

Original Research Article

Finding Balance in Chaos: An Observational Study on the Psychological Wellbeing and Life Satisfaction of Undergraduate Nursing Students during and after the COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown (August 2020 - January 2022)

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Article History

Received: 30.04.2025

Accepted: 04.06.2025

Published: 06.06.2025

Abstract: **Background:** The world and the health care system went through a challenging and life-changing situation. Psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction have an impact on the overall development of an individual. People with higher psychological wellbeing enjoy a better quality of life and a higher life satisfaction outcome. As a counsellor for the study population in this study, the investigator assesses the association between psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction during the lockdown and post-lockdown periods from August 2020 to January 2022 to provide appropriate service. **Methodology:** The researcher used a quantitative descriptive design. Six hundred seventy-two students participated by filling out an online demographic Performa, Ryff's and Keyes's psychological wellbeing scale, and Diener's Satisfaction with Life scale. The psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction were assessed during lockdown, two weeks post-lockdown, and three months post-lockdown. **Data Analysis:** The psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction of undergraduate nursing students during and after the lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic were analysed using descriptive and univariate regression analysis. **Results:** The study involved 672 nursing students, predominantly female Christians from Tamil Nadu, South India, with a mean age of 22.87 ± 1.94 . Psychological wellbeing remained consistently high during the lockdown, two weeks post-lockdown, and 3 months post-lockdown, with scores of 91.42 ± 12.56 , 91.75 ± 12.37 , and 92.53 ± 14.31 , respectively. Similarly, life satisfaction scores were 25.41 ± 5.39 , 25.30 ± 5.61 , and 25.54 ± 5.88 during these periods. Positive relationships with others significantly contributed to the student's psychological wellbeing ($p < 0.001$), with post-lockdown relationships showing continued significance. Additionally, personal growth exhibited a positive relationship ($p = 0.030$) between lockdown and three months post-lockdown. Life satisfaction significantly improved ($p < 0.038$) from lockdown to three months post-lockdown. **Conclusion:** Based on the findings, the counselor took appropriate interventions to improve the wellbeing and life satisfaction, such as tele-counseling based on the sub-scale and overall score, identifying appropriate support systems, enhancing positive coping strategies, and developing resilience.

Keywords: Psychological Wellbeing, Life Satisfaction, Nursing Students, Pandemic, Covid-19, Lockdown, Post Lockdown, Mental Health Intervention, Counselling.

INTRODUCTION

The pandemic outbreak showed a decline in psychological wellbeing irrespective of age, marital status, and potential harm. College students are more vulnerable to psychological problems such as stress, depression, adjustment

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CITATION: Devaki. B, Maya P. G, Manoranjitham S, Vathsala Sadan, Vinitha Ravindran (2025). Finding Balance in Chaos: An Observational Study on the Psychological Wellbeing and Life Satisfaction of Undergraduate Nursing Students during and after the COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown (August 2020 - January 2022). *South Asian Res J Nurs Health Care*, 7(3): 49-57.

disorder, etc. They experienced emotional turmoil that impacted their person's physical and mental health. The primary investigator being, the counselor observed the students during the outbreak, lockdown, self-quarantine, and return to their new normal life. Also, I offered individual counselling to Students who faced emotional difficulty, adjustment issues, stress, and negative thoughts due to the lockdown and COVID-19. The counsellor wants to help them bring effective change and enhance their wellbeing. The investigator was part of their journey from the onset of the pandemic to their transition into a new everyday life. Keeping this in mind, the study intends to assess psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction during the lockdown and post-lockdown period from August 2020 to January 2022.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The COVID-19 pandemic left an indelible mark on almost every aspect of our lives. During this pandemic, the students went through unpredictable life changes and challenges irrespective of their place of stay. Addressing the students' safety, security, and psychosocial wellbeing was vital. Since student nurses will be future healthcare providers, monitoring their psychosocial wellbeing and overall life satisfaction is essential.

