Life in Lockdown: Mental and Social Consequences of COVID-19 for differently able person

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Abstract:

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented situation for populations worldwide, with consequences that are likely to persist for years. For persons with disabilities (PwDs), the disruption of training, therapy, classroom learning, and social interaction has brought profound challenges. This sudden shift has affected their social, biological, cognitive, and psychological well-being.

This study examines the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health, social relationships, and physical activities of PwDs. A survey method was employed, involving 100 parents of children with disabilities selected purposively. Data were collected through a Google Form containing a five-point rating scale across three domains (mental health, physical activity, and social relationships), supplemented by open-ended questions. The findings revealed significant challenges: PwDs commonly experienced inattention, lack of concentration, boredom, inactivity, sleep disturbances, irritability, anger, and even weight gain. Many struggled to adjust to the prolonged "stay-at-home" conditions, finding the restrictions both difficult and distressing.

Keyword: Person with Differently able (PwD) , Inclusive Education (IE) , COVID-19.

Introduction:

Mental health, broadly defined as cognitive, behavioural, and emotional well-being, shapes how individuals think, feel, and act in daily life. It also influences the quality of relationships and overall life satisfaction. Children with special needs are particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges, as they often experience heightened stress, social difficulties, and barriers to communication. Limited language abilities and neurological symptoms may further exacerbate risks, placing them at greater susceptibility to trauma, including abuse, neglect, bullying, and restrictive practices.

Social relationships provide belonging, emotional support, and opportunities for identity formation and interpersonal understanding. They are essential for development, exploration, and learning. During the pandemic, online interactions increasingly replaced face-to-face connections, raising concerns about reduced social capital and weaker interpersonal bonds (Kraut et al., 1998; Putnam, 2000; Turkle, 2011).

Similarly, physical activity—defined as any skeletal muscle movement requiring energy expenditure—plays a vital role in physical and psychological health. Regular activity strengthens bones, muscles, and joints, while improving confidence, focus, concentration, and cognitive functioning. It also enhances breathing, circulation, sleep quality, and social engagement.

Review of Literature:

The review of literature acts as a "guiding star" for researchers. According to Best (1992), the review of related literature is a valuable tool in defining the research problem, identifying its significance, suggesting appropriate data collection methods, determining the study design, and locating reliable sources of data. It involves the systematic identification, analysis, and interpretation of documents relevant to the research problem.

A thorough review provides a faithful source of information, demonstrating the relationship between completed studies and the topic under investigation. A strong theoretical framework refines research objectives, identifies variables, enhances the likelihood of meaningful findings, and simplifies interpretation. Even when results are not statistically significant, the review ensures that findings remain cumulative and build upon prior research.

The primary purpose of reviewing literature is to understand existing knowledge, narrow the scope of the problem, and identify appropriate methods and tools. It also creates a link between the current study and previous scholarly work.

For the present study, the literature review is organized into the following themes:

- **Studies on Mental Health during COVID-19**
- **Studies on Social Relationships during COVID-19**
- **Studies on Physical Activities during COVID-19**
- **Studies on Persons with Disabilities during COVID-19**
- **Studies on Mental Health during COVID-19**
- Pfefferbaum & North (2020) highlighted widespread emotional distress due to uncertain prognoses,

shortages in health resources, restrictive measures, and financial losses. Such stressors have been linked to increased psychiatric risks.

- Research in Frontiers in Psychology (2020) emphasized that children, college students, and health workers were particularly vulnerable to anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder during the pandemic. Telepsychology emerged as a valuable intervention to maintain continuity of care.

- A study in The Lancet Psychiatry (December 2020) found that depressive symptoms, anxiety, and loneliness increased significantly among individuals without pre-existing mental health disorders, suggesting heightened vulnerability among the general population.

Studies on Social Relationships during COVID-19

- Online social interactions have replaced face-to-face connections, reduced social capital and weakened personal networks (Kraut et al., 1998; Putnam, 2000; Turkle, 2011).

- Naser et al. (2020) reported that social isolation negatively impacted social relationships, potentially leading to adverse health consequences. The authors recommended educational campaigns to address sociological health.

- Imran, Zeshan, and Pervaiz (2020) highlighted the significant psychological impact of COVID-19 on children and adolescents, pointing to isolation, disrupted routines, and parental stress as major challenges.

Studies on Physical Activities during COVID-19

- Ammar et al. (2020) found that lockdown restrictions led to reduced physical activity and unhealthy eating behaviours', raising health concerns across populations.

- Andrade et al. (2021) demonstrated that reduced physical activity during lockdowns was strongly associated with higher levels of depression and anxiety.

- Studies summarized by Physio-Pedia emphasized that enforced sedentary behaviour contributed to low mood and depressive symptoms, underlining the importance of promoting physical activity for mental well-being.

Objectives:

1. To find out the impact of COVID 19 on Mental Health of PWID.
2. To find out the impact of COVID 19 on Social Relationships of PWID
3. To find out the impact of COVID 19 on the Physical Activities of PWID

Research Questions:

Is there any impact of COVID 19 on Mental Health of PwD?

Is there any impact of COVID 19 on Social Relationships of PwD?

Is there any impact of COVID 19 on Physical Activities of PwD?

SAMPLE DESCRIPTION:

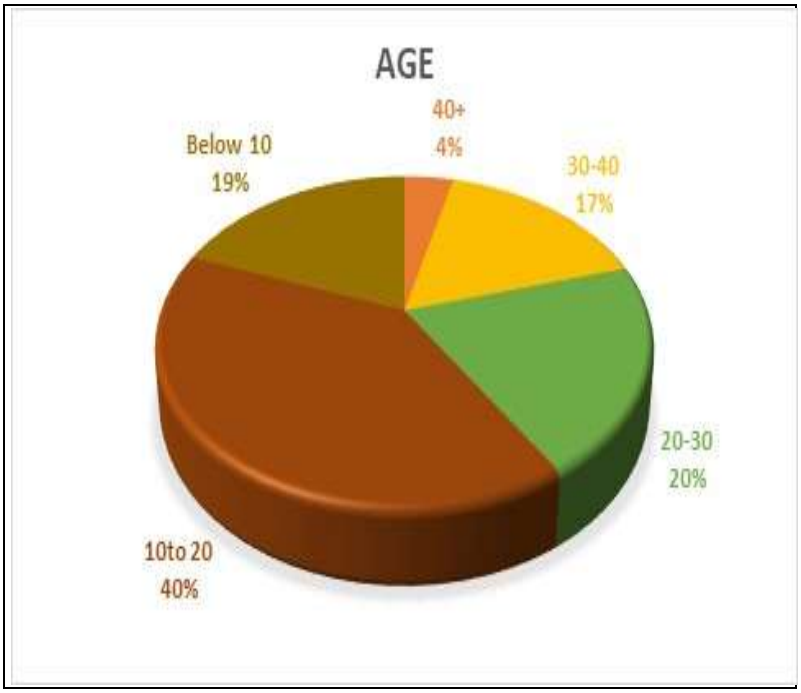
Location

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Semi Urban	29	37.2	37.2	37.2
	Urban	49	62.8	62.8	100.0
	Total	78	100.0	100.0	

Among the sample 62.8% of the respondent were from urban areas whereas 37.2% of the respondent were from rural areas.

