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Mental Health Status of Children during Late Adolescence from Ernakulam District, Kerala in the Pandemic Era

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Abstract

Background: COVID pandemic had created a huge havoc in the lives of citizens all over the world. Adolescence being the most sensitive period in an individual's life, is the most affected stage. School and college lock down had led to social isolation and media addiction among teenagers, all leading to poor mental health. Furthermore, the terrifying news of COVID-19 spread all over the social media have deteriorated the mental health status of the youth. The cases of depression and suicide rates among the youth population has increased from the onset of pandemic. Hence, the study is an attempt to determine the mental health status of the teenagers of Ernakulam, thereby strategies to cope up with this situation can be formulated and made into practice.

Objectives

- To study the prevalence of various mental health issues among adolescents.
- To explore the symptoms of various mental health issues among adolescents.
- To assess the impact of COVID 19 upon the mental health of youngsters.

Methodology

- The area selected for the present study was Ernakulam city, which is a city in Kerala.
- The sample consists of 225 adolescents between the age group of 18 to 20 years from different areas of Ernakulam city. Adolescents were chosen randomly from different parts of Ernakulam via Google forms.
- A self- designed questionnaire was distributed via Google form to elicit information regarding the mental health status of the youth.
- Data collected from the study, was tabulated, consolidated and analysed using percentage analysis.

Results: It is evident from the study that a noticeable amount of the adolescents had mental health issues due to various problems including peer pressure, academic pressure, parental conflicts, divorce, family background, social media and lockdown.

Conclusion: As the results indicates, COVID pandemic had made the teenagers feel unsafe, anxious and depressed. It is very important for the family and school/college to join hands together and keep an eye on the growth and development of the adolescent, spent time with them and provide them with confidence to share their issues and viewpoints with them.

Keywords: Mental health, late adolescents, COVID Pandemic, Lockdown.

Introduction

Adolescence is said to be a period of transitional development. It's a peak phase of developmental changes that can occur in an individual's life. The ability to cope up with these changes and challenges depends upon the mental health of the teenager. Reports and studies have indicated that there has been an increase in mental health issues among adolescents from past 8 years due to social and emotional changes around them, including family disruption, unemployment, social media, educational and vocational pressures and peer pressure.

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Majority of the mental health problems arises during adolescence period. Latest studies have revealed that mental health problems, specifically depression is the main cause of psychological burden among teenagers. Poor mental health can have a significant impact on the overall health and development of adolescents, and is associated with many health and social consequences, such as increased use of alcohol, tobacco and illegal substances, teenage pregnancy, dropouts, and criminal behaviours. The emergent studies have also indicated that healthy development of children and adolescents leads to the development of good mental health and well-being and aids in preventing mental health related issues or disorders (Subbadra 2017).

The outbreak of COVID 19 has brought many disturbances and to daily life. For children and young people, school closures affect about half of the world’s student population. Social distancing measures and movement restrictions can bring serious risks of loneliness. In the short and long term, this painful temperament is associated with an amplified risk of poor physical health and higher levels of anxiety and depression among teenagers. Studies have confirmed that the impact of these types of long-term disruptions on physical and mental health, showcasing that when children are out of school, they are less physically active, spend more time in front of the screen, have irregular sleeping patterns and less favorable diets often leads to weight gain

and decreased cardiorespiratory fitness (Nearchou et.al., 2020).

At the present scenario, lock down have affected the mental health among adolescence adversely. It has put the teenagers at risk of dropping out from school, emotional turmoil, screen addiction, abuse and loneliness, substance abuse, interrupted career/educational opportunities, early marriage and various other serious mental health issues. The cases of suicides, depression and criminal behaviours among teenagers are all over the newspaper.

Since there are only very few studies related to mental health issues among late adolescents conducted in Kerala, the investigator endeavoured to assess and examine the mental health issues among late adolescents developed during COVID 19 lockdown. Therefore, this study would provide an insight on the prevalence and extent of mental health among the teenagers and will form a basis to formulate strategies to tackle the adverse youth condition.

Results and Discussion

The mental issues among the late adolescents during the pandemic era are discussed in the following sections.

