



# A CAUSAL STUDY ON LIFESTYLE CHANGES DURING PANDEMIC AND ITS IMPACT ON MENTAL WELL – BEING & QUALITY OF LIFE IN IT & ITES SECTOR

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## ABSTRACT

Humans are increasingly changing their lifestyle from active living to passive living due to technology and occupational settings. The Covid - 19 pandemic has added to it exponentially and more prone to adversity on mental health as well as the quality of lifestyle. The virtual shift of the workplace and long sitting hours lead to physically inactive and encouraged sedentary behavior. Social isolation, staying away from people, lack of personal touch with colleagues and peer groups, lack of proper sleep & quality time with family and loneliness has resulted in burnout and chronic stress. This affects the cognitive function in terms of working memory and executive functions. The physical in-activeness and sedentary behavior has affected the quality of lifestyle and mental health. The WHO says that sedentary lifestyle has attributed to serious mental health problems leading to clinical depression, stress, and anxiety. The study shows that the quality of lifestyle depends on the activity they do to improve their physical and mental well - being. Thus reducing the activity of sedentary behavior ameliorate the cognitive function and improved physical activity. The focus is on encouraging behavioral changes to shift sedentary or virtual lifestyle to active lifestyle to resulting in better quality living and mental health.

**KEY WORDS** : Shift in Lifestyle, Sedentary Lifestyle, Sedentary Behavior, Technology, Work From Home, Mental Health, Mental Well-Being & Quality of Lifestyle .

## I. INTRODUCTION

The change in lifestyle from physically active to bodily inactive has drastically affected the behavioral aspects of an individual. These resulted in leading a sedentary lifestyle which has become the major threat for non-communicable diseases among adults and middle age as it affects the quality of life and one of the major cause for death. The health consciousness of the people has become the global problem due to increase in chronic diseases and medical emergencies. The health experts highlights on the physical activity to lead a better life. Fitness and nutrition are complimenting aspects to manage one's physical health.

The effort of lawmakers to mitigate the covid - 19 has affected the common man's life in many ways. This pandemic has induced high level of perceived fear, risk, anger, home quarantine, loneliness stress, anxiety, eliciting negative mental health and behavioral changes in people. The research says the damages resulted from pandemic are much far lesser when compared to that caused on physical and mental health of the people.

The behavioral changes of an individual has affected their quality of lifestyle, health conditions, family well-being, organization productivity, and increased medical help. Due to pandemic, this has become the global problem as more and more people are getting affected by the shift in lifestyle and increased sedentary behavior.

### **Sedentary Lifestyle**

The Sedentariness is defined as the state of being sedentary at one place for prolong hours. Sedentary comes from the Latin term "sedere," which means "to sit." Sedentary behavior, defined as any waking behavior that requires low energy expenditure ( $\leq 1.5$  MET) such as prolonged sitting, reclining or lying posture.

The World Health Organization recommends that adults 18-64 years old "should do at least 150–300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity." Or a minimum of "75–150 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity; or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity throughout the week."

The study published in JAMA, 2018 reported that one in four American adults sit for more than eight hours a day. The other studies show that , on an average an adult sit for 7.7 hours and some people sit up to 15 hours per day. The recent research says, professional who spend most of their working hours sitting are at higher risk of developing lower back problems as well as mental health issues, including stress and anxiety, which affect the enthusiasm for work (Hanna, 2019). This is due to the physical inactivity and unhealthy diet are among the principal risk factors. (American Health Association, 2005).

## Shift in Lifestyle Behaviors

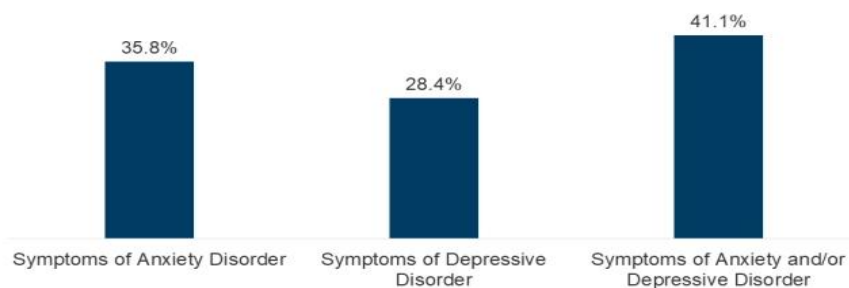
The behavioral changes during pandemic have affected the physical and mental health. The effect of lockdown, work from home and media elevated the symptoms of increased anxiety and decreased physical activity. Spending more time at home increased the eating habits along with sedentariness. The restrictions in physical activity due to closed sports and fitness centre and limited social mobility. Telecommuting and work from home augmented sitting and extended working hours resulted in less or hardly any physical activity.

