



Effects Of Fear Of Covid-19 On Attitude Towards Social Distancing Among College Students

Anitha^{1*}, Sathya², Vijay M³, Sureshkumar Murugesan⁴, K. Kajavinthan⁵ & Pavithra C⁶

¹Assistant Professor and Head, Department of Social Work, School of Rehabilitation Sciences, Holy Cross College (Autonomous), Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, Tamilnadu, India.

²Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, School of Rehabilitation Sciences, Holy Cross College (Autonomous), Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, Tamilnadu, India.

³Assistant Professor of Psychology, Department of Psychology, Christ (Deemed to be University), Kengeri Campus, Bangalore, Karnataka, India

⁴Assistant Professor and Head, Department of Psychology, American College, Madurai, TN, India.

⁵Senior Lecturer in Psychology, Department of Philosophy & Psychology, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

⁶Post Graduate Student, Department of Psychology, Holy Cross College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli, Tamilnadu, India

***Corresponding Author: - Anitha**

*Assistant Professor and Head, Department of Social Work, School of Rehabilitation Sciences, Holy Cross College (Autonomous), Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, Tamilnadu, India.

Abstract

Nowadays, individuals are experiencing a covid-19 pandemic situation. In this regard, the government has been making a lot of attempts to reduce the spread of this virus. Social distance is considered to be one of the significant strategies to reduce the spread of this virus. The attitude towards the social distancing refers to the tendency to reduce the frequency and closeness of the interaction between individuals in order to safeguard themselves from the threatening environment. This study made an attempt to find out the significant effects of fear of Covid-19 on attitude towards social distancing and emotion regulation among college students. About 280 college students participated in this study. A simple random sampling method was used in the data collection process. The 'Structural Equation Modelling' (SEM) was carried out in the assumed path model. The results show that there was a significant positive total effect of fear of Covid-19 on expressive suppression strategy of emotional regulation and significant negative effect on negative social distancing attitude among undergraduate students. Other findings and discussion were presented in detail in this article.

Keywords: Fear of Covid-19 and Social distance attitude, Emotion regulation

Background

Individuals are still experiencing a lot of physical and mental health issues due to 'Covid-19'. The impact of the pandemic has been increasing the cases of coronavirus. The Covid-19 is known as a novel virus which belongs to the same virus family as 'Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome' (SARS), which includes some common colds and severe problems in human's respiratory. The 'Covid-19' has been first found and recognized in Wuhan City, Hubei Province in China in 2019. With regard to 'Covid-19', all the governments have been taking different actions to reduce the spread of the disease, for instance, lock down, working from home, regular hand washing, wearing a face mask and so on. However, these initiatives produce certain impacts in people, it is important to highlight their use of emotion regulation strategies to cope with these problems and their attitude towards maintaining a positive social distance in this pandemic situation.

Fear can be an inappropriate form of expression of individuals if it is not well-measured, it leads to the actual threat. 'Fear of Covid-19' defined as "a negative emotional state that captures the anxiety and depression experienced due to an awareness of the possible consequences of the 'Covid-19' pandemic, such as being infected with the coronavirus" (Ahorsu et al, 2020). The fear of Covid-19 has been producing a lot of impacts on individuals' mental health. Hence, the measures should be taken to minimize the potential psychological effects of 'Covid-19' to the general public.

Attitude refers to a tendency to act in a particular way due to both an individual's experience and temperament. It helps the individuals to define like, how to perceive situations and react toward the situation or object. Social distance was described by the American Center for Disease Control (CDC) in 2007 as referring to the collection of "methods for reducing the frequency and closeness of interaction between people in order to reduce the risk of disease transmission." With respect to the Covid-19 pandemic, the WHO (2020), described social distancing as "staying out of people group settings, avoiding mass gatherings, and keeping distance (approximately six feet or two meters) from others whenever possible." The use of face masks, good respiratory hygiene, and hand wash along with social distancing are recommended in this context. Hence, it is understood and conceptualized that 'social distancing attitude' refers to "the tendency to act in a particular way to reduce the frequency and closeness of the interaction between individuals in order to safeguard themselves from the threatening environment". By maintaining a positive social distancing leads to delay or reduce the

spread of this Covid-19 which leads to moving the individuals to the safer side. The word "emotion regulation" refers to a person's ability to effectively handle and respond to the emotional states. It also refers to the ability to intensify and reduce the strength and duration of emotions as needed (Cole, Michel and Teti, 1994). "Emotional regulation is the mechanism by which people regulate their own emotions, when they experience them, and how they experience and convey those to others. It can be automatic or regulated, conscious or unconscious and can occur at any point during the emotion-producing process" (Gross et al., 1998). Emotional regulation refers to the ability to intensify and reduce the strength and length of emotions as required (Cole, Michel, & Teti, 1994). Studies highlighted that the student population also have been affected due to Covid-19 pandemic (Son C et al, 2020; Batra et al, 2021). In this regard, they were slightly trying to adopt new learning methods and environment and they regulate their own emotion in order to tackle these situation.

