

**A SURVEY OF MAIN STAKE-HOLDERS' OPINION ABOUT CONDUCTING
EXAMINATIONS DURING CORONA PANDEMIC WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO MAHARASHTRA**

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Abstract

The examination is expected to evaluate student's ability of learning, is a measure of analysing the knowledge of students and measures how much they have learnt, is expected to improve student-outcomes, forms the basis of further admissions of students and selection for employment and is a measure of judging teacher effectiveness. Universities the world over conduct examinations for these reasons. Never in the history, have Indian universities faced situations where it is extremely difficult to conduct examinations like the present times emerging due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Various stakeholders of the system of higher education are confused or worried about whether examinations will take place and if so, what will be its format or when it will be conducted. Such a situation led to the researchers undertaking an exploratory survey on 1061 undergraduate and post-graduate students to find out the opinions of students regarding whether examinations need to be conducted. The study found that about 72.67% of the students do not want final year/semester examinations due to (a) fear of getting exposed to Corona virus if students go out to give examination, (b) fear of travelling to examination center and (c) confusion over changing decisions about taking final year/semester examinations. If at all, examinations have to be conducted, then it should be in the month of October 2020. The students' opinion regarding examinations is likely to be due their overall anxiety (fear of the unknown) which can further affect students' other part of life such as social, personal and professional too.

Key Words: *Examination, Stakeholders, Pandemic*

Background:

The examination is expected to evaluate student's ability of learning. It is a measure of analysing the knowledge of students and measures how much they have learnt. Its ultimate purpose is improvement of student-outcomes. It also forms the basis of further admissions of students and selection for employment. It is also a measure of judging teacher effectiveness. Universities the world over conduct examinations for these reasons. These examinations could be through internal assessment or external assessment, formative or summative evaluation, practical examination, projects, open-book examination, MCQs or year-end/semester examinations.

In India, Nalanda University was established in 5th century. Another ancient university in India, Takshashila was established in 6th century BC. However, very little information is available about the examination system prevailing there. The first modern university in the western world, namely, University of Bologna was established in the World in 1088 in Italy. The first three universities in modern India were established in 1857. While a lot of people attribute formal assessments and examinations to the gentleman called Henry Fischel, the concept of ‘examination’ has its roots in ancient China. Almost 2000 years ago in China, it was a matter of great prestige to be a government official, and the only way to enter this elite club of government officials was to pass examinations that were designed under the watchful eyes of Emperor Zhang of Hen. In the late 16th century, a Jesuit priest named Matteo Ricci was sent to China and eventually rose to a very senior position within the order. He was very impressed by the competitive and meritocratic nature of the Chinese examination system, and described it in glowing terms to his superiors in Rome. Being a pedagogically-minded order, the Jesuits themselves adopted written examinations in order to make their own system tougher and more competitive. *“In the 18th century, absolutist reformers trying to create meritocratic civil services (as opposed to ones run by aristocratic place-holders) decided to put the Jesuits’ “Chinese” system to work”* (Usher, 2016). Originally, the Western tradition avoided conducting examinations. Universities offered jobs or placement based on recommendations. If a candidate could impress his teachers for a few years, he might be invited to audition for right to be granted a degree. In medieval universities, for example, a student obtained a degree once he was capable of giving lectures or convincingly discuss a particular position in a debate at least till the 17th century as opposed to how it was done in China. Ancient China was the first country to implement a nationwide standardised test known as the imperial examination, established by the Sui Dynasty in 605 AD. Imperial examination was meant to select able candidates for specific governmental positions. This system was abolished by the Qing Dynasty 1300 years later in 1905. Starting in Prussia, then spreading around Europe over the following century, bureaucrats now had to pass examinations. England adopted this examination system in 1806 for Her Majesty’s Civil Service and was later applied to education. Other parts of the world were progressively influenced by this. This is the history of emergence of the concept of examinations for students. As more and more people tried to apply to the civil service, the universities – which were mainly prep schools for the civil service – became more crowded and gradually introduced their own entrance examinations as well.

Never in the history, have Indian universities faced situations where it is extremely difficult to conduct examinations like the present times emerging due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Various stakeholders of the system of higher education are confused or worried about whether examinations will take place and if so, what will be its format or when it will be conducted.