1. Mental health facts about the respondents

The figures 1-4 portrays the mental health problems faced by the teenagers due to media usage, home environment, activities done before sleeping and sleeping time.

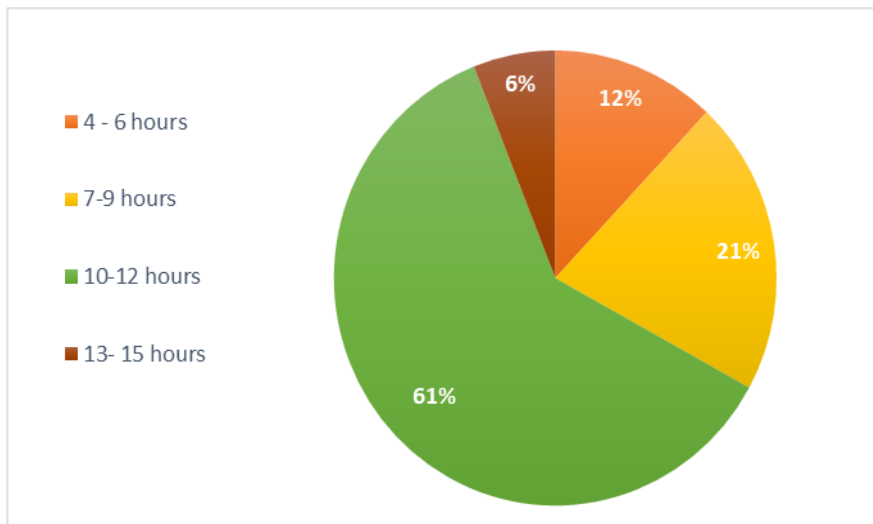


Fig. 1: Time spent online.

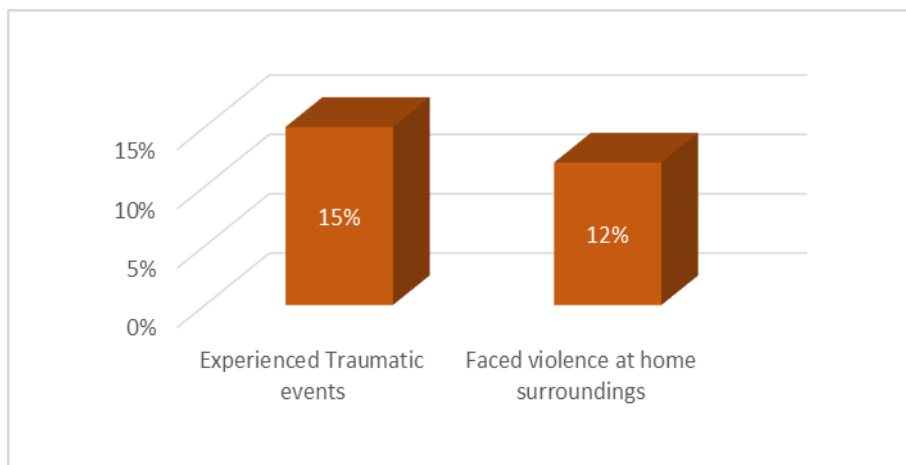


Fig. 2: Life Events.

