



Elucidating Gender Discrepancies In Skill Development And Media Consumption During Youth Isolation

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the gender-based impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on student lifestyles and learning capabilities through a cross-sectional survey. Key findings show lockdowns more adversely affected female mental health. Males focused more on technical skills like coding, while females pursued creative hobbies. The analysis explores impacts on sleep, sedentary behavior, and coping strategies. It highlights gender differences in how students responded to lockdowns, providing insights into effects on wellbeing and learning during this challenging time.

Index Terms – Learning capabilities, Data analytics, COVID-19, Lockdown, Mental health, Anxiety, Depression, Lifestyle.

I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdowns in 2020 drastically disrupted global daily life. Extended lockdowns and restricted movement initiated a worldwide public health crisis and economic recession, severely impacting mental wellbeing. This paper investigates the impact of the 2020 Indian national lockdown on the lifestyle and learning capabilities of post-secondary students.

In March 2020, the Indian government initiated a stringent national lockdown, confining citizens to their homes for months with exceptions only for essential activities and impeding normal function for educational institutions and companies. Domestic public transit halted, social interaction ceased, and technology became the lifeline for interpersonal connection. Prolonged uncertainty and isolation intensified pressure, negativity, stress, and risk of issues like hypertension, anxiety, depression, and addiction.

These extraordinary circumstances variously altered student habits as opportunities for structured activities evaporated. While some students dedicated time toward personal development and learning new skills, others focused leisure activities like media consumption or old hobbies. Simultaneously, lack of exercise and outdoor time contributed to increased sedentary lifestyles associated with lethargy and weight gain – interlinked issues affecting mental health [7,16-17]. These issues form the crux of this study's analysis on how an extended, unforeseen disruption impacted young people based on gender and use of time.

Specifically, the next section covers design and population sampling for this cross-sectional analysis. Section 3 examines analytical insights on student lifestyle and capabilities during lockdown informed by an online survey of school and university students. Lastly, Section 4 reviews conclusions and implications from the data trends on mental health and student experiences in this historic period.

II. STUDY DESIGN AND POPULATION

This section describes study design and population studied in the analysis [2]. It is across-sectional study aimed to find out the impact of lockdown on mental health of students which is a gender wise analysis. A google form of the survey questionnaire along with participation details of students were circulated to various students of school and college in Delhi through WhatsApp and Gmail. No pre calculated sample size was fixed. Data was collected from the google form and then it was processed and relevant entries were taken into consideration. The details of the population are as follows

- 60% of females and 40% of males
- Minimum age was 15 yrs.
- Maximum age was 25
- Maximum undergraduates responded.

III. ANALYTICAL INSIGHTS ON STUDENT'S LIFESTYLE & LEARNING

This section describes the impact of lockdown on the mental health of students, their sleeping pattern, digital media consumption, technical skills acquired by them and any mental issue faced by them and way they found out to overcome it.

3.1 IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted extended lockdowns that upended normal life for students of all ages. New survey data highlights concerning mental health impacts that affected students during this crisis.

As Figure 1 shows, female students reported higher overall rates of anxiety, stress, and depression compared to males, indicating young women faced additional struggles. However, most students did not report clinical diagnoses, possibly due to limited access. Still, widespread negative emotions suggest lockdowns took a heavy toll. Further qualitative research through interviews could clarify the full scope of challenges students encountered during this isolating time.

These insights are critical to inform policies and programs to better support student wellness now and in potential future lockdowns. As future leaders, prioritizing their mental health and growth deserves attention. The struggles illuminated highlight opportunities where we must do better. By deeply understanding their experiences, we can build empathy and systems to help students thrive even amidst uncertainty. As society continues grappling with the pandemic's effects, we must listen and respond better to student needs in this crisis and those that may emerge ahead.