Age:

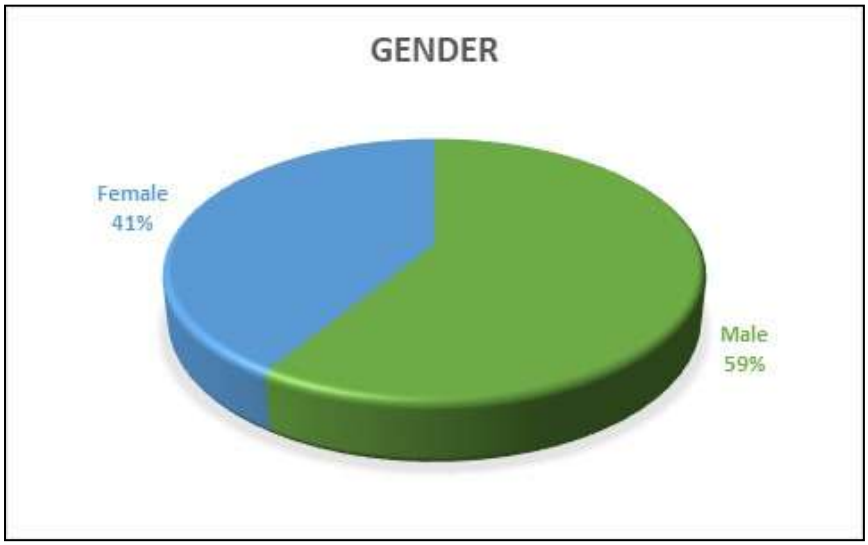
Frequency			Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	40+	3	3.8	3.8	3.8
	30-40	13	16.7	16.7	20.5
	20-30	16	20.5	20.5	41.0
	10-20	31	39.7	39.7	80.8
	below 10	15	19.2	19.2	100.0
	Total	78	100.0	100.0	



Among the sample 40%of the respondent belonged to the group 10 to 20 years, followed by 20%of the respondent who belonged to the group of 20 to 30 years whereas only 4%of the respondent belonged to the age group of 40 years and above.

Gender :

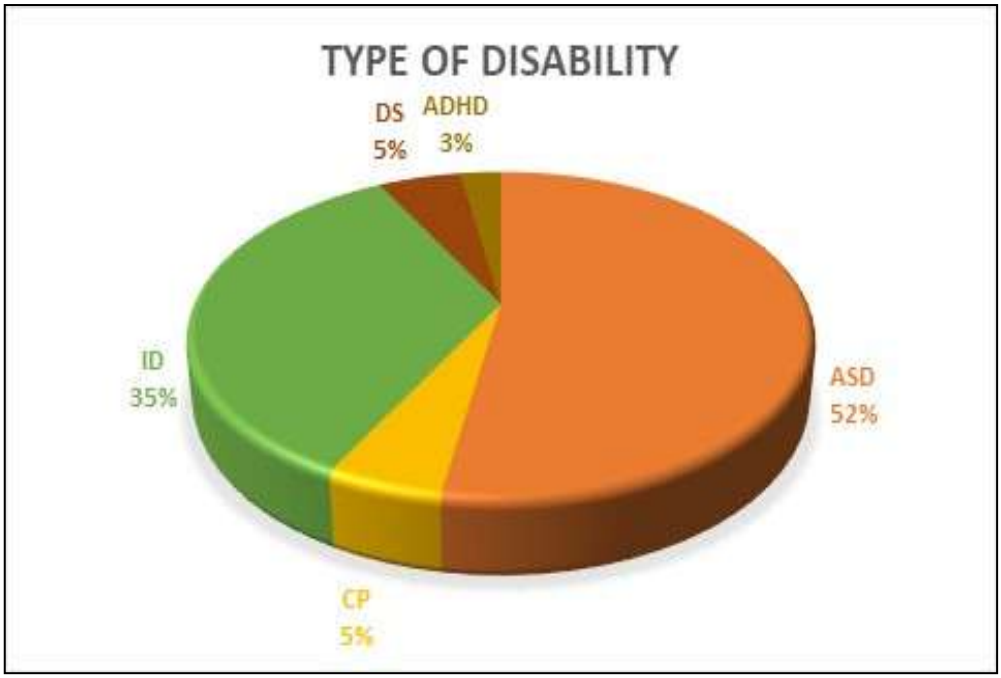
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	32	41.0	41.0	41.0
	Male	46	59.0	59.0	100.0
	Total	78	100.0	100.0	



Among the sample 59%of the respondent were male whereas 41%of the respondent were female.

Type of differently able

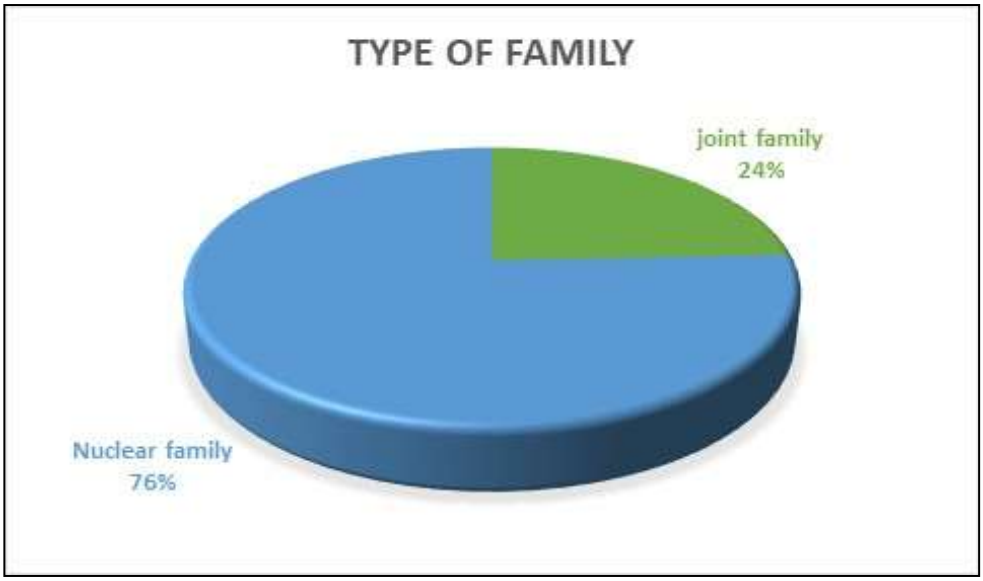
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	ASD	41	52.6	52.6	52.6
	CP	4	5.1	5.1	57.7
	ID	27	34.6	34.6	92.3
	DS	4	5.1	5.1	97.4
	ADHD	2	2.6	2.6	100.0
	Total	78	100.0	100.0	