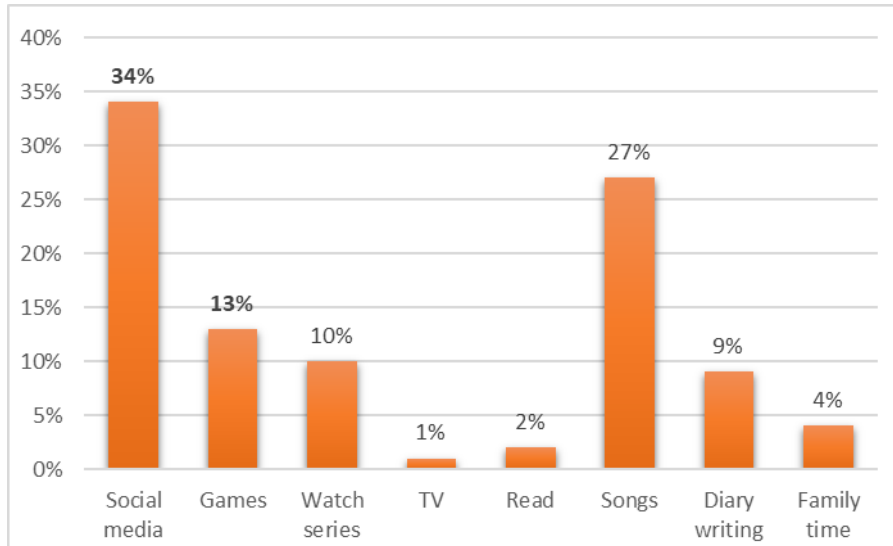


Fig. 3: Activities done before sleeping.

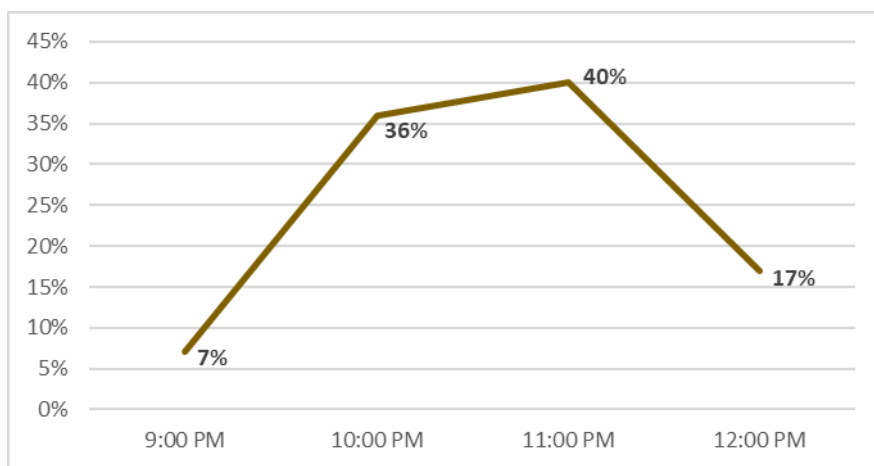


Fig. 4: Sleeping Time.

Figure 1 clearly indicates that majority (61%) of the respondents spent 10-12 hours online per day. About 21% of the teenagers spent 7-9 hours online and few of them spent 4-6 (12%) and 13-15 (6%) hours online.

It was wretched to note from figure 2 that about 15 percent of the respondents have faced violence at their home surroundings and 12 percent of them had experienced traumatic incidents in their life.

Figure 3 indicates the activities done by the teenagers before they sleep. A considerable proportion (34%) of the respondents liked surfing through social media before they sleep. Around 27 percent of the teenagers listened to music, 13 percent of them played games and 10 percent of them watched series before going to sleep. A few of them preferred to write diary (9%), spend time with family (4%), read (2%) and watch TV (1%) before dozing. It is evident from table 3 that almost half (40%) of the youngsters sleep at night by 11pm, about 36 percent of them sleep by 10pm and a few of them usually sleep at 12am (17%) and 9pm (7%) respectively.

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motivates these adolescents to reveal the hidden phases of their problems to their parents and elude avoid treacherous traits caused by the influence of peers with less knowledge and less life experience (Shahhosseini et.al, 2012).

The figures depicted below points out the child- family relation, discussing various aspects including Family status, relationship and the qualities that the child dislike about their parents.