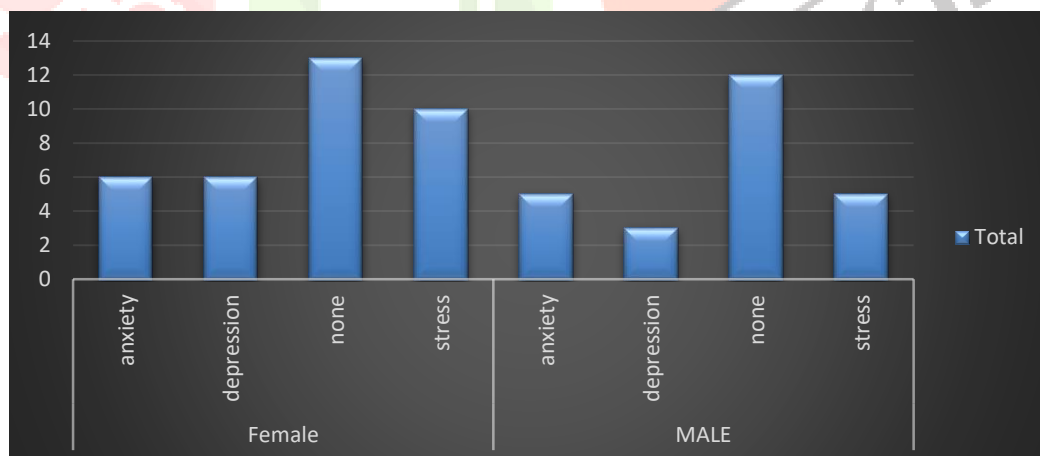


Figure 1: Gender wise mental health issues faced by students during lockdown

3.2 DIGITAL MEDIA CONSUMPTION

Lockdowns dramatically increased media consumption with limited mobility and activities. As Figure 2 shows, Netflix emerged as the most used streaming platform by students. Analysis revealed gendered differences in viewing preferences – females frequently chose lighthearted comedies, while males preferred intense, plot-heavy content [5]. This points to potentially varying impacts on coping and wellbeing depending on the type of shows consumed in isolation.

Further research could examine connections between genres watched and mental health indicators and verify the following results like more anxious students lean toward uplifting content, males immerse in tense dramas as a distraction coping mechanism. Or did this fuel negativity and stress, Additionally, how might personality traits interact with types of media and subsequent effects on emotions and outlook. Exploring these statements can provide clearer understanding of how entertainment consumption patterns during lockdowns influenced youth mental welfare in an unprecedented time of social restriction. These insights may guide better recommendations to support student resilience if stay-at-home circumstances arise again.