Need of the Study :

The situation mentioned in the preceding paragraph led to the researchers undertaking a study to find out the opinions of the main stakeholders of the system of higher education, namely, students. Administrators at the governmental levels and university levels have been stating their stand on whether examinations should be conducted in public forums. However, students do not have any forum through

which they can express their opinions except media. It is important to know whether they want examinations to be conducted and their reasons thereof. This need for this study becomes more pronounced in a state like Maharashtra due to high incidence of Covid-19. Hence the study at hand was undertaken.

Statement of the Problem :

What is the opinion of stakeholders regarding conducting of final year/semester examination during Covid-19 pandemic?

Objectives of the Study :

Following were the specific objectives of the study :

- a) To obtain the opinion of the main stakeholders, namely, students regarding whether examinations should be conducted for final year/semester end students in Maharashtra.
- b) To acquire information about stakeholders' reasons for their opinion.

Methodology:

The study adopted the exploratory survey method which is used to investigate a problem so as to have a better understanding of the existing problem. Here the researcher begins with a general idea and uses this research as a medium to identify issues, that can be the focus for future research or guide action. Exploratory survey is typically conducted when the problem is at a preliminary stage. It often focusses on obtaining answers to questions like what, when, why and how. Exploratory research is the process of investigating a problem that has not been studied or thoroughly investigated in the past.

In the present study, the survey method was adopted for the following reasons :

1. There is no prior relevant information available from past researchers regarding the topic at hand.
2. The researchers wanted answers to questions like what is the opinion of stakeholders of higher education so as to acquire more information about the research.
3. The exploratory research is usually flexible.
4. It did not require a theory for verifying the outcomes of the study.

Further, the present study adopted the online exploratory research method.

Sample :

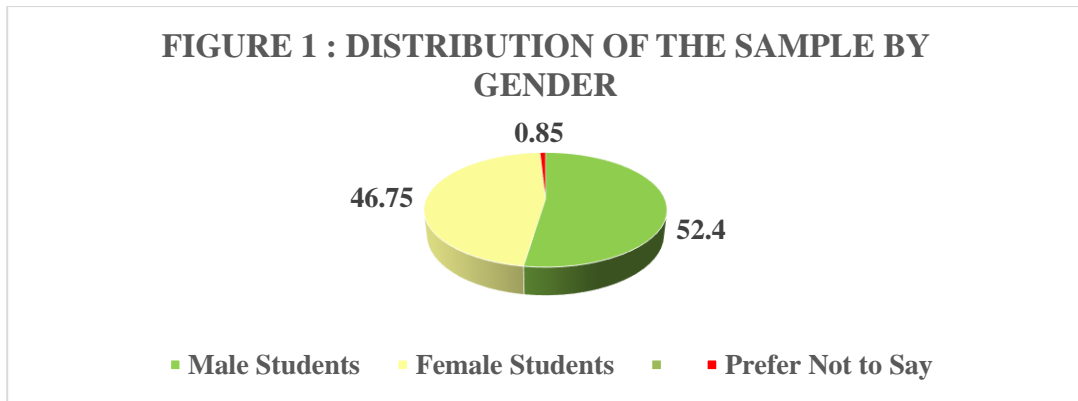
In the present study, the researchers used available sampling technique which is a type of non-probability sampling techniques since the data were collected online. The study included 556 male students and 496 female students. 9 respondents did not mention their gender. The sample included 168 post-graduate students and 893 under-graduate students. The data were collected from respondents from geographical areas of Mumbai, Thane, Navi Mumbai, Pune, Solapur, Sangamner, Satara, Kolhapur and Osmanabad from the state of Maharashtra. The study included 474 respondents from Commerce and Management faculty, 501 respondents from Science & Technology faculty, 45 respondents from Social Science and Humanities faculty and 41 respondents from Interdisciplinary faculty.

I.DESCRPTION OF THE SAMPLE

a) Gender of the Respondents:

Number of responses: 1,061 responses.

