



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Post-Pandemic Effects on Psychological Well-Being of Students with Visual Impairment at Higher Education Level**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examined the impact of the post-pandemic period on the psychological well-being of students with visual impairment at the higher education level. A mixed methods research design with an explanatory approach was employed, consisting of two phases: quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative phase involved 102 purposively sampled students aged 18 to 32, who completed the Psychological Well-being Scale (PWS-42 items) for data collection. SPSS was used to analyze the quantitative data. In the qualitative phase, 10 students with low psychological well-being were selected for interviews. The findings indicated that 50% of students with visual impairment had a high level of psychological well-being, while the remaining 50% reported low to moderate levels. Male students reported higher well-being compared to female students. Among students aged 26-32, higher levels of autonomy, personal growth, and positive relationships were reported compared to those aged 18-25. Employment during Covid-19 was associated with better environmental mastery, while being a victim of the disease was linked to lower environmental mastery and self-acceptance. Common effects of the pandemic on the well-being of students with visual impairment included anxiety, depression, mental stress, isolation, loneliness, restrictions, financial problems, fear of death, technology barriers, and difficulties with online exams. Further research is needed to investigate important factors influencing the well-being of students with visual impairment and individuals with other disabilities.

**KEYWORDS** Higher Education, Post-Pandemic, Psychological Wellbeing, Visual Impairment

**Introduction**

A The COVID-19 pandemic originated in a Chinese city and rapidly spread to other countries, prompting several nations to declare it a national emergency (Yaseen, et al. 2020; Sifat et al., 2022). In order to mitigate the spread of the virus and reduce fatalities, many countries implemented measures to encourage social distancing among individuals. These measures included the imposition of curfews and temporary closure of borders by several nations.

Many schools were shuttered due to the lockdown, and the school was shifted to online lessons, exams, etc., limiting interactions with their classmates and decreasing their opportunities for physical activity. The Covid-19 pandemic impacted negatively on education and psychological wellbeing of students with visual impairment, particularly in a developing nation (Nasir & Hameed, 2021).

The recent study seeks to examine the impact of covid-19 pandemic on the psychological well-being and six factors of psychological well-being (autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance) of higher education students with visual impairment. Students with visual impairment faced complications in their life, especially during the phase of covid-19. It is

essential to look into these factors in Eastern culture, especially in Pakistan due to the smaller number of studies available on these variables.

The current study will provide a detailed description of the issues that students with visual impairment had to deal with during the COVID-19 pandemic. Different studies were to evaluate the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on different contexts (Zeeshan et al., 2022), and other disabilities in Pakistan but data is not available on the psychological well-being of students with visual impairment and difficulties of students with visual impairments during the covid-19 perspective of Punjab, Pakistan.

### **Literature Review**

The COVID-19 pandemic not only brought about a public health crisis but also led to significant psychological disturbances, particularly impacting the well-being of students. With its widespread reach, the pandemic affected approximately 1.6 billion individuals across more than 200 countries, causing unprecedented disruptions to educational systems (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021).

The COVID-19 epidemic has brought increased attention to mental health concerns among various affected populations. It has introduced novel stressors, including heightened anxiety and fear for oneself and loved ones, restricted social interactions due to isolation measures, and abrupt lifestyle changes. An analysis of virus epidemics and pandemics has identified additional stressors such as worries, discomfort, boredom, limited resources, incomplete knowledge, financial losses, and the presence of stigma (Brooks et al., 2020).

Most of the time, isolation was unpleasant for people because limited their autonomy and develops worry, sadness, boredom, and fears of diseases and losing their jobs (Wu et al., 2009). In the starting stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, more than 40% of respondents said they felt moderate to severe distress. The study's findings were used to enhance psychological intervention and education-based mental health prevention even though they were not indicative of the mental health of the broader population (Respati et al., 2021).

Researchers have observed the psychological effects of online study during the pandemic, according to the literature. A recent study found that during the COVID-19 outbreak, university students were found emotional difficulties, post-traumatic stress disorder, anger, fear, despair, and anxiety (Brooks et al., 2020).

### **Material and Methods**

#### **Research Design**

To find the outcomes of the varying level of post-pandemic psychological well-being among university students, explanatory mixed-method research design was used. This design involves collecting and analyzing both numerical data (quantitative) and textual data (qualitative) to address research questions and explore relationships between variables (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004).