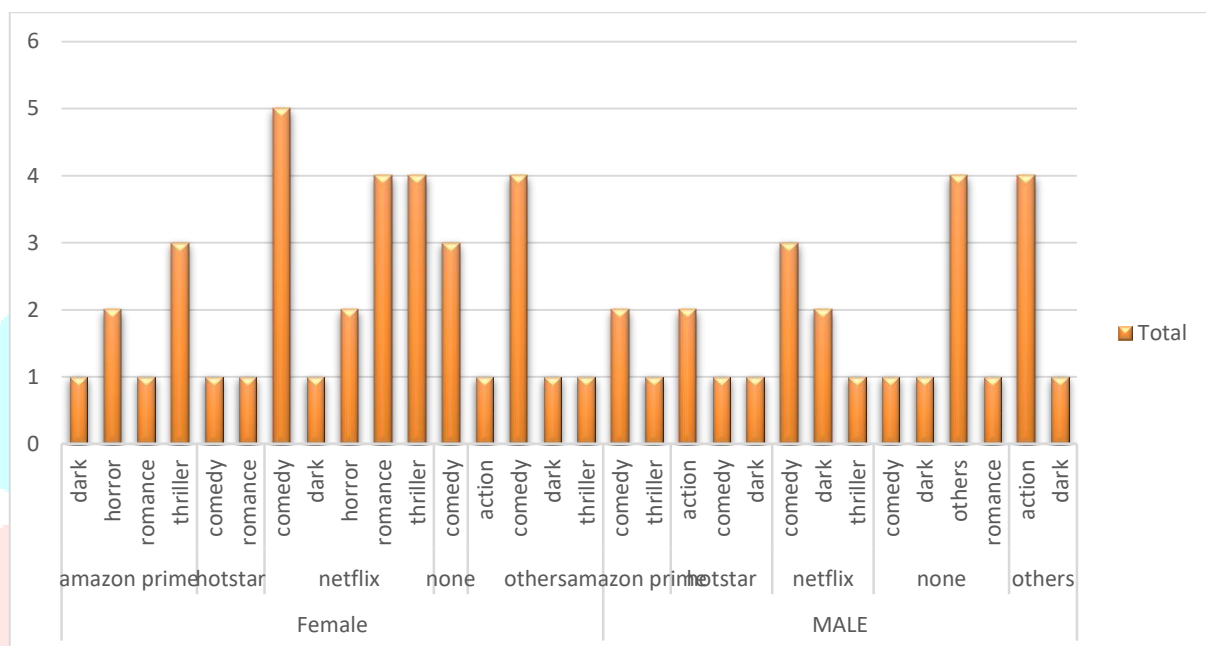


Figure 2: Preferred genre along with preferred OTT platform gender wise

3.3 TIME UTILIZATION

The lockdowns prompted youth to fill their time in different ways as daily structure evaporated. Male students disproportionately dedicated effort towards building technical skills viewed as professionalism valuable, like programming languages R and Java, as Figure 3 shows. This indicates an eye towards skill-building for career preparedness once restrictions lifted.

In contrast, female students more commonly partook in recreational hobbies such as reading, painting, and writing. These artistic pursuits provided enjoyable and constructive ways to occupy abundant extra time during quarantine. The gender discrepancy in time use suggests differing motivations and priorities in the void of academic obligations.

Additional survey data could provide richer insights into the factors driving observed trends like family expectations or access to technical resources influence males to focus self-improvement on career-aligned skills or social messaging about acceptable gender roles lead females towards more decorative hobbies over practical ones and economic considerations affect the feasibility of accessing expensive equipment or training programs.[8] Further interviews and focus groups may reveal more context about the reasoning, means, and decision-making behind the use of time among youth coping with stay-at-home restrictions.

