

Social Isolation as a Precursor to Academic Downturn and Vice Versa

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Abstract:- Research in the fields of social science and public health indicates the vital role of social interaction and relationships in promoting mental well-being across the entire human lifespan and education is no exception. Academics ,with its power of inquiring about the universe’s hymn to the patterns of subatomic beings , go beyond the confines of textbooks, Academics can be comprehended as a banyan tree with ever growing branches. Each branch has nuances , differentiating it in the most miniscule ways. As leaves sprout out of innumerable nodes , it ingeniously represents the evolving nature of academics. Wherein each discovery or invention creates a ripple effect in academics. While I have only experienced the finance and business side of academics , The surrealness of penetrating the boundaries of education stays alive in me. For approximately 3 years , I have dedicated time and effort into dissecting my patterns of studying , results , and conducting research - primary and secondary- between Isolation and its effect on academics and learning experiences. Although the relation may seem one dimensional , it delves deeper into the studies of psychology and academics. This project has been intellectually stimulating for me. Furthermore , this research explains the effects of social isolation and how it profoundly impacts learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the past, India boasted a robust social structure characterized by the prevalence of joint families, strong connections with neighbors and relatives, communal leisure activities that fortified these relationships, grand and collective celebration of various festivals, as well as the tradition of visiting relatives during vacations and spending extended time with them. These practices cultivated an environment where feelings of 'loneliness' were virtually inconceivable. Regrettably, over the past few decades, significant changes have been observed. Notably, the traditional social structure has waned, giving way to the emergence of nuclear families as the new norm. Deliberate social isolation has become increasingly common, leading to the gradual development of 'loneliness' as a prevalent outcome.

While isolation is not confined to a single, isolated area of study in psychology, it represents a pervasive theme that intersects with various facets of human psychology. This topic has consistently intrigued me due to its ambivalent nature. Having both experienced isolation and conducted

studies on its implications, I have derived substantial insights from these dual perspectives. My journey to deepen my understanding was fueled by the evident, albeit complex, relationship between social isolation and academic performance. Over the course of a year, I have endeavoured to unveil its latent effects.

Isolation manifests in several critical ways, including changes in brain structure, neurochemical imbalances, cognitive decline, mental health issues, emotional dysregulation, sleep disturbances, impaired social skills, and physical health consequences. These multifaceted impacts contribute to a detrimental relationship with academic achievement and learning processes. This research paper elucidates the intricate connections between isolation and academic performance, exploring how isolation infiltrates daily life and its broader implications.

➤ *What is Loneliness & Social Isolation?*

Lindsay Favotto, a Canadian Researcher summarized loneliness as “the feeling that results from the absence of a social life that one desires, including a perceived discrepancy between the social contacts one has in relation to what they crave, an increase in their need for social connection that is not met, or a subjective feeling of isolation regardless of surrounding social opportunities”. 1,

However, the concepts of loneliness and social isolation are distinct yet interconnected. Loneliness refers to the distressing emotion experienced when one feels alone or detached, while social isolation denotes a lack of social interactions and limited regular social contacts. It is important to note that an individual may live alone without experiencing loneliness or social isolation, and conversely, may feel lonely despite being in the presence of others.

Social isolation can be thought of as a state of detachment, where you lack social bonds or ties. It's important to understand that anyone can become isolated. In other words, isolation often has nothing to do with your character, charisma, or other personality traits. However, both the terms are used as synonyms in a general context.

- (Ref - Favotto, L., Michaelson, V., Pickett, W., & Davison, C. (2019). The role of family and computer-mediated communication in adolescent loneliness. *PLoS One*, 14(6), e0214617.)

➤ *Types of Social Isolation & Loneliness*

According to public health research, social isolation among young individuals can lead to mental health disorders, viz, depression, anxiety, self-harm, suicidal thoughts, and an increased vulnerability to substance abuse. This issue is particularly pressing within students who may think of themselves as "atypical" due to physical attributes, disabilities, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious affiliations, or other distinguishing characteristics. Social isolation may be categorized into three types:

- **Physical Social Isolation:** Refers to being physically separated from others.
- **Social Loneliness:** Denotes the disparity between desired social connections and actual social experiences.
- **Social Isolation (not seen):** Occurs when individuals feel disconnected in the same physical space as others.

