

## Original Research Article

# Physical and social challenges of youth during lockdown in Mizoram: a COVID-19 lockdown study

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Young people experience the COVID-19 pandemic differently and their new found 'leisure' time can pose several challenges in their physical and social life. This paper incorporates findings from an online survey that was conducted to probe into the physical and social challenges that disrupted the daily life of youth across gender during the lockdown in Mizoram, India.

**Methods:** The study adopted a cross sectional descriptive research design and findings are based on an online survey using Google forms questionnaire administered through different social networking platforms among youth aged between 18-35 years. All respondents are permanent residents of Mizoram, India and the study was carried out during the first and second phases of lockdown across the country.

**Results:** Physical challenges such as abuse, body weakness, laziness and appetite issues were found to be more among female youth while social challenges such as communication and socialization; and inability to maintain social distancing were found to be higher among male youth. Gender is found to have a highly significant relationship with laziness ( $r=0.069$ ), increased appetite ( $r=0.086$ ) and decreased appetite ( $r=0.122$ ) and negative significant relationship with increased substance use ( $r=-0.183$ ).

**Conclusions:** The study found numerous challenges of youth in Mizoram during lockdown. These crisis calls for intervention of various researchers, policy makers and those working in the field of youth health and development.

**Keywords:** Challenges, COVID-19, Lockdown, Physical, Social, Youth

## INTRODUCTION

The experiences and challenges of youth are changing as a consequence of a global disaster which has caused not just physical illness but has a ripple effect on every aspect of life. Although necessary steps are being taken on global and national levels to ensure the safety of people, there are many challenges and threats posed by the pandemic. Different individuals and groups experience the crisis differently. The resultant lockdown and mandatory physical distancing have affected youth considerably in that educational institutions are closed, social gatherings are not permitted, the economy is hugely disrupted, and job opportunities become even

scarcer. This paper explores how youth spent their new found 'leisure' time and what physical and social challenges they faced as a result of COVID-19 lockdown.

COVID-19 pandemic may present youth with more free time than ever before and it is certain to have an immediate and long-lasting impact on youth. People spend much time on social media to stay connected to one another. Mass media have given continuous and timely updates on the pandemic during this period.<sup>1</sup> While it can rapidly disseminate important information for people to adopt an appropriate measure to protect themselves from the growing pandemic, rumours, misinformation, and fear

can also be readily spread through social media which further worsens fear, panic, and anxiety.<sup>2</sup>

Lockdown or restrictions on out-of-home movements affect physical mobility and increase sedentary behaviour among youth. Physical activity plays a very important role in the process of attaining a healthy and active lifestyle, quality of life, and health in general. Though it is difficult to witness the health effects of low physical activity among youth, the health professionals, and policymakers started paying attention to obesity and diabetes epidemics which confirmed that decline in physical activity matters.<sup>3</sup> Also, the effects of sedentary behaviour can be harmful to health as it can further have effects on eating behaviours. It is also added that it could worsen food intake that will have adverse health effects such as increased frequency of snacking, consumption of energy-dense foods.<sup>4</sup> In an attempt to understand students' behaviours related to COVID-19 in Italy, one study found that the greatest part of students reported an improvement in their diet and more than a third maintained their smoking habit while the majority of the students did not modify their diet and smoking habits. Almost half of the sample also reported a decrease in physical activities during the lockdown.<sup>5</sup>

The pandemic lockdown has also led to the woe of more vulnerable groups and families as their inability or restrictions to work during the lockdown worsen their sufferings. Volunteer work carried out by various youth groups and volunteer organizations in Mizoram have been eminent in meeting the needs of the needy during the covid crisis. Mizo society auspiciously follows the value of "tlawmngaihna" whereby people go out of their way to serve their fellow beings especially in times of crisis. This value has been carried fervently through the Young Mizo Association (YMA) whereby all able Mizo youth obligingly undertake community welfare services be it illness, death, maintaining cleanliness, disaster or helping the vulnerable households. This sense of voluntary service has saved the Mizo society to a considerable extent particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. In keeping alive this value system, each community in Mizoram formed a Local Task Force to reach out to the needy and to keep the community safe from the growing pandemic. The readiness to take an active part in public activities indicates the individual's quality in terms of citizenship. Youth, who engaged themselves in leadership opportunities, serving affected communities is a significant and important way to apply and develop personal skills. It is assumed that many youth can take their own initiatives and contribute to the local or global initiatives in serving the community.<sup>6</sup>

## METHODS

The current study sought to understand the Physical and social challenges faced by youth during COVID lockdown in Mizoram. The study adopted a cross sectional descriptive research design and findings are

based on an online survey using Google forms questionnaire. The survey was administered through different social networking platforms during the months of April and May 2020 following the inclusion criteria: i) Youth aged between 18-35 years; ii) Permanent residents of Mizoram, India; iii) Youth who were willing to give informed consent.

