



## PSYCHOSOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF TEENAGE GIRLS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC GAMPAHA MOH AREA

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The COVID-19 pandemic imposed substantial psychological and social consequences on individuals and families, especially teenagers' lives. They have lost their education and social contacts with family, relatives, peers, and teachers. However, their experiences are poorly studied, with special reference to teenage girls both globally and locally. Therefore, the present study aimed to explore the psychological and social experiences of teenage girls during the COVID-19 pandemic. A qualitative approach and phenomenological design were utilized. Fourteen teenage girls (13–19 years old) were selected from the Gampaha MOH area using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Face-to-face, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted using an interview guide until the data saturation point was reached. In addition, participants' facial expressions and body gestures were noted. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, and a thematic data analysis approach was performed. This study was approved by the Ethics Review Committee of the University of Kelaniya. Three themes, including adapting to new conditions, psychological discomfort, and attitudes towards the disease, emerged under psychological experiences. Most teenage girls made alterations to their routine activities. They feared getting infected, hospitalization, and the severity of complications, including death, and were excessively worried about the lack of peer relationships to share their feelings. The social experiences of teenagers were revealed through three themes: relationships with others, continuity of education, and family income. Teenagers were happy about the caring relationship with their neighbours, relatives, and peers and satisfied with the medical guidance that they received during the infected period. Though most of the teenagers were worried about the missed syllabus and postponement of scheduled examinations, some were happy about the school closure due to their decreasing tiredness from travelling traveling by bus. While some of them thought of online education as a new way to continue their education in a changing world, others thought of it as a boring method of learning. Further, teenagers experienced financial issues in their families during the pandemic. In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions have had a significant impact on teenage girls' lives. Therefore, it is needed to provide more support to teenagers and their families to buffer the challenges they faced during and after the pandemic.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic, teenager girls, psychological experiences, social experiences



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### INTRODUCTION

Since December 2019, a global outbreak of the novel coronavirus disease COVID-19 has resulted in a worldwide pandemic with substantial consequences for individuals and communities globally. Lockdowns and social distancing measures have had a significant impact on the lifestyles of Teenage girls in particular. They have missed out on educational opportunities, social connections with peers, and recreational activities such as gaming (Guessoum et al., 2020). As a result of stressful life events, many youths have turned to overuse of the internet and social media, increased television consumption, and excessive gaming as coping techniques (Balhara et al., 2020). Furthermore, family dynamics and socioeconomic status have played an important role in shaping teenagers' experiences during the pandemic, with increased family time during lockdown affecting relationships with family members and parents' socioeconomic status influencing teenagers' psychosocial development (Christner et al., 2021; Solekhah, 2020).

Furthermore, the COVID-19 epidemic has caused a societal crisis with consequences for education and learning. School closures, unexpected bereavements, home confinement, unemployment, and separation from parents and peer groups as a result of quarantine have all had a profound impact on the lives of children and adolescents around the world, leading to the experience of physical illness, psychological distress, learning difficulties, and child abuse (UNICEF, 2020; UNDESA, 2020; Rohanachandra, 2021). Though the evidence for the psychosocial experiences of teenage girls has been explored in the global context, limited studies have been conducted in the local context, especially focusing on teenage girls. Since understanding their experiences during a pandemic is useful for addressing their mental health and psycho-social well-being, the present study aimed to explore the psychological and social experiences of teenage girls during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Gampaha MOH area in Sri Lanka.