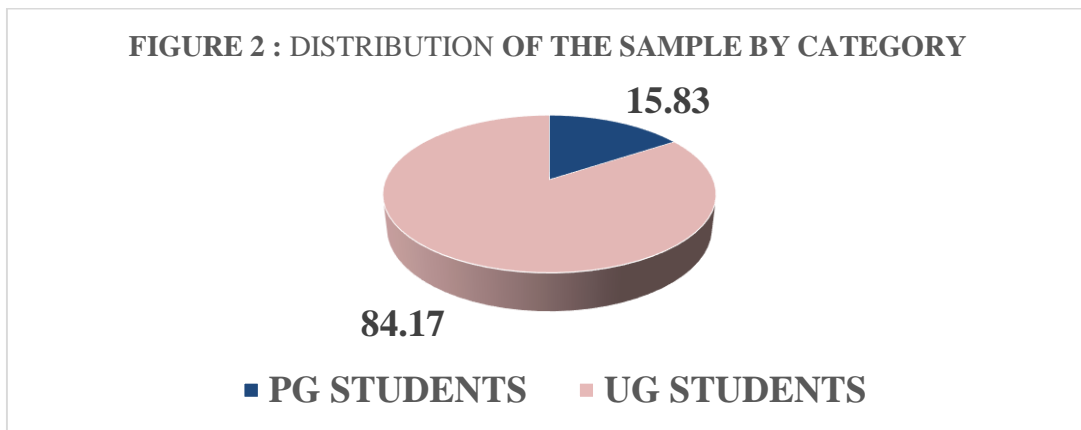
Figure 1 shows the distribution of the sample by gender.



b) Category of the Respondents:

Number of responses: 1,061 responses.

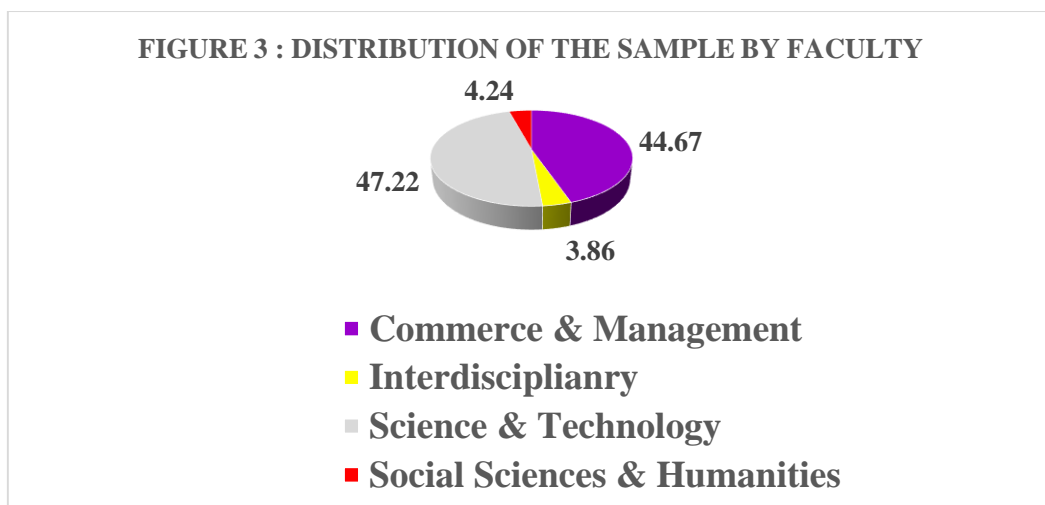
Figure 2 shows the distribution of the sample by category.



c) Faculty of the Respondents :

Number of responses: 1,061 responses.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of the sample by faculty.



Tool of Data Collection :

The study used a structured online questionnaire for collecting the data. It contained 7 questions of which the first four were regarding the personal information of the respondent such as their name, institution, category (parent/teacher/student) and faculty (Social Science and Humanities/ Science & Technology/ Commerce and Management/ Interdisciplinary). The remaining four questions focused on respondents' opinion regarding conducting examinations during Covid-19 pandemic.

Results :**II. DATA ANALYSIS**

a) **Question:** Should final year examinations be conducted for final year students in Maharashtra ?

Number of responses: 1,061 responses.

The data were analysed using the technique of Chi-square. For this purpose, the research question was converted into null and research hypothesis as follows :

Null Hypothesis : The opinion of stakeholders regarding whether examinations should be conducted is equally divided.

Research Hypothesis : The opinion of stakeholders regarding whether examinations should be conducted is not equally divided.

TABLE 1 : PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS' RESPONSES ABOUT WHETHER EXAMNATIONS SHOULD BE CONDUCTED