The sample consisted of 1429 Mizo youth from the eleven districts of Mizoram: Aizawl, Champhai, Hnahthial, Khawzawl, Kolasib, Lawngtlai, Lunglei, Mamit, Saitual, Serchhip, and Siaha. The sample was drawn using convenience sampling technique and excludes those youth who do not have access to technological device and internet connection. Responses were analyzed using SPSS for multiple response analysis of physical and social challenges across gender. The survey questions covered physical challenges such as laziness, appetite, body weakness, substance use, abuse, physically tired with volunteer work whereas social aspects focused on communication gap, relationship, volunteer work, and use of social media.

## RESULTS

The socio demographic details in the current study consisted of more female participants (51%) and less than half (46.6%) who had completed education up to post-graduation. A larger number (77.5%) belong to upper socio-economic status and 58.2% were unemployed.

A comparison of physical challenges among male and female youth (Table 1) shows that laziness was the most common physical challenge among both genders (28.3%) where almost half (48.4%) were female and 41.6% were male respondents. This is followed by increased appetite (16.8%) wherein female respondents comprised a larger number (30.5%) than males (22.9%). A fifth of male (20.3%) and almost a fourth (24.3%) of female respondents complained of bodily weakness while more male youth (22.5%) reported not having any physical challenges as compared to their female counterparts (20.6%). More than a third of male respondents (27.4%) admitted that their consumption of tobacco and gutkha products increased during the lockdown while the same was reported by 12.8% of female respondents.

While increased appetite is seen to be common for both genders, decreased appetite was also more common among females (16.2%) than males (8.2%). A few (2.1%) reported not having adequate food as a result of the lockdown. While physical abuse from family members is low (0.5%), it is found to be more among females (1.1%) than males (0.4%).

Volunteering is one of the manifestations of culture and citizenship in Mizo society. The study found that several young people are taking active part in the voluntary work of Local Task Force and YMA duties. It can be seen that 4.6% of youth felt physically exhausted as they dedicated

their full time serving the community during the lockdown. More male youth (10.5%) stated that they were physically tired from the local task force and YMA duties while very few female respondents (4.3%) stated the same.

**Table 1: Physical challenges among youth: a comparison across gender.**

Physical challenges	Gender		Total n=1429
	Male n=687	Female n=742	
Laziness	285 (41.6)	359 (48.4)	644 (28.3)
Increased appetite	157 (22.9)	226 (30.5)	383 (16.8)
Body weakness	139 (20.3)	180 (24.3)	319 (14)
No challenges	154 (22.5)	153 (20.6)	307 (13.5)
Increased consumption of tobacco/supari/kuhva/cigarettes	188 (27.4)	95 (12.8)	283 (12.4)
Decreased appetite	56 (8.2)	120 (16.2)	176 (7.7)
Not having adequate food	22 (3.2)	26 (3.5)	48 (2.1)
Physical abuse from family members	3 (0.4)	8 (1.1)	11 (0.5)
Physically tired from volunteer work (local task force and YMA duties)	72 (10.5)	32 (4.3)	104 (4.6)

Figures in parenthesis are percentages. Source: Computed

Table 2 shows a gender comparison of the social challenges faced by youth in Mizoram during the lockdown. More than a tenth (11.3%) of youth respondents stated that they did not face any social challenges during the lockdown. More female

respondents (18%) claimed to face no social challenges as compared to 15.6% of their male counterparts. Lack of communication with others was the main social challenge for youth during the lockdown which is a little higher for males (25.3%) than females (22.9%). Missing friends and family was another issue where more females (56.5%) than males (51.3%) accounted for the same. This was followed by an almost equal number of male (12.6%) and female (12.1%) youth who reported being unable to properly maintain social distancing during this time. Whereas some (4.2%) reported that their lockdown period was consumed by local task force activities was considerably more among young men (10.9%) than women (1.9%). More than a third of both males (35.9%) and females (34.4%) felt overwhelmed with bad news regarding the pandemic especially with fake news through social media.

**Table 2: Social challenges among youth: a comparison across gender.**

Social challenges	Gender		Total n=1429
	Male n=687	Female n=742	
No challenges	106 (15.6)	132 (18)	238 (16.7)
Lack of communication with others	172 (25.3)	168 (22.9)	340 (23.6)
Missing friends/family	349 (51.3)	415 (56.5)	764 (53.6)
Inability to maintain propersocial distancing	86 (12.6)	89 (12.1)	175 (12.3)
More time spent in voluntary work (local task force and YMA duties)	74 (10.9)	14 (1.9)	88 (6.2)
Information overload (fake or bad news) from social media	244 (35.9)	253 (34.4)	497 (34.8)

Figures in parenthesis are percentages. Source: Computed.