The benefit of physical activity has been over raided by the impact of sedentary behavior resulted in chronic diseases and mental illness. The most commonly affected behaviors are eating habits, weight gain, risk of illness, change in sleep pattern, and chronic medical conditions. The lack of sleep and regular routine has taken the toll on personal and professional life. The regular physical activity has helped to increase quality of life and protect mental health.

## Mental Health

The continuous bombardment of covid - 19 news in media has developed anxiety in many persons and impacted the quality of mental health. This has resulting in economic recessions, loss of job, suicidal ideation and increase substance abuse. According to KFF Health Tracking poll, July 2020 found that many adults are reporting specific negative impacts on their mental health and well-being, such as difficulty sleeping (36%) or eating (32%), increases in alcohol consumption or substance use (12%), and worsening chronic conditions (12%), due to worry and stress over the corona virus. The young adults (18 - 24 yrs) are much affected and report symptoms of anxiety and / or depressive disorder when compared to older adults. Women in the middle age reporting much anxious and depressive due to closure of schools, domestic violence, continuous doing on house hold chores, working hours, and lack of rest and proper sleep. Whereas middle age men are less depressive compared to women and impacted by loss of job and financial loss. The below figure represents the reporting symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder in adults:

Share of Adults Reporting Symptoms of Anxiety or Depressive Disorder During the COVID-19 Pandemic



NOTES: These adults, ages 18+, have symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder that generally occur more than half the days or nearly every day. Data shown is for January 6 – 18, 2021.  
SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, 2020 - 2021.

KFF

The focus on mental health has become the open talk among industrialist, bureaucrats, business man, startups, lawmakers, professionals, students and children. The need to address it has become the global agenda as it impacts the global economy, health care, medical care, and human life. The shift in lifestyle has lead to serious problems in increasing numbers on psychological disorders such as anxiety, stress, depression, and suicidal ideation. The early intervention in addressing mental health problems helps to decrease the economic downturn and improves the quality of life.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A healthy workplace is defined as a work environment where workers and managers collaborate to improve the health, safety, and well-being of the workforce and thus sustain the productivity of the business. The health assessment at workplace has become one of the prime decisive factors in recent days to improve employees physical and mental health. Though its a subjective assessment to employee's personal health but becomes the indicator for healthy workplace.

The current pandemic has limited the movement of employees from commuting to workplace to telecommuting or teleworking the job. The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines telework as the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) including smartphones, tablets, laptops or desktop computers for work that is performed outside the employer's premises. The work from home has become the new norms for the organization to function remotely or virtually. The employers are reworking on the working modules as well as focusing on the quality of lifestyle. They become more flexible and adaptable to the changing needs of the employees. Though its on the one end the quality of work and productivity gets affected due to non accessible factors by the employers.

The change in working style and loss of job impacted the health at work. The restriction on physical movement and non - accessible to sports and playgrounds affected the physical health. The deterioration in health has impacted the psychological factors as well as increased the unhealthy eating habits and disturbed sleep patterns. The employers are focusing on developing strategic plans to address the health issues as well as mitigate the risk of life and improve the quality of life.

People experienced a general decline in well-being, deterioration in mental health, and an increase in psychological distress such as stress, anxiety, depression, and feelings of isolation (Chtourou et al., 2020; Gupta et al., 2021). Though covid - 19 has deleterious effect on one side on the other side it has emphasized the importance of mental health and physical activity. According to the stress coping framework by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), when people recognize the existence of a threat, they will be involved in either emotion

- focused or problem-focused. Engaging in physical activity has helped to focus on the problem and develops better coping mechanisms. The work from home has also taken a toll on physical and mental health due to various stressors.

