (Rating 1-10) You are feeling pressured to be more productive during lockdown.

The disruption in routine and virtual school creates the illusion that students have been awarded with a plethora of free time, and they must utilize it for max proficiency to ensure they have used the lockdown period productively. Rather than prioritizing adapting to the situation and working on mental health, students feel compelled to normalize life and fill the seemingly free time with productive work. This leads to an inevitable build of pressure to be more and more productive, contributing to an already declining mental health status. Forced productivity can lead to burnout amongst teenagers in the long run. As can be seen, the majority of the respondents rated between 8-10 (68%) thus supporting the claim.

Q9. Are you worried about the pandemic's impact on your college application?

Considering that around 68% of the sample is worried about the pandemic's impact on their college applications, while 30% are decisively not, it can be inferred that for the most part Grade XII students who are being forced to apply to universities in such unpredictable times are carrying the most burden in regards to application induced stress. Due to the shift to virtual school, many high school seniors have seen a fall in their academic performance. Additionally, due to the severe hit to the economy, many students are faced with the reality of being able to afford college tuition. Their now "weakened" applications along with financial disparity might change their future plans completely; thus, contributing to the uncertainty that plagues high school seniors.

Q10. Has the cancellation of standardized testing e.g. SAT/ACT made you feel more nervous about applying to colleges?

For students interested in applying to foreign universities, or even many Indian ones as of late, standardised testing such as the SAT or ACT are important tests that are highly valued for college applications. The College Board has been repeatedly forced to cancel many testing dates, leading to many high school seniors being unable to take the test in time for their applications. Keeping in mind the universal cancellation, most universities have decided to forgo the compulsory submission of test scores. Due to this waiver, the respondents are evenly split with no clear majority. This leads to the inference that as universities across the world have decided to make test scores optional, many students do not feel extra pressure by them.

Q11. Do you feel more anxious about applying to colleges due to a lot of extracurriculars getting cancelled?

An essential component of college applications are the extracurriculars that a student has participated in over the course of their high school years. As Grade XI and XII students, extra curriculars become extremely important as they are often specialized to one's stream which showcases their interest in their intended course in college. However, due to the pandemic many extracurriculars have come to a standstill, such as student council, clubs, sports teams, art competitions etc. Many students who may have planned to take up such activities are now in a situation of concern as the opportunity has been taken away. As many were relying on extra curriculars to strengthen their application, there is rising stress across all high school students which is supported by the respondents' answers with 58% being decisively concerned and 18% being somewhat concerned.

Q12 + 13**Have you been able to keep up with your academics through virtual classes?****What are the problems you have faced in attending online classes?**

The shift to virtual classes was a completely unexpected and forced overnight transition, one that students across the country were unprepared for. Even having the necessary resources such as the internet, a device, teachers available digitally, many have faced various issues in online classes that has inevitably hindered their academics. In the survey, 52% of respondents felt they were somewhat able to keep up with their academics while 38% felt they were lagging behind. A mere 10% felt that they were adequately able to keep up with online classes. From this it can be inferred that for high school students, the physical setting of school and in person education plays an important factor in the understanding, participation and academic performance.

The respondents were asked to elaborate on common issues faced during their extensive experience with virtual school. Amongst the responses, the vast majority mentioned facing obstacles such as connectivity issues, increased screen time, headaches, lack of focus and concentration in their houses. Many have mentioned the lack of physical interaction with a teacher and classmates makes it harder to concentrate and understand concepts better, linking back to an initial factor considered for worsening mental health - social isolation. Additionally, students feel burdened with an excessive amount of assignments, the increased pace of teaching, backlog of work and inconsistency in routines. Respondents claim that schools are not providing adequate support to the students in this dire situation, and

feel disconnected to their teachers. This leads to lack in self-confidence, questioning one's self-worth, fearing failure and for some edging onto nihilism, ultimately leading to what could be a negative self-concept.

Q14. Are you feeling too burdened with assignments?

A common trend amongst all responses was that there was an influx of assignments they have been burdened with. Virtual school creates an illusion of excess time which coupled with teachers' fear of lagging behind in syllabus, results in extremely fast-paced classes. This often leads to increased number of assignments, more homework, and classwork that the student has to fit in the tight deadlines given to them. A staggering 80% of the respondents feel overburdened with school assignments, with 12% on the fence. Only 8% of the sample does not feel so, hence it can be deduced that these are likely students from younger classes, burdened with less syllabus and less academic pressure.

