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Research Article:

Expanding the Notion of Personal Well-Being During COVID-19 Campus Closure in India: Results from a Mixed-Methods Study with Members of Higher Education

Guydeuk Yeon[1], Sebastian Perumbilly[2], Elangovan N[3]*, Sarah Awungshi[4] and Varghese K. J.[5]

[1]Department of Economics, Christ University, Hosur Main Road, Bhavani Nagar, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560029 India

[2]Department of Marriage and Family Therapy, Southern Connecticut State University, 501 Crescent Street, New Haven, CT 06515 USA

[3]School of Business and Management, Christ University, Hosur Main Road, Bhavani Nagar, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560029 India

[4]Department of Psychology, Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi 110021 India

[5]Department of Psychology, Christ University, Hosur Main Road, Bhavani Nagar, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560029 India

*Corresponding author: elangovan.n@christuniversity.in

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged lives globally in unprecedented ways. While numerous studies have discussed the impact of this pandemic on human lives, this descriptive study examined how this pandemic affected personal well-being (PW) for members of Indian higher education in the early phase of the pandemic in 2020 when there were no vaccines and remedies available. Research participants (n = 551) were faculty members, graduate students, and non-teaching staff in Indian higher education. At the time of data collection, when all campuses were closed, all participants were functioning in their roles in the academic communities via virtual platforms. This descriptive study, based on a mixed-methods research design with concurrent triangulation strategies, collected data from all regions of India. Resulting data identified and discussed the impact of the pandemic on six domains of PW in the life of participants: (a) self-care; (b) professional growth; (c) quality of interrelationship within the family; (d) relationships with significant others outside of the family; (e) process of experiencing/facing and addressing challenges; and, (f) relationship with spirituality/transcendental dimensions. The relevance of the last domain may be unique to Indian participants' socio-cultural context and ethos. The findings and discussion explain how PW is a composite of all these six domains, and the pandemic expanded the notion of PW for the members of Indian higher education. Further, the findings also provided a general orientation on how educational leadership teams and institutions can enhance at least three specific dimensions of their community members and thus increase the likelihood of improving the quality of their professional and personal life. The findings may also have relevance for academic communities worldwide and inform clinicians working with members of academic communities, educational institutions, and policymakers.

Keywords: Teacher leadership, middle leadership, teacher leaders, middle leaders, distributed leadership

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INTRODUCTION

Personal well-being (PW) is a much-discussed topic in the field of mental health across the globe. It has been generally understood as an individual's overall satisfaction with life and happiness (Diener et al., 1985; Diener, 2000); a state of equilibrium between the psychological, social, and physical challenges and corresponding resources (Dodge et al., 2012); the outcome of receiving consistent support from friends and families (Tonsing, 2022); spiritual wellness with an expanded sense of purpose and meaning in life (Wills, 2009; Lai et al., 2018); sexual well-being (Oyanedel et al., 2020); family well-being (Krys et al., 2019), and environmental sustainability (Malkina-Pykh & Pykh, 2016). Most importantly, the research literature reveal that PW involves subjective well-being of the individual, with enhanced relationship within family (however they want to define what family is), personal resilience while dealing with or escaping from stress and worries, significant relationship with others outside of the family, and personal actualisation of various gifts and talents (Copolov et al., 2018; Krok, 2018; Pöllänen & Voutilainen, 2018). While some researchers included "spirituality" as a crucial domain related to the construct of PW (Copolov et al., 2018), others vehemently disagreed with such inclusion (Misajon et al., 2016).

When examining the existing literature on PW, it becomes clear that the concept of PW is complex and nuanced. What constitutes PW varies depending on how it is defined, the socio-cultural context of the research participants, the nature of the data being collected and analysed, and the research methods used to conduct the study. Further, when studying PW, it is worth examining if it undergoes any change when humans go through a pandemic.

When we surveyed the literature that focused on PW during the COVID-19 pandemic, it became clear that there is a notable paucity of literature on this topic and a significant need to deeply explore through new studies, and understand what constitutes PW within the context of the most recent pandemic. In order to address the gap in the literature, the purpose of this study was to examine how the pandemic impacted the construct of PW for members of India's higher education system during the early phase of COVID-19 in India.

The construct of PW has been studied prior to the emergence of COVID-19 among academic communities. For instance, Kansky and Diener (2017) studied the relationship between well-being and academic performance. Braaten et al. (2019) looked at the relationship between the Hedonic and eudaimonia motives to wellbeing among university students. More recently, August and Dapkewicz (2021) studied the role of positive coping strategies of college students during the COVID-19. However, their focus was not on the construct of PW but on how college students effectively coped during the pandemic with benefit-finding strategies (e.g., living with gratitude) and looking for how people became more self-less and focused on team-building to survive.

Though a handful of studies have focused on the impact of a pandemic on PW, their focus was on something other than members of academic communities. For example, Lau et al. (2008) studied the SARS pandemic (i.e., severe acute respiratory syndrome pandemic) in Hong Kong in 2003. Their study discussed how low education, unemployment, and poor health conditions negatively affected the PW in elderly and younger people and how an increased sense of community-connectedness and neighbourhood-bonding improved

PW during that pandemic. Rosenberg et al. (2021) studied the impact of COVID-19 on paediatric palliative care clinicians. They reported how COVID-19, in its beginning stage, enhanced clinicians' fear of being infected and losing patients; and reduced their professional productivity as they were still learning about the disease.