No	Yes	Undecided
72.67	17.15	10.18

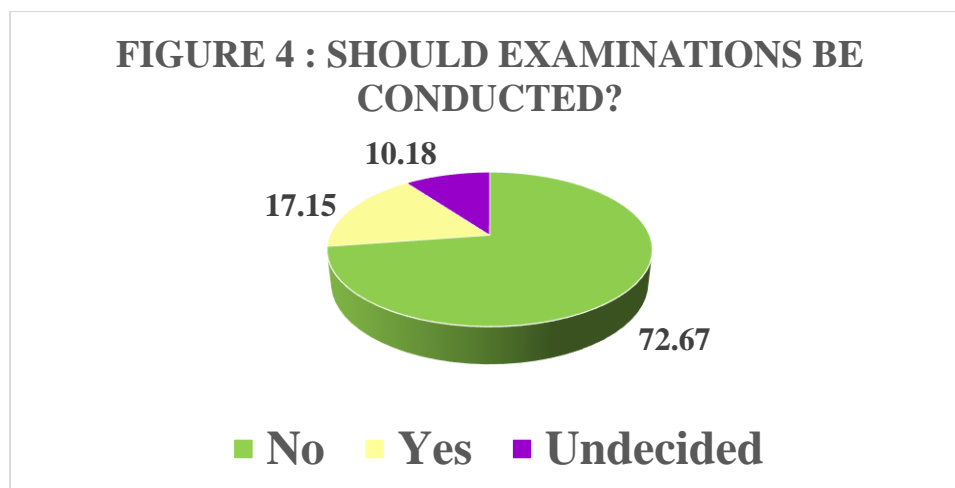
Technique used for analysis : Chi-Square.

The statistical computations were done using online website www.vassarstats.net.

$$\chi^2 = 70.36, P < 0.0001$$

Conclusion: Null hypothesis is untenable. The opinion is not equally divided. Since the largest number (%) is 72.67, **it may be concluded that a large majority is NOT in favour of conducting examinations.**

The data are shown diagrammatically in figure 4.



b) **Question:** In your opinion, why should it be conducted?

Number of responses: 608 responses.

The data were analysed using the technique of Chi-square. For this purpose, the research question was converted into null and research hypothesis as follows :

Null Hypothesis : The opinion of stakeholders regarding the reasons of conducting examinations is equally divided.

Research Hypothesis : The opinion of stakeholders regarding the reasons of conducting examinations is not equally divided.

TABLE 2 : PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS' RESPONSES ABOUT WHY EXAMNATIONS SHOULD BE CONDUCTED

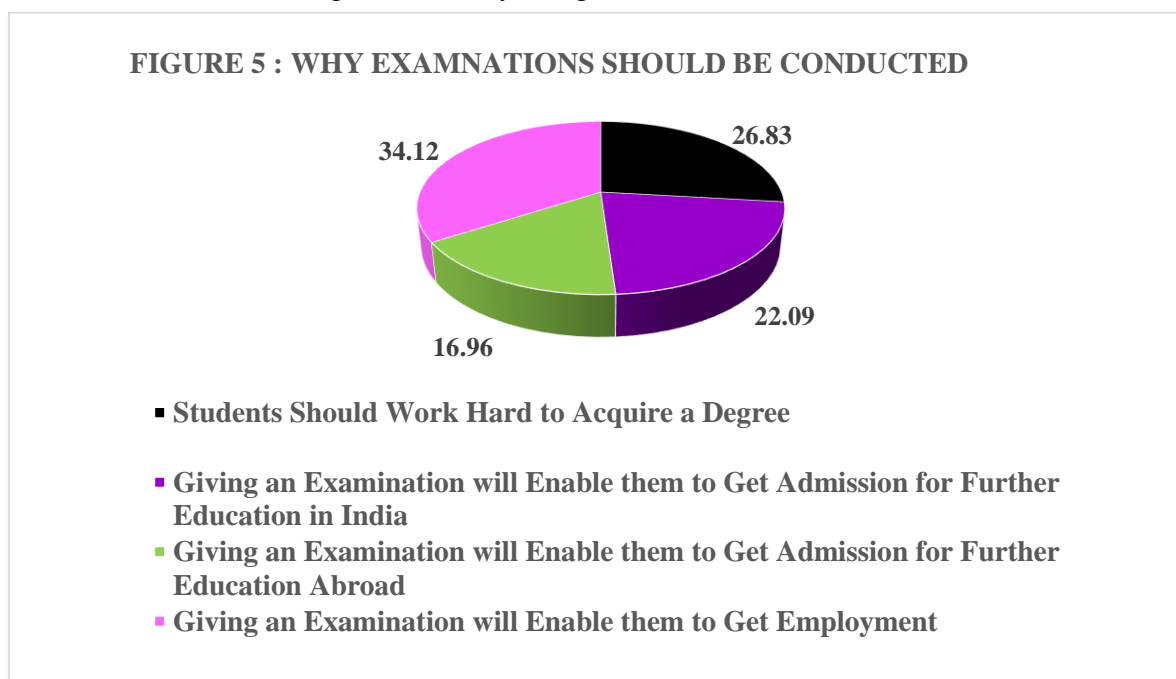
Students Should Work Hard to Acquire a Degree	Giving an Examination will Enable them to Get Admission for Further Education in India	Giving an Examination will Enable them to Get Admission for Further Education Abroad	Giving an Examination will Enable them to Get Employment
26.83	22.09	16.96	34.12

