

The Impact of Knowledge Level and Attitude Towards Covid-19 on Psychological Distress and Social Isolation Among the University of Tabriz Faculty of Physical Education Students

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected everyone, including college students. Due to the consequences related to health, economy and individual life, Covid-19 is associated with many psychological stressors and may cause psychological distress and social isolation. The aim of this study was to investigate the impact of knowledge level and attitudes toward Covid-19 on psychological distress and social isolation among college students. This research was a cross-sectional study and based on the purpose of an applied type, and in terms of method, it was a descriptive research that was conducted as a survey. The statistical population was all physical education students (N=383) of Tabriz University in the academic year 2020-21. Cochran's sample size formula was used to determine the sample size (n=192). The data collection tool was a questionnaire. A total of 200 physical education of Tabriz University took part in an online survey from 1 December to 6 December. The questionnaire included demographic information, a Standard Questionnaire for Knowledge and Awareness Level of Covid-19 by Mahshvari et al. (2020), Standard Questionnaire Attitude towards Covid-19 Al-Hanawi et al. (2020), Kessler Standard Distress Questionnaire (2003) and Standard Questionnaire for Social Isolation of Yazidi School (2014). The findings showed that in the knowledge and awareness level variable, older people, women compared to men, married people compared to single, and doctoral students compared to other levels, had a higher level of knowledge and awareness of Covid-19. In the attitude level variable, older people, women compared to men, single people compared to married people, and undergraduate students compared to other levels, had a higher level of attitude towards Covid-19. In the variable of psychological distress, young people, women compared to men, single

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people compared to married people, and doctoral students had higher psychological distress compared to other levels. In the social isolation variable, young people, women compared to men, single people compared to married people, and undergraduate students had higher social isolation compared to other levels. Testing research hypotheses showed that there is a significant inverse relationship between the level of knowledge and the level of attitude towards Covid-19 with psychological distress and social isolation. It was also found that the level of knowledge about Covid-19 and the level of attitude towards Covid-19 have a significant effect on psychological distress and social isolation. Therefore, it is better to consider preventive behaviors at the community level in order to control the Covid-19 epidemic, and this issue should be considered by policy makers and health officials.

Keywords: knowledge, attitude, Covid 19, Coronavirus, psychological distress, social isolation, physical education college students.

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a significant number of fatalities worldwide (Bo et al., 2020). Previous studies on epidemics have shown that they can result in considerable psychological distress and related problems (Greenberg, Wessely & Wykes, 2015; Maunder et al., 2006). The Covid-19 disease has also been linked to negative impacts on people's mental health and emotional reactions, especially due to the restrictive measures put in place (Talevi et al., 2020). Several factors such as personal concerns, job loss, school and college closures, social isolation, and deteriorating relationships have been identified as potential contributors to increased psychological distress during the Covid-19 epidemic (Holmes et al., 2020; Fiorillo & Gorwood, 2020).

Despite the unprecedented efforts made to control the spread of the Covid-19 virus, the success of these efforts largely depends on public behavior (Al-Hanawi, 2020a). People's awareness and attitude towards the disease are crucial in predicting their behavior (Fallahi et al., 2020). Furthermore, adherence to control measures is influenced by people's knowledge, attitude, and behavior towards Covid-19 (Zhong et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on everyone, including students, and has brought with it numerous psychological stressors related to health, social, economic, and individual consequences. As a result, many individuals are experiencing psychological distress and social isolation. Given the urgency of addressing these immediate and ongoing psychological problems, it is essential to assess people's knowledge and attitudes towards COVID-19 disease. This study was conducted in a cross-sectional manner to

investigate the level of knowledge and attitude of physical education students at Tabriz University towards COVID-19 and its impact on psychological distress and social isolation.

Methodology

The present study is a cross-sectional, descriptive research that was conducted through a survey of physical education students in all three levels of Tabriz University during the academic year 2020-2021. The study aimed to assess the level of knowledge and attitudes of students towards the Covid-19 epidemic, as well as their psychological distress and social isolation at the university. The statistical population of the study was 383 physical education students, and a sample size of 192 was determined using Cochran's formula.

