MENTAL HEALTH AMONG STUDENTS' DURING COVID 19 PANDEMIC : A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The literature reviews to provide an understanding of the scenario of mental health among undergraduate students, factors that contribute to mental health problems during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the impact on student's mental health. The conceptual framework had shown the fear of Infection, Financial Constraints, Limited Social Interaction, and the Challenges of Online Learning. Next, the dependent variables are stress, depression, and lastly anxiety. Besides, the conceptual framework offers a direct relation between the four independent parts under factors that contribute to mental health problems during the Covid-19 pandemic, which are fear of infection, financial constraints, limited social interactions, and the challenges of online learning. The impact on student's mental health is dependent on depression, stress, and anxiety influenced by these four independent variables. All of the variables in the conceptual framework are explained in detail in the conceptual framework definition section.

Keywords: *mental health, student, covid 19, pandemic, stress, anxiety, depression*

INTRODUCTION

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and emotional well-being and not the absence of illness or infirmity. Mental health generally is about the lack of mental diseases. According to the World Health Organization (2003), mental health can be defined as a well-being state. The person knows his or her abilities, can cope with regular life stresses, can work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to society. Furthermore, the WHO also added that mental health is about developing personal and societal skills and attaining self-determined desires. Therefore, the scenario of mental health among undergraduate

students can be referred to as a postulated sequence of possible events regarding mental health issues,among undergraduate students in college or university, who have not yet earned a bachelor's degree (Aleksandar Kecojevic et al. 2020).

In the contemporary world, as the demand for living increases, the number of students currently diagnosed with mental health problems likewise increases. Besides, mental health problems are common among students, as they are among the general population. Plus, going to college can be a stressful time for many students due to many factors. According to Paola, Maren, Albert, Courtney & Timothy (2014), some students encounter the stressful tasks of separation from their family of origin. Others must attend to multiple work and family responsibilities, to cope with academic pressure. According to Ranita, Sohana, & Marhaini (2020), there are three crucial indicators for mental health: identifying depression, anxiety, and stress levels. These three types of emotional disorders lead to adverse outcomes such as emotional distress, exhaustion, and health problems due to lowered functioning. Consequently, there will be an increased level of psychological morbidity and detrimental impacts on their professions and lives if this problem is not identified and addressed early.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Poor mental health is more than just a psychological illness (WHO 2022). It can be seen as a mental health state that denies a person to prosper and thoroughly enjoy their lives. During this Covid-19 pandemic, most of the people focused primarily on undergraduate students face many difficulties and limitations in having a regular life as before. Besides, adapting to new living and learning styles that have different restrictions somehow adversely affects their state of mind to be in the right conditions. In this paper, a few factors have been identified as stressors for graduates during this Covid 19 pandemic through further research and studies, namely fear of infection, financial constraints, restricted social contact, and online learning challenges.

Fear of Infection

Fear of infection or fear of contagion means a feeling afraid of a dangerous virus and bad disease being spread or expose. Fear is also an unpleasant feeling or emotion that can be caused by danger, pain, or harm such as the pandemic virus Covid-19. The incidence of epidemics is known to enhance or develop new stressors, including anxiety and concern for oneself or loved ones, restrictions on physical mobility and social activities due to quarantine, and unexpected and drastic changes in lifestyle (Farahiyah et al. 2020). Fear is, in the presence of a threat, an adaptive response. However, anxiety can become persistent and burdensome when the danger is unpredictable and constant, as in the current coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Fear of infection can be considered from many factors such as personal health, the risk for loved ones, risk control, health anxiety, and also safety behaviors. Sources of stress such as infection concerns, anger, boredom, insufficient supplies, inadequate knowledge, financial loss, and stigma have been reported in a recent study of virus outbreaks and pandemics. (Farahiyah et al. 2020). When the students are in fear, they are afraid of the disease being spread to themselves. They will also worry about their loved ones or family members' health during this pandemic. When the students are worrying about their own and family health, it could induce the fear feeling until affect their studies. As an example, when one of their family members is on the front lines that help to curb the pandemic of Covid-19, they will be in the fear of infection and as a result, affects their studies too (WHO, 2022).