The physical activity induces the muscle and metabolism functioning thus resulting in the benefit of better health and lifestyle. The recent research says that physical activity in any forms helps to improve the mental health thus paving way to improve the quality of life. Though pandemic has impacted the way of living but reminded us on the primitive living to lead a healthy life.

### III. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

The humans are evolving from stone age to technology era. The change of lifestyle has become the part of each and every evolution and this pandemic has great influence on the working style. In the current globalization scenario, technology rules the world right from kids to senior citizens. Even the employment has thrived on virtual work setup during covid - 19 pandemic. This has an advantages and disadvantages in the workforce and performance. The study focused on balancing the physical and mental health and reducing the sedentary behavior to improve the quality of life.

#### Conceptual Model: MOCK Model

An integrated approach to mitigate the risk of health due to covid - 19 pandemic

The MOCK model focus on connecting the direct and indirect factors that affects the lifestyle changes, behavior modifications, mental well-being and quality of life.

M - Mental Health - Focus on reducing the stressors and improvising the coping skills.

O - Occupation - Change of working style and sedentary behavior at work

C - Connecting Factors - Balance the physical and mental health for better life.

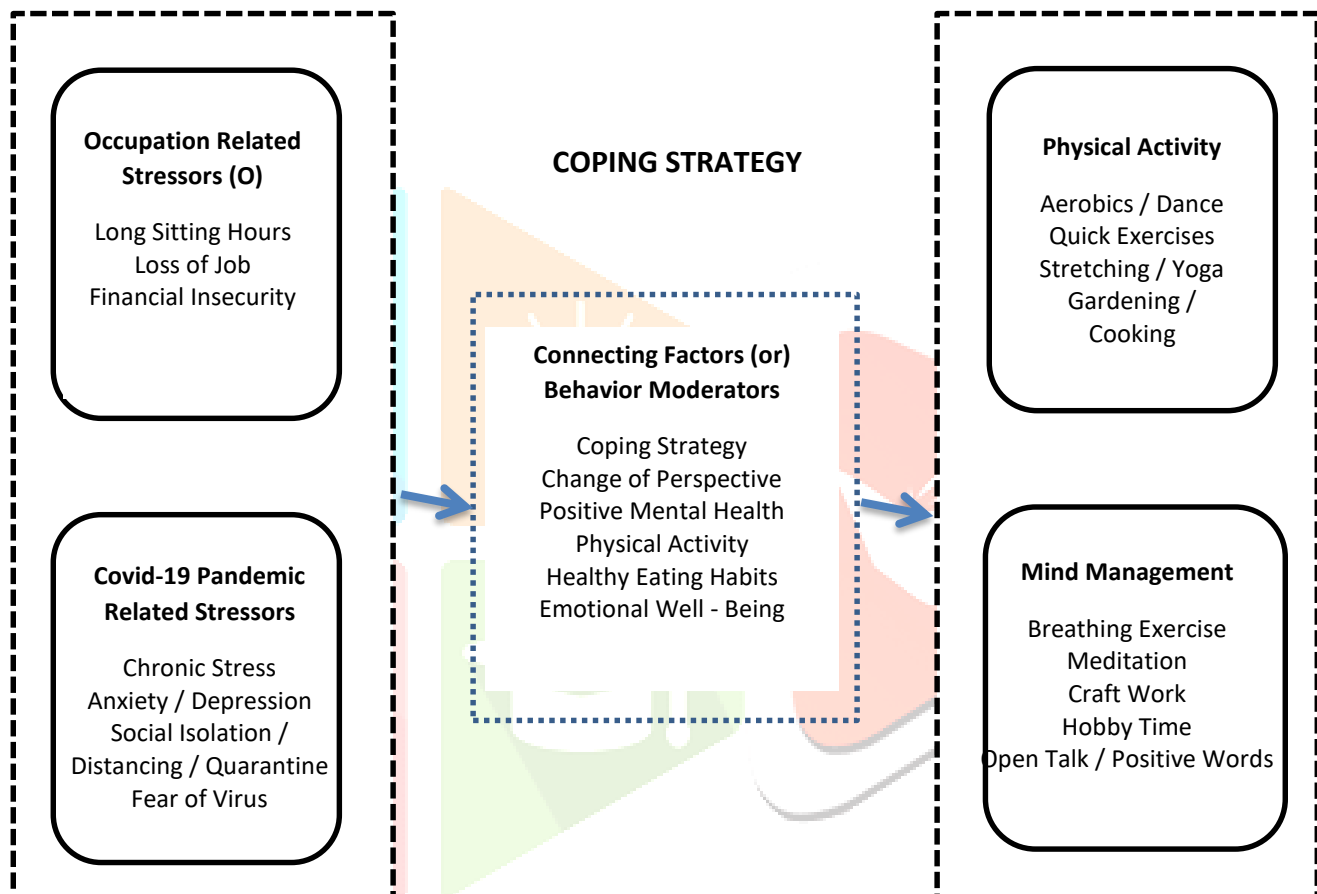
K - Kinesthetic - Physical activity or bodily movement to keep healthy and fit.