When we looked at all the existing studies, we found that no studies have focused on the impact of COVID-19 on the PW of members of higher education in a country. Those existing studies have either focused on PW before the COVID-19 pandemic or on PW for a different community other than communities of colleges and universities. In the absence of studies focusing on PW during COVID-19 in academic communities, to our knowledge, this may be the first mixed-methods-based study that discussed how COVID-19 had impacted PW of members of higher education in a country, India, in this case.

Research Question

What do faculty, staff, and postgraduate students in Indian higher education report relative to their experience and perspectives on how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their personal well-being?

Research Objectives

This research project's primary objective was to create a new body of knowledge on the impact of COVID-19 on the PW of members of Indian higher education. Using a mixed-methods approach, we combined descriptive and exploratory information from quantitative and qualitative data to create a richer picture of what constitutes PW. The findings and discussion have shed light on six domains related to the participants' PW.

COVID-19 Pandemic and Indian Context

As of 4 January 2023, over 667 million cases had been detected globally, and over 6.69 million deaths. There have been almost 44.6 million confirmed cases and 530,707 deaths in India alone (Coronavirus Resource Centre Report, n.d.). No pandemic has had such a huge global impact as COVID-19 in recent history.

During the early phase of the pandemic, life and well-being in almost every human system were challenged like never before. According to a study conducted in India during the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic (Varshney et al., 2020), it increased worries, anxiety and insomnia, and much uncertainty in the lives of the Indian public, especially in the areas of their livelihood, health, and economy. As the pandemic continued to rage in India, social and community life was catastrophically impaired by quarantine restrictions, lockdowns, livelihood loss, and escalating unemployment. Life in the world of academia in India was also challenged like never before. Although most universities and colleges transitioned their day-to-day operations to online platforms, no systematic studies were conducted in the Indian context to assess this pandemic's impact on Indian higher education.

Indian Higher Education: A Brief Background

India's higher education system is the largest globally in terms of student enrolment and the number of faculty members and non-teaching staff (Thomas & Bhasi, 2018). Table 1 shows that according to the Department of Higher Education (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2019), total student enrolment in Indian higher education was estimated to be 37.4 million, with 19.2 million male and 18.2 million female. Women constituted 48.6% of the total enrolment. About 79.8% of the 37.4 million students were enrolled in the undergraduate level programme. The number of students enrolled in graduate and higher levels was 7.55 million, out of which 1,69,170 were in doctoral programmes. According to the same 2019 report (as cited earlier), the total number of international students enrolled in Indian higher education was 47,427.

Table 1 shows that the total number of faculty members in Indian higher education was 1,416,299, out of which about 57.8% were male teachers and 42.2% were female teachers. At the all-India level, there were 73 female faculty members per 100 male faculty members. The Indian higher education sector had a total of 1,214,302 non-teaching posts. The average number of females per 100 male non-teaching staff was approximately 49.

Table 1. Indian higher education system: Demographics

Type	Category	Count
Institution	University	993
	College	39,931
	Standalone degree-granting institution	10,725
Academic community	Student	37,400,000
	Faculty members	1,416,299
	Non-teaching staff	1,214,302

Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development (2019).

METHOD

Research Design

Considering the paucity of literature, this article focused on the impact of PW on members of Indian higher education: Graduate students, faculty members and non-teaching staff. To capture both existing knowledge claims about the construct of PW and explore new dimensions of PW in light of a raging global pandemic, we decided to employ mixed-methods research (MMR) design with concurrent triangulation strategies for this study. MMR verifies and confirms existing knowledge claims and explores new ideas related to a topic of investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). MMR design provides better and stronger inferences by independently offsetting limitations of quantitative and qualitative

methods and creates the opportunity for a greater diversity of views that come from both qualitative and quantitative worldviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Teddie & Tashakkori, 2003).

Survey instrument

At the time of the data collection, there was no existing instrument suitable to be used within the Indian context explicitly. In the absence of a reliable and valid survey instrument suited for this study, in consultation with relevant research literature and peer discussion among authors of this article, we developed a culturally appropriate survey instrument based on MMR for the Indian context. Since the purpose of the survey instrument was to create a container that would help research participants describe and explore their personal experiences related to their PW during the pandemic, we did not focus on the validity and reliability of the survey instrument. We pilot-tested the items on the survey instrument with 12 members of the Indian higher education. We integrated their feedback into the final instrument before launching it for data collection.

Drafting and finalising the survey instrument went through several rounds of iterations within our group. The final version of the survey instrument had 58 items, which included checklist items, semantic and Likert scales, and open-ended questions. The survey instrument had the following sections: questions 1–3 addressed informed-consent and inclusion-exclusion criteria; questions 4–9 focused on participants' awareness and confidence in public health services to deal with COVID-19 in India; questions 10–27 centred on how the COVID-19 related campus closure impacted participants' life in general, personal and social life in particular; questions 28–30 asked if participants had experienced any discrimination from the community with the pandemic; questions 31–36 addressed topics related to participants' PW and coping mechanisms; questions 37–44 were open-ended questions with a focus on exploring newer perspectives gained by the participants during the ongoing pandemic; and questions 45–58 explored the participant demographics.

