



# Psychological & Physical and Social Factors Impacting Students' Happiness of Higher Educational Institutions: A Comparative Analysis of Pre and During Pandemic Scenario

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**Paper ID: 13A6H**

**Volume 13 Issue 6**

Received 23 January 2022

Received in revised form 26 April 2022

Accepted 03 May 2022

Available online 10 May 2022

## Keywords:

Happiness of students;  
Physical factors;  
Psychological factors;  
Social factors; Higher educational institutions;  
Pandemic; Education system; Student's issues.

## Abstract

The happiness and well-being of students are the prime focus of every educational institution. The pandemic forced us to once again think of a robust structure of curriculum that can stand firm in any such unseen futuristic conditions. An attempt has been made to study the effects of psychological, physical, and social factors contributing to happiness among students along with their comparative study before and during pandemic scenarios. Data was collected from 366 respondents through structured questionnaires both before and during the pandemic using convenience sampling. SPSS was used where paired t-test was conducted to compare the before and during Covid-19 happiness of students. Happiness was found to be reduced during the pandemic. The physical factors impacted happiness the most closely followed by the psychological factors and social factors with no significant effect between before and during pandemic happiness. The research explored the difference between happiness scores and factors contributing to happiness amongst students in pre and during covid scenarios in the Indian context. Results may help educational systems to strategise curricula, maximise students' happiness, and a more robust structure for future education systems.

**Disciplinary:** Psychology, Education & Management.

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## Cite This Article:

Devvrat, S. A., Gujral, H. K., Bhatt, N. J. (2022). Psychological & Physical and Social Factors Impacting Students' Happiness of Higher Educational Institutions: A Comparative Analysis of Pre and During Pandemic Scenario. *International Transaction Journal of Engineering, Management, & Applied Sciences & Technologies*, 13(6), 13A6H, 1-11. <http://TUENGR.COM/V13/13A6H.pdf> DOI: 10.14456/ITJEMAST.2022.113

## 1. Introduction

The pandemic caused by a novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) has affected each sector and that too around the world. Covid -19 got originated in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, and enforced restrictions on travel, and gatherings, closing the education system by public authorities in several countries (Rabi et al., 2020). India got its first 1 lakh infection by 18th May 2020 and it reached up to 8.5 lakh by 11th July. Broadly it severely affected the economy and society (Nicola et al., 2020).

One of the most vulnerable sections of society is our young generation, the college-going ones, who were forced to switch to online education since the inception of the pandemic in the country. The students are that section of society that is always full of enthusiasm, have great energy, carry a lot of dreams for the future, have a passion for doing their best, etc. Any country's future and development are completely based on the strong shoulders of youngsters. Students are always counted as building blocks of a flourishing society and so taking care of their happiness becomes the prime motive. Overnight switching from ever-practiced physical classes to unimaginable complete online classes was not an easy task for the education system. This impacted every participant of this system starting from teachers, staff, and most importantly students. The daily physical exertion in commuting, attending classes, submissions, and various endless activities suddenly became nil. The life of sharing thoughts, feelings, aggressions, etc. with colleagues, teachers, mentors, etc. physically also came to an end.

The new mode of teaching though supported the education system in times of crisis, it impacted everyone in various ways. It affected both academicians and students. This paper deals with psychological, physical, and social issues that affected students' happiness during the pandemic. The paper tries to unfold the gap, by comparing psychological, physical, and social contributors to the happiness of students before and during the pandemic. Further, this study attempts to suggest new and innovative practices for managing the happiness of students in this crucial time making the education system a more robust one.

## 2. Conceptualisation

Happiness is the measure of subjective well-being. Many scientists gave their own form of definition for happiness like -"what I experience here and now" Daniel Kahneman (Mandel, 2018). Students from that part of society that remains always active, happy going, full of excitement, ready to take up challenges, etc. Visiting college does not only provide education, more to it is discipline, routine, competitions, social bonding, fun, sharing feelings, etc. all make a part of it. Students in their growing phase were already trying to understand various aspects of life like managing the balance between remaining easygoing to becoming responsible for the future. This covid-19 suddenly added to their ambiguity in dealing with life.