### METHODOLOGY

This study utilised a qualitative research approach and a phenomenological design. Fourteen teenage girls were recruited for the study using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Female school teenagers (aged 13–19 years) residing in the Gampaha MOH area were included in the study, while differently abled teenagers and teenagers with maladaptive behaviours were excluded upon discussion with the participant's closest guardian regarding the participant's medical and psychological history. Data were collected through face-to-face, semi-structured, in-depth interviews using an interview guide that was designed by referring to relevant literature. Data were collected until the saturation point was reached. Participants' facial expressions and body gestures were recorded using notepads, while all the interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. Each interview lasted 30 to 45 minutes. Participants were interviewed with the consent of their parents, and a separate area was used to provide privacy for the participants. Participants were given the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence. Participants were volunteers for the study, and



the participant or the guardian signed the informed consent. Interview voice records were transcribed verbatim and analysed using Colaizzi's thematic analysis method (Shosha, 2010), including steps of transcription, coding, categorising, searching for patterns of data, developing themes, and writing up the findings.(Braun & Clarke, 2006). The ethical approval for the study was granted by the Ethics Review Committee of the University of Kelaniya.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The experiences of teenage girls during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed through thematic analysis are shown in Figure 1.

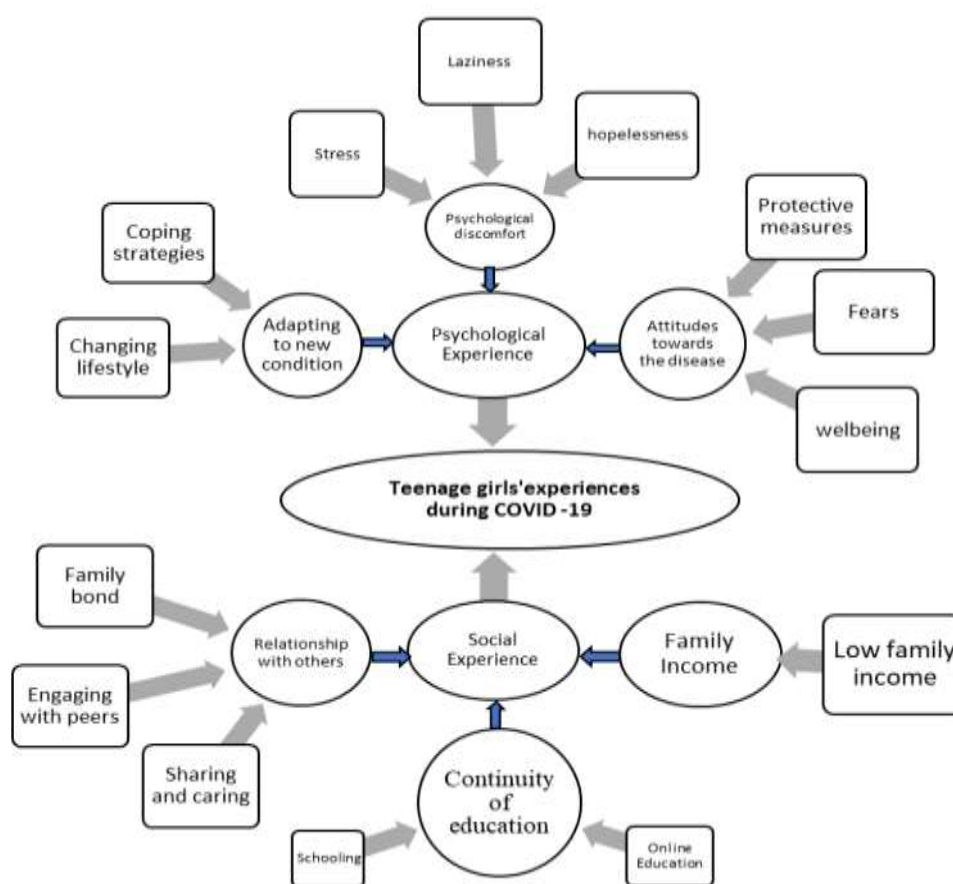


Figure 1: Experiences of Teenage Girls during the COVID-19 pandemic

### *Psychological Experiences of Teenage Girls*

Three themes, including adapting to new conditions, psychological discomfort, and attitudes towards the disease, and eight sub-themes emerged under psychological experiences (Figure 1). The theme of adapting to a new condition emerged from sub-themes of coping strategies and changed lifestyles. Similar findings were reported by Nicola et al. (2020). As revealed in the present study, Teenage girls adapted to the new condition by practicing photography, painting, following YouTube lessons, reading storybooks, and watching cartoons and kids’ movies. Most teenage girls made alterations to their routine activities.