After securing the appropriate institutional review board approval, the survey's final version was launched through a secure and encrypted online platform. The instrument had a built-in informed-consent form and inclusion-exclusion criteria.

Research participation criteria

Each participant had to be at least 21 years old and proficient in reading, understanding, and writing in English. Participants had to be associated with an Indian university or college recognised by the University Grants Commission of India; and required to have one of these roles: a faculty member/non-teaching staff/graduate student.

Sampling procedures and survey administration

The list of Indian universities was identified from the Association of Indian Universities (2020). The academic institutions were grouped on the state and the union territory they belonged. A convenience sampling approach was used to select the universities from the list, ensuring representation from all 28 states and nine union territories. Subsequently, the invitation email with the survey hyperlink was sent to participants through the Deans

and Department Chairs associated with India's higher education institutions. Before responding to the survey instrument, every participant had to read and agree with the informed-consent form, which explained the nature and purpose of the research project.

Data analysis

Two types of data were collected through the survey instrument (quantitative and qualitative). Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS Statistics, version *25*) was used to analyse quantitative data. Descriptive analysis, ANOVA, and *t*-test were done. NVivo 9 was used for analysing qualitative data. Data analysis was performed in three stages: data reduction, data display, and data integration. The data reduction process for qualitative data encompassed doing an exploratory thematic analysis from written texts provided by the research participants through iteration. The data display stage consolidated the multiple occurrences of the themes and presented a frequency table. The data integration stage identified related themes to build the domains. Six domains emerged in the third stage.

Researcher reflexivity

As authors, all of us are higher education members and have been affected by COVID-19-related campus closures. Except for the second author, all others reside in India. The second author taught in Indian higher education as a Fulbright Scholar for several months towards the end of 2019 and is familiar with the world of academia both in the United States and India. All authors met weekly for several months over virtual platforms during the data collection and analysis phases. At the time of the data collection and analysis, all co-authors worked remotely as members of academic communities. Our discussions focused on how COVID-19 impacted us as members of the academic community. Our meetings and conferences shaped how we looked at and interpreted the qualitative data.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

Research Participants

Research participants (n = 551) in this study were exclusively members of Indian higher education from all academic disciplines. They were located in 26 out of 28 states and two out of nine union territories in India. Among the participants, 36.2% identified as male and 63.8% as female. Of the participants, 60% identified as graduate students; 30.4% were faculty members, and 9.6% were non-teaching staff.

Domain One of PW: Self-Care

In response to the question of whether the quality of self-care was enhanced during COVID-19, research participants reported the following: 70.54% had seen many "positive changes" associated with self-care, which included more time for personal reflection; more family times (67.10%); more time to enjoy the natural environment surrounding them (53.33%); more time to read favourite books (37.42%); and more focus on spiritual practices (36.77%). Other changes noticed were personal hygiene, physical activity,

regular sleep hours, media consumption for fun and relaxation, and overall experience in anxiety (see Table 2.). In terms of personal hygiene, about 80.86% of participants agreed that there was an improvement in consciousness and action related to enhanced personal hygiene in their life. The total of 49.9% of participants reported decreased physical activity, while 36.9% reported increased physical activity. About 46.96% of participants reported an increase in anxiety experience, 10.07% reported a decrease, and 38.57% reported no change.

Table 2. Self-care: Quantitative data

Variables	Faculty members (n = 127) M(SD)	Students (n = 251) M(SD)	Non-teaching staff (n = 40) M(SD)	F (2,416)	p
Self-care enhanced	3.62 (1.03)	3.64 (1.10)	3.82 (0.90)	0.578	0.562
Personal hygiene	4.02 (0.99)	4.10 (0.92)	4.25 (0.87)	0.926	0.397
Physical activity	2.99 (1.13)	2.64 (1.22)	3.0 (1.3)	4.004	0.019
Organising habit	3.13(0.94)	3.05 (1.09)	3.44 (0.86)	2.552	0.079
Anxiety management	3.38 (0.81)	3.45 (0.83)	3.44 (0.85)	0.083	0.921
Changes in sleep patterns	3.04 (0.84)	3.29 (1.08)	2.82 (0.81)	5.563	0.004

Note. $^{*}p < 0.05$

As listed in Table 2, there are statistical differences in physical activity and changes in sleep patterns among the six factors associated with self-care. Table 3 presents the components of self-care identified from the open-ended questions. Some of the quotes from the participants are shown in Table 4.

Table 3. Self-care: Qualitative data

Components of self-care	References (general category)	Faculty members (F) Graduate students (S) Non-teaching staff (NTS)
The clarity in thinking and purposeful living; discovery of new talents; increased autonomy, confidence, self-respect; reflectiveness, independence, newer awareness and perspectives (wisdom), and enhanced self-care (i.e., better-eating habits, better sleep; more relaxing time; increased physical exercise; less stress, reduced commute time; more time to self; and improved hygiene).	167	(F = 36, 22%) (S = 114, 68%) (NTS = 17, 10%)

Table 4. Self-care: Participant quotes

Members of the academic community	Participant quotes
Faculty members	"The lockdown allowed me to work on a pending paper, start a new collaborative project, catch up with friends in other parts of the world for information exchange, spend more time attending to my personal life, family members who are usually busy had time to connect with me, I had more time to exercise, cook healthy food with available groceries, read a book outside of the work requirements, watch a series online. When regular work from home started, the flexibility and reduced teaching hours per week helped. All while receiving a monthly salary, which is extremely important for mental peace."
Students	"I have improved my food habits. I do take adequate rest. I don't get tired. I save time on traffic. My work concentration has increased."
	"I have more time to reflect on myself and read more self-help books and eat healthily."
Non-teaching staff	"I have improved my food habits. I do take adequate rest. I don't get tired. I save time on traffic. My work concentration has increased."
	"The extra time I get helps me clear my head of doubts and confusion."