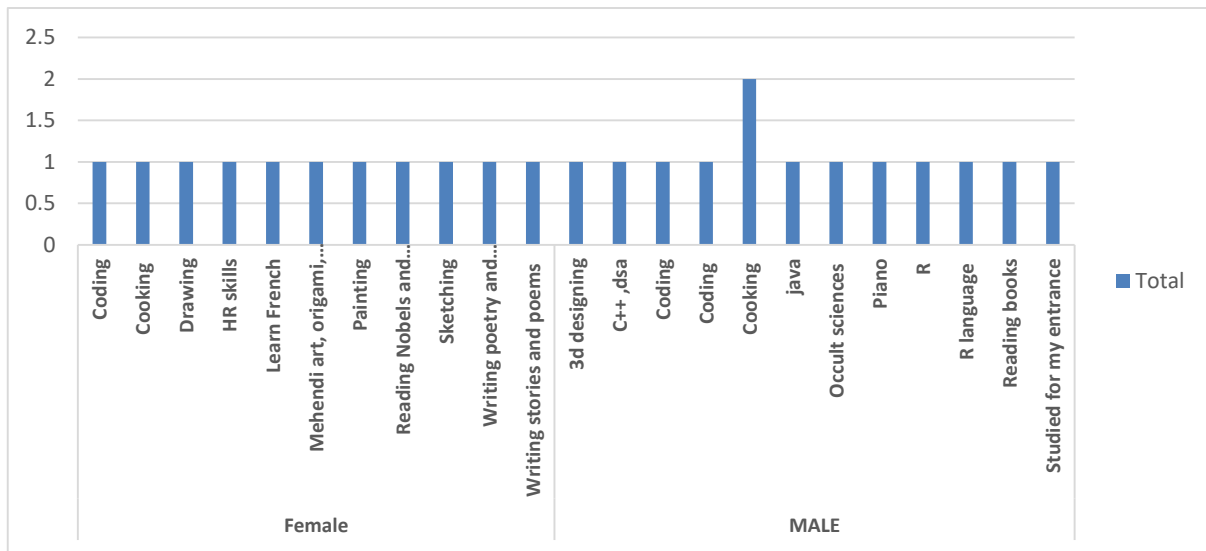


Figure 3: Time utilization by student's gender wise

3.4 TECHNICAL SKILLS ACQUIRED

Aligning with time utilization trends, analysis of technical skills acquired also exhibited gender divergence [6]. As Figure 4 conveys, male students more actively developed technological abilities possibly to expand professional prospects when lockdowns lifted. Their upskilling displayed higher engagement with coding, data science, machine learning and even 3D design - intermediate training beyond basic digital literacy.

In contrast, most females concentrated on fundamental computer skills like web browsing, social media, and basic MS office functions. While these basic abilities still carry value for schoolwork and everyday life, they signal less intent on positioning for post-lockdown job readiness.

This discrepancy highlights how gender socialization may influence skill priorities amid a crisis. Perhaps familial norms steered young males towards hard skills for future payoffs, while females felt less pressure around career advancement from parents. Additionally, the significant gender gap in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.) fields could have contributed towards males feeling higher self-efficacy with technological skills. Without equal confidence or social support, fewer females may have viewed advanced technical training as approachable.

As education moves increasingly online, these insights urge re-examining how to embolden more girls to gain digital fluency and pursue STEM training. Equitable skill-building would enable female students to thrive equally in a more digital future.

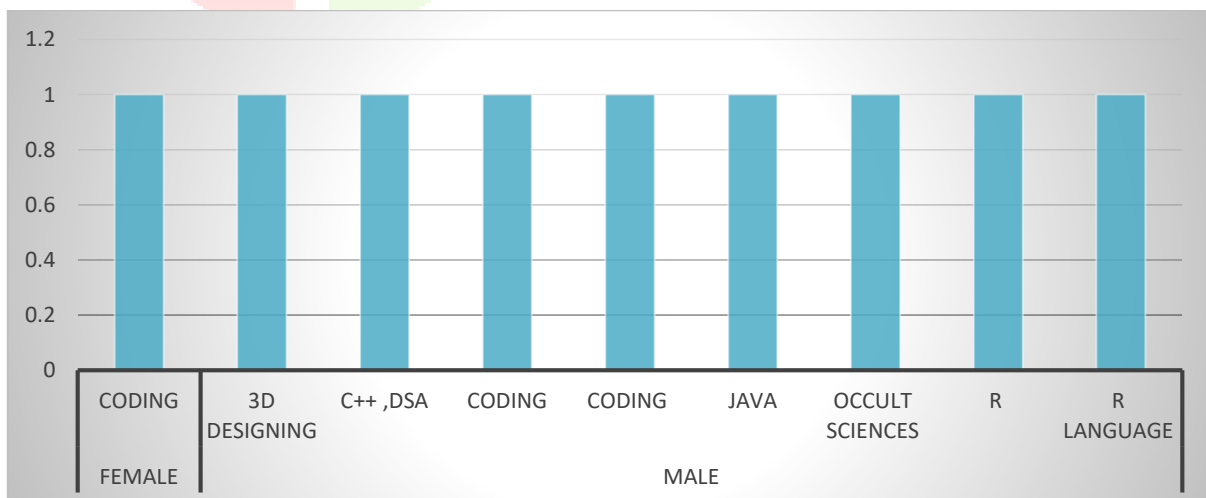


Figure 4: Technical skills acquired during lockdown period

3.5 SEDENTARY LIFESTYLE

Messaging to stay home limited outdoor exposure but inadvertently fueled sedentary behavior[11-15]. As Figure 5 shows, female students reported especially high continuous sitting time. However, most youth aimed to mitigate extensive screen leisure through adequate sleep and 1–3-hour power naps, as Figure 6 indicates.