The mental health had affected different groups have been brought into focus by the COVID-19 pandemic. The incidence of epidemics is known to enhance or develop new stressors, including anxiety and concern for themselves or family and friends, limitations on physical action or movement and social interactions due to quarantine, and unexpected and drastic changes in lifestyle (Farahiyah et al.,2020). An overwhelming majority of the students stated that COVID-19 enhanced the rate of fear and anxiety for their health and their friends and family's health. Few students were concerned for their more fragile families

and friends, such as older adults, those with existing health conditions, and pregnant or have recently given birth to a child (Farahiyah et al.,2020). Some of the students shared their concerns about their family members whose profession, such as vital and health care employees, raised their level of harm to COVID-19 (Farahiyah et al.,2020). Some students explicitly stated that they were concerned about the virus being contracted.

The students worry about families and relatives with higher vulnerabilities. They have one of the family members affected by the virus and fear that anything could happen towards their family. A student worried their grandmother had been affected by the virus, giving more risk to the older person. All people in this world knew that the virus has a higher risk towards a person's health (Farahiyah et al., 2020). They are also a student worry about families with more interpersonal contact with the Covid-19 virus. The student worries about his brother who just graduated from medical school and needs to work directly in the hospital doing his residency and his brother most probably meet to the patient related to the Covid-19 (Farahiyah, et al., 2020). Next, the student will worry about themselves being infected too because the Covid-19 virus can expose anyone. Few students have the symptoms that nearly to the Covid-19 virus, thus they afraid that they will be infected by it (Farahiyah et al. ,2020). Based on the findings, showed that the students' inner levels of concerns regarding contracting Covid-19 for themselves, their families, and friends surviving if contracted with Covid-19 (Ilango Saraswathi, 2020).

Financial Constraints

A financial constraint is something that limits an economic way to proceed which, instead, must be tolerated. The results of the study show that financial constraints increase the opposite influence of financial reporting quality on investment inefficiency (Changwon S. et al ,2020). Financial constraints can be described as financial barriers that prevent companies from financing their investment activities by accessing external funds. Financial constraints are also defined as an inelastic supply of external finance, suggesting a constraint when internal funding is inadequate for firm decisions (Sheela, et al.,2020). The financial constraints can cause by a lot of issues such as loss of employment, loss of main income, health and medical expenses, and many more. The most prominently highlighted stress factors were primarily financial constraints, mobile online classes, and confusion about the future due to COVID-19 and lockdowns, based on the selected related narrative feedback provided by the students in the study (Sheela, et al., 2020).

Students voiced their doubts about the effect of Covid-19 on their financial conditions. Many reported that Covid-19 has affected their own current and potential employment prospects, such as part-time work and internships, or is probably affecting them. In the aftermath of Covid-19, some exposed the financial struggles of their family members, mainly parents, being laid off or getting pay cuts (Farahiyah et al.,2020). The student is also distressed regarding their financial issues such as the need to think of their financial commitments due to the loss of income affected by their family (Sheela, et al., 2020). Moreover, they also lose the opportunity to do their part-time job as in they always did that during their studies to self-finance their studies (Muhammad., 2020). This will lead the undergraduate students to think about the upcoming university fee that exacerbates the financial constraints and their mental health (Muhammad et al.,2020). Most of the students did not eligible or did not receive the financial relief under their university fees and it makes them more worried and can affect their mental health too (Aleksander Aristovnik, 2020). Likewise, certain avoidance behaviors may be correlated with a rise in financial and family distress in a tragedy, which would have exacerbated their mental well-being and a more passive lifestyle (Muhammad et al.,2020).