Happiness means the ability to self-expression. The time has come when exploring, understanding, and addressing issues with students has become a priority of the education system before making it too late. A lot of studies are going around in the world in this context, but few are conducted in the Indian context. This research tries to dig out the difference in happiness and

factors contributing to it among students of higher educational institutions and find out if those differ in their contributions during the pandemic. Further suggestions for practicing innovative techniques and inculcating those in curriculum design are given where student's issues can be addressed in a better way.

## **3. Literature Review**

### **3.1 Happiness**

Happiness on one side can be described very deeply as a peaceful state of mind and body while on the other side it can be expressed as just a momentary smile on the face. It has several synonyms like contentment, joy, pleasure, cheerfulness, merry, etc. It is found that happiness is a positive perception of self-relativity, but surely with no complete absence of negative emotions (Diener and Satvik, 1991). Graham et al. (2004) also found that various changes and fluctuations influence happiness and it's based on one's nature inherited from parents through genes. Further Sheldon & Lucas (2014) also found that one's genes and nurture give specific points to their happiness. This study reassures that people facing good and bad times tend to come back at a set point that is governed by their genes. Nes (2010) challenges this by stating that increment in happiness is not restricted by genes and thus opens the door for exploring methods, and interventions for increasing happiness.

### **3.2 Factors Affecting Happiness during Pandemic**

Covid-19 has not only brought the risk of mortality from infection but unsustainable pressure of psychosocial issues. In past also diseases like MERS brought along high levels of mental problems like anxiety, and aggression (Jeong et al., 2016). Similarly, covid also is resulting in mental health issues like panic attacks, depression, and anxiety (Ahorsu et al., 2020; Qiu et al., 2020). A lot of ways were adopted to handle pandemics e.g.- isolation, washing hands, quarantine, etc. which researchers concluded short- and long-term impacts of fear of infection, frustration, and boredom (Tian et al., 2020).

The pandemic affected each and every section of society. It also impacted higher education students' activities related to work of academic and personal life because of various changes in routine activities. Suddenly switching from offline to online classes was not easy for students and their parents too. Lack of technological knowledge, unavailability of internet connectivity plus parents' tremendous efforts in assisting and supervising their wards were some of the major hurdles posed by this pandemic all causing negative impacts and suggesting the need for innovative and offline e-learning platforms to supplement classroom teaching benefiting students having issues (Owusu-Fordjour et al., 2020). Comparing outdoor activities to indoor ones, Stieger et al. (2021) show that higher emotional well-being is associated with outdoor ones, and spending greater time on screen is linked with lower well-being. Talking about eating habits across ages largely got affected by various restrictions like self-isolation, social distancing, quarantine,

disturbed daily routine activities, less outdoor activities, etc.(Di Renzo et al., 2020) and all these factors impacted physical activity too again across ages (Calcaterra et al., 2020).

Husain and Ashkanani (2020) showed a reduction in consumption of fast food and an increase in freshly made food greatly during the pandemic along with a reduction in physical activity and an increase in screen time plus sedentary behavior. Also detects an increase in a day–time sleep and a decrease in nighttime sleep. Bracale and Vaccaro (2020) revealed that food habits took a change where long shelf-life got recorded, decreasing the consumption of fresh green food goods. AlMughamis et al. (2020) found that unhealthy diets, anxiety, and consuming excessive snacks are more prone to have weight increase leading to psychological issues.

Lund et al. (2010) found that an alarming stage is reached in the college student population where insufficient sleep and improper sleep-wake patterns are diagnosed, needing urgent intervention programs for sleep disturbance. Romero-Blanco et al. (2020) researched nursing students and showed that due to changes in their sleep patterns, areas got affected were their performances, behavior, and eating habits. Further pre and during-lockdown data showed that sleep quality was worse during lockdown although time spent in bed was high.

Anxiety and depression are the two most reported issues which are increasing in the population (Burke et al., 2020) which are actually the repercussion of psychological well-being, being negatively affected due to unforeseeable situations (Brooks et al., 2020). Anxiety is found to be positively related to effects on the economy, physical activity, and delays in academic activities due to pandemics (Cao et al., 2020). This once again resulted in findings of moderate to severe anxiety in students of Changzhi medical college but interesting findings are that students living in urban areas, having a stable family income, and living with parents acted as protective factors towards anxiety while relatives and acquaintances infected with covid-19 increased anxiety amongst them (Cao et al., 2020).