This unanticipated public health trade-off reveals tensions between infection risk reduction and holistic wellness. While students acted responsibly to follow medical guidance, longer-term inactivity and internet immersion posed other health threats like weight gain, lethargy, strain, and mood issues [9]. Still, preservation of sleep offers a bright spot for fostering resilience. Quality rest buffered negative effects from extra sitting and tech usage.

Moving forward, public directives should couple reduced exposure advice with concrete recommendations on balancing healthy movement and unstructured tech time. Rather than just saying “stay home,” authorities need to provide actionable guidance on maintaining mental, physical and emotional wellbeing while navigating restrictions. Specifically including simple exercise options compatible with small spaces would further support youth through periods of confinement.

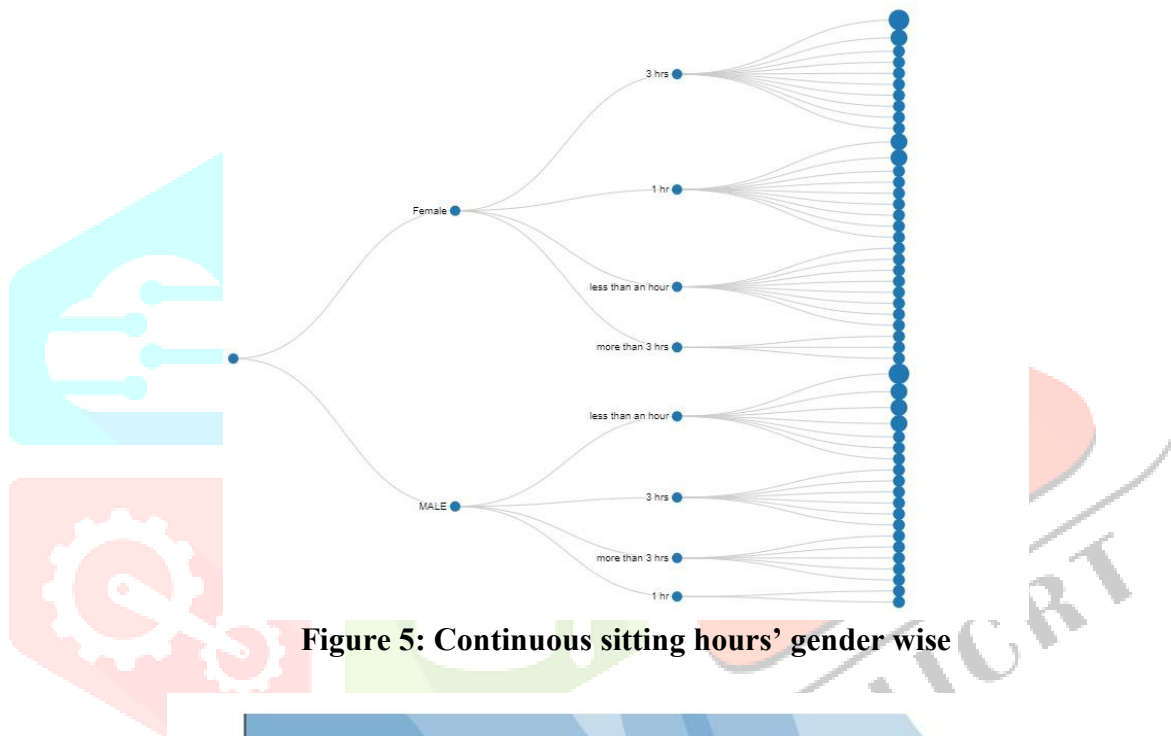


Figure 5: Continuous sitting hours' gender wise

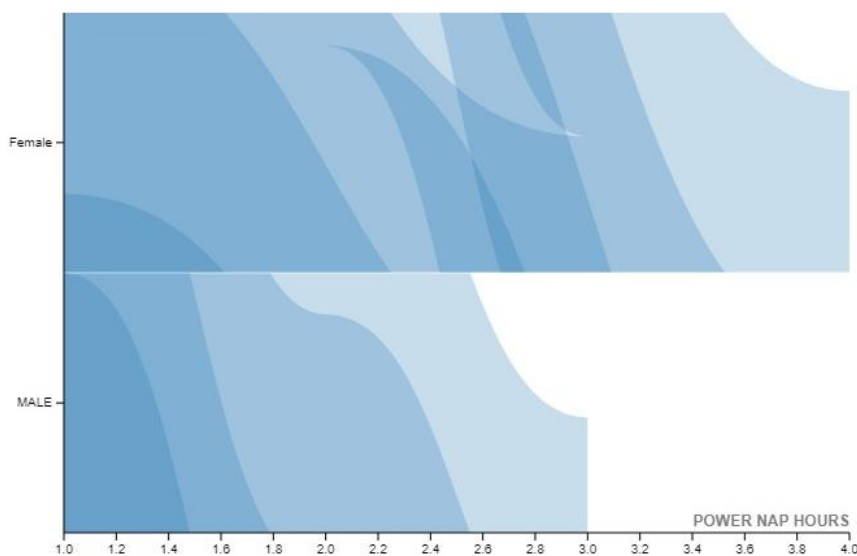


Figure 6: Powernap schedule gender wise

3.6 MENTAL HEALTH AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Despite widespread struggles, students demonstrated remarkable resilience through the crisis by leaning on healthy coping mechanisms for managing mental wellness [1], as depicted in Figure 7. Most turned to accessible options like meditation, reading, family games, and home exercise to handle emotions under prolonged uncertainty.

The prevalence of these protective strategies spotlights youth resourcefulness even under great distress from isolation. Rather than succumbing to overwhelming anxiety, depression and stress, many displayed self-awareness to mitigate negative feelings through activities that provided enjoyment, purpose and connection. Reading allowed escapism into different worlds where the mind could wander freely, perhaps buffering fixation on grim pandemic news. Practicing meditation potentially calmed turbulent moods and worries through training focus and breathing. Seeking out relatives for indoor games created bonding opportunities when friend meetups halted, combatting loneliness. Maintaining exercise routines further preserved both physical and mental health amid stay-at-home restrictions.

Together, these small acts to nourish wellbeing despite suboptimal circumstances demonstrate incredible thoughtfulness and maturity. While adults often underestimate youth resilience, student implementation of de-stressing techniques shows determination to manage hardships independently. These healthy coping strategies likely safeguarded many from worsening states of sadness, lethargy, tension or distress[10]. Times of trauma can illuminate individual and collective stores of fortitude -- through this lens, adolescent responses to the pandemic reveal much hope for the future.