Research Problem

There is a lot of research work carried out with regard to the Covid-19 among different populations across the world. It is important to stress that, college students are facing a lot of struggles in their day-to-day life due to Covid-19, such as stress, depression, anxiety, fear and so on. Studies highlighted that the fear of 'Covid-19' leads to affecting college students' mental health (Konstantinov., et al, 2020); and they were anxious, more often worried about the spread of COVID-19 and viral infection for themselves and as well as their families (Saravanan, 2020). Another research study highlighted that the 'Covid-19' produces negative effects on students' mental health, academic and as well as their life styles (Son,et al, 2020). In order to reduce the Covid-19 spread, the government has been taking different strategies. Even though some countries are trying to regularize their own people's day-to-day life activities with following certain rules; then there might be a greater chance of fear of covid-19 among them. Especially, due to 'Covid-19' the college students are facing a lot of issues during this relaxed lockdown. Some of the research studies highlighted that "some form of social distancing may be needed for up to several years in combination of other virus control measures to manage the pandemic situation" (Lonergan & Chalmers, 2020; Kissler et al, 2020). In this regard, the researcher made an attempt to identify the effects of fear of covid-19 on attitude towards social distancing and emotional regulation among college students.

Hypotheses

1. There will be a significant direct effect of fear of Covid-19 on emotional regulation among college students.
2. There will be a significant direct, indirect and total effect of fear of Covid-19 on attitude towards social distancing among college students.

Methods

A survey method was used in this study. The population of the study was considered to be college students. The present study aimed to find out the significant effects of fear of 'Covid-19' on attitude towards social distancing and emotional regulation among college students. About 280 undergraduate students were participated (their age range between 18 years to 22 years) in this study. A simple random sampling method was used in the data collection process. Data were collected with the help of a standardized tool. Finally, the data were scored with the help of the respective manual keys and analyzed with the help of SPSS V.23 and AMOS Graphics.

Measures Used

The following tools have been utilized to collect the data along with the personal data sheet among college students.

1. Fear of Covid -19 Scale

This scale was developed by Ahorsu et al (2020). It was an 'uni-dimensional' scale that assesses the fear about Covid-19. The instrument contains seven items with a 5-point Likert scale of "strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree". The internal consistency of this scale such as 'Cronbach's alpha' of 0.87. The concurrent validity by examining its correlation with loneliness was found to be significantly positive $r = 0.50$ (Pakpour,2020).

Administration:

The scale was administered to the individuals with the following instructions. The scale consists of 7 items. Each item has seven responses such as "strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree". The researcher asked the participants to respond to it by making a tick on any of the five responses given against the statement which is perfect for your feelings. There are no right or wrong answers. Your responses will be used only for research purpose and kept confidential.

2. Coronavirus Social Distance Attitude Scale

This scale was developed by Lawrence et al (2020). The purpose of the scale is to assess the fear about Covid-19 in this pandemic period. The scale consisted of 14 items with positive and negative worded statements with the 5-point Likert scale "strongly disagree to strongly agree". The items 5,6,7,8,10,13 were negative statements which express the individuals' negative social distancing attitude and the items 1,2,3,4,9,11,12,14 were positive statements which express the positive social distancing attitudes of them. The internal consistency of was high for both positive (Alpha = 0.92) and negative (Alpha = 0.91) attitude factors and the construct validity showed statistically significant associations between scale factors and perceived norms and related measure (Lawrence et al, 2020).

Administration:

The scale was administered to the individuals with the following instructions. The scale consists of 14 items. Each item has seven responses such as “strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree”. The researcher asked the participants to respond to every statement by making a tick mark on any one of the five responses given against the statement with regard to their feelings. There are no right or wrong answers. The responses will be used only for research purpose and kept confidentially.

3. Emotion Regulation Questionnaire:

Emotion Regulation Questionnaire was developed by Gross & John (2003). The 10-item scale was designed to measure the respondent’s tendency to regulate individuals’ emotions in two ways such as ‘cognitive reappraisal’ and ‘expressive suppression’ with 7-point ‘Likert scale’ ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The items 1,3,5,7,8,10 were the cognitive reappraisal facet and the items 2,4,6,9 were the expressive suppression facet. Cronbach’s alpha internal reliability coefficients were calculated for the ERQ cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression scale scores. Reliability coefficients >.70 were judged to indicate acceptable reliability >.80.