2. Adolescent- Family Relation

A trusting bond amongst teenagers and their caregivers

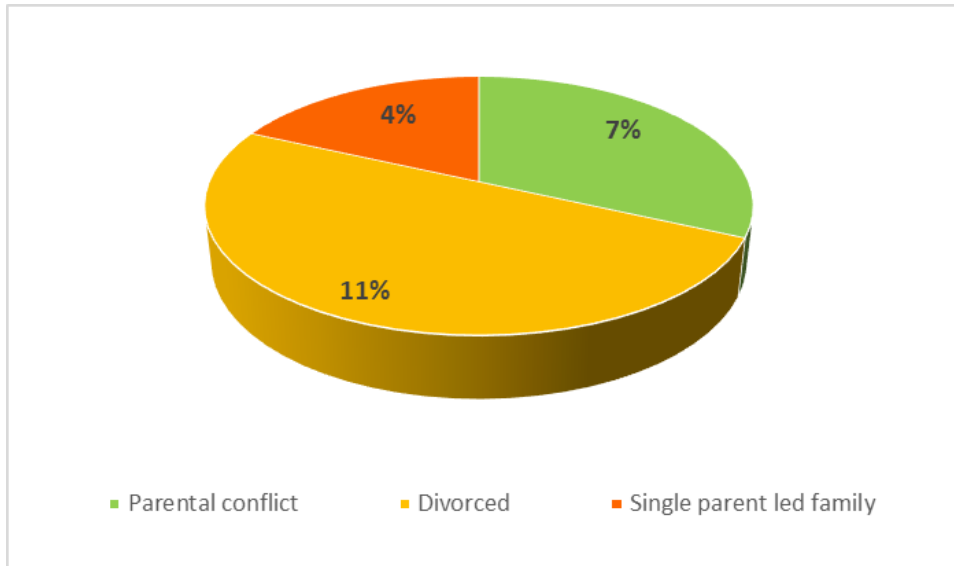


Fig. 5: Family Status.

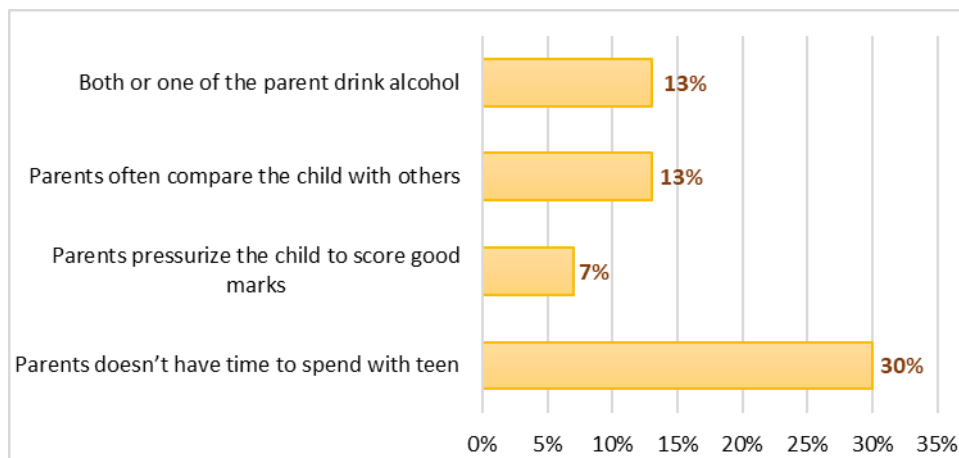


Fig. 6: Child – parent relation.

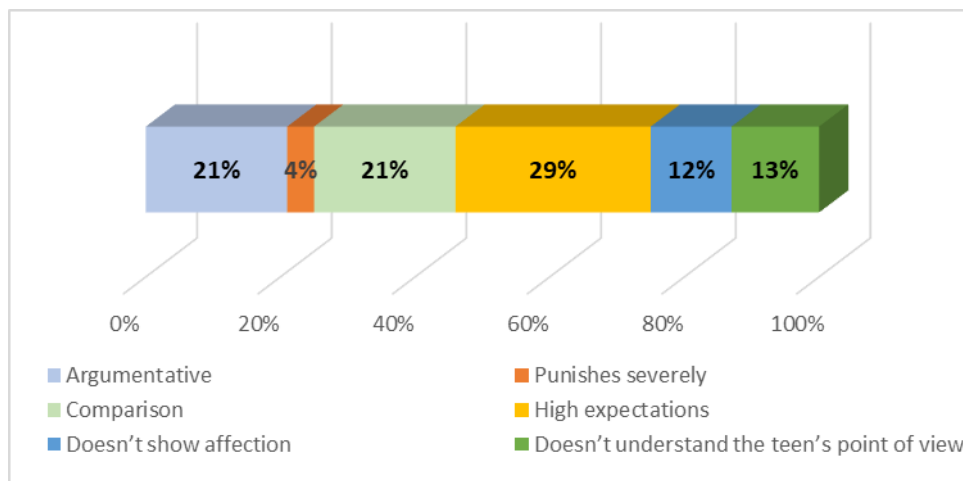


Fig. 7: Qualities of parents that the child dislike.