Students were scared and angry and struggled to feel safe without authentic, caring mentors to drive their wellbeing. Their world is full of messages about what is wrong, and students struggle to see what is right, not simply in the world at large but in themselves too (MORIN, 2020). Social isolation and loneliness resulted from the current COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of social distancing, self-isolation, and self-quarantine on health, psychological wellbeing, and relationships was high (Martínez *et al.*, 2005). Students faced unprecedented social isolation and life disruption and have had to adapt to new learning methods overnight.

A study conducted in China revealed a 74% decline in emotional wellbeing due to the onset of COVID-19, and factors such as living close to the Centre and the extent of potential harm exacerbated the adverse effect on emotional wellbeing (Yang & Ma, 2020). College students are more vulnerable to problems like stress, depression, and anxiety. The main reasons for this were mental tension, social distress, satisfaction in life, finance, and future life; negative psychology comprised 80% of the cause of psychological wellbeing (Punia & Malaviya, 2015) (Roslan *et al.*, 2017).

An online publication by a psychiatrist said that on COVID-19 death tolls, infection rates had disrupted personal and professional lives severely. The strategies of distancing and isolation significantly impacted lives and relationships. He also highlighted the impact on mental health in different ways, such as isolation, limitation of travel, social behavior, sense of insecurity towards self and loved ones, lack of physical contact with family and friends, phobia of going in public, reinforced by fear-mongering on social media, guilt and fear of transmitting infection (Banerjee, 2020).

Evidence recommended monitoring psychological wellbeing daily as there was significant mental health risk (Lades *et al.*, 2020). Psychological wellbeing and academic performance are highly associated with women, individual characteristics, and student's college experiences (Satpathy & Ali, 2020). Psychological wellbeing helps one adopt coping strategies, which improves life satisfaction (Freire *et al.*, 2016).

Life satisfaction was a favourable attitude towards one's life, but drastic and forceful lifestyle changes happened in everyone's life due to the pandemic. Life satisfaction was conceptualised as the cognitive factor of subjective wellbeing (Prasoon & Chaturvedi, 2016). Life satisfaction was significantly influenced by family and nutrition in developing countries (Schnettler *et al.*, 2017). People with higher life satisfaction are happier as it brings higher personal income. During COVID-19, life satisfaction levels were affected by recession, decreased life expectancy, lowered income, and mental health issues (Zhang *et al.*, 2020). Life satisfaction significantly correlated with stronger hope, a higher level of purpose, lower anxiety status, and lower stress due to COVID-19 (Trzebiński *et al.*, 2020). Research conducted by the Central Statistical Office in Ireland showed an 80 % decrease in overall life satisfaction among adults aged 18-34 during April 2020 compared to 2018. This change was due to low-income impact and concern for one's health and others (O'Donoghue, 2020).

Psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction contributed to the mental health of the student. So, the results of the studies were used to construct positive coping strategies among the students and contribute to their positive wellbeing and higher life satisfaction.

METHODS

Design

An observational study was done to document the Psychological wellbeing and Life Satisfaction of Undergraduate Nursing Students during the lockdown and Post-lockdown period of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The Institutional Review Board approved the study (minute no 10/15.7.2020).

Participants and Setting

The study assessed undergraduate nursing students in the 2019-2020 academic year at the Nursing College of a prominent educational institution in South India. A sample of 672 Undergraduate Nursing Students who filled the criteria were recruited. Based on the previous article by Roslan *et al.*, (2017), the mean overall psychological wellbeing of the students was 4.39 ± 0.61 (95% CI: 4.30, 4.48). By assuming 0.05 precision and a 95% confidence interval, the sample size needed was 595 nursing students. The sample size chosen for this study was 672, using the total enumeration sampling technique to identify the students who needed help. Data collection was done online from August 2020 till January 2022.

Measurements

The research tools used in the study were Demographic data, Ryff's psychological wellbeing scale, and *the Satisfaction with Life Scale*. Demographic data included gender, age, birth order, marital status, religion, state, location, family income, course enrollment, year of study, parent's education, psychiatric treatment, and other illnesses. Ryff's psychological wellbeing scale (PWB) measured six aspects of wellbeing and happiness (© Stanford *et al.*, n.d.; Ph.D., 2021; Psychological Wellbeing). They are autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. It has 18 items and three questions in each sub-scale. Respondents rate how strongly they *agree* or *disagree* with 18 statements using a 7-point scale (1 = strongly agree; 7 = strongly disagree) with reverse scoring for a few items. *The satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)* was developed by Diener *et al.*, (1985) in order to assess the cognitive component of subjective wellbeing (Diener *et al.*, 1985). The 7-point Likert scale includes five items ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Data Procedure