Technique used for analysis : Chi-Square

$$\chi^2 = 6.39, P = 0.0941$$

Conclusion : Null hypothesis is acceptable. The opinion is equally divided. **It may be concluded that stakeholders' have varied reasons for conducting examinations and the opinion regarding it is equally divided.**

The data are shown diagrammatically in figure 5.



- c) **Question:** Since you feel that final year examinations should be conducted, in which month it should be conducted, if at all these have to be conducted?

Number of responses: 514 responses.

The data were analysed using the technique of Chi-square. For this purpose, the research question was converted into null and research hypothesis as follows :

Null Hypothesis : The opinion of stakeholders regarding the time of examination is equally divided.

Research Hypothesis : The opinion of stakeholders regarding the time of examination is not equally divided.

TABLE 3 : PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS' RESPONSES ABOUT WHEN EXAMINATIONS SHOULD BE CONDUCTED

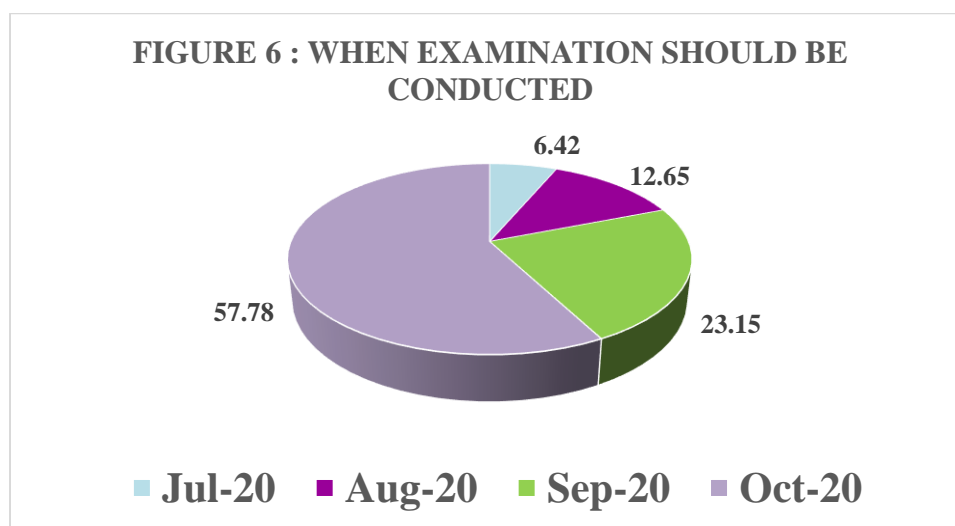
July 2020	August 2020	September 2020	October 2020
6.42	12.65	23.15	57.78

Technique used for analysis : Chi-Square

$\chi^2 = 63.03$, $P < .0001$

Conclusion : Null hypothesis is untenable. The opinion is NOT equally divided. Since the largest number (%) is 57.78, **it may be concluded that a large majority wants exams to be conducted in October 2020, if at all they are conducted.**

The data are shown diagrammatically in figure 6.



- d) **Question:** In your opinion, why it should not be conducted?

Number of responses: 989 responses.

The data were analysed using the technique of Chi-square. For this purpose, the research question was converted into null and research hypothesis as follows :

Null Hypothesis : The opinion of stakeholders regarding the reasons for not conducting examinations is equally divided.

Research Hypothesis : The opinion of stakeholders regarding the reasons for not conducting examinations is not equally divided.