Among the sample 52%of the PWID were with Autism Spectrum Disorder, 35% were with Intellectual Disabilities whereas only 3%were with ADHD.

Type of Family

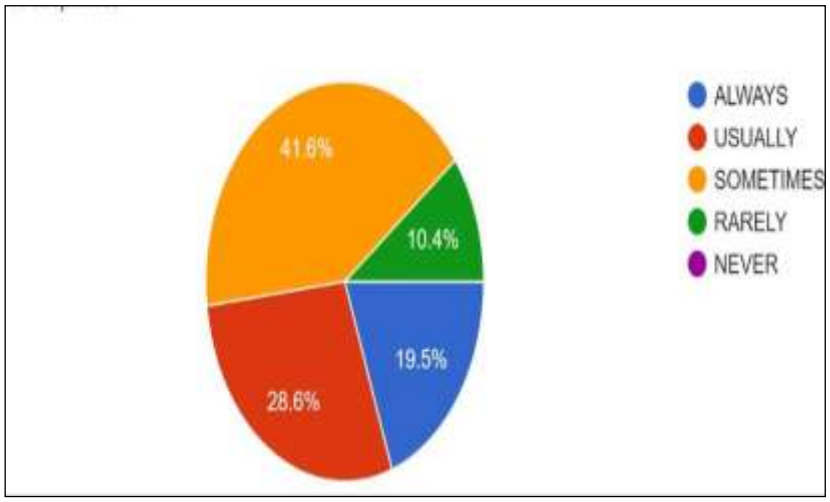
Frequency			Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Nuclear	59	75.6	75.6	75.6
	Family				
	Joint family	19	24.4	24.4	100.0
	Total	78	100.0	100.0	



Among the sample 76%of the PWID lived in Nuclear family whereas 24% lived in joint family.

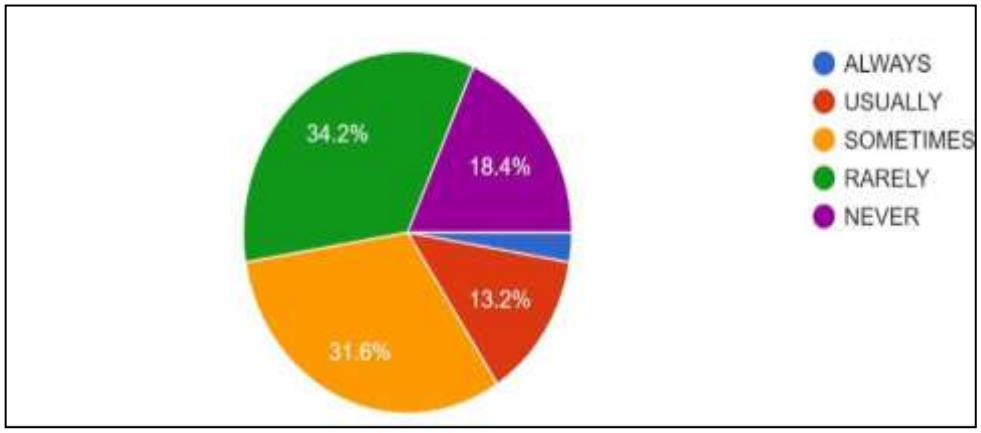
Discussion related Mental Health Quantitative analysis

Does the child show interest in doing things?



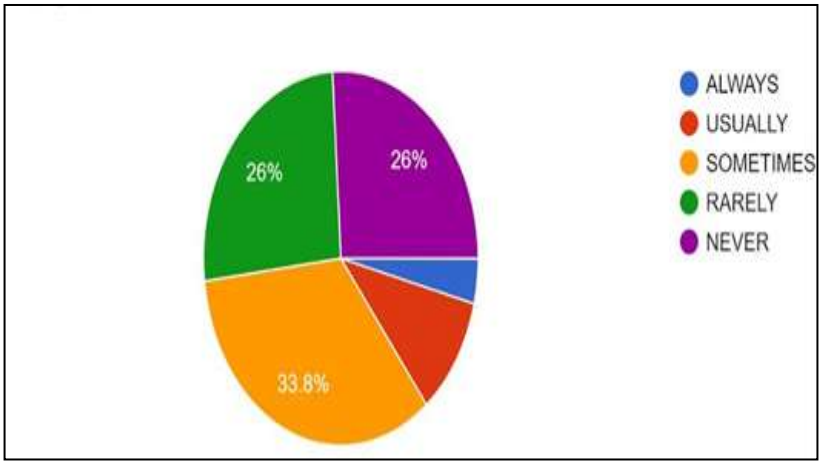
The question was asked to parents and 77 responses were received through the google form. It was observed that among the sample about 41.6% of the respondent sometimes showed interest in doing things and 10.4% rarely showed interest.

Is the child showing any sings of sadness?