Study used Quantitative Descriptive design and total enumeration sampling technique. The information sheet and consent form were sent online to the class assignment personal email ID. Once consent obtained, students completed their online demographic Performa, psychological wellbeing scale, and satisfaction with life scale using Microsoft Forms. Psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction were assessed during the lockdown and post-lockdown period. During the post-lockdown period, it was assessed twice (the first assessment in the second week after joining college and the second assessment three months after joining the college). The data was collected based on the course and year of study from August 2020 to January 2022 using Microsoft Teams. The subject was given a code number before analysis to maintain confidentiality. The coding changed in post-lockdown data. Data was analysed using STAT statistical software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 672 nursing students participated in the study with a mean age of 22.87 ± 1.47 ; gender distribution reflected a substantial majority of females (95.68%), indicating a female-centric sample, as there is a historical predominance of females in the nursing profession. Birth order distribution significantly represented the firstborns (54.32%). Marital status predominantly comprised of singles (99.85%). Geographically, the majority of participants are from Tamil Nadu (57.58%), followed by Kerala (29.61%) and other states of India (12.81%). The religious belief they followed was predominantly Christian (85.30%), while Hindu, Muslim, and other categories make up more petite proportions, as the participants were from minority institutions.

Location was relatively balanced, with 55.51% urban and 44.49% rural areas. Diversity in family income distribution, notably more in the 5000 to 25000 Rs range (61.46%). About 57.74% were enrolled in B.Sc. Nursing and 42.26% in Diploma in Nursing. Year of study distribution was reasonably uniform across the four years. Parents' education levels and background varied. Fathers have diverse educational qualifications, ranging from primary to postgraduate levels (8.78%). In contrast, Mothers education follows a similar trend, with a relatively higher percentage of higher secondary (28.13%) and graduate qualifications (26.93%).

Psychological Wellbeing and Life Satisfaction

In the challenging times marked by lockdowns and uncertainties, counselors played a pivotal role in supporting individuals' mental and emotional wellbeing. Highlighting counseling services' significant impact and value to individuals and communities. It recognised their contribution to improving mental health, personal development, and overall quality of life. The impact of counseling services during the COVID-19 pandemic on nursing students was a subject of paramount importance, given the unprecedented challenges and stressors brought about by the global health crisis. Existing literature supported the notion that mental health support, mainly through counseling, was crucial for the wellbeing of healthcare professionals, including nursing students, during times of crisis.

Table 1: Psychological Wellbeing and Life satisfaction of nursing students

Variables	During lockdown		Post lock down two weeks		Post lock down three months		P value
	Mean±SD	Range	Mean±SD	Range	Mean±SD	Range	
Psychological well being	91.42±12.56	42-126	91.75±12.37	32-126	92.53±14.31	33-126	0.165
Self-acceptance	7.65±3.05	3-21	7.49±3	3-18	7.6±2.96	3-19	0.313
Positive relationship with others	9.19±4.05	3-21	9.54±4.09	3-21	9.9±3.94	3-21	<0.001*
Autonomy	16.3±3.28	3-21	16.18±3.16	3-21	16.22±3.07	5-21	0.722
Purpose of life	13.71±3.53	3-21	13.66±3.53	4-21	13.96±3.76	3-21	0.146
Personal growth	16.95±2.58	8-21	16.89±2.74	3-21	16.69±2.94	3-21	0.064
Environmental mastery	15.49±3.02	5-21	15.74±2.95	4-21	15.81±3.07	3-21	0.071
Life satisfaction	25.41±5.39	5-35	25.3±5.61	5-35	25.54±5.88	5-35	0.476

During the COVID-19 pandemic, nursing students faced heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and uncertainty due to increased online workload, concerns about personal safety, and disruptions to their regular education. Psychological wellbeing assessment showed 38 ± 12.6 among nursing students (Tekir, 2022) and low scores among university students (Lopes & Nihei, 2021). A study (2021) emphasised the psychological toll on adults during the pandemic and highlighted the need for targeted mental health interventions. Increased pandemic-related stress diminished students psychological wellbeing (Labrague, 2021a). Our research aligned with this perspective, demonstrating the potential positive impact of counseling services on various aspects of psychological wellbeing among nursing students, as in Table 1.