TABLE 4 : PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS' RESPONSES ABOUT WHY EXAMNATIONS SHOULD NOT BE CONDUCTED

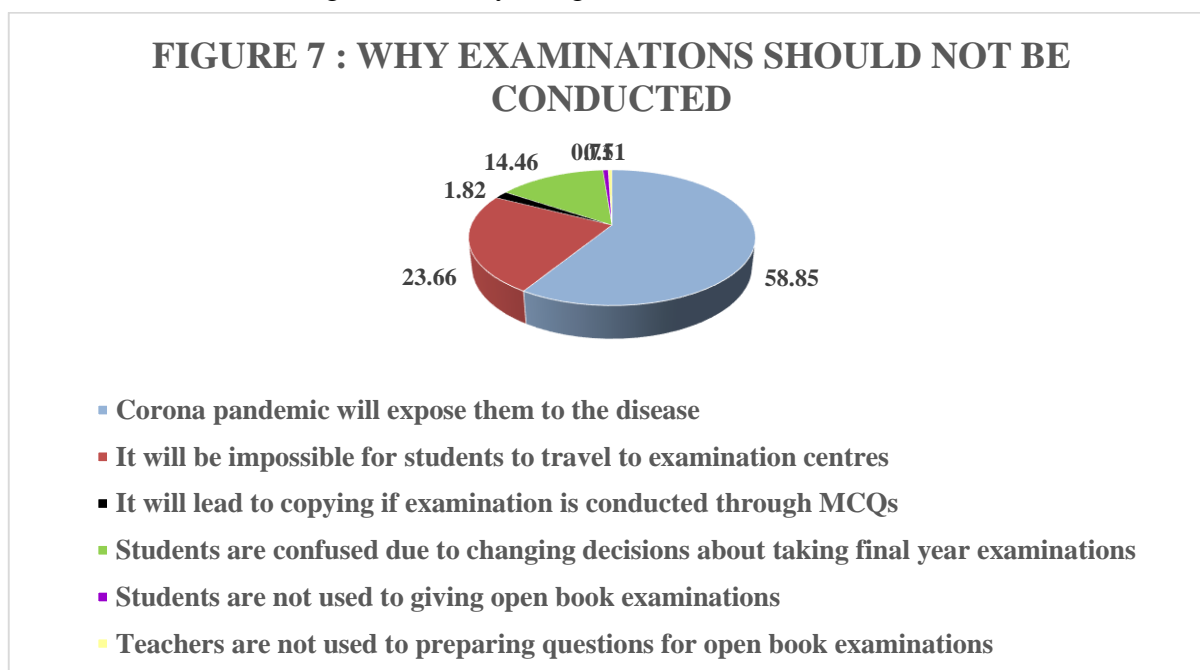
Corona pandemic will expose them to the disease	It will be impossible for students to travel to examination centres	It will lead to copying if examination is conducted through MCQs	Students are confused due to changing decisions about taking final year examinations	Students are not used to giving open book examinations	Teachers are not used to preparing questions for open book examinations
58.85	23.66	1.82	14.46	0.71	0.51

Technique used for analysis : Chi-Square

$$\chi^2 = 154.13, P < .0001$$

Conclusion: Null hypothesis is untenable. The opinion is NOT equally divided. It may be concluded that a large majority does not want exams to be conducted due to (i) the fear that Corona pandemic will expose them to the disease (58.85%), (ii) the fact that it will be impossible for students to travel to examination centres (23.66%) and (iii) the fact that students are confused due to changing decisions about taking final year examinations (14.46%) in that order.

The data are shown diagrammatically in figure 7.



Conclusion: It may be concluded that about 72.67% of the students do not want final year/semester examinations due to (a) fear of getting exposed to Corona virus if students go out to give examination, (b) fear of travelling to examination center and (c) confusion over changing decisions about taking final year/semester examinations. If at all examinations have to be conducted, then it should be in the month of October 2020.

Discussion:

Since this is a very recent and current phenomenon, it is difficult to compare the findings of the present study with that of prior research. However, it is pertinent to note the words of Veena Vaishy, a Psychologist, who explained the findings and states that the overall anxiety (fear of the unknown) is the main cause. It can further affect students' other parts of life. She suggests that if possible, this too needs to be measured as part of further research since fear can transfer to other parts of life like social, personal and professional too. Examination itself leads to high anxiety in students' lives. In addition, due to Covid-19, the extent of fear is going to be double. If not taken care, it can ultimately lead to anxiety disorders as behaviour is learnt and is likely to be repeated. This study can take a step further in researching on the nature of social/personal relationships in this pandemic.

Similar studies could be conducted on opinions of teachers, support staff of examination section, parents, principals, educational administrators and employers across India. Further, it is needed that the universities shall conduct the survey of other stakeholders to know their preparedness and opinion about the conduct of examinations in this pandemic so as to take evidence-based decision. A detailed paper regarding how the system of higher education needs to be resilient in this fast changing complex world.

Implications of the Study:

The decision to conduct final year/semester examinations needs to be evidence-based and taken keeping in mind the ultimate well-being of all the stakeholders, especially that of students in particular.

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