

## Distance Learning Format in the Period of Covid-19 Pandemic

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**Abstract:** Many clinical studies show that in the presence of stress, not only motivation to learn is reduced, but also devaluation of acquired knowledge and difficulty in reproducing existing skills and abilities occur.

**Keywords:** students, COVID-19., distance learning.

**Introduction.** Constant loading of the consciousness with discussion of the causes of stress and search for a way out of it reduces the capacity of working memory, and the hormonal background changed under stress introduces disturbances in the process of reproduction of necessary information. It is also necessary to note violations of interaction of brain hemispheres at expressed emotional stress in the direction of greater dominance of the right, 'emotional' hemisphere, and reduction of influence of the left, 'logical' half of the cortex of large hemispheres on human consciousness. All the above-mentioned processes are not only a consequence of psychological stress development, but also hinder its successful and timely resolution, as a decrease in thinking potential makes it difficult to find a way out of a stressful situation. Numerous studies have proved that stress causes reorganisation of the frontal-triatal area and hippocampus, which becomes the cause of memory impairment and behavioural disorders. Numerous studies have confirmed the numerous negative effects of conspiracy beliefs. Belief in conspiracy theories often leads to stress and contributes to adverse health behaviours, and can reduce the likelihood of vaccination and create scepticism about measures to prevent the spread of disease, among other things. During the COVID-19 pandemic, belief in conspiracy theories reduced the effectiveness of anti-epidemic interventions. The social and political consequences of belief in conspiracy theory contributed to reduced trust in science and destructive political behaviour.

**PURPOSE:** To determine the characteristics of students' psychological well-being during the first four months of a distance learning format during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Materials and methods:** The study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, when all universities of the country were switched to the distance learning format. To study the emotional state of the students and to identify coping strategies, an author's questionnaire was developed and administered to the students online. The study was conducted from March to July 2020. This period is divided into three stages: Stage 1 - the beginning of distance learning (March 2020). The main phase of distance learning came in April and early May 2020. The third and final stage (June-July 2020) is the period of the students' session. The study involved 372 participants, including 112 male and 160 female students of 1-2 years of Samarkand State Medical University. The same students were interviewed at each stage of the study.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections, each of which reflected the stages of distance learning (initial, main and final). Each section included questions about the students' condition. In addition, there were general questions about the difficulties the students encountered during the distance learning, ways of coping with these difficulties, resources during the distance learning period, and the experiences the students had during these months. The total questionnaire included 25 open-ended questions.

**Results of the study:** The analysis of the obtained results was carried out by the method of content analysis, where the students' answers were analysed, categories were identified, qualitative and quantitative analysis of the obtained results was made. Content analysis provides unique subjective

phenomenological descriptions of students' condition during the pandemic, which is in line with the objectives of the study.

In the study of students' state of mind and characteristics of their coping behaviour, students' responses about the difficulties they encountered during the distance learning period were first analysed. Out of 372 students, 16.2% indicated that they did not experience any difficulties during distance learning and 83.8% indicated a few difficulties they faced. The presented results show that the most significant difficulties for students were the learning activity itself (33% of respondents) - the volume of assignments, deadlines for their completion and the session. Many students were unprepared for the new format of assignments, when working through both lectures and seminars involves written work, rather than just attending classes. Thus, students had to organise themselves to complete their assignments on time. The prospect of passing the session was particularly challenging. Based on the results obtained, it is clear that not everyone successfully coped with this task. The need to motivate oneself, to exercise self-discipline was the fourth most important difficulty (noted by 17% of respondents).

27% of respondents reported technical difficulties. During the period of distance learning, many non-resident students who had such an opportunity went home to their relatives, considering the transition to distance learning as an unscheduled holiday. Very often students did not take into account whether they would have a technical opportunity to study there (availability of equipment, Internet access) and space to organise the learning process (quite often relatives may be in the room with students at the same time, which sometimes interfere with the learning process). But even those students who stayed in the city did not always have the opportunity to fully use a computer-laptop, have the necessary quality of Internet, working camera and microphone, etc. Consequently, many students studied remotely, attending classes from a smartphone.

The third most significant was the communicative difficulty related to the relationship with teachers (24% of respondents), namely, inaccurate technical instructions, lack of or inaccurately constructed algorithm of assignments, lack of timely responses and comments from teachers.

Students noted two more difficulties: lack of communication (related to the situation of self-isolation, which has affected almost all residents of our country), as well as lack of free time (probably, this is due to the difficulty of distributing efforts to perform academic tasks, difficulties in self-organisation).