The factor of stress by the financial constraints can be when a student worries that they already rented a room for stay during their internships at the town while all the people need to be quarantined at home. The student worry that how to manage to pay the rent while their family had financial crisis since before. Plus, there is a student also worry the condition of their family as an example their parent's salary need to be cut and the parents still need to pay all the commitment like before and still need to pay all the

school and university fees of their children. The student will feel worry and anxiety that they could not manage to pay the fees and could not help their parents due to the financial constraints (Farahiyah et al.,2020). In order to curb the financial constraints, the university can take an initiative to do the fee relief to the students that had low income of family. The university could provide a survey and ask the student to stated their financial needs during the online learning. There might be a lot of students that had the financial crisis since the pandemic had affect all the people around the world. As an example, there are some students live in rural area that could not afford to have the high coverage of the Internet due to the high fees of the Internet the telecommunication. The student could not join the online class on time and could not focus during their online classes. Thus, they will lose their motivation to study which could affect their mental health too.

Limited Social Interactions

Social interactions can be defined, according to Rummel (1976), as the acts, actions, or practises of two or more individuals who are mutually oriented towards each other, that is, any behaviour that attempts to influence or take into account the subjective experiences or intentions of each other. Also, according to Andy (2012), social interaction is the process by which individuals interact with different groups of people and respond to how other human beings' function and become a fundamental aspect of social life. Paraphrasing from the words of an author namely John Donne, where no one is an island, shows that all people will interact with other people every day and often many times in any one day, except those who choose to live truly alone (Andy, 2012). Therefore, limited social interaction can be defined as the situation in which people have limited exchange between two or more people, due to certain constraints.

In general, young people are not among any particular risk groups at risk of coronavirus infection and having serious health effects due to COVID-19. However, students as young people are the demographic group that felt severe consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic's first wave and thus a major shift in their ordinary routine and probably even more worrying, the outlook for their near and distant future (Aleksander Aristovnik, 2020). Many countries affected by the pandemic have also succeeded in slowing the rate of coronavirus transmission more or less effectively by taking drastic steps such as banning public events and meetings, closing workplaces, restrictions on stay-at- home, restraints on domestic and international travel, testing and contact tracking and closing educational institutions. As a consequence, social interaction has been limited due to this pandemic for all people, including university students.

Challenges of Online Learning

The challenge was defined by Ronald (2018) as an invitation or a call to action. Neeta (2020) also points out that it refers to something whose nature or character serves as an appeal to make a special effort, a request to explain, justify or impede an undertaking that stimulates one involved. Besides, online learning encompasses various technologies to provide education, such as the world wide web, email, chat, new groups and texts, audio and video conferencing delivered over computer networks (Indira Dhull & Sakshi, 2017). It helps students learn at their own pace, depending on their convenience. On the other hand, purely online courses are courses delivered entirely over the Internet. According to Tuan (2015), hybrid or blended learning combines traditional face-to-face classes, Internet learning, and other digital learning. Therefore, online learning challenges can be described as teaching and learning differently in an e-learning environment than in the traditional classroom and can present new challenges for instructors and learners involved in this online learning environment.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, most governments have shut down schools and institutions, prompting a need for social distancing and avoiding crowded areas. The unforeseen closing of educational institutions has prompted the authorities to recommend emergency remote teaching to ensure students are not left stagnant in this era of pandemics (Emmanuel, Joseph, & Kofi, 2020). For the present running, thus, the conventional face- to-face teaching approaches have been replaced by online. As a consequence,

students and lecturers in higher education institutions have been critically impacted by unprecedented changes as a result of this pandemic. According to Ellen, Geetha, & Laura Christ (2020), many prominent universities around the world had already decided to embrace online learning as a means of ensuring continuity of education in order to curb the spread of Covid-19. Similar thing applies in our country, where, according to Salleh Suleiman (2020), Malaysia's academic session to continue the new norm of social distance and movement control order (MCO), online learning has been introduced to ensure a smooth teaching and learning process.