#### **Phase I:**

In the quantitative phase (Phase I) of the study, a sample of N=102 university students was included. The sample consisted of 70 male students and 32 female students. Data collection was conducted among students from both government and private universities across the province of Punjab. The participants were selected purposively, taking into account their age ranges, which were categorized as 18 to 25 and 26 to 32.

**Table 1**  
**Selected sample of students with visual impairment for survey**

Sr #	Students with VI	City	Students from govt Sector 77%	Students from private sectors 23%
1	19	Lahore	11	8
2	5	Bahawalpur	5	0
3	8	Sargodha	5	3
4	7	Faisalabad	5	2
5	6	Rawalpindi	4	2
6	2	Jhang	2	0
7	2	Kasur	2	0
8	5	Sialkot	4	1
9	2	Muridke	2	0
10	5	Pattoki	5	0
11	2	Sahiwal	2	0
12	3	Bahawalnagar	3	0
13	6	Islamabad	3	3
14	1	Noshera	1	0
15	2	Jaranwala	2	0
16	5	Jehlum	5	0
17	3	Gujranwala	2	1
18	2	Sheikhupura	1	1
19	5	Multan	3	2
20	2	Rahimyarkhan	2	0
21	2	Wazirabad	1	1
22	3	Mandibahaudin	3	0
23	1	Chishtian mandi	1	0
24	2	Okara	2	0
25	1	Gojra	1	0
26	1	Lodhran	1	0
Total	102	Overall Punjab	78	24

### Instrument

Ryff's Psychological Well-being scale (PWS-42 items) was used as a research instrument to collect quantitative data. The 42-item Psychological Well-being scale was used by the researcher to assess the psychological health of higher education students with visual impairment. Ryff's 42-item Psychological Well-being (PWB) Scale gauges' happiness in six areas: self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal progress, and positive connections with others (Ryff et al., 2007; adapted from Ryff, 1989). Psychological Well-being scale having 42 items and it's a 6 points Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) through 2 (disagree somewhat), 3 (slightly disagree), 4 (slightly agree), 5 (agree somewhat), and 6 (strongly agree).

### Reliability of instrument

The reliability of the instruments was measured by using SPSS and the value of Cronbach alpha (.856) was determined by the sample of 102 students with a visual impairment from different cities in Pakistan.

## Data Collection

The researcher collected the data from students with visual impairment studying in public and private sector universities of the Punjab. To collect data, the researcher took written permission from the chairpersons of the departments in universities. Most of the data was collected by physical visits to universities and rest was collected online through Google Forms from cities where the researcher could not physically visit. The questionnaire took 20-25 minutes to be filled by an individual participant.

## Phase II

Phase II based on the Qualitative procedure of research:

### Sample and sampling technique:

After collecting the data with the help of Ryff's Psychological Well-being scale (PWS-42 items). The researcher makes the total score of wellbeing and chose 10 students with low score and conducted interviews with these students. The sample for qualitative interviews of the study N= 10 includes males (n= 5) and females (n= 5). This sample was selected by using purposive sampling technique. This sample was selected by using purposive sampling technique.

**Table 2**  
**Sample of students with visual impairment for interviews**

Sr #	Students with Visual Impairment	City	Students from govt Sectors	Students from private sectors
1	2 males	Lahore	1	1
2	1 male	Bahawalpur	1	0
3	1 male	Faisalabad	1	0
4	1 male	Rawalpindi	1	0
5	3 females	Lahore	2	1
6	1 female	Bahawalpur	1	0
7	1 female	Sargodha	1	0
Total	10 students		8	2

### Research Instrument: Semi-structured questionnaire

Self-developed interview protocol was used. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to examine the impact of post-pandemic psychological Well-being. Students with visual impairments in higher education were interviewed in semi-structured interviews to gather qualitative data. Interviews of students were collected by physically visiting the universities but the interviews of students belonging to Bahawalpur and Rawalpindi were conducted via audio calls. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 3**  
**Frequency and Percentage of Participants (N =102)**

Demographic variables	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	69 %
Female	31 %
<b>Age</b>	
20 - 25	65.7 %
26 - 32	34.3 %

<b>Qualification</b>	
BS/ M.A	84 %
M.phill	16 %
<b>University</b>	
govt	76 %
Private	24 %
<b>Residential Area</b>	
Rural	38 %
Urban	62 %
<b>Type of vi</b>	
Partially sighted	8.8 %
Low vision	24.5 %
Total Blindness	66.7 %
<b>Computer Literate</b>	
Yes	78 %
No	22 %
<b>Attending online classes</b>	
Yes	80.4
No	19.6
<b>Self-isolation and loneliness</b>	
Yes	45 %
No	55 %
<b>Suffering from COVID</b>	
Yes	18 %
No	82 %
<b>Employment status during COVID</b>	
Employed	26 %
Unemployed	74 %