Administration:

The scale was administered to the students with the following instructions. The scale consists of 10 items, each item has seven responses such as “strongly disagree, slightly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, slightly agree, strongly agree”. You should read carefully each and every statement and respond to it by making a tick on any of the five responses given against the statement which is perfect for your feelings. There are no right or wrong answers. The responses will be used only for research purpose and kept confidentially.

Methods of Data Collection

The researchers visited different college institutes and met the target sample in Trichy city, Tamil Nadu, India. Initially, the researcher met and got permission from the various head of the college. Then met the participants through the head of the organization and built rapport and explained the nature of research. The researcher explained the details of the questionnaire and then the researcher distributed the questionnaire along with the personal data sheet and also gave instruction for each tool. There are about 280 data collected with the help of standardized measures by using a random sampling method.

Finings

Table-1: A Structural Equation Modelling Model Fit

Chi-Square	NPAR	df	CFI	GFI	RMSEA
2.044	14	1	0.94	0.99	0.06

Table-2: Standardized Regression Weights of fear of Covid-19, Emotional Regulation and Attitude towards Social Distancing

Parameters		Estimate	Lower	Upper	P	
ER- CRS	<---	Fear of Covid-19	0.073	-0.057	0.193	0.257
ER-ESS	<---	Fear of Covid-19	0.158	0.032	0.276	0.027
NSDA	<---	Fear of Covid-19	-0.117	-0.270	0.016	0.099
PSDA	<---	Fear of Covid-19	0.033	-0.154	0.180	0.878
NSDA	<---	ER- CRS	-0.035	-0.141	0.071	0.515
PSDA	<---	ER- CRS	0.122	0.007	0.228	0.041
PSDA	<---	ER-ESS	0.123	0.015	0.250	0.020
NSDA	<---	ER-ESS	-0.081	-0.173	0.052	0.244

Acronyms: ER- CRS: Emotional Regulation- Cognitive Reappraisal Strategy; ER-ESS: Emotional Regulation-Emotional Suppression Strategy; NSDA: Negative Social Distancing Attitude; PSDA: Positive Social Distancing Attitude

Table-3: Direct, Indirect and Total Effect of Fear of Covid-19 on Emotional Regulation and Attitude towards Social Distancing among College Students

Effect	ER-ES	ER-CR	PSDA	NSDA
Direct	0.158*	0.073	0.033	-0.117
Indirect	-	-	0.028*	-0.015
Total	0.158*	0.073	0.061	-0.132*

*-Significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Discussion

Table-1 shows the path model value of this study. It observes from the table that the chi-square value, CFI, GFI, NFI and RMSEA values show that the present path model had a good fit. From the table-2 it is observed that the fear of Covid-19 had a significant positive influence on expressive suppression strategy of emotional regulation and this strategy had a significant positive influence on both positive and negative social distancing attitude. Hence, the hypothesis-1 is partially accepted. Expressive suppression is considered to be the response-focused emotional regulation strategy which involves individuals' positive and negative feeling of emotion and as well as it being associated with individuals' negative emotional and psychological impact. With regard to the Covid-19 situation, students may use these expressive suppression strategies to control their emotion in order to maintain their social distance in their social environment.

From the table-3 it is noticed that the fear of Covid-19 had a significant positive direct effect on expressive suppression emotional regulation strategy and had a significant positive indirect effect on positive social distancing attitude among college students. From the finding of this study, it is understood that when the students' fear of Covid-19 increases per single unit, then their expressive suppression of emotional regulation strategy also increases the same. The total effect of fear of Covid-19 on observed endogenous variables show that fear of Covid-19 had a significant positive effect on expressive suppression and had a significant negative effect on negative social distancing attitude. Hence, the hypothesis-2 is partially accepted. From this study, it is stated that when the students had certain mental worries with regard to fear of Covid-19, then they use this expressive suppression strategy to control their emotion which leads to change in their attitude towards maintaining their positive social distancing in their social environment. Therefore, it makes them feel both physically and mentally healthy.

Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it is concluded that the exogenous variable had a significant positive and negative effect on the endogenous variables. The total effect of fear of Covid-19 had a significant positive effect on emotional expressive suppression strategy and had a significant negative effect on negative social distancing attitudes of college students. From the table-2 it is observed that expressive suppression strategy had a positive influence on both positive and negative social distancing attitudes which leads to a positive change in their maintaining healthy relationship with family, friends, neighbours, relatives and others. The awareness about fear of Covid-19 should be reached to the student groups at all levels. It would make them to reduce their fear, anxiety, stress and worries which promote their mental and social well-being.

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