➤ *Social Isolation in India*

The issue of social isolation and loneliness in India is of growing concern. Despite the lack of comprehensive statistical data due to limited research in this area, available information sheds light on the current situation and raises concerns for the future. Demographic changes in living arrangements have significantly impacted the elderly population in India, resulting in increased levels of loneliness, as indicated by a study. Moreover, a global study involving researchers from various regions has found higher levels of loneliness among older individuals compared to younger ones. However, conflicting reports in various research studies and media sources present a more complex picture. For instance, a study in Chandigarh revealed that 62% of adolescents experienced feelings of loneliness, while another study suggested that adolescents experience moderate levels of loneliness. According to an e-paper, the World Health Organization stated that one in four children aged 13 to 15 in India encounters loneliness. Furthermore, an article in 'The Hindu' reported that young urban Indians aged between 20 and 30 are increasingly experiencing a sense of isolation and lack of companionship.

➤ *Factors Responsible for Social Isolation in Indian Students*

Loneliness has emerged as a significant concern for mental health globally. Government bodies and psychologists are undertaking diverse studies to identify the root causes of this issue and to formulate effective strategies to address this prevalent challenge. Initially, it was believed that loneliness primarily affected the elderly or individuals who found themselves alone due to life events such as divorce or the loss of a spouse. However, what is particularly concerning and complex about loneliness is its potential to impact individuals of any age and circumstance. Both those living in solitude and those within a family setting, leading what might be considered a typical life with work and social connections, are susceptible to experiencing loneliness. The prevalence of loneliness is rapidly increasing among the younger demographic, extending to include teenagers. It has become evident that loneliness in India is not limited to the elderly.

➤ *Self-Improvement -*

The pursuit of self-improvement has led individuals to become increasingly career-focused, driven by the pervasive ethos of competition and the imperative to adhere to the doctrine of "survival of the fittest." The incessant quest for self-betterment has resulted in social seclusion, as individuals prioritize activities such as reading, consuming knowledge-based content, and adhering to fitness regimens over engaging in social interactions and leisure pursuits with close associates. Even in their professional networking endeavors, the emphasis remains on accruing professional benefits rather than seeking emotional fulfillment. While empirical research largely overlooks this phenomenon as a factor contributing to loneliness, certain perspectives circulated by both national and international media posit its plausibility. Conversely, some researchers regard such seclusion as a form of beneficial isolation, deeming it crucial for self-improvement.

➤ *Academic Underachievement:*

In the current era, the significant level of competition has led to the widespread adoption of comparison and continuous assessment in our society. This trend is particularly prevalent in the academic realm. Individuals are subject to ongoing scrutiny, comparison, and frequent evaluation. It is essential to recognize that academic performance is inherently variable and cannot remain consistently high. During periods of underperformance, individuals may experience diminished efficiency. Subsequent academic setbacks can lead to feelings of humiliation, resulting in diminished self-esteem and a sense of unworthiness. Lowered self-esteem can contribute to social isolation, fostering a sense of loneliness in the individual.

➤ *Personal Failures-*

Broken relationships, commitment failures, breakup or divorce, and external pressures can cause a massive dent in self-actualization, self-esteem, feelings of unworthiness, social isolation, and loneliness. Indian research has revealed a negative association between self-esteem and loneliness and suggested that Indian adolescents experience high levels of loneliness due to low self-esteem.

➤ *Physical Appearance –*

Today, physical appearance holds a prominent role in perceived personality development. Individuals with average looks, non-"ideal" body weight, non-optimal height or other often face body shaming, bullying from not only fellow students, peers or colleagues, but also family and society at large and experience public disrespect, humiliation, and frequent insults. Low self-esteem in female adolescents is due to perceived poor physical appearance, as per research. Frequent degradation and assaults diminish an individual's self-worth resulting in cutting off and deliberately reducing social circle, they construct emotional barriers that are challenging to breach, making it difficult for well-intentioned individuals to enter their personal space. Initially embraced by these young individuals, loneliness gradually evolves into a substantial concern for their mental well-being.