Besides, previous studies show that online learning has many advantages for learners, according to Dhawan (2020), since this form of learning allows more flexible student centering. In addition, according to Marinoni, Van't Land, & Jensen (2020), engagement with students can also be enhanced by offering asynchronous and synchronous resources such as e-mail, forums, chats, video conferencing. According to Anis & Mohammad (2020), online education is the best way to teach different courses, as this form of training has been growing for years and has created new opportunities for students, professors and educational planners and institutes. Online learning could strengthen the learning experience for students and, despite some inherent difficulties created by this period of emergencies, then that could lead to improved communication with students (Claudiu, Laurentiu, Luiza Meses, Carmen, & Maria Cristina, 2020).

However, online learning leads to several of the factors that may be regarded as barriers in the teaching and learning process and can negatively impact the mental health of the students. First and foremost, according to Professor Datuk Dr Ahmad Ibrahim, Fellow, Academy of Science, UCSI University, as reported in the New Straits Times (2020), internet coverage gap education is under threat from the pandemic as inadequate connectivity affects the higher education sector. This is because, with growing demand for online instruction, students with limited Internet access fail to follow lectures. In Malaysia, internet coverage disparity can be seen when people in Kuala Lumpur enjoy high-speed Internet up to 800 megabytes per second. At the same time, Internet speed in Sarawak which located in East Malaysia, is much slower, with some places in the state without Internet access (Nurianti, 2020). Throughout online classes, this disparity would impact student access to education. Moreover, many students are economically disadvantaged families (Nurianti, 2020). Instead of having no access to unlimited Internet for their mobile devices, they also face difficulties accessing computers because they are limited to university computer labs. Nurrianti Jalli claimed that she asked her students at Universiti Teknologi MARA in Malaysia about coronavirus-related possibilities for online classes. However, the finding shows that some East Malaysian students were worried that their access to the Internet would not be enough to sustain online learning.

IMPACT ON STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH

Undergraduate students are the future of our society, reflecting society's investment for the future, so their mental well-being is essential for their rights and society as they contribute to the more significant part of society. However, many undergraduates suffer psychological issues due to various factors as a consequence of the Covid 19 pandemic. Stress, anxiety and depression have been described as significant and often affected undergraduate students during this pandemic by referring to many previous studies. Besides, stress, depression and anxiety are mood disorders that make us depressed and hopeless over time. These kinds of physiological problems have long and short-term consequences. Within a short period, people will feel low with psychological issues such as stress and depression, but they will work and take care of day-to-day tasks. Risks, however, are related to long-term psychological issues that often turn into physical illness.

Stress

According to Amir Mohammad Shahsavarani (2015) stress is a regular occurrence all around during all human lifespans. Stress is one of life's unique characteristics, and its nature has been emphasised so that it has been discussed in all eras of fine arts and literature. He also defines stress as a feeling of mental pressure and tension in psychological research. Low-stress levels can be desirable, helpful, and even

safer. Besides, stress is the body's non-specific reaction to any query. Hans Selye argued that stress is not similar to emotional arousal or nervous discomfort, as stress may occur in humans and animals under or respond to anaesthesia. It can also occur in plants and bacteria that do not have a nervous system (Fink, 2017). Stress is part of our everyday human experience. Still, it is correlated with a wide range of fundamentally different problems, such as surgical trauma, burns, emotional arousal, mental or physical effort, exhaustion, discomfort, and anxiety (Fink, 2017). Therefore, stress can also be defined as a reaction of a person to changing circumstances or a threatening situation. It can be seen as a personal answer to an external event/demand, such as writing an exam or to an internal state of mind, such as an examination issue (Counseling of Services , 2016).