Domain Two of PW: Professional Growth

During the COVID-19 pandemic, 46.78% of participants reported that working remotely (i.e., being away from campus) decreased their overall academic activities, while only 35.68% reported an increase.

Table 5 showed that the professional growth in terms of academic research, academic, creative words, working hours, and overall academic activity were different for faculty members, students, and non-teaching staff. From the qualitative data, new learnings, confidence in using technology, enhanced self-respect and time to read and reflect were identified as some indicators of professional growth (see Table 6). Some of the participant's quotes on professional growth are presented in Table 7.

Table 5. Professional growth: Quantitative data

Variables	Faculty members (n = 127) M(SD)	Students (n = 251) M(SD)	Non-teaching staff (n = 40) M(SD)	F (2,416)	p
Academic research	3.27 (0.96)	2.75 (1.18)	3.36 (0.87)	11.069	0.000

(Continued on next page)

Table 5. (*Continued*)

Variables	Faculty members (n = 127) M(SD)	Students (n = 251) M(SD)	Non-teaching staff (n = 40) M(SD)	F (2,416)	p
Academic creative works	3.35 (0.99)	2.72 (1.23)	3.29 (0.98)	13.301	0.000
Work hours	3.53 (1.07)	2.87 (1.20)	3.64 (1.04)	18.080	0.000
Overall academic activity	3.45 (1.03)	2.64 (1.22)	3.43 (1.14)	23.866	0.000

Note. $^{*}p < 0.05$.

Table 6. Professional growth: Qualitative data

Constituents of professional growth in academia	References (general category)	Faculty members (F) Graduate students (S) Non-teaching staff (NTS)
Resulting from: new learning; confidence to master their profession using technology, enhanced self-respect; dedication to read and reflect.	70	(F = 25, 36%) (S = 35, 50%) (NTS = 10, 14%)

Table 7. Professional growth in academia: Participant quotes

Members of the academic community	Participant quotes
Faculty members	"Though it has not created a drastic change as a teacher since we all have been asked to teach classes through the online platform, this is an opportunity to know, explore, understand, use and benefit from a few online teaching and research tools. I think this is very important for every teacher and scholar."
Students	"I have been more productive since I have been able to do things at my own pace. I have published multiple articles during the last two months, which I could not do before. I have resumed reading books, which is definitely helping me. I have learned new skills, like video editing and data analysis software."
Non-teaching staff	"It has enhanced my focus and upgraded my knowledge level in specific areas."

Domain Three of PW: Relationship with Immediate Family

Participants reported more positive changes in their relationship with family during the COVID-19-related work/study from home: increased sense of gratitude and appreciation towards family; helping around the house; taking care of dependents (e.g., children and

elders). While 72.91% of participants agreed that they grew in gratitude and appreciation towards their family, 8.18% disagreed. Around the theme of helping around the house, 77.32% of participants reported an increase, while 4.54% reported a decrease. The work/study from home also changed conflicts and fights within the family. While 24.9% of participants reported decreased conflicts and fights in the family, 19.25% reported increased conflicts and fights.

Table 8 compares the relationship factors between faculty members, students, and non-teaching staff. Except for *taking care of dependents in the family* (p = 0.030), all the other aspects are not different. The qualitative data that reflected the relationships identified greater involvement in family life and peace of mind at home (see Table 9). Some of the participant's quotes are presented in Table 10.

Table 8. Relationship with immediate family: Quantitative data

Variables	Faculty members (n = 127) M(SD)	Students (n = 251) M(SD)	Non-teaching staff (n = 40) M(SD)	F (2,416)	p
Growth in gratitude and appreciation toward family	3.91 (1.08)	3.95 (1.0)	4.02 (0.98)	0.170	0.844
Help around the house	3.96 (0.89)	4.06 (0.83)	4.02 (0.98)	0.525	0.592
Family conflicts and fights	2.85 (1.0)	2.98 (0.88)	2.58 (0.81)	2.952	0.054
Taking care of dependents in the family (e.g., children)	4.21 (0.92)	4.10 (0.80)	4.48 (0.75)	3.553	0.030

Note. *p < 0.05.

Table 9. Relationship with immediate family: Qualitative data

Constituents of relationship with immediate family	References (general category)	Faculty members (F) Graduate students (S) Non-teaching staff (NTS)
Greater involvement in the life of the family; peace of mind being at home.	65	(F = 20, 31%) (S = 38, 58%) (NTS = 7, 11%)

Table 10. Relationship with immediate family: Participant quotes

Members of the academic community	Participant quotes
Faculty members	"I feel more relaxed at home as the stress of commuting is not there. I am also getting to spend more time with family."
	"I am spending extra time with my family. During my breaks from work, I can do household works."
Students	"More family time helped me reduce stress and anxiety."
	"How tiny things matter, such as household chores/errands-they have become stimulating factors for physical activity and family cohesion."
Non-teaching staff	"I feel more connected with my family members, and we do a lot of talking and sharing."