From figure 5, it can be noticed that 11 percent of the respondents had divorced family status, 7 percent of them revealed that they often face parental conflicts and a few of them (4%) belonged to single parent led family.

Figure 6 points out that about 30 percent of the respondents have responded that their parents don't have time to spend with them. The various reasons for not spending with the teenagers included late night jobs; looking after siblings, watching news on TV, surfing through social media and

household works. It was shocking to note that 7 percent of the teenager's parents pressurized them to score good marks, 13 percent of the parents often compare their child with others and 13 percent of the adolescent's parents consume alcohol.

It's clear from figure 7 that 29 percent of the respondent's disliked that parents keep on having high expectations regarding them. The various other qualities of parents that the teenager disliked included their argumentative nature

(24%), comparison (21%), not showing apt affection (12%), egocentric viewpoint (13%) and punishing mentality (4%).

3. Adolescent – School relation

A Study conducted by Cavioni et.al (2021) pointed out that good school - adolescent relation leads to positive mental

health outcomes and life satisfaction among the teenagers. The figures indicated below reveals the relation and level of comfort and safety that the adolescent had with the school.

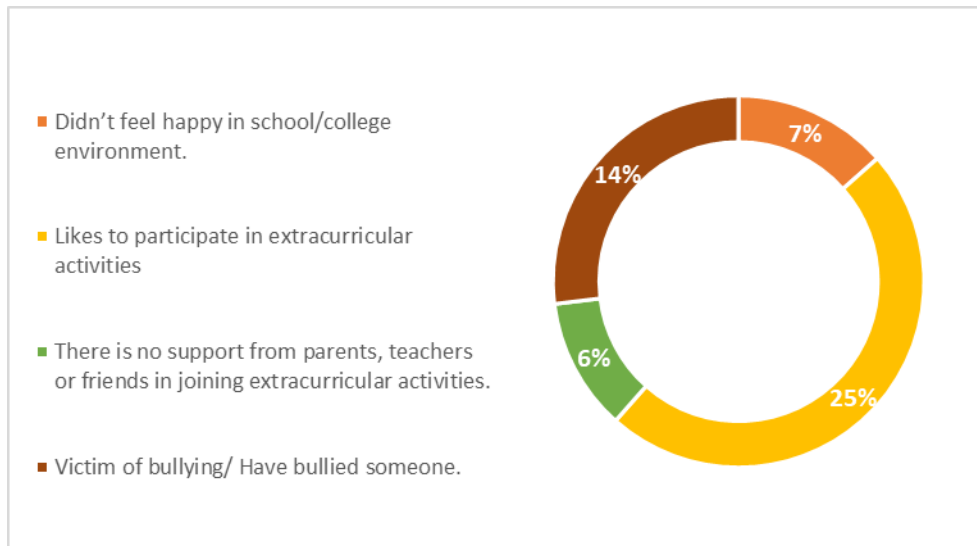


Fig. 8: School interests.