➤ *Poor Health –*

Individuals with poor physical health experience greater feelings of social isolation in comparison to their healthier counterparts. The impact of poor health on one's social life is significant, leading to a diminished interest in participating in social activities. Poor physical health often results in social isolation, fostering an environment conducive to feelings of loneliness. This is particularly pronounced in older individuals, where poor health serves as a key driver of loneliness, as it impedes their ability to engage in social interactions and maintain healthy relationships. It is noteworthy that limited research has been undertaken in India regarding this aspect.

➤ *Internet, Mobile Phone, And Social Media Addiction –*

The extensive use of Social media platforms may provide a temporary escape from boredom, isolation, and loneliness. However, it can exacerbate these emotions and further lead to depression and self-pity. Continuous engagement with the virtual or real world can lead to detachment from meaningful connections, the reality of society, and genuine social interactions. Teens and students are particularly susceptible to the internet and social media. Cyberbullying, intimidation, and constant comparisons can lead to damaged self-perception and skewed interpersonal relationships. Additionally, social media content often normalizes and even promotes self-harm and suicidal behaviors among youth. A significant proportion of young students engage in heavy smartphone usage and media multitasking, leading to chronic sleep deprivation and adverse effects on cognitive function, academic performance, and socioemotional well-being.

➤ *Other Mental Health Issues –*

An increase in social isolation and loneliness often leads to a deterioration in mental health, and vice versa. When mental health deteriorates, loneliness may develop as a by-product of other mental health problems. This parallels the impact of poor physical health, which can decrease an individual's interest in and ability to actively participate in various social activities. Additionally, addiction can reduce a person's social circle, making it difficult for an addict, due to their disturbed mental health, to maintain harmonious relationships and often resulting in emotional deprivation. This emotional deprivation can further intensify feelings of loneliness in an addict or other mental health patient."

II. CASE STUDY

The current research delves into the "correlation between the perceived absence of academic social interactions in the online learning environment and students' challenges in learning and self-regulation during online study.

The individuals included in the study were meticulously selected through the process of simple random sampling. Questionnaires were used to collect data, which were analyzed by multiple regressions.

A. *Parameters & Results– A sample size of 36 students across Delhi NCR were surveyed through online forms and personal interviews with following parameters & results*

➤ *Age of the Respondent – 89.4 % of Respondents were between the Age of 16-18 & in High School*