Domain Four of Domain Three of PW: Relationship with Immediate Family: Meaningful Relationship with Others Outside of the Family

While 46.96% of participants reported decreased interaction with colleagues and peers in the profession, 25.99% reported an increase. Also, 57.09% of participants reported increased social media activity.

Table 11 showed that only social media activity was significantly different (p = 0.024) and the participant groups. Connectedness with friends, extended family, and colleagues; care and support to dependents were some themes from the qualitative data that highlighted the meaningful relationships (see Table 12). Some sample quotes from the participants that mentioned meaningful relationships are presented in Table 13.

Table 11. Meaningful relationship with others outside of the family for validation: Quantitative data

Variables	Faculty members (n = 127) M(SD)	Students (n = 251) M(SD)	Non-teaching staff (n = 40) M(SD)	F (2,416)	p
Interaction with important people outside of my family	2.70 (1.13)	2.56 (1.17)	2.87 (1.22)	1.496	0.225
Social media activity	3.53 (0.74)	3.61 (0.99)	3.18 (0.80)	3.744	0.024

Note. *p <0.05

Table 12. Meaningful relationship with others outside of the family for validation: Qualitative data

Constituents of relationship with others outside of the family	References (general category)	Faculty members (F) Graduate students (S) Non-teaching Staff (NTS)
Being connected with validating and supportive friends, extended family, and close colleagues; and providing care and support for those who depend on me.	8	(F = 1, 13%) (S = 6, 74%) (NTS = 1, 13%)

Table 13. Meaningful relationship with others outside of the family: Participant quotes from qualitative data

Members of the academic community	Participant quotes
Faculty members	"Now I have more time to be with my extended family and opportunities to catch up with my friends and relatives over video calls. I am also able to connect with a select few of my colleagues and peers in the profession through online platforms. This would not have happened as often without the lockdown."
Students	"I have started to reflect upon myself and take care of my loved ones even more."
Non-teaching staff	"This work from home time has helped me spend more quality time with my aged mom and other relatives."

Domain Five of Domain Three of PW: Relationship with Immediate Family: Challenges Experienced and Addressed (Qualitative Data)

While the previous four sections reported quantitative and qualitative data results, the next two sections examined only qualitative data. In the spirit of listening to every voice (and it is culturally respectful within the Indian context to include all voices), we must capture all perspectives. The fifth domain sheds light on how participants experienced and addressed various challenges of working/studying remotely while maintaining a work-life balance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 14 presents the themes identified from the qualitative data. All the sub-themes were around the experiences of challenges and how the participants addressed them. Participants narrate the stressful situations at home while working or studying from home. Participants reported that they addressed the challenges through deep and respectful dialogue, having reflective and realistic perspectives in life, and learning additional skills. Table 15 presents some of the quotes of the respondents on the domain.

Table 14. Constituents of challenges experienced and addressed

Constituents of challenges experienced and addressed	References (general category)	Faculty members (F) Graduate students (S) Non-teaching staff (NTS)
Resulting from: Experiencing challenges and stressful home situations while working/ studying from home; and addressing those challenges through deep and respectful dialogue; taking reflective and realistic perspectives in life; and learning additional skills to address those issues	40	(F = 10, 25%) (S = 26, 65%) (NTS = 4, 10%)

Table 15. Challenges experienced and addressed

Members of the academic community	Participant quotes
Faculty members	"During these challenging times, I had to focus and concentrate on my work while at home, and at the same time, I had to take care of the needs of my immediate family and extended family."
	"It has made me more organised and focused though it has taken a toll on my sleeping habits."
Students	"It was hard learning to fight against the many odds during this tough situation and taking sincere efforts to focus on my studies."
Non-teaching staff	"This situation had both positive and negative effects. Positive effects being few, (1) keeping my brain functioning to do my job while working from home, (2) helped keep one foot on reality. Negative: (1) increase in anxiety, (2) sleeplessness, (3) lack of interest in a social media interaction."

Domain Six of Domain Three of PW: Relationship with Immediate Family: Spirituality/Relationship with the Transcendental Dimension

While reporting themes and subthemes, we have included the percentages of participants who brought these themes and subthemes. Since we did not want to lose any themes, we did not use any cut-off points for selecting themes. Therefore, we converge on the domain six of PW that indicated spirituality. Participants reported that they could set aside time for prayer and were consistent with their spiritual practices. Participants had a feeling of well-being when they had a disciplined meditation and connected themselves to spirituality. The emerged themes indicated a transcendental dimension of PW (see Table 16). Participants' quotes that showed the transcendental dimensions in their responses are presented in Table 17.