They feared getting infected, hospitalization, the severity of complications, and death. Some teenage girls were excessively worried about the lack of peer relationships due to their difficulty sharing their feelings. It resulted in too much stress for them. Some teenage girls suffered emotionally due to postponing their examinations. They were disappointed in the delay and interruption of their plans. Further, Teenage girls experienced helplessness and laziness, which in turn caused psychological discomfort. As Wang et al. (2020) note, isolation due to the pandemic causes psychological symptoms such as boredom, laziness, and hopelessness.

The theme of attitudes towards the disease emerged from the sub-themes of well-being, fear, and the use of protective measures. Most of the teenage girls had taken several protective measures in their daily lives, like daily baths, frequent hand washing, wearing masks, using sanitizer, and steaming. These findings are consistent with findings elsewhere (Guzek & Skolimowska, 2020). There were both positive and negative thoughts regarding protective measures among these teenage girls. As they revealed, they practiced doctors' advice broadcast on television.

### ***Social Experiences of Teenage Girls***

Three themes, including relationships with others, continuity of education, and family income, and six sub-themes emerged about the social experiences of Teenage girls (Figure 1). Some teenage girls expressed their experiences regarding relationships with others when they were suffering from COVID-19. They were happy about their caring relationships with their neighbours, relatives, and peers. Further, teenage girls were satisfied with the medical guidance that they received from the health sector during the COVID-19-infected period. They have engaged in activities with the whole family, and they thought that those increased their bond with the family during the pandemic. This finding is comparable with the findings of Evans et al. (2020).

Further, as revealed in the present study, teenage girls had some worries due to reduced bonds with their peers. They continued their relationship via phone calls and social media chats. Some teenage girls thought that they should have face-to-face conversations with their peers. Similar findings were reported by an Australian study (Evans et al., 2020). Accordingly, parents and family members had to use online communication to keep in touch with their family and friends. Further, they stated that online communication was "not the same" and could not be replaced by in-person interaction (Evans et al., 2020). Consistent with the present findings, Yang et al. (2021) reported that teenagers are worried about the difficulties of having physical meetings.

According to the findings of the present study, teenage girls had both positive and negative thoughts about schooling. Though most of the teenage girls were worried about the missed syllabus and postponement of scheduled examinations, some teenage girls were happy about the school closure due to the reduction in tiredness when traveling by bus to school. Some teenage girls expressed their views on the positive aspects of online education. Teenage girls thought that it was a new way to continue their education in a changing world. However, some Teenage girls think that online education is a very boring method of learning. By the present findings, previous studies also reported negative thoughts of teenagers towards online learning about physical complaints. As shown by Nandlall et al. (2022), teenagers feel tired or drained and have frequent headaches and eye and body strain due to the extended periods of sitting and screen time while learning online during the COVID-19 pandemic.



The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a dramatic loss of human life due to the increased risk of a deep economic recession (Nicola et al., 2020). The crisis has affected families with breadwinners employed in both the formal and informal economies (UNICEF, 2020). As found in the present study, most teenage girls reported financial problems in their families during the pandemic, and some of their parents lost their careers and were unable to earn as much money as they had before.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study revealed important psychological and social experiences for teenage girls. Three themes emerged on psychological experiences, including adapting to new conditions, psychological discomfort, and attitudes towards the disease; three themes emerged on social experiences, including relationships with others, continuity of education, and family income; and sub-themes emerged for each. Accordingly, the COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions have had a significant impact on teenage girls' lives. Therefore, it is needed to provide more support to teenage girls and their families to buffer the challenges they face during and after the pandemic. The study also emphasizes the importance of promoting extracurricular activities and the continuation of education through new ways to ensure the well-being of teenage girls.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

*We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the Regional Director of Health in Gampaha, the Provincial Director of Health in the Western Province, and the Midwives in Gampaha MOH for their cooperation and assistance in data collection, as well as to all the participants for their participation.*