The integrated approach of the MOCK model explains the occupation related factors that affects physiological and psychological well being and ways to improve the quality of life.

Stressors - Occupation / Behavior Moderators - Connecting Factors / Well- Being - Physical and Mental Health

## Occupational Stressors:

The work from home and virtual jobs has tremendously increased the insecurities among young and middle age men and women. The up-skilling in the job needs continuous insights from the managers or supervisors. Due to juggling between office and home the proper communication and understanding between the colleagues has reduced and resulted in internal conflicts. Owing to lot of restrictions from the bureaucrats and lawmakers created an unpredictable situations for both employers and employees.



Integrated Approach to Improve Physical and Mental Health during Pandemic

The non - conducive environment and overburden of job resulted in low satisfaction among employees. This created occupational related stressors that affects their physical and mental health. The major stressors are loss of losing a job, non conducive work environment at home, prolong sitting hours, increased screen time and financial insecurity. Also, the mental state of mind gets affected due to back pain, chronic stress, anxious about future, and depressed about many things due to accumulated stressors over a period of time. These stressors are hardly attended by the concerned persons or people around them. This has eventually reduced the well being of an individual.

### **Connecting Factors or Behavior Moderators:**

The balance need to be established between the stressors and well - being. The connecting factors plays a pivotal role in understanding the gap and bridging them. The shift in the focus from non productive thoughts and emotions to addressing the problem. This could be through developing a new coping skills, change of perspective, positive approach and being optimistic about the situations or events, regular physical activity, developing healthy eating habits and managing emotions. The slight shift in behavioral changes will help in developing new focus and alleviate the distress.

### **Physical and Mental Well - Being:**

The absence illness is not the presence of wellness. Wellness is measured by the well being of physical and mental health as well as depends on the quality of life. The gap between the well being is subjective and measured by varied assessments depending on the individual health. The physical and mental health are correlated with each other and has a direct impacts in certain areas like obesity, chronic diseases, and indirect effect on anger, frustration, loneliness, emptiness and emotional traumas.

It is imperative to start acting either on physical or mental health to impaired the unhealthy lifestyle. It is advisable to start working on the body through slight free movements and eventually to a proper physical regimen. This could be dance, aerobics, yoga, stretching, and gardening. Any activities that require to spend at least minimum energy expenditure in a day. To take care of the mental health indulge in hobbies, talk with your loved one, cooking, art works, breathing, and meditation. The integrated approach of body and mind leads to a quality living.

## **IV. SUGGESTIONS**

The lifestyle changes are going to be part of our life now and in future. The changes need to be accompanied by factors that influence our life and well - being. Change in one arena has an direct and indirect impact in other areas which eventually results in in-balancing of personal and professional life. The pandemic has focused majorly on work life changes and overseen the other areas of health and quality of living. The balance need to be brought out by every individual with an integrated or comprehensive approach. This includes the physical environment, eating habits, sleep patterns, physical activity, emotional well-being, managing stressors and developing coping skills. Working either on physical or mental health will have a positive impact in both areas and improves the quality of life.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

The physical and mental health has a strong link in managing the shift in lifestyle. In the current scenario, the mental health has gained much confidence and need to address it openly has become the need of the hour. The research and studies are focused on stressors and physical activity. The gap related with lack of physical activity and mental health impact of cognitive function is very less. Due to virtual classes and technology, the future study needs to focus on understanding the function of working memory, executive functions, and thinking. The research could focus on cognitive function in association with quality of lifestyle or quality living.

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