Table 16. Spirituality/relationship with the transcendental dimension

Constituents of spirituality/relationship with the transcendental dimension	References (general category)	Faculty members (F) Graduate students (S) Non-teaching staff (NTS)
Resulting from: Time set aside for prayer, consistent spiritual practices, disciplined meditation, and focus on spiritual formation.	12	(F = 5, 40%) (S = 5, 40%) (NTS = 2, 20%)

Table 17. Spirituality/relationship with the transcendental dimension: Qualitative data

Members of the academic community	Participant quotes
Faculty members	"During these difficult times, I have learned to give more time for my spiritual formation."
	"My prayer time with family is also improving my well-being."
Students	"I have been a lot in touch with my spiritual side and been reading a lot of books regarding the same."
	"I notice that I pray more for everybody's health than before. My prayers are towards ending the mystery around COVID-19. I keep praying that countries like India should be spared from heavy losses of life since we lack the necessary infrastructure to handle this pandemic."
Non-teaching staff	"I'm able to dedicate more time to prayer and yoga."
	"These days, I spend more time on spiritual life enhancement and family time."

Statistically Significant Mean Differences in Academic Groups

We performed a one-way ANOVA to compare the mean differences of three groups (i.e., faculty members, graduate students, and non-teaching staff) on each of the 16 dependent variables as listed in Table 2 (with six variables), Table 5 (with four variables), Table 8 (with four variables), and Table 11 (with two variables) respectively. This analysis produced statistically significant results for eight dependent variables at $p < 0.05$ level. Post hoc Bonferroni corrected tests (applied at 0.05 alpha level) revealed a statistically significant difference between group means for the following dependent variables (see Table 18). Students' mean was significantly different from faculty members and non-teaching staff for academic research, academic creative works, work hours, overall academic activity. Students' mean were significantly different from non-teaching staff for changes in regular hours of sleep, social media activity and taking care of dependents in the family (e.g., children). Students mean were significantly different from faculty members for physical activity.

Table 18. Mean differences in academic groups

Dependent variables	Mean difference between academic groups	Mean difference and significance level
Academic research	Students and faculty members	−0.52329* (0.000)
	Students and non-teaching staff	−0.60924* (0.000)
Academic creative works	Students and faculty members	−0.63136* (0.000)
	Students and non-teaching staff	−0.56961* (0.039)
Work hours	Students and faculty members	−0.66748* (0.000)
	Students and non-teaching staff	−0.78094* (0.000)
Overall academic activity	Students and faculty members	−0.80981* (0.000)
	Students and non-teaching staff	−0.78986* (0.000)
Changes in regular hours of sleep	Students and non-teaching staff	0.47219* (0.016)
Physical activity	Students and faculty members	−0.33625* (0.031)
Social media activity	Students and non-teaching staff	0.43117* (0.020)
Taking care of dependents in the family (e.g., children)	Students and non-teaching staff	−0.36800* (0.030)

Note. *$p < 0.05$.

We further performed a *t*-test to determine if there is any statistically significant difference between gender groups (i.e., male and female) for 16 variables covering the four dimensions. The results are shown in Table 19. Academic activity ($p = 0.038$), physical activity ($p = 0.022$), work hours ($p = 0.027$), and changes in regular hours of sleep ($p = 0.032$) are found to have a significant difference between male and female respondents.

Table 19. *t*-test results related to significant variables

Variable	*t-value*	df	Significance level
Academic activity	2.080	372	0.038
Academic research	0.970	347	0.333
Physical activity	2.436	377	0.022
Academic creative works	1.152	345	0.250
Work hours	2.213	370	0.027
Organising habit	−0.323	374	0.747
Changes in regular hours of sleep	2.153	377	0.032
Social media activity	0.158	371	0.874
Anxiety management	1.466	357	0.144
Interaction with important people outside the family	0.168	376	0.866

(Continued on next page)

Table 19. (*Continued*)

Variable	t-value	df	Significance level
Family conflicts and fights	−0.006	318	0.995
Growth in gratitude and appreciation toward family	−1.920	369	0.056
Self-care enhanced	1.471	372	0.142
Help around the house	−1.359	363	0.175
Personal hygiene	−1.009	374	0.314
Taking care of dependents in the family (e.g., children)	−0.469	365	0.640

DISCUSSION

This article examined how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the PW of members of Indian higher education during the initial phase of COVID-19 campus closures in 2020. The findings reveal that PW is a composite of six dimensions: self-care; professional growth; relationship with immediate family; relationship with others outside of the family; experiencing and addressing challenges; and integration of spirituality/transcendental dimensions of life. Unlike the ambiguity presented in the previous research literature on what constitutes PW, this research identified and expanded on six specific dimensions associated with a person's PW and how the COVID-19 pandemic has specifically impacted them. In the sections below, we have discussed these six dimensions and their relationship to PW. We have also provided some general suggestions on how educational institutions and their policies can enhance the quality of life on campus for their community members.

Six Dimensions of PW

Self-care

One of the fundamental dimensions of PW is self-care. Self-care is generally understood as maintaining health and well-being through an individual's health-promoting practices (Riegel et al., 2022). During the COVID-19 campus closures, members of Indian higher education had numerous opportunities to engage in health-promoting practices such as spending ample time for personal reflection, clarity in thinking, purposeful living, self-respect, enhanced autonomy, and newer awareness and perspectives in their personal life. They also had great opportunities for more rest without the hassles of travel to the campuses, more time to spend with family, enjoyment of nature surrounding them, and improved personal hygiene. All these opportunities and experiences improved their self-care practice, leading to enhanced PW. The main challenges to self-care reported during the campus closures were decreased physical activity and increased anxiety about their future security and safety. Of course, campus closures and working from home had afforded the members of Indian higher education numerous ways to practice health-promoting practices in their life, as reported in the results section above.