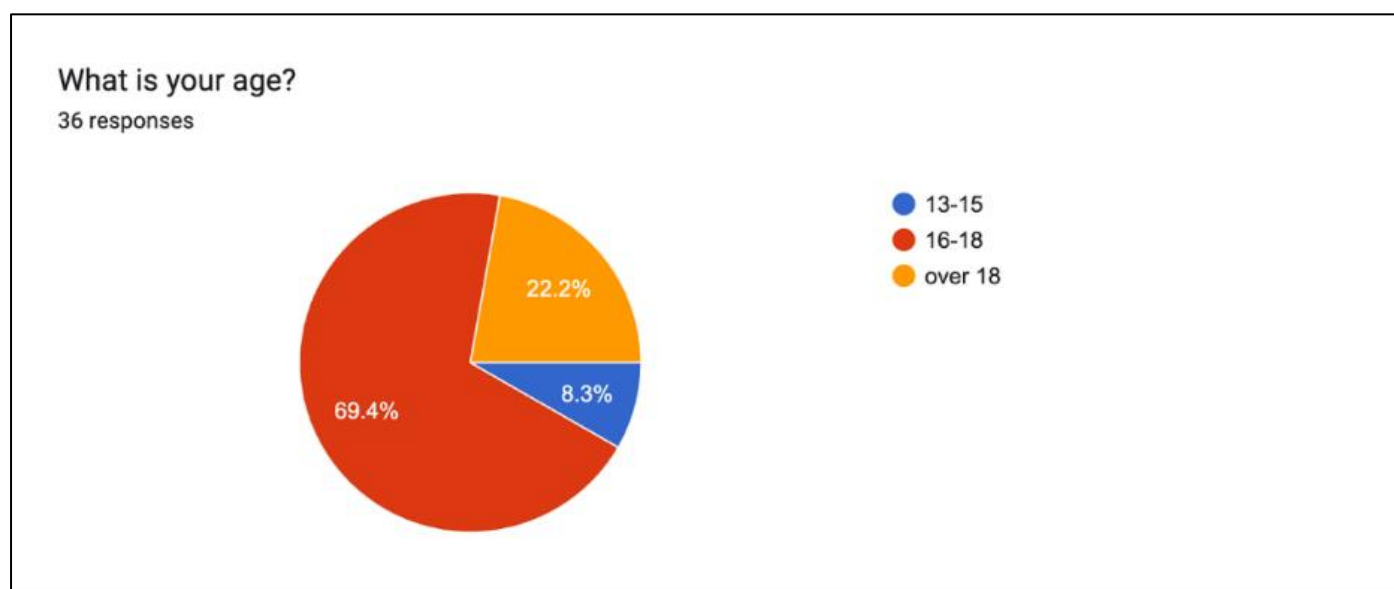


Fig 1 What is your Age?

➤ *Grade - Most of the kids in sample were High Schoolers*

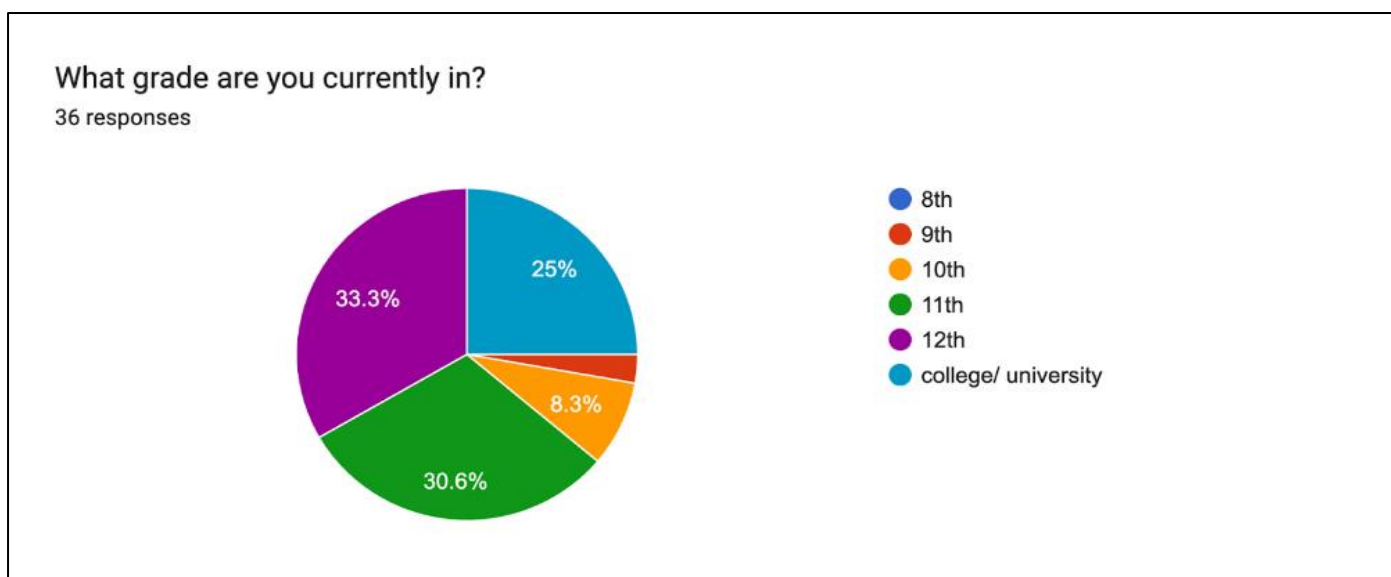


Fig 2 What Grade are you Currently in?