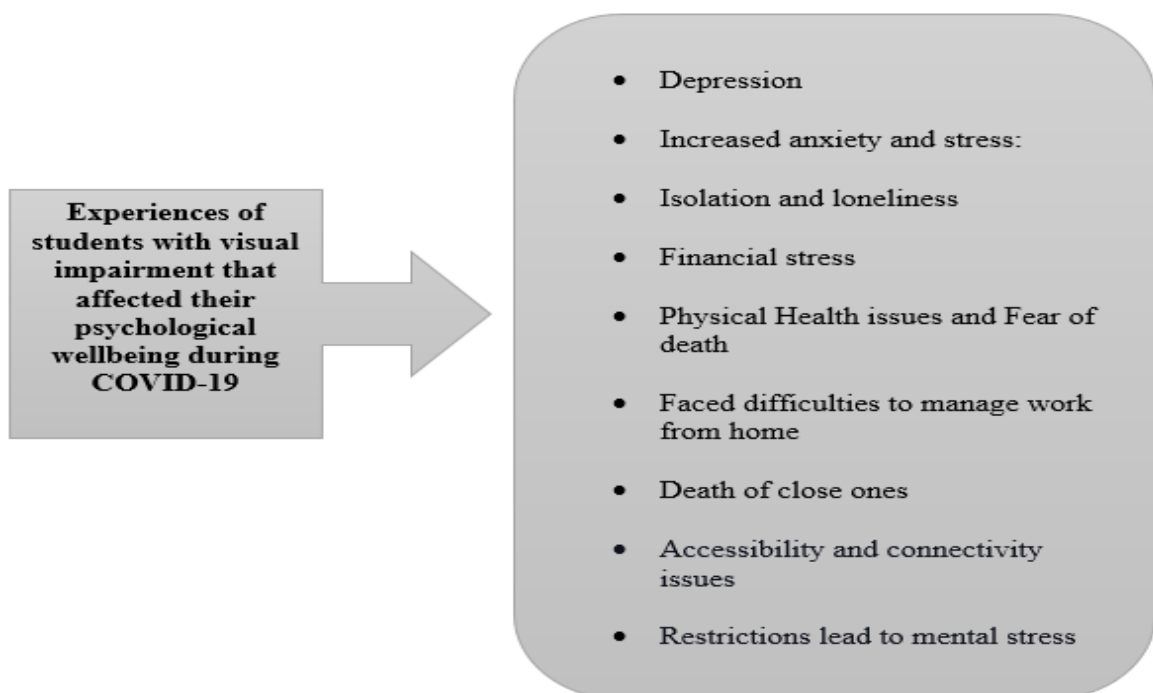


Figure 1: Experiences of students with visual impairment that affected their psychological wellbeing during COVID-19