An anonymous online questionnaire, inspired by the research literature, was used to collect data from the participants over a period of six days. The questionnaire was designed using Google Forms and was distributed randomly through the main communication channels and social networks to reach a large number of students. The online questionnaire was closed on the seventh day after the release of the link.

The questionnaire utilized in this study consists of five sections (Table 1). The first section comprises four questions related to demographic information, including age, gender, marital status, and educational level.

The second section of the questionnaire assesses the level of knowledge and awareness of Covid-19 and includes 11 questions taken from the standard questionnaire developed by Maheshwari, Gupta, Sinha & Rawat (2020). The validity and reliability of this questionnaire have been previously confirmed, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.71.

The third section of the questionnaire evaluates attitudes towards Covid-19 and includes six questions taken from the standard questionnaire developed by Al-Hanawi (2020a). The validity and reliability of this questionnaire have also been previously confirmed, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.81.

The fourth section is the standard Kessler Psychological Distress Questionnaire, a 10-item questionnaire with a range of four Likert options, developed by Anderson et al. (2011). The validity and reliability of this questionnaire have been confirmed in previous studies.

Finally, the fifth section of the questionnaire includes the standard social isolation questionnaire developed by Modaresi Yazdi et al. (2017), comprising 18 items in a 5-point Likert scale. The validity and reliability of this questionnaire have been previously confirmed, with a reliability of 72% using Cronbach's alpha method.

After collecting the information through the questionnaires, the data were entered into SPSSv25 software for analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the demographic information of the subjects and the research variables. To test the hypotheses, several statistical tests were employed, including one-sample t-test, one-way analysis of variance, Pearson correlation test, and regression. These tests were used to examine the relationships between different variables and to determine the significance of the findings.

Findings

Descriptive statistics revealed that the highest frequency in the age variable was observed in the age group of 21 to 30 years, with 78 individuals, while the lowest frequency was found in the age group above 41 years, with only 4 individuals. Regarding the gender variable, women accounted for 57% and men accounted for 43% of the statistical population. In terms of marital status, 127 individuals were single, while 73 individuals were married. As for the education variable, 47.5% had a bachelor's degree, 43% had a master's degree, and 9.5% had a doctorate.

In terms of knowledge and awareness of COVID-19, the findings indicated that older individuals and women had a higher level of knowledge and awareness compared to men. Moreover, married individuals and doctoral students had a higher level of knowledge and awareness than single individuals and students of other levels. In the attitude level variable, older individuals and women had a higher level of attitude towards COVID-19 compared to men, while single individuals had a higher level of attitude towards COVID-19 than undergraduate students.

Regarding psychological distress, young individuals and women experienced higher levels of distress than men. Additionally, single individuals experienced higher levels of distress than married students, and doctoral students experienced higher levels of distress than students of other levels. As for the social isolation variable, young individuals and women experienced higher levels of social isolation than men. Moreover, single individuals and undergraduate students experienced higher levels of social isolation than married individuals and students of other levels.

The testing of research hypotheses revealed that there was a significant inverse relationship between the level of knowledge and the level of attitude towards COVID-19 with psychological distress and social isolation. Furthermore, it was found that the level of knowledge about COVID-19 and the level of attitude towards COVID-19 had a significant effect on psychological distress and social isolation.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study highlight the significant impact of the level of knowledge and the level of attitude towards COVID-19 on psychological distress and social isolation. Based on these findings and the theoretical foundations related to the research topic, it is crucial for officials to be aware of the consequences associated with psychological distress and social isolation among students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To address these issues, we suggest that governments and authorities initiate and develop remote mental health services to manage the psychological consequences of the disease among students now and in the future. It is also important to ensure that students have access to accurate and up-to-date information about COVID-19, which can help reduce negative feelings associated with the disease. Educational institutions should also provide supportive counseling to students with a history of mental illness. In addition, students should be encouraged to raise their awareness of the disease and seek support from peers, friends, and family.

Generally, addressing the psychological consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic among students requires a multi-faceted approach that involves collaboration among educational institutions, governments, and mental health professionals. By taking proactive steps to address the mental health needs of students, we can help mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic on their well-being and ensure that they are equipped with the tools and resources necessary to navigate this challenging time.

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