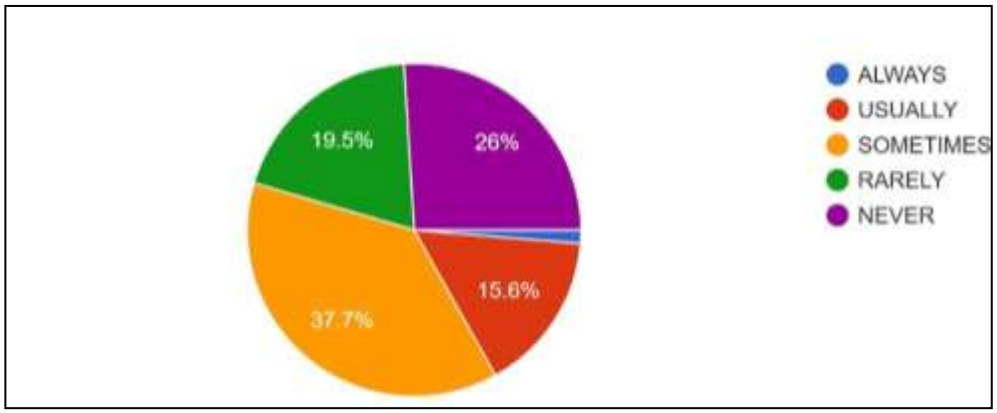
Among the sample 34.2% of the respondent rarely showed any signs of sadness whereas 2.6% of the respondent showed signs of sadness.

Does the child feel tired frequently?



Among the sample 33.8% of the respondent are feeling tired frequently.

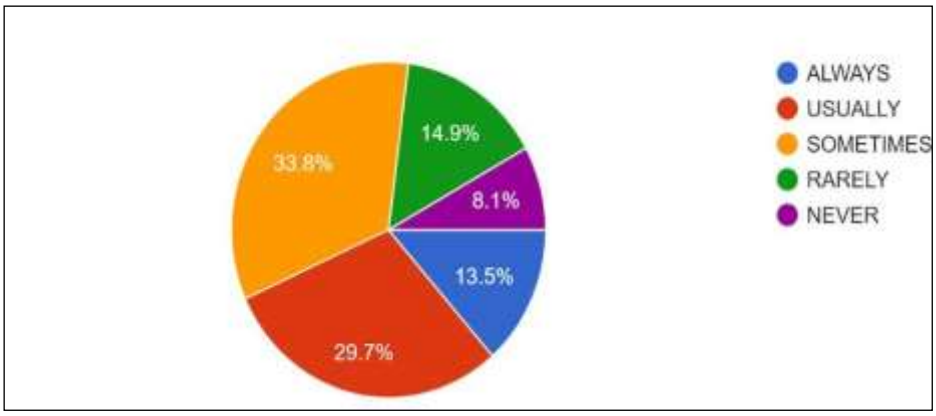
Is the child facing difficulty in falling asleep?



Among the sample 37.7% of the respondent are sometimes

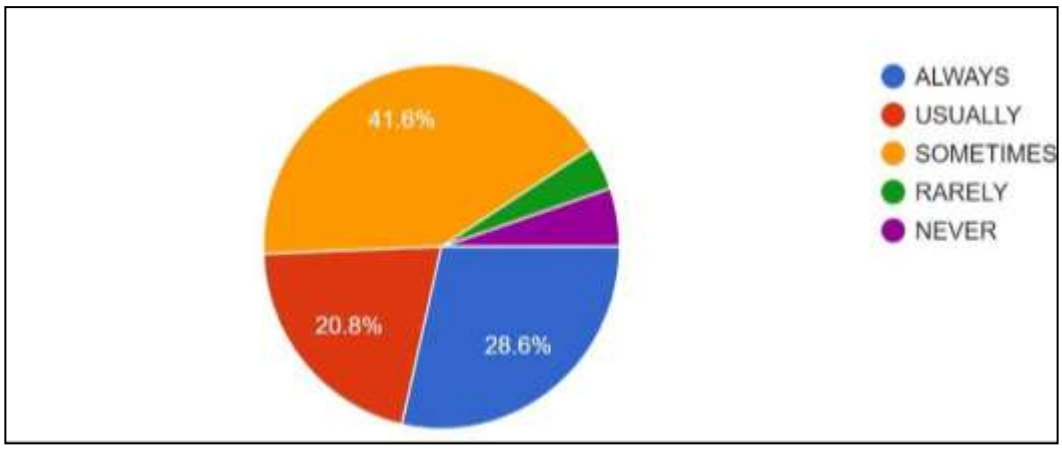
facing difficulty in falling asleep whereas 1.2 %are always facing difficulty in falling asleep.

Is the child easily distracted?



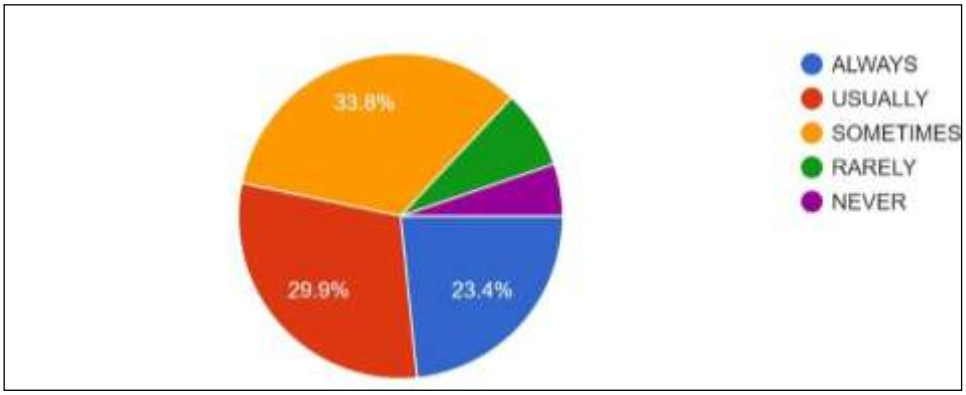
Among the sample 33% of the respondent were easily distracted whereas 8.1% were never easily distracted.

Is the child facing difficulty to concentrate?



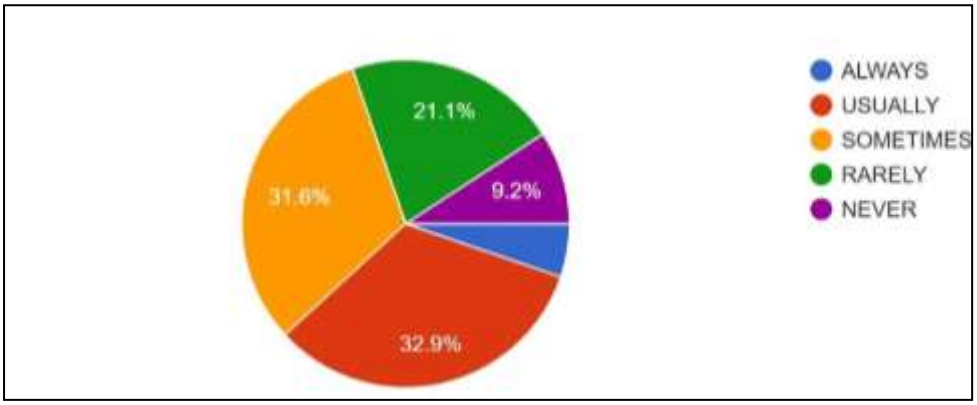
Among the sample 41.6% of the respondent found it difficult to concentrate.