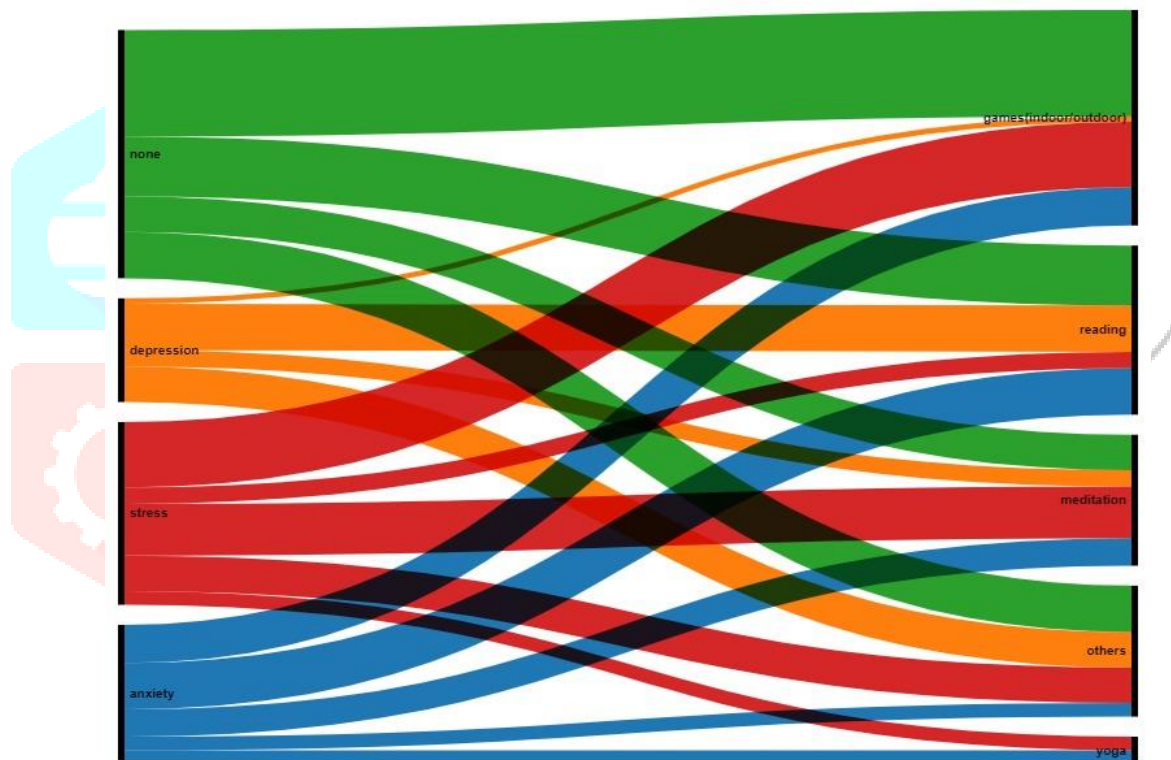


Figure 7: Mental issue faced during lockdown and activity done to divert attention

3.7 MENTAL HEALTH COPING MECHANISMS

The lockdown fueled widespread negativity, uncertainty and tension as phases kept extending arbitrarily[4,18]. Constant concerning pandemic news also took a toll - from rising infections to economic turmoil and stories of loved ones falling ill. Under such duress, experiencing heightened stress, anxiety and depression would be normal adaptive reactions. As Figure 8's alluvial diagram shows, while many students reported no clinical mental health issues, still others faced challenges like emotional distress.

However, positive coping behaviors also emerged, indicating youth deliberately acted to nurture wellbeing despite adversity. The most common strategies encompassed meditation, reading, home exercises, indoor family activities, and skills training. These pastimes helped divert focus from toxic narratives fueling fear or hopelessness. Reading fiction allowed momentary immersive escapism while acquiring knowledge. Physical activity combatted restlessness and mood issues through neurochemical and hormonal regulation from movement. Games and quality time bonded families closer to alleviate isolation. Meanwhile, dedicating effort towards upskilling supplied a sense of progress optimal for mental health[19,20].

Together, these intentional activities cultivated resilience - not just helping time pass but actively nourishing positivity and purpose to counter the negativity dominating the news cycles. They also broadly enhanced flexibility to handle difficulties both related to the pandemic and in everyday life. Learning to tap into internal motivation to move or learn rather than relying solely on structured externals represents a pivotal developmental milestone towards adulthood. This global crisis thrust many students into confronting how to independently manage emotions, time and progress.

The broader popularity of healthy coping mechanisms like movement, recreation and mindfulness highlight most youth were in tune with self-awareness despite turmoil. Recognizing emotional and physical needs while finding creative ways to fulfill them underscores profound maturity. However, schools and communities can further foster these behaviors by promoting outdoor time, lending recreational material, and sharing guidance on accessible wellness habits. Enculturation of resilience through modeling adaptation provides children with vital skills to overcome current and future adversities.