The 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) has been identified as unprecedented health, economic and social emergency and was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization in March 2020, leading to lockdowns and restrictions on life in Italy and around the world to prevent and delay the spread of the virus. In terms of depression, anxiety, panic attacks, and even psychotic symptoms, delirium, and elevated suicidal rates, comparable prior emergencies, such as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic, were clearly shown to spread stress and cause psychological disease (Maria Clelia Zurlo, 2020). Without discussing and defining particular sources of stress linked to relationships and everyday life changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, the instruments mentioned in this study explicitly addressed the effect of the COVID-19 outbreak in terms of psychological performance (Maria Clelia Zurlo, 2020). Besides, based on this study stated that stress is one of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown on the Italian University students. According to Maria Clelia Zurlo (2020) study, the COVID-19 Student Stress Questionnaires Scales had results 67.09% of 514 Italian University students were laden with things related to perceived stress pertaining to relationships with family and friends, social isolation, and also fear of contagion.

Depression

Depression is a significant contributor to global depression. The burden of disease and impacts people globally in all cultures. For these factors, in terms of the overall year missed because of disability, depression is the world's leading cause of disability. Based on World Health Organization (WHO) (2012), Depression is a common mental illness with depressed mood, lack of interest or satisfaction, reduced motivation, feelings of shame or low self-worth, disrupted sleep or appetite, and insufficient attention. Moreover, signs of anxiety also come with depression. The term depression comes from "depressio" in Latin, meaning sinking. With weight on their nature, the person feels sunk. It is a good condition that ranges from everyday intermittent low mood to psychiatric syndrome, with extreme and significant duration and related signs and symptoms, substantially different from normality, in everyday life itself (Bernard, 2018). Besides, depression is often everyone feels sad or bad, but these feelings generally pass with a little time. Depression, also known as "clinical depression" or "depressive disorder," is a mood condition that causes distressing symptoms, such as sleeping, eating, or working, that affect how you feel, though, and manage everyday activities (National Institute of Mental Health, 2016).

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic creates a psycho-emotional chaotic condition. Countries have reported a rapid increase in mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, stress, sleep disorder and fear among their people, which eventually increased the use of drugs and often suicidal behavior. Based the study in Islam et al., the results indicate that 392 (82.4%) students appear to have depressive symptoms that were moderate to severe. More than 60% of the students were male (67.2%), and the remainder were female. One student out of three lived in rural areas (35.1%). Less than a quarter of students (24.8%) claimed that they were not missing educationally, and just over 30% were officially exercising daily at home during the lockdown. Besides, the study also shows the level of depression among university students in Bangladesh. 392 (82.4%) the total 476 valid respondents were found to have moderate to severe depressive symptoms. Males (67.35%) had higher depressive symptoms than females (32.65%), although students reported higher depressive symptoms in the early twenties (66.07%) than other age groups.

Students in the United States of America (USA) were met with the elimination of summer internships and the cancellation of major standardised exams. Earlier studies have shown that college students are negatively affected because of school closures from epidemics, and experience intensified negative emotions as a result. A background of family instability further highlights such stressors due to loss of earnings or jobs, looming uncertainty about the family's finances, and possible health threats to family members, all of which will affect students' usual coping strategies (Blair Academy, 2020). As the results find out in particular, 49% of the participants had an abnormal PSS score, and 68% had an abnormal Patient Health Questionnaire for Depression and Anxiety (PHQ4) score. Females had raised levels of depression and mood disorder depression consistently higher than males. The study explains the intensity of perceived stress and depression levels among the students. In PHQ, approximately 34% of respondents had moderate to severe depression, and 13% reported moderate to extreme stress in the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). In summary, the respondent faced higher moderate to severe depression than moderate to extreme stress (Blair Academy, 2020).