The pandemic disrupted university student's life too along with the whole world. Talking student learning performances, it was found to be improved during Covid-19 confinement, as a change is seen in learning habits which have become more continuous (Gonzalez et al., 2020). The study revealed that students were satisfied by the support given by university public relations and teaching staff but their perception of higher performance was found to be affected due to lack of computer skills and higher workload. In the end, the research analysed that students studying in Europe with better living standards (ability to pay fees), the ones more satisfied with academic work/life, social science students, more hopeful and less bored ones showed greater satisfaction with university activities and measures during the crisis of covid-19 (Aristovnik et al., 2020). One of the studies conducted on Italian adolescents aged 15-21, in relation to the ongoing pandemic investigated lifestyle behaviors and coping strategies. The study revealed adaptation with coping strategies like daily routine planning, engaging in constructive activities, and exploring new interests. Though found tough to stay at home, reevaluation of family relationships, and maintaining contact with friends, teachers were also part of coping strategies. The study showed

frequent anxiety symptoms and some changes in subjective well-being due to various coping strategies (Pigaiani et al., 2020).

The pandemic forces us to re-evaluate the guiding norms and reconstruct them (Honorato et al., 2020) and thus such reformulated norms can pose drastic changes in dealing with the education of the future workforce (Rose, 2020). Adolescents are crossing a very fragile phase of quick psychosocial and socio-cognitive alterations on which their well-being is dependent in long run. Another research talks about attitudes and behaviour among young students during the pandemic time. Students need to be adapted to new and more efficient technologies in daily and academic practices. Taking into consideration all the above perspectives, an alert and proactive intervention seems very important nullifying the effects of unhealthy lifestyles and dysfunctional behaviors for long-term happiness and well-being

*The objectives of this study are to*

- Explore the difference in the happiness experienced by students of higher educational institutions before and during the pandemic.
- Study the difference in contributing factors of happiness by students of higher educational institutions before and during the pandemic.

**H1a:** there is a difference in happiness among students before and during the pandemic

**H2a:** there is a difference in contributing factors of happiness for students before and during the pandemic

## 4. Research Methodology

The research was conducted on higher education institution students before the pandemic to collect data and find out factors contributing to happiness among college-going students. Simultaneously as the pandemic arrived, the study was extended and carried forward to see the difference in happiness among students before and during the pandemic. The further study statistically tested if the factors contributing to happiness before and during a pandemic also differ in their contributions.

The data collection was performed in two phases, one before the pandemic February-March 2020, and another during pandemic from January- to February 2021. For the pre-pandemic and during-pandemic data, 366 higher education students were surveyed through a self-structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale having a Cronbach's alpha of 0.877.

## 5. Results and Discussion

For this study, questions based on physical, psychological, and social factors influencing happiness were analysed. Happiness scores for both collected data were then compared through SPSS, paired t-test. Table I (Demographic Profile of Respondents) shows the demographic details of respondents both before and during the pandemic.

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents**

	Respondent's Profile	No. (N) Before Pandemic	(%)	No. (N) During Pandemic	(%)
Gender	Male	169	46.2	270	73.8
	Female	197	53.8	96	26.2
Education Level Undergraduates	First Year	64	17.5	82	22.4
	Second Year	124	33.9	103	28.1
	Third Year	50	13.7	91	24.9
	Fourth Year	51	13.9	90	24.6
Postgraduates	First Year	48	13.1		
	Second Year	29	7.9		

Table II (Paired Sample Statistics) shows results for mean values of happiness in both cases where Happiness 1 denotes before the pandemic and Happiness 2 denotes during the pandemic with mean of 217.72 and 212.32 along with std. deviation as 20.284 and 22.811 respectively.