Is the instruction following of the child same as before?



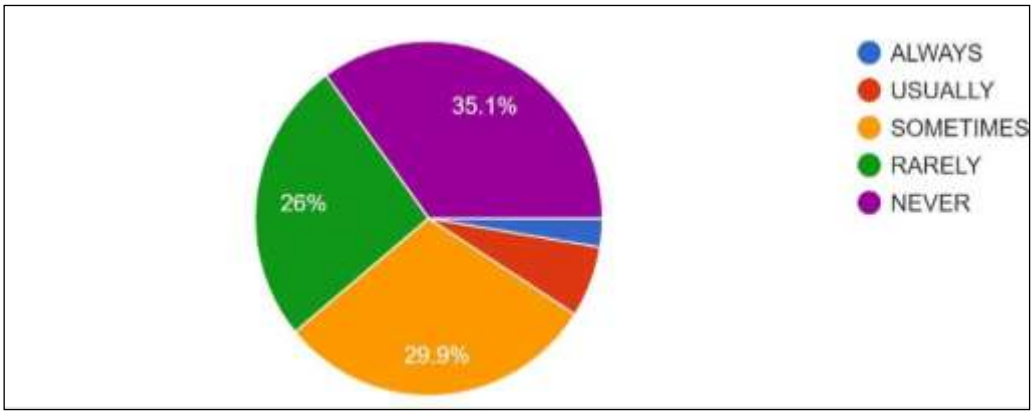
Among the sample 33.8% of the respondent have the instruction following same as before.

Is the child finding it difficult to manage anger?



Among the sample 32.9 % of the respondent found it difficult to manage anger.

Is the child showing any signs of fear?



Among the sample 35.1% of the respondent showed signs of fear

Qualitative analysis

WHAT KIND OF ACTIVITIES IS THE CHILD INVOLVED THROUGHOUT THE DAY?

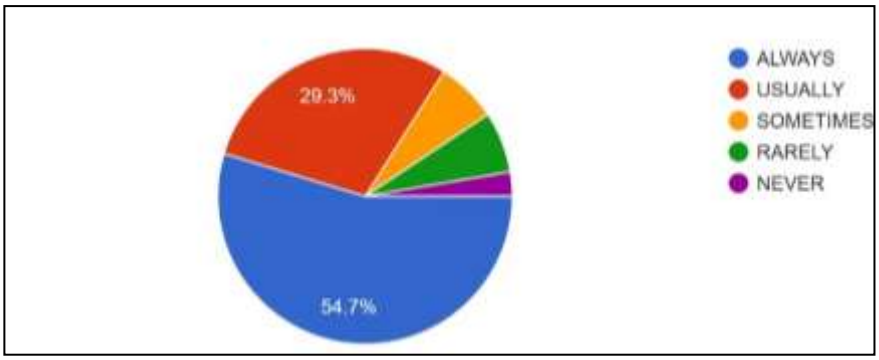
Majority of the persons are involved in Indoor activities like listening and singing songs, playing Lego, doing crafts, drawing, coloring, painting, solving puzzles, reading story books. Quite a large section of the PWID are engaged in watching television, mobiles, YouTube. They are also engaged in studying and online classes. Comparatively a lesser amount of PwDs are involved in exercise, yoga, playing and walking. Very few are involved in Domestic chores. Some of them are not engaged in any activities and either sleep or lie down throughout the day.

How is the child adjusting to “STAY AT HOME” Situation?

The respondents reported a variety of reaction to the “STAY AT HOME” situation. It includes a wide range from feeling bored, friendless, quiet to getting annoyed, irritated, throwing tantrums, using slangs etc. A major portion are trying to adjust to the situation, whereas some are unable to do so. Quite a few respondents inform that the PWID are taking the situation normally and are well adjusted.

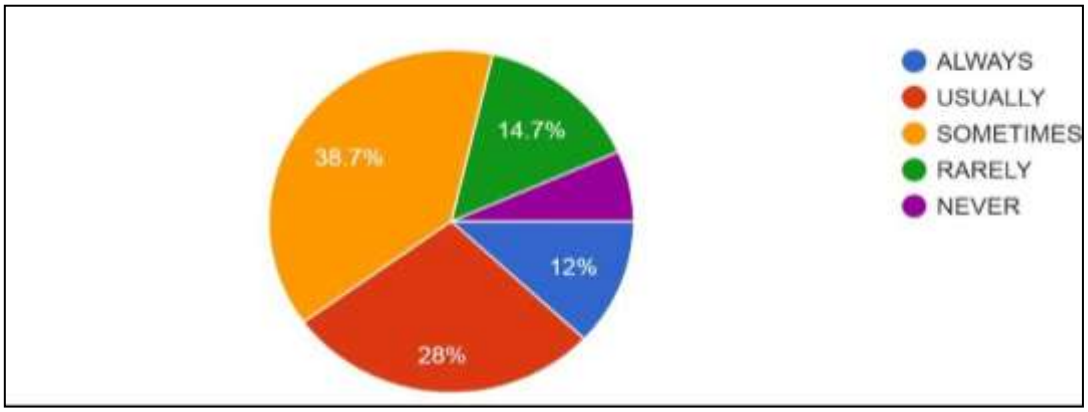
Discussion related to physical activities

Is the child active?



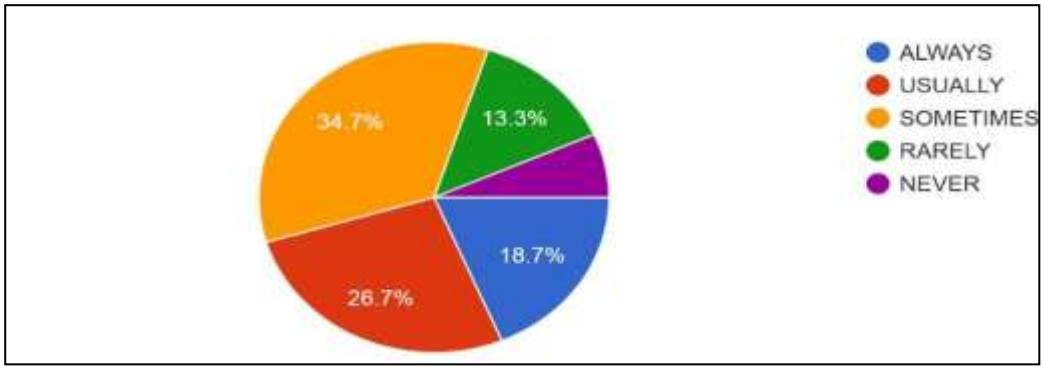
Among the sample 54.7% of the respondent were active.