Anxiety

Anxiety is a word used when dealing with a threat, danger, or nervousness to describe a natural feeling that people encounter. They usually feel irritated, nervous, and tense when people become anxious. Anxiety disorders are a category of diseases marked by constant feelings of high anxiety and intense pain and stress, not just a single illness (Australian Government: Department of Health and Ageing, 2017). Based on Donald Moss (2014), anxiety is a human being's overall reaction to a threat or danger. Each anxiety experience includes a perception of risk, thoughts about harm, and a physiological warning and activation mechanism. The subsequent actions reflect a "fight or flight." emergency effort. An anxiety disorder goes beyond common fears and anxiety that are temporary. An anxiety disorder requires a mechanism that is debilitating and lingering, disturbing the ordinary course of life (Moss, 2014). Besides, the most prevalent psychiatric illnesses are anxiety disorders. It is apparent in mood disorders, as well as in thought, actions, and physiological activity. It encompasses panic disorder, agoraphobia, generalized anxiety disorder, particular phobia, social phobia, acute stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder (J.M Jbireal, 2019).

Early research, unique to this report, has reported the negative effect of pandemics on students' mental well-being, which has contributed to intense depression and anxiety (Sheela, et al., 2020). The mental effect on undergraduate students in China during the COVID-19 pandemic was investigated by Cao et al. Of the 7143 students surveyed, 0.9% had extreme anxiety, 2.7% had moderate anxiety, and 21.3% had mild anxiety. The study of 1210 students from 194 cities in China found that 53.8% of respondents had severe to moderate psychological effects, with a more significant psychological impact correlated with female students. As mentioned in earlier studies, he also believed that increased uncertainty and its effect on students' academic success could affect students' psychological well-being. The mental well-being of Spanish university students was analyzed during the COVID-19 pandemic by Odriozola-González et al. The research was performed two weeks after the lockdown in Spain COVID-19 pandemic between March 28 and 4 April 2020 (Sheela, et al., 2020). 21.34% displayed severe signs of anxiety in the study. Compared to that of the general population, the prevalence of anxiety was more significant among students. These authors have added that COVID-19, primarily on social media, has been repeatedly branded a killer virus, which has increased feelings of perceived risks and confusion. Compulsory 14-day quarantines and monitoring during the pandemic as part of public health procedures further raise the anxiety of people based on the impact of illness and stigma (Sheela, et al., 2020). Based on this study, the researcher studies the levels of anxiety among University Students in Malaysia during the pandemic. The result was internal accuracy of the 20 items was high (Cronbach's alpha = 0.944) on the self-rating anxiety scale (SAS). Based on the Zung's Anxiety Index, 201 (20.4%), 65 (6.6%), and 28 (2.8%) of the 983 respondents in the survey experienced minimum to moderate marked too high, and most severe anxiety levels, respectively (Sheela, et al., 2020). Due to the small frequencies, in further study, cases with labelled to moderate anxiety and most extreme anxiety were placed together and named as "Severe to Extreme" anxiety level.

A national cross-sectional analysis by Banna et al. (2020) has shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has threatened Bangladesh's adult population's physical and mental health. The study conducted by an online survey found that 57.5% of students at the undergraduate level have mental stress, 30.2% have anxiety disorder, and 58.8% are depressed. Another cross-sectional web-based study of 476 university students showed that more than 15% of students were reported to have moderately severe depression, while 18.1% were incredibly anxious (Sifat, 2020). Besides, there are also higher depressive symptoms in students living with families (96.93%) and urban areas (65.05%). In the case of anxiety, there are significant anxiety symptoms in 389 (87.7%) students. Females (33.67%) tend to have lower anxiety symptoms than males (66.33%) out of the total students with anxiety disorder, while students (66.58%) showed more significant anxiety symptoms in the early twenties than males (66.33%) (Sifat, 2020).