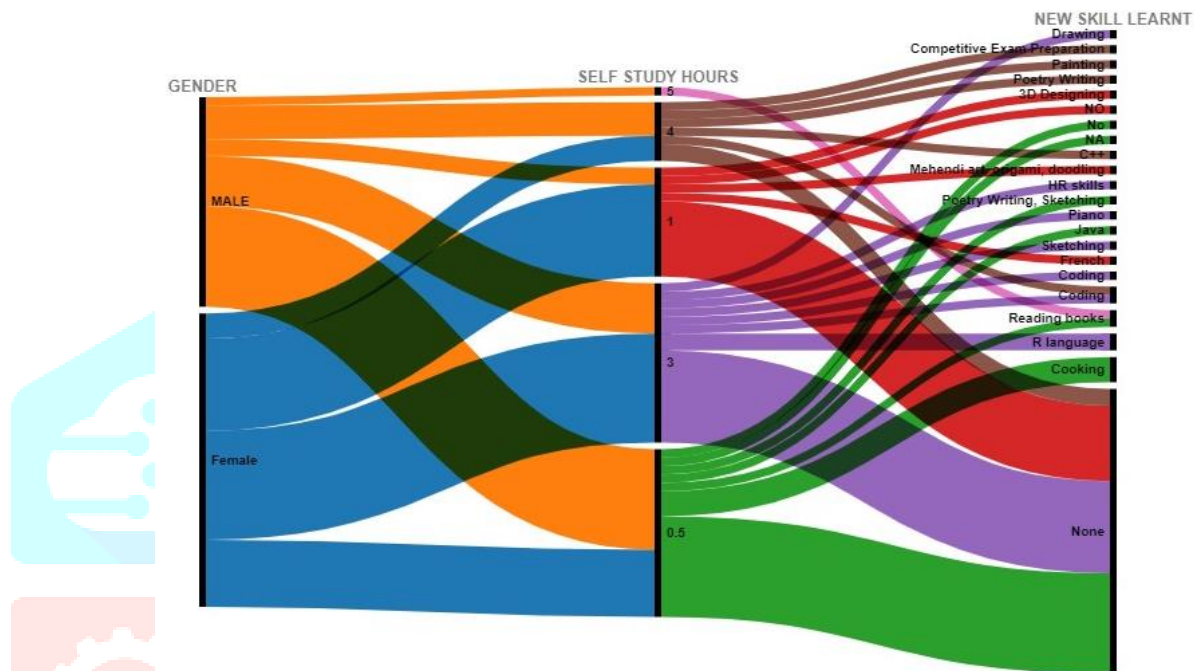


Figure 8: Gender wise classification of self-study and new skill learnt

IV. CONCLUSION

This study illuminates how the COVID-19 lockdown distinctly impacted youth across factors like mental health, lifestyle, skill development, and recreation. Results indicate that while many students struggled with common issues like stress, anxiety, and depression, most did not report facing clinically diagnosed disorders. Additionally, analysis of coping trends demonstrates youth resilience through activities like meditation, reading, and family time – potentially buffering mechanisms to support wellbeing amid adversity.

However, an overarching story emerges on lifestyle changes among students during quarantine. As campus and social contact vanished abruptly, young people gravitated toward technology to stay occupied and connected. Extensive leisure media consumption contributed to increasingly sedentary daily routines – a risk highlighted by contrasting skill development along gender lines aligning with traditional expectations.

Yet, preserving sleep health offered a bright spot for youth adaptation [3]. The surveyed students appeared recognizing the importance of rest by balancing screen immersion with adequate power naps. This intentionality encouraging self-care practices could prove invaluable if stay-at-home orders persist intermittently. Ultimately, by elucidating the student experience in this historic period, findings can inform supportive interventions from schools, families, and communities enabling healthy youth development despite ongoing uncertainty ahead.

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