Professional growth

Research participants reported a mixed picture of "gains" and "challenges" to their professional growth during the campus closure. Gains included more time and opportunities to master newer technology, access to training programmes nationally and internationally, and gain confidence in working alone, which helped many participants enhance autonomy and improved self-respect. During the campus closures, academic community members interacted with a broader community of their peers through virtual platforms. Working remotely thus provided a combination of working alone and learning from other professionals and peers beyond one's campus community.

There were also challenges to professional growth. Graduate students, in particular, reported an overall decrease in academic activity. Perhaps it may be due to a combination of factors: loss of peer socialisation on campuses, academic institutions' slow transition to online platforms, and academic faculty members' slow transition to online teaching and provision of mentorship. Several recent studies have reported higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among student communities during the COVID-19 pandemic (Aylie et al., 2020) and diminished sleep (Marelli et al., 2020) had also posed other noteworthy challenges to their professional growth.

Relationship with immediate family

Several non-Indian studies reported the negative impact of COVID-19 on family systems, such as crowding of the houses, increased anxiety, financial insecurity, and caregiving burden (Prime et al., 2020). However, we found more positive changes associated with the experience of Indian participants in this study, who experienced increased gratitude and appreciation towards their families; more significant participation in their family's life when they stayed with their family members during the COVID-19 campus closures. They also reported enhanced caregiving provided to the family's dependent members (e.g., children and elderly). Reduced travel stress from not having to commute to work, spending more time with family, and increased participation in the family functioning (e.g., eating together and resting better, etc.) also contributed to their positive experiences in their family. Future studies should explore these results further and examine how members of academic communities differ from the mainstream population in handling changes and challenges during the pandemic.

Meaningful relationships with others outside of the family

Due to social distancing, limitations in socialising activities, and restrictions in travel, maintaining meaningful relationships with significant others outside of the family suffered significantly for the academic community in India. Pöllänen and Voutilainen (2018) reported that meaningful and validating relationships with peers and supportive friends outside of the family through personal gatherings and celebrations are crucial for refreshing the mind, receiving helpful feedback, and gaining confidence in one's profession. Socialisation was difficult in the pandemic's early phase before people began to get used to celebrations through virtual platforms.

Qualitative data from this study confirmed the importance of being connected with validating and supportive peers and friends as crucial for PW. During the data collection phase of the research project (May–June 2020), due to the challenges in telecommunication infrastructures and network issues in internet services, academic community members could not be in regular contact for academic discussions, socialisation and peer support.

There has to be a more focused investigation into how meaningful relationships with validating friends and peers are crucial for enhancing PW during a pandemic. Also, future studies must focus on how technology and telecommunication infrastructures can affect "meaningful connections" with significant others outside of the family; and the difference between the impact of in-person and virtual meetings for academic community members.

Challenges experienced and addressed

Addressing challenges and solving problems are critical factors in enhancing PW. One of the crucial topics in this domain is work-life balance. Several "pre-pandemic studies" have discussed the importance of work-life balance for PW through planning and sequencing work goals (Hirschi et al., 2019) and the need for employee flexibility and support (Arachchige & Vithanage, 2017). However, at the time of the data collection, no studies had focused on how professionals attained work-life balance during COVID-19.

Participants from this study discussed how they navigated the many challenges associated with working/studying from home and managed work-life balance through learning new skills, deep and respectful dialogue with self and others, and reflecting and accepting the reality of various personal and professional challenges. Though all these are critical factors associated with work-life balance, this study's current data are preliminary and rudimentary. This domain needs further exploration, with future studies focusing on the relationship between work-life balance and PW during COVID-19; and how educational institutions encouraged, created and implemented policies to facilitate work-life balance among their members.

Spirituality/relationship with transcendental dimensions

As researchers, we did not include questions or items related to spirituality in our survey instrument. Despite that, participants from all categories (faculty members, students, and non-teaching staff) voluntarily reported how crucial it was for them to integrate spirituality when they were dealing with the loss of control and uncertainty about the future arising from the COVID-19 context and how it was a critical part of PW. Their voluntary disclosure (gathered in qualitative data) unravelled how they had set aside time for prayer and spiritual practices in their daily schedule, and for spiritual formation through meditation and spiritual reading during the pandemic. This was not surprising because, traditionally, the Indian psyche and culture have deep spiritual connections. The link to the spiritual and transcendental dimensions during this pandemic provided them with comfort, induced hope, and helped them develop PW-focused coping strategies and self-preservation.

Several previous studies (before the pandemic) have illustrated the positive role of spirituality in preserving PW during "crucial" and challenging stages in people's life (Aflakseir, 2012; Fry, 2000; Copolov et al., 2018). For instance, Fry (2000) reported how spirituality contributes to PW in older adults. In another study, Copolov et al. (2018) reported how spirituality facilitates the PW of persecuted refugees. There have not been many studies on spirituality's positive role during a pandemic. It was striking that Indian participants in our study discussed how they integrated spirituality to preserve their PW during these challenging times. Future researchers may want to study spirituality's role during a pandemic in facilitating PW for members of academic communities.