The literature reviews have providing the understanding on the scenario of mental health among undergraduates' students, factors contribute to mental health problems during the Covid-19 pandemic, and impact on students' mental health. The conceptual framework in figure 1.0 had shown the fear of Infection, Financial Constraints, Limited Social Interaction, and the Challenges of Online Learning. Next the variables are stress, depression, and lastly the anxiety. Besides, the conceptual framework in figure 1.0 offers a direct relation between the four independent parts under factors contribute to mental health problems during the Covid-19 pandemic, which are fear of infection, financial constraints, limited social interactions, and the challenges of online learning. The impact on students' mental health is dependent on depression, stress, and anxiety influenced by these four independent variables. All of the variables in the conceptual framework are explained in detail in the conceptual framework definition section.
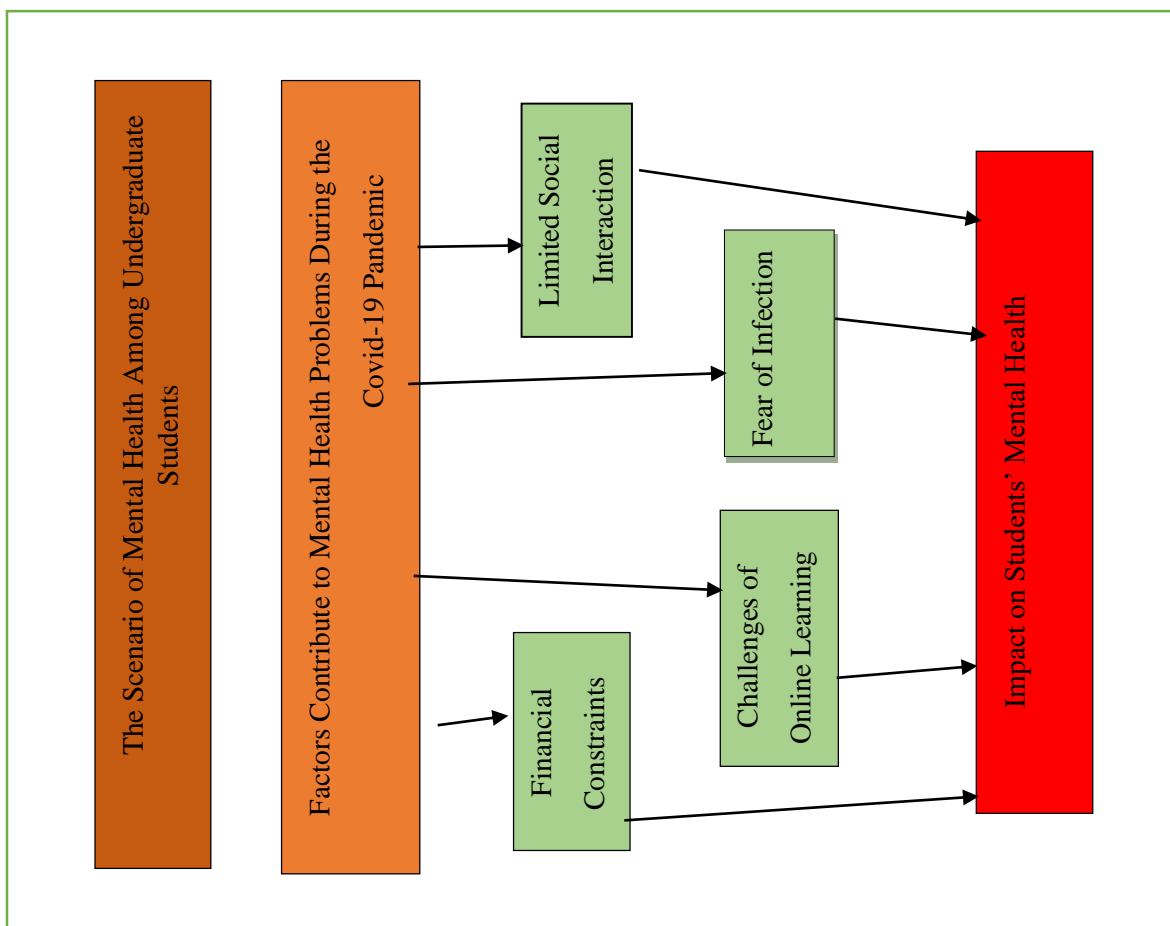
Figure 1.0: Adapted and adopted from (Abid, et al., 2020, Sheela, et al.2020)

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