Is the child spending more idle time?

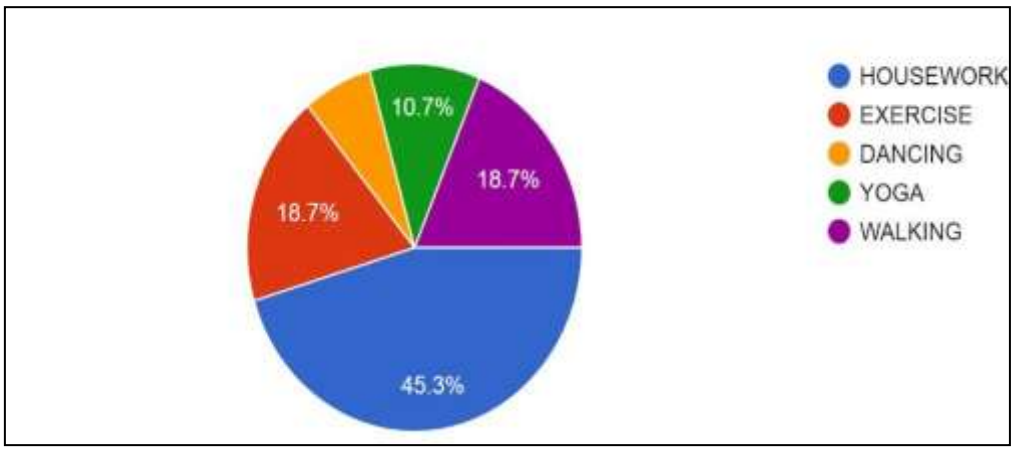


Among the sample 38.7% of the sample are spending more idle time and below 12% are not spending idle time.

Is the child involved in physical activities?



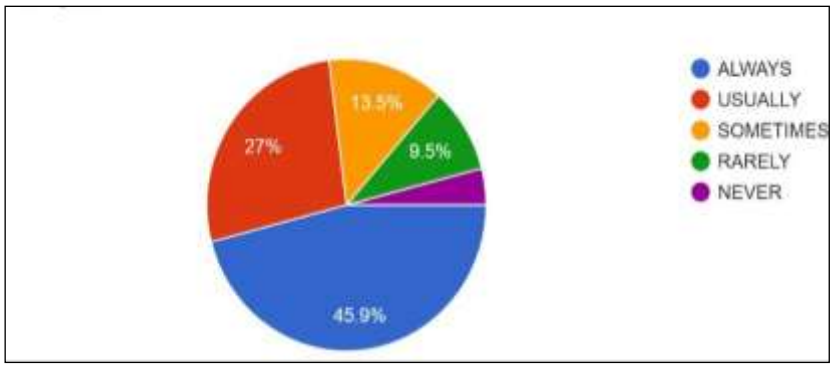
Is the child involved in any of the activities every day ?



Among the sample 34.7% of the sample are involved in physical activities whereas 6% are not involved in physical activities.

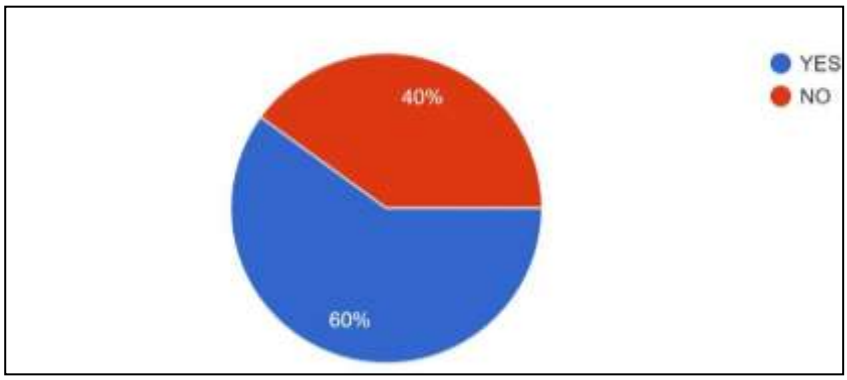
Among the sample 45.3% of the respondent are involved in housework while 18.7% of the respondent are involved in exercise and walking each.

Does the child have proper appetite?



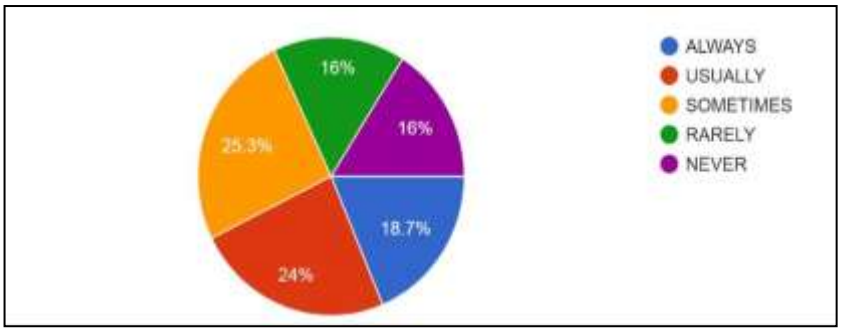
Among the sample 45.9% of the respondent have proper appetite while less than 5% of the respondent do not have proper appetite.

Has the child gained weight?



Among the sample 60% of the respondent have gained weight whereas 40% of the respondent have not gained weight.

Has the child become more dependent on mobiles and television?



Among the sample 25.3% of the respondent are sometimes more dependent on mobiles and television whereas 16%are never dependant on mobiles and television.

Qualitative Analysis

What Physical activities is the child involved in during leisure?