The presented difficulties were reflected in the state of students. Let's consider the characteristics that were studied in students in dynamics. Let us present a description of the psychological state of students (136 subjects) by three components (cognitive, emotional, behavioural) at different stages of inclusion in distance learning in higher education.

In the cognitive component, students' knowledge, thoughts, perceptions about distance learning during the pandemic were noted.

Emotional component of students' state is represented by emotions, feelings, sensations that arose in students during distance learning during the pandemic.

Behavioural component is represented by actions, deeds, performance of different types of activities by students during the period of distance learning, the most frequent answers of students regarding how their thoughts changed during distance learning during the pandemic, how their emotional state manifested itself, and what behavioural reactions accompanied students' thoughts and emotions.

At the initial stage of distance learning, students' attitudes can be examined from several perspectives. 110 students (40.4%) associated the transition to distance learning with the opportunity to rest, considering the situation as an unscheduled holiday, expecting easy studies (full of optimism and joy). A part of students noted for themselves thoughts about studying (29.4%) - for some (17.6%) these were very disturbing thoughts and expectations, probably related to the assessment of the quality of their knowledge in the distance learning format. Students met the beginning of distance learning with a state of incomprehension, confusion, and denial of the reality of what was happening (31.8% of

respondents). The situation of distance learning seemed to be a temporary, incomprehensible situation for which there were no ready strategies yet.

The state of students at the main stage of distance learning can be characterised by the lack of expectation of easy study. 49.7 per cent of respondents note strong resistance to the current situation. Students are very much expecting that this format of learning will soon end, their thoughts are filled with anxiety for the outcome of the session, thoughts about the number of assignments. 21.3% of respondents note that they successfully adapt to new conditions. 20.5% often think about studying within the university walls, think about relatives and report a deficit of communication.

At the final stage, students' thoughts are related to the expectation of the end of the distance learning format. 36.7% of students are already 'anticipating the holidays', study for them during this period turned out to be easy, 36.8% are in an anxious state, thinking about the session, 6% continue to solve organisational learning processes. Thus, the cognitive component of the students' state in dynamics is characterised by students' non-serious attitude to the distance learning format: the forecast of easy study and rest, the mismatch between this expectation and reality, which led at the final stage to an increase in the number of students who note anxious thoughts (more than twice as much as compared to n/a).

The results show an increase in the number of students experiencing negative emotions (first stage - 30.5%; second stage - 61.7%; third stage - 61.4%). In all stages, anxiety and sadness are most strongly represented. Probably, it has to do with the arisen situation of uncertainty accompanying the whole period of distance learning and the period of the pandemic as a whole. Note that at the first stage students note shock and surprise. From the second stage, irritation and anger are present in the students' state, which allowed to smooth out the tension caused by anxiety.

At the same time, we note that a part of students experienced positive emotions such as joy, pleasure. High rates (44.9%) at the first stage are probably related to the non-seriousness of the perception of transfer to the distance form of education. At the second stage we can see a sharp decrease in the index more than twice (16.2%), this can be associated with the organisational and learning difficulties that the students encountered. At the third stage, positive emotions are associated with the feeling of 'joy, relief' (28.7%). Probably, this state is characteristic of those students who are confident in the positive outcome of the session.

In addition to clearly presented positive and negative emotions, students had mixed emotions, which they could not clearly differentiate. This state can be called 'emotional swings', when students simultaneously experienced the feeling of 'joy - anger', 'relief - tension'. Perhaps, this state is not only due to the uncertainty of the external situation (distance learning, pandemic), but also due to the lack of intrapersonal stability. It is manifested as a reliance on one's inner strength, a sense of control and subjectivity. A visible part of students noted the feeling of 'indifference and apathy' to what is happening (the first stage - 6%; the second stage - 17%; the third stage - 13% of respondents). These feelings can be assessed as students' refusal to realise and accept the events taking place and the new situation. Perhaps, this is the work of the defence mechanisms of the psyche: displacement and denial.

**Conclusions:** Thus, in the course of planning and organisation of distance learning activities it is necessary to take into account the peculiarities of the students' condition, to introduce the students to the distance format in a planned manner. Such support can be provided by tutors and teachers who have already had experience of distance work with students. The obtained data will help to plan and develop recommendations for supporting students who may face different difficulties during the period of distance learning, as well as to prevent the occurrence of these difficulties in the course of work with students.

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