➤ *Most Kids were above Average – Average Performers*

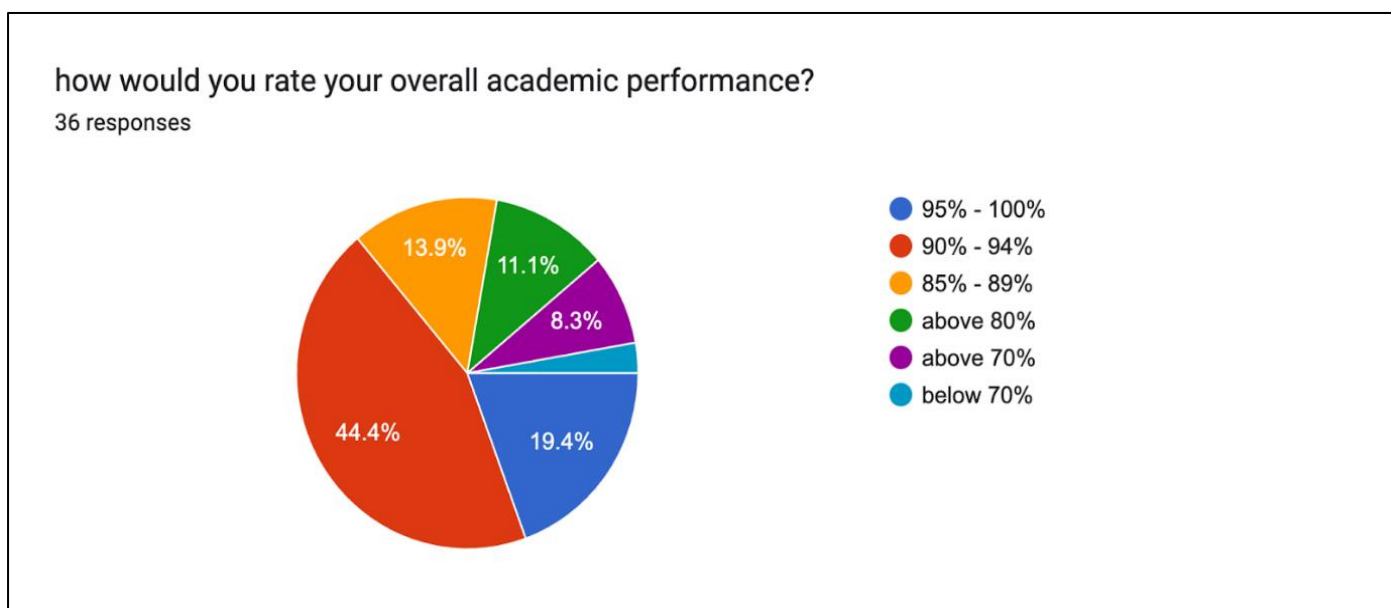


Fig 3 How would you rate your overall Academic Performance

B. Observations –

- 30.6% Students felt highly motivated in studies & often participated in group studies.
- A high majority felt that interactions with fellow students (being with someone) , however a huge 22% rarely studied in groups
- It was almost a consensus that group studies help

- A vast majority found difficulty in finding peers to study with
- Covid has made them feel socially more isolated.
- They are willing to use and pay for personalized peer groups that motivate them to study and perform better as most feel solving problems with peers was useful
- Not being able to find right peers was impacting their well being