Positive relationships with others emerged as a significant ($p < 0.001$) outcome in our study, as the students got help to mend, build, and maintain interpersonal relationships through individual and group counselling sessions. Existing works of literature (Wang *et al.*, 2020) also emphasised the importance of social support in mitigating the psychological impact of the pandemic on the general public. Although evidence (Banerjee & Rai, 2020; Heinberg & Steffen, 2021; Hwang *et al.*, 2020; Jeffers *et al.*, 2022) indicates social isolation has negative consequences on psychological wellbeing, the majority of our participants had good psychological wellbeing scores, as shown in Table 1. Counseling interventions fostered positive relationships among nursing students, contributing to their resilience and coping mechanisms (Egcas *et al.*, 2021). The observation in Personal Growth aligns with the study by Green & Yildirim, 2022, which highlights that personal growth reduces fear and develops resilience in nursing students. Early care and education (Randall *et al.*, 2021) are crucial for nursing students facing unprecedented challenges, and counseling services emerge as a valuable resource in supporting their personal development. Individual counseling through smartphone online chats, WhatsApp chats, personal calls to counselors, and group sessions was well-planned and organised. Students could avail themselves of an updated support system for their needs as it provided alongside their academic institution.

While autonomy, purpose of life, and environment mastery did not show significant changes in the present study, the nuanced effects would still be meaningful due to the multifaceted nature of nursing education, and the need for tailored interventions was emphasised in various studies (Martin *et al.*, 2023; "Nursing Education," 2020). The non-significant trends in these dimensions suggest that counseling services during COVID-19 had subtle, yet potentially valuable, effects on personal and environmental mastery.

This study featured the importance of inbuilt counseling services in supporting the psychological wellbeing of nursing students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The positive outcomes observed, particularly regarding positive relationships and personal growth, drew a parallel with existing literature on the benefits of mental health support for healthcare professionals during crises.

University students from nine countries and different religions assessed during the pandemic revealed that 54% had a negative impact of Covid 19 on life satisfaction (Rogowska *et al.*, 2021). The present study, conducted among students of different cultures, shows high life satisfaction. While the fear related to Covid -19 decreased by one unit in life satisfaction (Dymecka *et al.*, 2021), another study among nursing students stated that life satisfaction is 13 ± 4.92 (Tekir, 2022).

Positive relationships with others and self-acceptance influence life satisfaction, plus increased pandemic stress reduces life satisfaction (Egcas *et al.*, 2021; Muntean *et al.*, 2022). During this study, tele-counseling and online group sessions on self-motivation, resilience, crisis intervention, and interpersonal relationships helped to maintain life satisfaction. The mean \pm SD was 25.36 ± 5.6 ; after two weeks in the college, it was 25.3 ± 5.6 , and after three months in the college, it was 25.5 ± 5.966 .

Research shows resilience hurts life satisfaction as stress increases (Labrague, 2021b). The new everyday life influenced the past and future. This study's high P value for life satisfaction ($p=0.476$) indicated a lack of significant change as an effect of counseling during the pandemic. The variation in results calls attention to the complex interplay of factors influencing mental health outcomes during a global crisis.

Comparison of psychological Wellbeing and life satisfaction among Two Time Points

Table 2 illustrate the comparison of psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction among nursing students at different time points during and after the lockdown. Several noteworthy trends and statistically significant differences emerged from the data. A marginal increase in psychological wellbeing was observed after three months' post-lockdown ($p=0.207$) this, suggesting a potential positive trend in the overall mental health of nursing students as the effects of the lockdown wane. This aligned with research (Priyamvada *et al.*, 2021), suggesting that psychological interventions contributed to the recovery of mental health during and after crises. There was a notable increase in self-acceptance after three months post-lockdown ($p=0.583$), indicating a positive impact of time on nursing students' self-perception and self-worth. The rise in self-acceptance was consistent with studies (Yao *et al.*, 2023), indicating that counseling services positively improved students' psychological wellbeing.