Q15. What other courses or activities have you been taking online outside of school work?

Most respondents are involved in a variety of activities outside of school, varying from supplementary classes, councils, MUNs, music and art classes. Some are participating in projects and collaborating virtually such as through volunteering teaching programs and social justice projects on platforms such as Instagram. Balancing these extra curriculars alongside academics is a task that was found difficult pre-COVID, however due to the pandemic and the irregular routines, it likely exerts more pressure and stress on high school students, especially seniors.

Q16. Have you stayed in touch with your social group virtually during the lockdown?

As teenagers, a social environment is a key aspect of one's personality, and often the biggest influence in their lives for various decisions. By nature, humans are social, they wish to interact and connect with each other. Due to the pandemic, there has been a sudden cut in interaction and socializing. Self-quarantine has to lead to an influx of social isolation. However, due to the advanced technology people have been able to maintain contact through virtual platforms. According to the survey, 28% of the respondents have kept in touch with their social group and 58% have somewhat. There is a smaller minority of those who have not at all, at 14%. It can be inferred that while most people are trying to maintain contact in their social group, the isolation and forced self-quarantine is taking a large toll on their relationships.

Q17 + Q18

Has the lockdown made you feel isolated from friends/family?

Has the isolation contributed to feelings of anxiousness or low moods?

With the world so interconnected and social interaction a staple part of one's life, the sudden forced isolation was bound to be detrimental to the lives of high school students. Their lives, once full of interaction amongst one another, going out to the movies, restaurants, parks, malls have now turned into a permanent stay at home. They're bound to their homes due to the pandemic which in turn fuels their social isolation. Being separate from your social group for an extended period of time puts into perspective how harshly social isolation can impact one's mental health. This isolation leads to a severe feeling of loneliness which is often a contributing or a risk factor to psychological disorders such as depression, anxiety, adjustment disorder, chronic stress, insomnia or dementia in the later stages of life. According to the survey, 52% of the respondents felt as though the nationwide lockdown has created distance amongst family and friends while 28% agree that to a degree, quarantine has led to self-isolation. Additionally, a staggering 78% felt that the self-isolation had contributed to feelings of anxiousness and low moods, with 12% at somewhat and barely 10% at no. The survey supports the argument drawn from social isolation and that it does indeed lead to loneliness and possibly contribute to or worse a psychological disorder.

Q19. (Multi-select Option) What are some ways you have been coping with the pandemic?

In order to sustain through this incredibly hard time, people have responded to the lockdown in various different ways and choosing different coping methods for the same. From the result, it seems the vast majority finds social media, talking to friends and family and engaging in different hobbies to be the most effective methods of coping during this uncertain lockdown. On the lower end of the spectrum lies eating and drinking responsibly and talking about one's feelings. Considering the importance of taking care of one's body and talking about how they feel in a time such as this, it is not surprising that it's practiced by fewer people keeping in mind the worsening mental health conditions noticed thus far.

Conclusion:-

The mental health of students in India has always been an area of concern, one more often than not overlooked by parents and teachers in the pursuit of academic prestige. With the tumultuous pandemic having severely disrupted student life this year, the associated pressures were bound to worsen the toll of an already growing issue. Through a survey conducted on six areas of focus, fifty high schoolers gave responses that support the conclusions of this paper.

COVID-19 has adversely impacted the mental health of students, with the vast majority of respondents having felt worsened conditions. Additionally, Grade XII students or high school seniors, have felt the immense pressure of maintaining academics. The persistent need to keep up with academics brings about a constant need for productivity fueled by internal guilt and external pressures. With the seemingly large amounts of illusioned free time and a disruption of routine, students are taking on more and more stress and as a result seeing a decline in their mental health.

This is further attributed to upcoming college applications. As high school seniors, the year is crucial for applying to college, and with the unforeseen circumstances of virtual classes, many are in turmoil over it. The pressure of college and virtual classes combined acts as a deadly force towards one's mental health. Considering all the aforementioned factors, it is inevitable that COVID-19 has invariably affected all students' lives for the long run. The traditionalistic nature of education as well as a student's life will have to be reimagined.

A new conversation about students' mental health needs to be brought into focus in India. As the world will slowly begin to transition out of the pandemic, its sustained effects will increasingly become apparent. It will prove to be an issue one must be cautious about from the get-go. Taking into consideration the declining mental health pre-pandemic, and the acceleration brought about due to it, it is only natural to assume the rate of worsening mental health will increase in the future. To combat this as strongly as possible, change must be brought now.

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