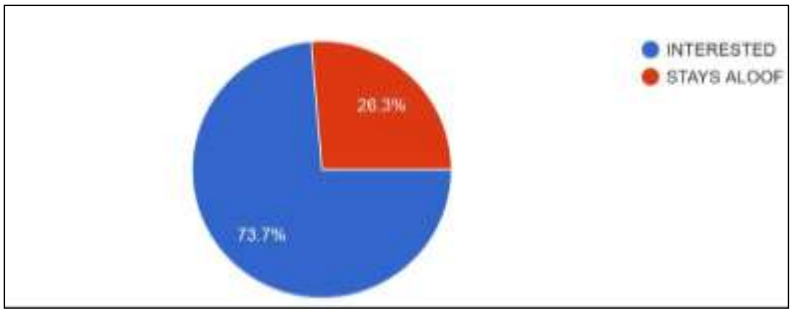
The PWID are involved in a variety of activities like exercise, yoga, walking. Most respondent inform of passive activities and not active ones. A few of them are involved in Cycling.

Does the child show any signs of Physical Stress?

A major section of the respondent report of no physical stress whereas the rest of them inform about various conditions like body ache, head ache, back pain, neck and shoulder pain, leg pain, sore eyes.

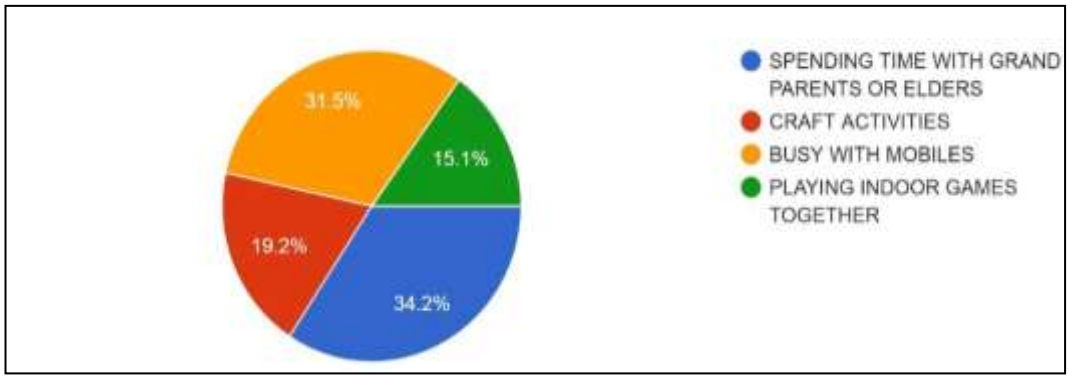
Discussion related to Social Relationships

How does the child behave at present?



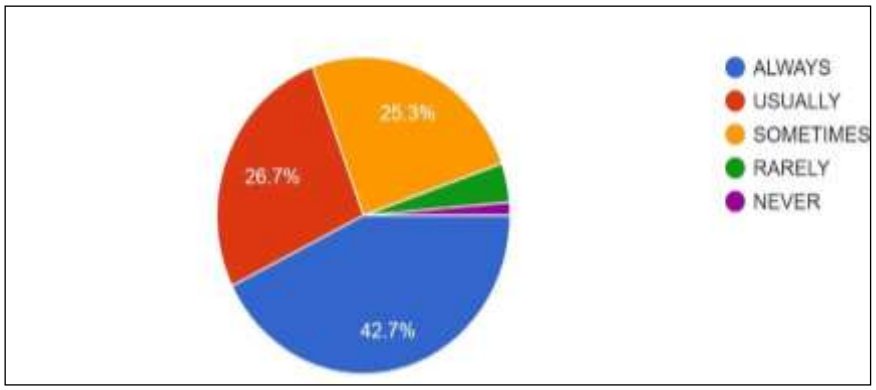
Among the sample 73.7% of the respondent are showing interest whereas 26.3% of the respondent stays aloof.

What activity does the child prefer?



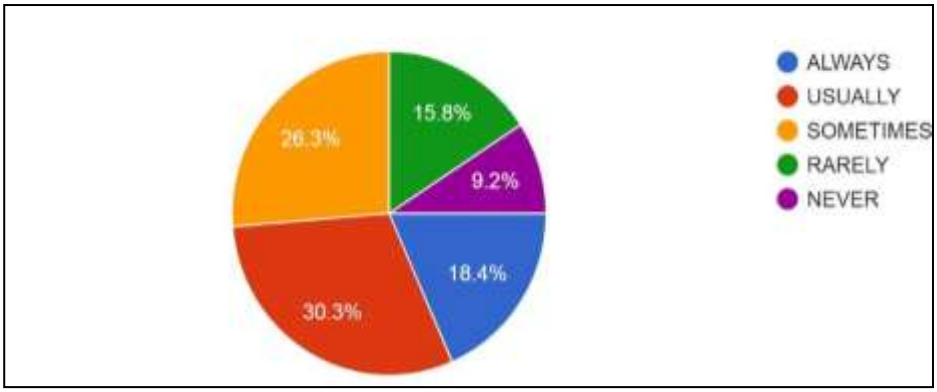
Among the sample 34.2% of the respondent spent time with grandparents or adults, 31.5% of the respondent are busy with mobiles whereas 15.1% of the respondent play indoor games together.

Does the child express his likes and dislikes freely?



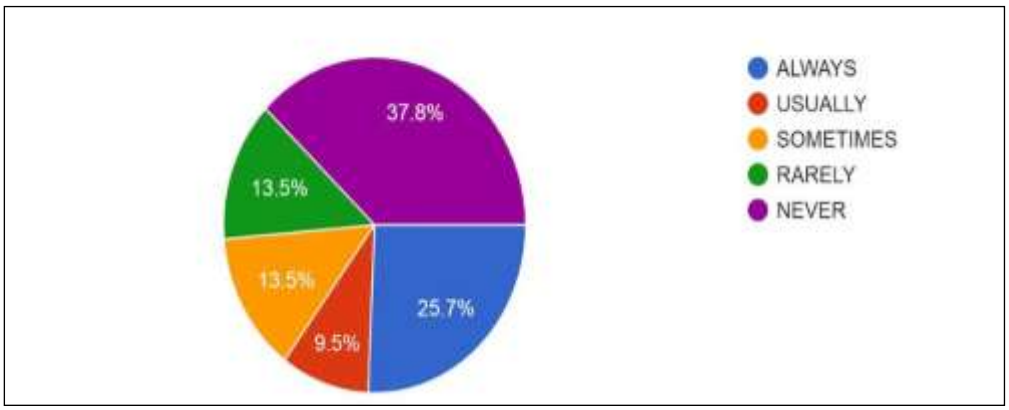
Among the sample 42.7% always express his likes and dislikes freely.