**Table 2: Paired Sample Statistics**

	Mean	N	SD	Std. Error Mean
Happiness 1	217.72	355	20.28	1.08
Happiness 2	212.32	355	22.81	1.21

Happiness 1 indicates happiness before a pandemic, Happiness 2 indicates happiness during the pandemic

Table III (Paired Samples Test) describes differences in happiness before and during the pandemic. The results are drawn with the help of Paired t-test using SPSS. The findings show a significant difference between before and during pandemic happiness with t values of 3.211 for 354 degrees of freedom and at a significance level of 0.05. This means there is a significant difference between both measured happiness levels, so accepting H1a. Further on average before the pandemic happiness scores were 5.402 points higher than during the pandemic happiness (95% CI [1.682, 2.094]). This clearly shows that students were happier before the pandemic.

**Table 3: Paired Samples Test**

	Paired difference			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Hypothesis Result
	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper				
Happiness 1- Happiness 2	5.402	31.697	1.682	2.094	8.711	3.211	354	0.001	Accepted

Happiness 1 denotes before the pandemic, Happiness 2 denotes during the pandemic

Now, Table 4 (Paired t-test for Constructs) depicts and compares the three constructs with their before and during pandemic scores as contributing factors to happiness. The findings show a significant difference between physical construct scores before and during the pandemic with t value of 4.112 for 365 degrees of freedom and a significance of 0.000. This means there is a significant difference between both measured physical construct scores, so rejecting null

hypothesis 2 and accepting H2a. Further on average before the pandemic physical construct scores were 1.234 points higher than during the pandemic physical scores (95% CI [0.644, 1.825]), depicting students to be physically more fit before the pandemic. Students used to commute for classes daily, attending sessions, the daily routine of submissions, the team works, competitions and much more all add up to a physical aspect that is nil in the covid-19 situation.

**Table 4: Paired t-test for Constructs**

Constructs	Mean	SD	Paired difference Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Hypothesis Result
				Lower	Upper				
Physical 1– Physical 2	1.234	5.741	0.300	0.644	1.825	4.112	365	0.000	Accepted
Psychological 1 – Psychological 2	1.208	7.816	0.409	0.403	2.014	2.95	363	0.003	Accepted
Social 1 – Social 2	-0.002	3.014	0.157	-0.312	.307	-.017	365	0.986	Rejected

Physical 1, Psychological 1, Social 1 all denote before pandemic measures of respective constructs  
Physical 2, Psychological 2, Social 2 all denote during pandemic measures of respective constructs

The psychological construct also gets the same results by showing significant differences between before and during pandemic scores with t value of 2.95 for 363 degrees of freedom and a significance of 0.003. Again, accepting H2a. Psychological construct on an average scores 1.208 higher before the pandemic than during the pandemic, stating that students were psychologically stronger before the pandemic. Students use to share their feelings with friends, teachers, and mentors. They used to express themselves. Listening, speaking, reacting, etc. all are needed to have mental balance. In this new normal, everything and everyone being in virtual space makes it difficult to have mental balance.

Surprisingly social construct does not show a significant difference between before and during pandemic scores with t values as -0.017 for 365 degrees of freedom and significance as 0.986 which is higher than 0.05. So, accepting null hypothesis 2 and rejecting alternate hypothesis 2. Stating that students are socially active and happy. This could be the result of family contribution towards their well-being in various forms like spending time with them, playing with them, helping with assignments, etc.

These findings compel us to dig out more as to which factors are contributing to making the difference as significant. So, table IV (Paired t-test for factors) shows a detailed breakup for all 3 constructs into the factors considered in this research. Table V (Paired t-test for factors) reveals that factors like meal, sleep, exercise, attitude and stress measured a difference in their scores when compared before and during the pandemic. Here factors meal, sleep and exercise contribute to physical construct while attitude and stress towards psychological construct. Table 5 (Paired t-test for factors) also shows that means of the meal, sleep, exercise, attitude, and stress are more for before pandemic scores than during pandemic scores by 0.175, 0.644, 0.437, 0.475. 0.286

respectively. This makes us interpret that eating, sleeping, and exercise pattern was better before the pandemic. The attitude was more positive before covid-19. Stress was also a little more, as there were proper exams conducted and various submissions for assessments. This stress may be acting as eustress as it was motivating students to perform.