Table 2: Comparison of Psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction among two-time points

Variables	During Lockdown & Post lockdown - After 2 weeks	During Lockdown & Post lockdown - After 3 months	Post lockdown - After two weeks & Post lockdown - After three months
Psychological Wellbeing – Overall	0.496	0.085	0.207
Self-Acceptance	0.126	0.583	0.344
Positive Relationships with Others	0.771	<0.001*	<0.001*
Autonomy	0.452	0.542	0.915
Purpose of Life	0.740	0.157	0.053*
Personal Growth	0.638	0.030*	0.079
Environment Mastery	0.072	0.861	0.952
Life Satisfaction	0.763	0.038*	0.749

A significant improvement in positive relationships with others was evident after two weeks and three months post-lockdown ($p<0.001^*$). This emphasised the lasting positive effects of time on interpersonal connections, possibly influenced by a more stable post-lockdown environment. The positive impact on positive relationships (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020; Tepeli *et al.*, 2022) significantly explained the role of social support in mitigating the adverse psychological effects of a pandemic. Autonomy showed no significant changes at either point, suggesting that nursing students' sense of independence remained relatively stable throughout the lockdown and post-lockdown periods.

The marginal decrease in the purpose of life after three months suggested a need for continued support, a multicomponent self-guided approach, and building the individual by positive psychological strategies (Przybylko *et al.*, 2021). A significant improvement in personal growth was observed after two weeks post-lockdown (0.030*), emphasising the effect of the initial transition. However, this effect diminished slightly after three months. This finding aligned with Windle *et al.*'s report that counseling interventions focused on self-transcendence to foster personal development and resilience (Windle *et al.*, 2020), as adversity, do not decide personal growth (Kim *et al.*, 2021). Environment mastery remained relatively stable, with no significant changes observed at either time point. Suggesting that nursing students' perceived control over their environment remained consistent throughout the study.

Positive shifts in self-acceptance, positive relationships, and life satisfaction were evident, emphasising the importance of ongoing support and interventions to foster a resilient and satisfied mindset among nursing students during and after challenging periods such as lockdowns and pandemics.

Life satisfaction showed a significant association between during lockdown and after three months post-lockdown ($p=0.038$), indicating that nursing students experienced a more profound sense of satisfaction as time progressed beyond the immediate post-lockdown period. The significant increase in life satisfaction after three months was consistent with studies done by Brooks *et al.*, 2020, underlining that psychological support contributes to overall life satisfaction, even in the aftermath of a crisis. A study suggested that undergraduate students experienced three times higher life satisfaction if they had not been exposed to COVID-19 (Rogowska *et al.*, 2021). In this, students who were quarantined and received tailored intervention also reported high life satisfaction during and after the lockdown.

Domain Contribution to Psychological Wellbeing

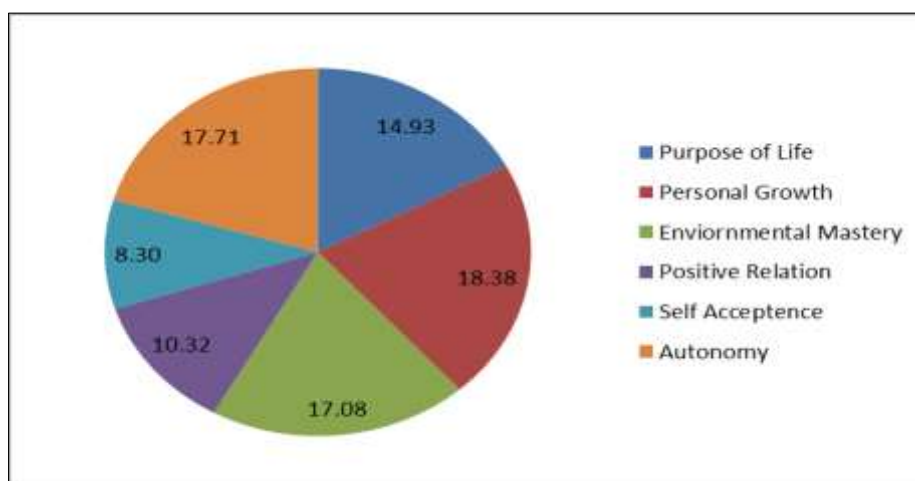


Figure 1: Domain Contribution to Psychological Wellbeing

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on nursing students, particularly during lockdown and in the post-lockdown period, was a critical area of study that requires attention. The overall average psychological wellbeing mean score was 53.11 ± 10.21 . The presented results, reflecting the average percentage contributions of various domains to psychological wellbeing, can be contextualised within the unique challenges nursing students face during these unprecedented times.