Does the child perform freely in front of others?



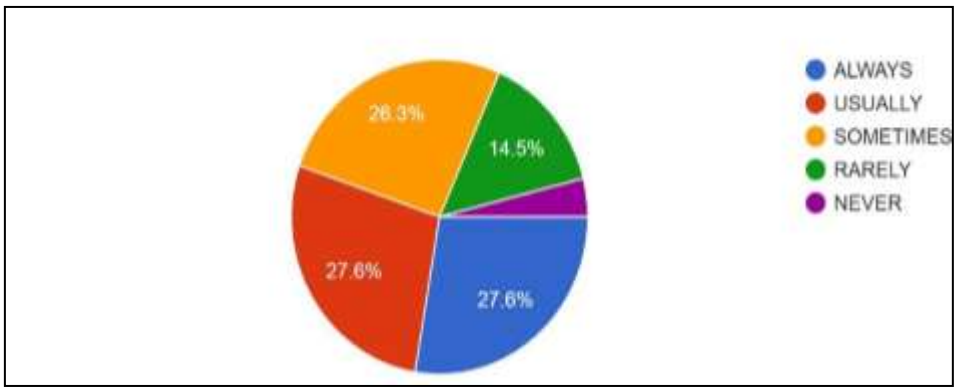
Among the sample 30.3 % of the respondent usually perform freely in front of others whereas 9.2% never performs freely in front of others.

Does the child attend calls and pass the information independently?



Among the sample 37.8% of the respondent never attended calls and passed the information independently whereas 9.5% of the respondent usually attended calls and passed the information independently.

Does the child communicate his needs when in trouble?



Among the sample 27.6 % of the respondent always as well as usually communicates his needs when in trouble whereas 5% of the respondent never communicates his needs when in trouble.

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative responses were analyzed thematically, with findings organized into three primary domains: coping with social distancing, behavior during outings, and behavioral changes during the stay-at-home period.

1. Coping with Social Distancing
Most persons with intellectual disabilities (PWID) adapted relatively well to social distancing measures such as avoiding physical contact, greeting from a distance, regular sanitization, and wearing masks. However, adherence often required continuous supervision and prompting from caregivers or guardians.

2. Behavior During Outings
When leaving the home for essential needs, the majority of persons with disabilities (PWDs) exhibited positive emotional responses, including happiness, eagerness, excitement, and a sense of enthusiasm. A smaller subset, however, demonstrated no significant change in affect or behaviour during such outings.

3. Behavioural Changes During the Stay-at-Home Period
The extended stay-at-home situation yielded both positive and negative outcomes. On the positive side, many PWDs were able to spend increased quality time with family members, and some demonstrated improvement in academic engagement. Conversely, a variety of negative behavioural changes were observed:

- **Emotional and Behavioural Challenges:** boredom, mood swings, irritability, frustration, aggression, agitation, anger, stress, lack of confidence, and emotional meltdowns.

- **Social and Interpersonal Difficulties:** loneliness, rigidity, deterioration in communication, and withdrawal or quietness.

- **Lifestyle and Habitual Changes:** laziness, hyperactivity, arrogance, restlessness, and increased dependence or addiction to mobile devices.

These findings highlight the complex psychosocial and behavioural impact of pandemic-related restrictions on individuals with differently abled person, underscoring the importance of targeted interventions and caregiver support.

Summary and Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented situation worldwide, with impacts that are likely to persist well into the future. For children with special needs, the disruption of training, therapy, regular classes, and face-to-face

interactions has brought significant changes in their social, biological, cognitive, and psychological development.

Mental health, encompassing cognitive, behavioural, and emotional well-being, plays a vital role in shaping quality of life and interpersonal relationships. Children with special needs often have heightened mental health needs due to increased stress, social challenges, and communication barriers, as well as neurological symptoms. These factors make them more vulnerable to trauma, including abuse, neglect, bullying, and other adverse experiences.

Social relationships fulfil the human need for connection, fostering identity formation, interpersonal understanding, and learning. However, the pandemic has accelerated a shift from face-to-face to online interactions, which research suggests can reduce social capital and limit the depth of personal connections (Kraut et al., 1998; Putnam, 2000; Turkle, 2011).

Physical activity, defined as any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure, is essential for healthy growth and development. It strengthens bones, muscles, and joints; improves concentration, cognitive function, and confidence; enhances respiratory and circulatory health; and promotes better sleep. Moreover, it offers valuable opportunities for social interaction—an aspect that has been significantly restricted during the pandemic.

In conclusion, the pandemic has not only altered the daily routines of children with special needs but has also posed serious challenges to their mental health, social relationships, and physical well-being. Post-pandemic recovery efforts in education and care must address these areas holistically, fostering environments that promote emotional resilience, social reconnection, and physical vitality.

Scope of the Study

This study will be useful for schools, teachers, and parents as life gradually returns to normal after the pandemic. Differently abled persons may show behavioural challenges when re-joining classes, and the findings can guide clinical professionals in identifying causes and planning suitable interventions. Educators can also use the results to design effective group and individual programs. If negative emotions have increased during the COVID-19 period, parents may seek counselling or therapy for their children. Likewise, if physical activity levels have been affected, teachers can adapt activities to meet the specific needs of learners.

Educational Implications

The findings of this study offer valuable insights for the educational sector. Evidence suggests that the pandemic has

impacted the attention and concentration levels of persons with disabilities (PwDs). Educators can address this by designing post-pandemic learning experiences that are more engaging, interactive, and innovative, helping to sustain students' focus. In this context, the priority should extend beyond academic content to include support for students' overall mental and emotional well-being.

The study also highlights challenges faced by PwDs in managing anger. Teachers and trainers can facilitate a gradual transition back to regular classes and training schedules, creating a supportive environment that reduces stress. In addition, findings of weight gain and increased sedentary indoor activities point to the need for integrating more outdoor and physical activities into daily routines to promote health and active lifestyles.

Limitations of the Study

The study was conducted within a short time frame during the COVID-19 pandemic, which posed significant challenges. Restrictions on face-to-face interactions with parents limited opportunities for in-depth data collection. With more time, a larger and more diverse sample could have been obtained, and in-person interviews might have yielded richer and more detailed responses.

Due to social distancing protocols, Google Forms served as the primary data collection tool. While this approach facilitated reaching participants, it also presented limitations such as language barriers and restricted access for individuals without Android devices or stable internet connections. Consequently, the pandemic circumstances affected both the size of the sample and the overall quality of the responses.

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