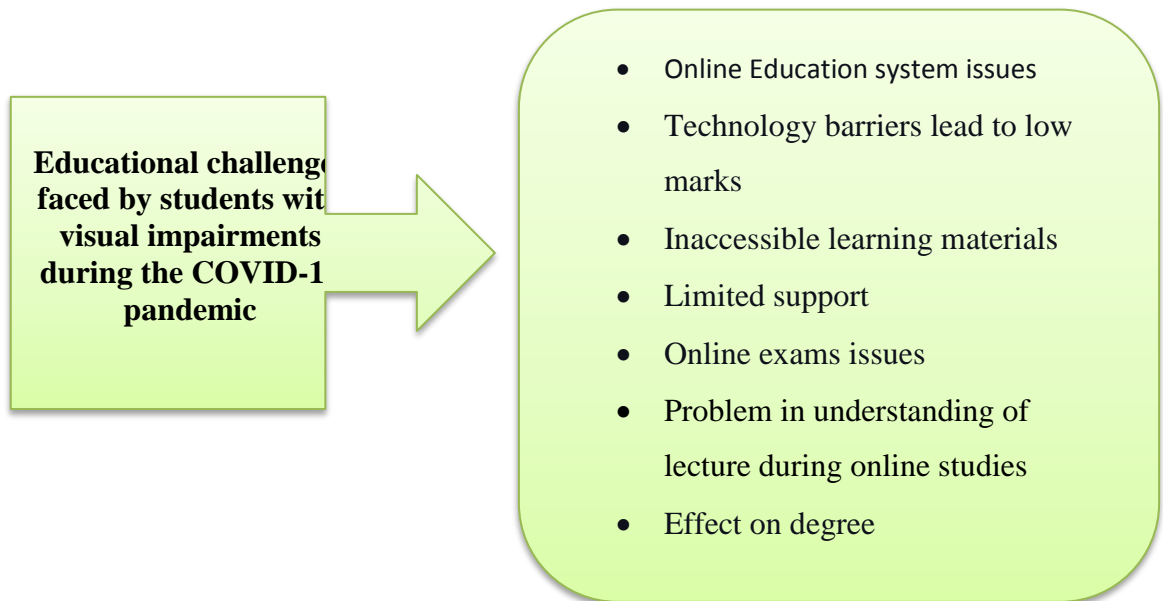


Figure 2: Educational challenges faced by students with visual impairments during the COVID-19 pandemic

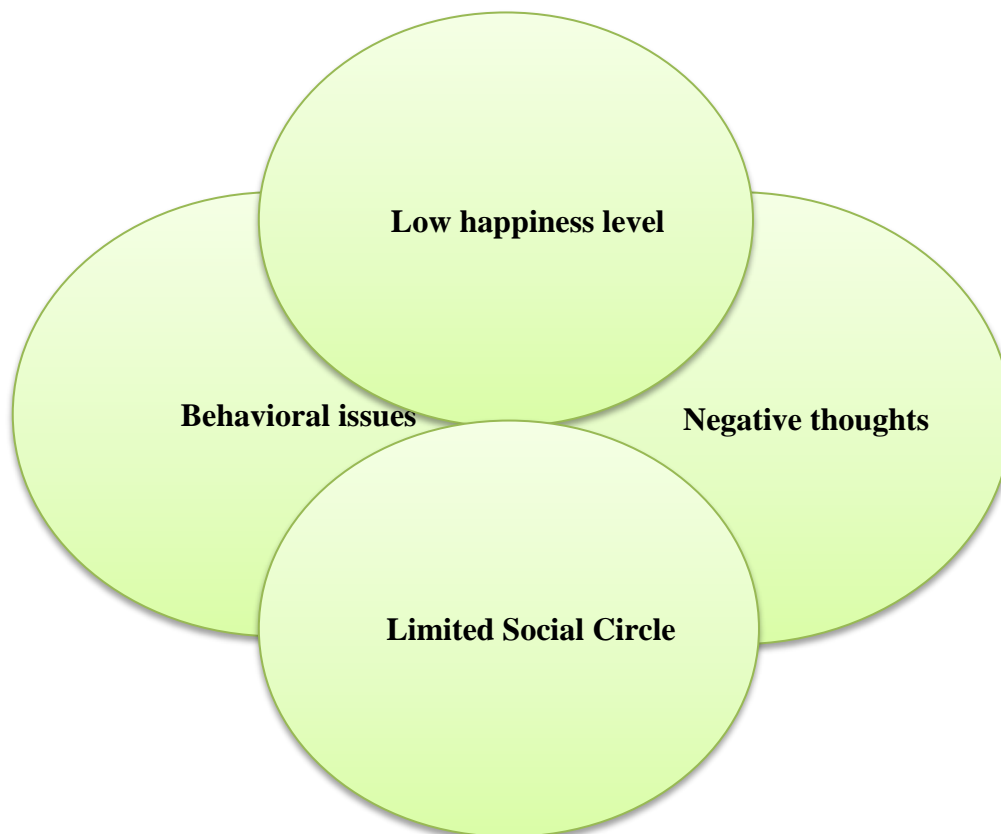


Figure 3: Post-pandemic effect on social behaviors and emotional health of students with visual impairment

### Discussion

Findings shows round about 50% of students with visual impairment have high level of psychological well-being and other 50% of students have low and moderate level of psychological well-being. Other studies show the opposite results. The study findings

indicate that students with visual impairment generally exhibit low levels of autonomy, environmental mastery, and self-acceptance. However, they demonstrate high levels of personal growth, positive relationships with others, and a sense of purpose in life. Previous research has shown that adults with visual impairment scored lower in autonomy and environmental mastery. A study by Mirandola et al. (2019) suggests that individuals with visual impairment who engage in physical activity experience positive effects on personal growth and self-acceptance.