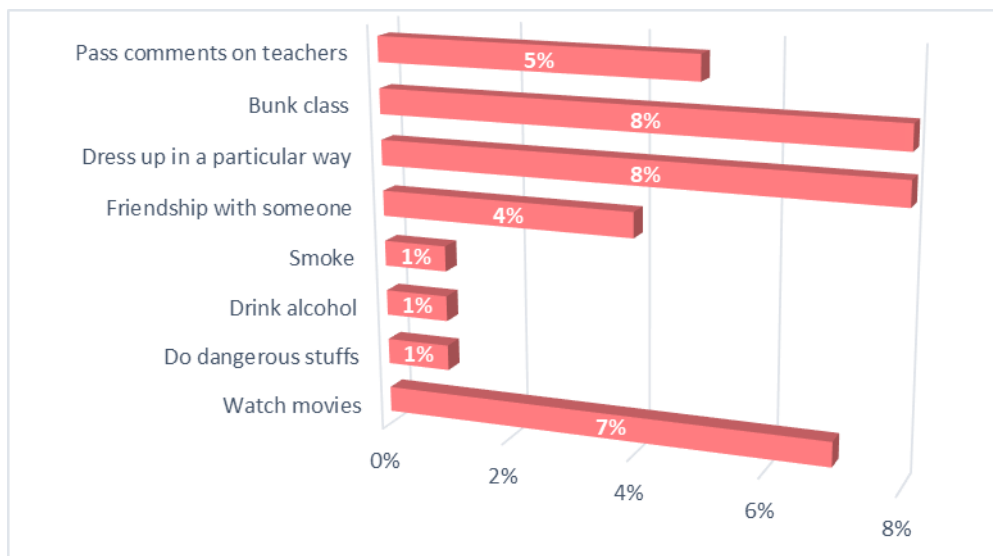


Fig. 9: Peer pressure.

It was disturbing to note from figure 8 that nine percent of the teenagers didn't feel happy in their school or college surroundings. Around 25 percent of the respondents didn't prefer extracurricular activities and six percent of them stated that they don't get support from parents, teachers or friends in joining extracurricular activities. It was alarming to note that 14 percent of the respondents accepted that they were victims of bullying or had bullied someone. A study conducted by Norrington (2021) portrayed that bullying can lead to long lasting impact upon the mental health of the teenager and can still persist throughout their adulthood too.

Figure 9 depicts the viewpoints of the teenagers about the various activities peers pressurize them to do. It was shocking to note that 8 percent of the teenager's friends often coerce them to dress up in a certain way and bunk

classes. Around 7 percent of the respondents conveyed that their peers compel them to watch adult movies and 5 percent of the peers forces them to pass comments on teachers.

4. Mental health issues due to lockdown

Panchal et.al (2021) reported that the pandemic leading to lockdown had led to mental health issues and psychological problems including anxiety and depression within the teenagers. The graphs illustrated below describes the mental health issues and concerns of the adolescents due to lockdown.

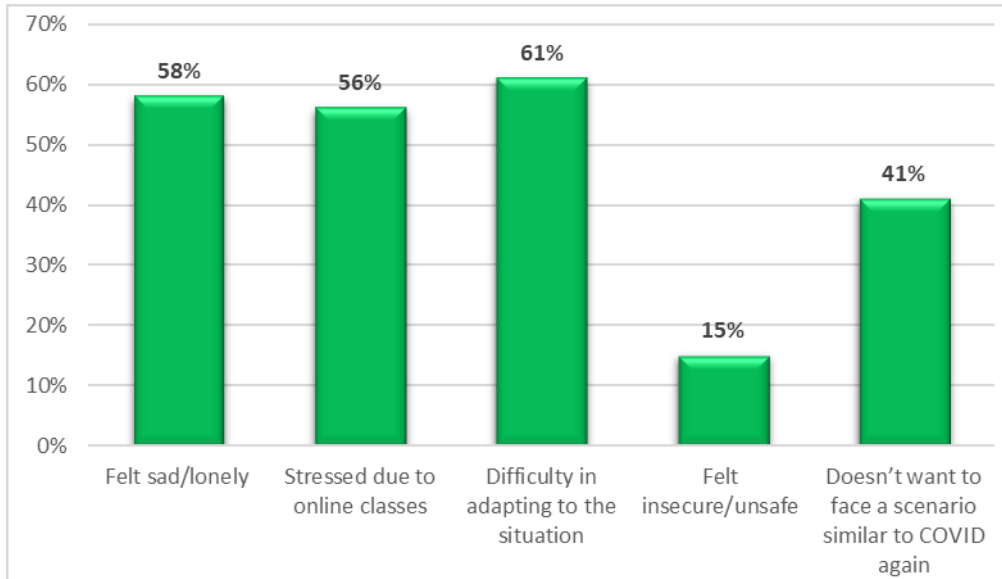


Fig. 10: Lockdown issues.