The modest contribution of self-acceptance (8.3%) may reflect the strain on nursing students' self-perception as they navigated the challenges posed by the pandemic. Literature, such as that by Labrague (2021a), acknowledged the psychological stressors experienced by healthcare students during the pandemic, emphasising the need for targeted support. The portion of positive relationships with others (10.32%) highlighted the importance of social support for nursing students. Studies by (Chen *et al.*, 2021) emphasised the role of peer and mentor support in mitigating the impact of stress on nursing students during the pandemic. The significant contribution of autonomy (17.71%) suggested that empowering nursing students with a sense of control over their learning environments was crucial, as a multicenter study indicated the importance of autonomy in nursing education to enhance students' adaptability, especially in times of crisis (Krukowska-Sitek *et al.*, 2022).

The focus on the purpose of life (14.93%) underlined the need to address existential concerns among nursing students. Literature, such as that by Liu *et al.*, (2019), discussed the existential challenges students face during university life and emphasised the role of finding meaning in their work for psychological health. The momentous contribution to personal growth (18.38%) aligned with the resilience and adaptability required of nursing students. Studies by Freire *et al.*, (2016) and Labrague (2021a) highlighted healthcare students' need for personal and professional growth when provided with appropriate support and resources. Environment mastery (17.08%) reflected the importance of creating supportive learning environments for nursing students. Literature by Satpathy & Ali (2020) and Taleb *et al.*, (2023) discussed the impact of the learning environment on the psychological wellbeing of healthcare students during the pandemic, affirming the need for adaptable and supportive structures.

Domains and their respective contributions shed light on the delicate psychological challenges nursing students face during and after the COVID-19 lockdown. By integrating these findings into educational and support frameworks, institutions can better address the unique needs of nursing students, fostering their psychological wellbeing and ensuring the development of resilient healthcare professionals. This study provides a foundation for understanding and addressing the multifaceted aspects of nursing student experiences during challenging times.

Implication of the Study by Counselor

- Periodic contact helped bring constructive and positive change to the participants.
- After the post-lockdown period assessment, students with low scores were identified for individual counseling to enhance the support system and help them develop resilience.
- Higher psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction made them cope and overcome the pandemic crisis, perform better academically, and adapt quickly to new normal life.
- Social isolation hurts psychological wellbeing, but early care and intervention improve psychological wellbeing.
- Personal growth, environmental mastery, and autonomy significantly impacted psychological wellbeing.

- Differences in cultural background, positive relationships with others, and self-acceptance positively affected life satisfaction. So, group counseling sessions are held on self-motivation and interpersonal relationship skills.

CONCLUSION

Psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction contributed to the student's holistic wellbeing and health. Integrating and enhancing counseling services for nursing students should remain a priority to ensure their resilience, wellbeing, and successful navigation through the challenges posed by global health emergencies. During the lockdown, it was essential to assess undergraduate nursing students' psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction and know their wellbeing post-lockdown. The results of this study highlighted psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction as a whole; it enabled the investigator (counselor) to give individual counseling as needed, helped to identify students in need of emotional support, and enabled the development of an intervention such as activity and group sessions online to build on positive attitude. Although the new normal life affected the past and future of students, it revealed an optimistic approach toward life during the lockdown. It enabled us to learn better-coping strategies during the crisis and post-lockdown. The result of the study was used to construct positive coping strategies among the students, contributing to their positive wellbeing and higher life satisfaction.

Ethical considerations: To maintain confidentiality, the subject is given a code number before analysis. The coding changed in post-lockdown data. This study received ethical approval from Institutional Review Board (No: 10/15.7.2020)

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