Regarding gender differences among visually impaired students, the present study reveals that male students tend to have better environmental mastery, personal growth, and positive relationships compared to female students. Another study by Matud et al. (2019) found that men scored higher in self-acceptance and independence, while women scored higher in personal development and interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, the study indicates that adults (26 to 32 years old) score higher in autonomy, personal growth, and positive relationships compared to young adults (18 to 25 years old). This suggests that adults are more self-reliant, exhibit greater control over their behavior regardless of social norms, and continue to grow personally while engaging in meaningful relationships (Seifert, 2017).

In terms of employment status during the COVID-19 pandemic, the study reveals a significant difference in one aspect of psychological well-being, namely environmental mastery. Students who were employed during the pandemic demonstrated better environmental mastery compared to those who were unemployed. This suggests that visually impaired students who worked during COVID-19 have a greater sense of seizing opportunities and exerting control over their environment and daily tasks (Seifert, 2017). Additionally, students who experienced the negative effects of COVID-19 demonstrated lower levels of environmental mastery and self-acceptance compared to non-affected students. This implies that those affected by the disease feel less able to influence their surroundings and events through physical or mental actions (Stafford et al., 2016).

Regarding the educational context during the pandemic, the majority (80%) of visually impaired students attended online classes during the lockdown, while 20% did not participate. The study found that students who attended online classes during COVID-19 exhibited lower levels of environmental mastery compared to those who did not participate in online classes. Through interviews conducted, it has been observed that students with visual impairments in higher education have experienced various psychological challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic. Anxiety, depression, mental stress, isolation, and loneliness have emerged as the most prevalent effects on their psychological well-being and mental health. The transition to a different learning environment and increased academic pressure in university settings have further contributed to these issues. A recent study by Brooks et al. (2020) found that university students, in general, experienced emotional issues, post-traumatic stress disorder, anger, fear, despair, and anxiety during the Covid-19 outbreak.

The psychological well-being and mental health of students with visual impairments in higher education have also been impacted by job losses and financial insecurities faced by themselves and their families during the pandemic. Another study highlighted various factors that affected the social behavior and emotional health of higher education students with visual impairments, including low happiness levels, behavioral issues, excessive time spent on social media, fear of vaccination, negative thoughts, and environmental factors such as government-imposed lockdowns, limited social interactions, mask-wearing, and the shift from physical to online classes.

Comparatively, the stress and anxiety experienced by college students in their daily lives have been compounded by the Covid-19 protective measures, such as shelter-in-place orders and social distancing practices. These measures have significantly altered students' lives, as noted by Son et al. (2020). Overall, students with visual impairments in higher

education have encountered a range of mental health problems and challenges to their psychological well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic. The combination of pandemic-related factors, academic pressure, financial uncertainties, and changes in daily routines has had a significant impact on their mental health and emotional state.

### **Conclusion**

This study examines the impact of the post-pandemic psychological well-being of students with visual impairments at the higher education level. The research follows an explanatory mixed-methods research design comprising two phases. Phase I utilizes a quantitative approach, while Phase II employs a qualitative method. The findings indicate that male students generally reported higher levels of well-being compared to their female counterparts. The study reveals that various factors related to psychological well-being, including self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relationships, environmental mastery, and autonomy, were affected among students with visual impairments during the Covid-19 pandemic. Students with visual impairments encountered numerous challenges during the pandemic, such as feelings of isolation, loneliness, difficulties with online classes, job insecurities, and other related issues. These findings are consistent with previous research and provide support for the observed effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the psychological well-being of students with visual impairments at the higher education level.

### **Recommendations**

1. Educational institutions should develop and implement targeted interventions to support the psychological well-being of visually impaired students in higher education. These interventions should focus on addressing the affected well-being factors, such as self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relationships, environmental mastery, and autonomy.
2. It is important to provide gender-specific resources and interventions to address the unique needs and challenges faced by female visually impaired students during the pandemic.
3. Special education institutes must recognize and address the job insecurities faced by visually impaired students during the pandemic. Collaborate with career services and disability support offices to provide employment guidance, resources, and accommodations to increase their opportunities for meaningful employment.
4. Mental health professionals should take a holistic approach to address the well-being of visually impaired students. This includes considering physical, mental, and emotional well-being aspects. Provide access to mental health services, counseling, and support networks to help students navigate the challenges and stresses associated with the pandemic.



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