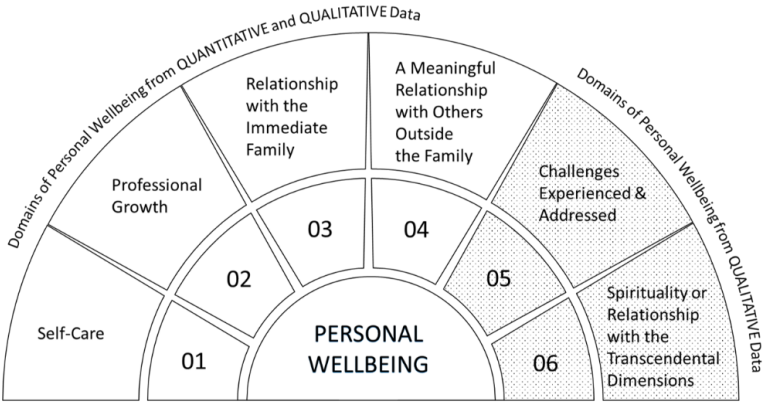

Figure 1. Domains of PW for members of Indian higher education

Through their sharing of personal experiences through qualitative and quantitative data, the research participants have shed light on how complex the construct of PW is and how it is related to all six dimensions described in Figure 1. The leadership teams in educational institutions can creatively develop and implement specific programmes and policies to support their community members in achieving and enhancing PW. Towards that goal, educational institutions can focus on at least three specific domains from the list of six: incentivising self-care, professional growth, and enhancing nurturing and validating relationships with their peers in the academic communities. Such a renewed focus in higher education institutions can improve the quality of PW and the community members' overall function and experience (educational and work experiences in those systems).

CONCLUSION

PW is deeply embedded within the matrix and web of significant and influential relationships in a person's life. It is mediated by personal reflection and internal locus of control. As the concept of PW is complex due to its dynamics, varying contexts and different communities, we proposed the study to address the research gap on how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the PW of individuals within Indian higher education. The study findings shed light on how the unique circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic have

influenced the PW of faculty, staff and postgraduate students in Indian higher education. The PW in a challenging situation like a pandemic and remote working for a community that had been interacting face-to-face in a physical environment has been explained under six dimensions. Our study reports that the PW of an individual within Indian academic communities during the COVID-19 pandemic is the sum of at least six domains, as discussed in this article.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings emphasise the importance of self-care in PW. Educational institutions should consider integrating self-care practices into their curriculum and promote initiatives that encourage students and faculty to prioritise self-care. This may include workshops, stress management programmes, and mental health resources. The future demand for remote learning environments will require faculty with the necessary training and resources for effective online teaching. Additionally, institutions can focus on enhancing students' digital literacy and self-regulation skills for remote learning. Meaningful relationships with peers and colleagues are crucial for PW. Educational institutions should create opportunities for students and faculty to connect virtually or in-person, fostering a sense of community and support. Promoting socialisation and interaction can contribute to overall well-being.

The integration of spirituality into PW is an essential aspect highlighted in the study. Institutions can consider incorporating spiritual and mindfulness practices into their programmes and curricula. This could include meditation sessions, mindfulness workshops, or courses that explore the intersection of spirituality and well-being. Work-life balance emerged as a significant challenge. Educational institutions can provide guidance and resources to help individuals maintain this balance, particularly in the context of remote work or study. Implementing flexible work arrangements and policies that support well-being can be beneficial.

Limitations of the Study

There are several significant limitations related to this study. The first limitation is that the data stem from the first phase of the pandemic in India (data collection was completed by mid-June 2020). Since our data were from the beginning of the pandemic in India in the first half of the year 2020, we cannot assume the research participants' experience associated with all six dimensions stayed the same throughout the more than two years of working and studying remotely. Future studies need to investigate how all these six dimensions were impacted by long-term work and study from home. For instance, did the research participants' family interactions and self-care practices change in 2021 as they continued to work and study remotely? Secondly, the survey design did not control research participants' potential biases of self-reports. In addition, the study lacked a pre-pandemic baseline, making it challenging to determine the extent of changes directly attributable to the pandemic. Longitudinal studies could offer insights into how well-being evolves over time.

Suggestions for Future Studies

Future studies can explore the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on PW. Investigating how the experiences and changes observed during the initial phase of the pandemic have evolved over time can provide valuable insights. Comparative studies between different countries and cultures can shed light on how the pandemic influenced PW. Examining cultural factors and responses to the pandemic can help identify unique challenges and coping strategies. Research can delve deeper into the mental health implications of the pandemic on students and faculty in higher education. This includes the prevalence of stress, anxiety, and depression and the effectiveness of mental health support programmes.

As many institutions are transitioning to hybrid learning models, future studies can explore the impact of these changes on PW. This includes examining how students and faculty adapt to the new educational environment. Further research can focus on the development and effectiveness of interventions and policies aimed at improving work-life balance for students and faculty. These interventions can be evaluated for their impact on PW.

Finally, we conclude that any domain associated with PW is complex and must be scrutinised within the studied population's socio-cultural, temporal and historical context.

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