**Table 5: Paired t-test for factors**

Factors	Mean	SD	Paired differences		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Hypothesis Result
			Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper					
Meal 1 - Meal 2	0.175	1.67	0.087	0.003	0.347	2.000	365	0.046	Accepted	
Sleep 1 – Sleep 2	0.644	2.932	0.153	0.343	0.946	4.206	365	0.000	Accepted	
Exercise 1 – Exercise 2	0.437	2.710	0.141	0.158	0.715	3.085	365	0.002	Accepted	
Attitude 1 – Attitude 2	0.475	2.840	0.148	0.183	0.767	3.202	365	0.001	Accepted	
Hope 1 – Hope 2	0.181	2.618	0.137	-0.88	4.511	1.321	363	0.187	Rejected	
Opportunity 1 – Opportunity 2	0.232	2.947	0.154	-0.070	0.535	1.507	365	0.133	Rejected	
Stress 1 – Stress 2	0.286	2.631	0.137	0.016	0.557	2.086	365	0.038	Accepted	
Belongingness 1 – Belongingness 2	-0.002	3.014	0.157	-0.312	0.307	-.017	365	0.986	Rejected	

1 all denotes before pandemic measures of respective factors  
 2 all denotes during pandemic measures of respective factors

Hope and opportunity also fall under psychological construct but they do not show any difference in their scores. Students were found to be more hopeful before because of the help they are getting from institutions. A full team of teachers, mentors, and coaches use to be in front of them and approachable. Further different institutions had various opportunities as career enhancement programs, campus interviews for final year ones, etc. Lastly, Belongingness contributes to social construct and it also does not show any difference. This could be the result of the family taking utmost care of students by spending quality time and institutions also handling their grievances and mentoring them online.

## 6. Conclusion

The results of this study clearly show that the pandemic has impacted the young generation physically and psychologically. There is a lack of routine regular diet, sleep, and exercise. All these three aspects are linked with each other. Any disturbance with one will disturb the cycle. Improper diet and eating anytime in the day lead to a lethargic body making it inactive and so lack of sleep occurs.

Further, there is a huge lack of positive attitude among students now due to covid-19 continuously going on. With lockdowns, isolations, quarantine, loneliness, and no better news in



near future are shattering all hope. They all are stuck in their hometowns with no timeline to resume offline classes. They are feeling helpless in terms of their careers.

In this crucial time family played its role well along with a lot of online efforts of institutions. Both bodies are trying to take utmost care of their young and budding generations. Remaining in continuous touch with students has become a priority. This is the time for exploring, understanding and resolving all issues concerned with students.

Various innovative techniques can be inculcated in pedagogy, to address issues with students in present and contribute toward a strong curriculum for the future. Institutions can go for many actions where motivating students should be the key.

- Educational sectors may add assessments related to health in their curriculum. Weekly and monthly progress of students may be monitored wherein nutrient-rich balanced and timely diet, routine exercise and proper amount of sleep can be administered. This assessment should be compared to individual progress and not with some generalised parameter. Benefit – Physical aspect - A new type of assessment full of excitement may motivate students to remain fit.
- Open access libraries. Benefit – Psychological aspect - it can be a good option for students so to maintain continuity in their studies.
- Subject matter experts. Benefit – Psychological aspect - they may be hired who can assist students' doubts after online sessions and help in monitoring and motivating students throughout the course. Many times, students find it tough to approach teachers due to many issues like shyness, fear, hesitation, occupied teachers, etc.
- Financial help. Benefit – Psychological aspect - Institutions may come up with financial help for affected dependent students who have lost their family members.
- 24/7 counseling and guidance centers. Benefits – Psychological aspect - These should be there monitoring academics and non-academics issues of students. The center should be in continuous touch with each and every student and not for only those who approach it themselves.
- Innovative career support. Benefit - Psychological aspect - Final year ones may be absorbed in the research assistance team of institutions. Pass-out students on a contract basis may be motivated to join counseling and guidance centers of institutions themselves, as coming up with batches always have a good bond with seniors and so can connect easily.

## 7. Availability of Data and Material

All information is included in this study.

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