**Table 3: Relationship between gender and physical challenges among youth.**

	Laziness	Increased appetite	Decreased appetite	Increased consumption of tobacco/ supari/ kuhva/cigarettes
<b>Gender</b>	0.069**	0.086**	0.122**	-0.183**

\* $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ .

Table 3 depicts the correlation between gender and physical challenges among youth in Mizoram. There was high significant relationship between gender and laziness ( $r=0.069^{**}$ ), Increased appetite ( $r=0.086^{**}$ ) and decreased appetite ( $r=0.122^{**}$ ) whereas negative relationship with substance use ( $r=-0.183^{**}$ ).

## DISCUSSION

As one of the vulnerable groups, to understand the challenges faced by youth during this pandemic lockdown

is of importance and would hopefully be of benefit for intervention. The study reveals that the imposed lockdown greatly results in laziness among the youth respondents followed by increased appetite and body weakness. Jha also found that staying in for so long and without any outdoor activity during lockdown has resulted in boredom for a lot of people.<sup>7</sup> The finding of the current study is also consistent with that of another study which found that sedentary behaviours are encouraged by the lockdown episodes where time spent sitting or lying down (apart from sleeping) increases.<sup>8</sup>

Gender comparison of physical challenges shows that male youth accounted for more increased consumption of tobacco-related products and physical exhaustion from volunteer work in the community. Most nicotine consumers reported using nicotine products as their main stress and anxiety coping mechanism and impelled by fear that local stores might run out of stock or be closed during lockdown, many smokers have been buying more cigarettes during pandemic.<sup>9</sup> The queries on increase and decrease in appetite reveal that female as compared to male are more prone to eating disorders during lockdown.

Many youth in this study reported taking an active part in community service through Local Task Force and YMA where almost a tenth (10.9%) are male and only 1.4% are female respondents. Most of the voluntary work in Mizoram during the lockdown included local supply and distribution of groceries, identification of vulnerable households and free distribution of food items, caring for the sick, work related to death and funerals, border area duty, maintaining curfews in the neighbourhood, apart from many other relief works. Such duties call for physical strength, which is why more male youth participated in voluntary work, and reported physical exhaustion and more time spent in such matters, as can be seen from the study.

As regards social challenges, females accounted more for a higher number of those who faced no social challenges but were comparatively reported missing friends and family more. More male youth accounted for a higher number of challenges such as lack of communication with others, inability to maintain proper social distancing, more time spent in voluntary work (Local task force and YMA duties) and information overload from social media.

Social media is commonly used to obtain the latest information on COVID-19 during the outbreak. It has a significant influence and sometimes people have been overwhelmed by receiving too much information regarding COVID-19.<sup>10</sup> Social media has become a part of daily life for an increasing number of people especially youth. This study found that male youth are overwhelmed by the overload of fake or bad news through social media which is similar to a finding that men spend more time as compared to women on social networking sites to review social issues.<sup>11</sup>

Physical challenges and gender had a significant relationship in the COVID-19 lockdown survey. WHO measures to reduce transmission of COVID-19 include social and physical distancing measures.<sup>12</sup> However, the study shows that more males were unable to follow physical distancing norms? On the contrary, another study observed that who trusted the governments more were also more likely to report higher compliance with social distancing norms in Italy and South Korea. Although there are certain limitations in the study, it is evident that youth are struggling to cope with changes

imposed by the pandemic and adjust to the new normal.<sup>13</sup> Along with the multi-disciplinary team work, social workers can play a vital role to reduce the vulnerability of youth during the COVID-19 pandemic. Appropriate social work methods can be used especially among vulnerable groups during biological disasters in the society.<sup>14</sup>

The study was conducted using convenient sampling resulting in unequal distribution of respondents from each district. The study also made only gender comparison and no periodical assessment that contribute to the limitation of the study.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that physical challenges such as abuse, body weakness, laziness, and appetite issues appeared to be comparatively higher among female youth while increased consumption of tobacco and related products is much higher for male youth. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruption in the lives of many people across the globe. The primary focus of the research undertaken was to throw light on the physical and social challenges of youth in Mizoram during COVID-19 lockdown. Understanding young people's lives especially during a pandemic is crucial for researchers, policymakers, and those working in the field of youth development. While all populations are affected by the outbreak of Covid-19, it has noticeably changed the habits and routines of youth.

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