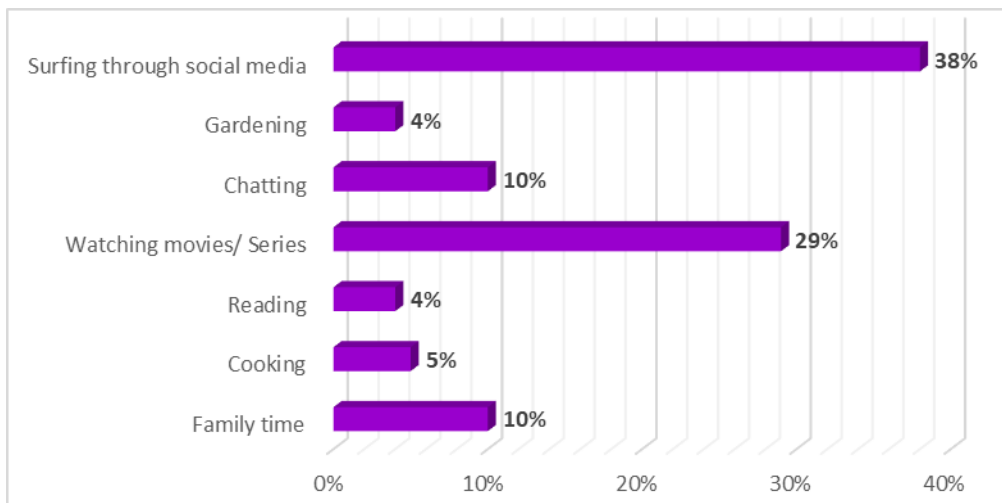


Fig. 11: Lockdown Activities.

It is as alarming to note from figure 10 that about 52 percent of the total respondents felt lonely/sad during lockdown days. It was eye-catching to note that about 56 percent of the respondents felt stressed due to online classes and 61 percent of them had difficulty in adapting to the scenario of lockdown. Around 41 percent of the respondents accepted that they don't want to face scenario similar to COVID 19 pandemic again.

Figure 11 depicts the activities done by the teenagers to pass time during lockdown period. Around 38 percent of the respondents preferred to surf through social media to overcome the lockdown boredom. About 29 percent of the respondents favoured to watch series/ movies. The rest of the teenagers engaged in activities such as family time (10%), chatting (10%), cooking (5%), reading (4%) and gardening (4%).

Excessive screen time has been reported to be associated with a variety of negative mental health consequences including anxiety, depression and emotional distress (Pandya & Lodha, 2021).

Discussion

The study on “Mental health status of late adolescents of Ernakulam district, Kerala in the pandemic era” was

conducted to determine the mental health status of the youth due to the pandemic. The results obtained from the study clearly points out a red flag towards the mental health of the adolescents. A substantial number of adolescents accepted the fact that they feel stressed, depressed and unable to cope up with the new situation. The various reasons for their deteriorating mental health included peer pressure, academic pressure, disoriented family background, and social isolation and so on. According to Behere A, Basnet P & Campbell P. (2017), dysfunctional family circumstances and financial hardships have resulted in suicidal tendencies within young people. Divorce and family conflicts leads to short- and long-term psychological problems within teens.

It was also discovered via the study that lockdown and pandemic have created screen addicts among the youth. Around more than half of the teenagers spent 10-12 hours online and 34 percent of them preferred to go through social media before sleeping. A study by Hale L. et.al (2018) have revealed that there is interconnection between screen time and disrupting sleeping patterns. The sleep loss hugely impacts the teenager by triggering obesity, psychological distress and impaired intellectual functioning. Similarly, Medic G, Wille M and Hemels M.E

(2017) revealed through their study that disrupted sleep can lead to poor scholastic performances and deviant personalities among teenagers.

The study also revealed that half of the respondents felt depressed and felt stressed to attend online classes and a little less than half of the respondents didn't want to face the pandemic situation again. The points depict above clearly proves that lockdown had created a huge impact upon the mental health of the youths making them feel confused, fearful, stressed and lonely. A similar study by Panchal u. et.al (2021) reports that the COVID-19 lockdown has caused emotional trauma and has drawn attention to vulnerable populations including individuals who have had or are now experiencing mental health issues.

From the results, we can conclude that there is prevalence of mental health issues among adolescents. Let this study act as a precursor to formulate new strategies to promote good mental health among adolescents in Kerala. It's time for the community, school and family to make strategies together and look after the mental needs of the youths for their future well- being and development.

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