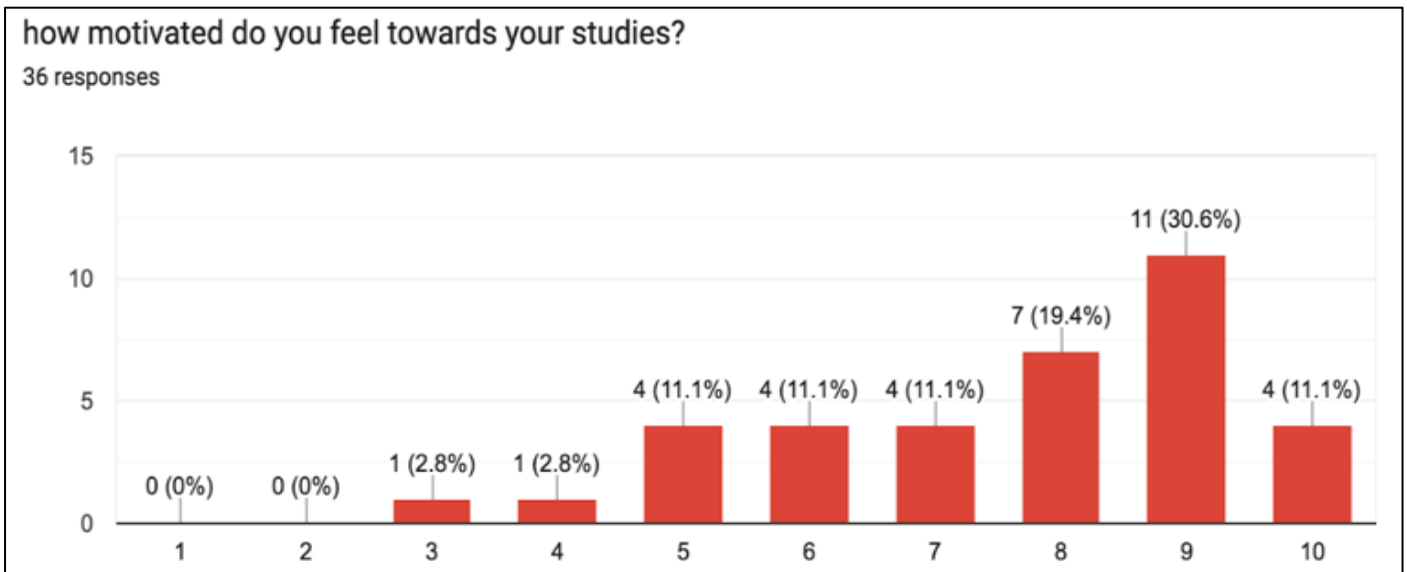


Fig 4 How Motivated do you Feel Towards your Studies?

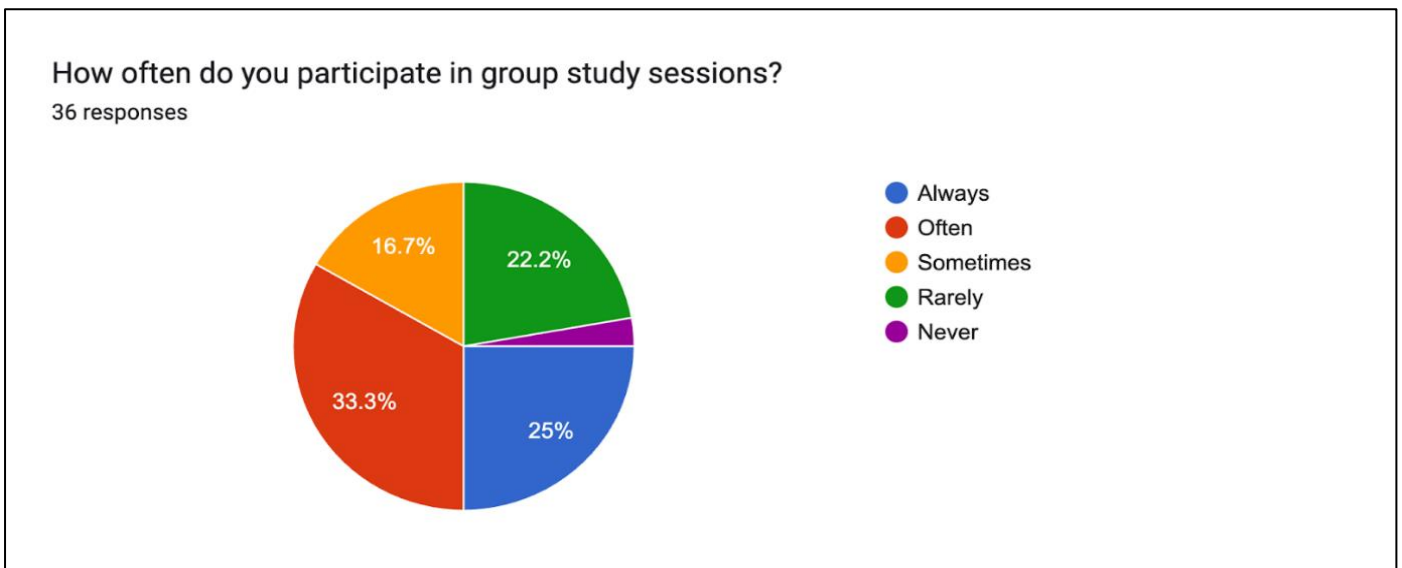


Fig 5 How often do you Participate in Group Study Session?

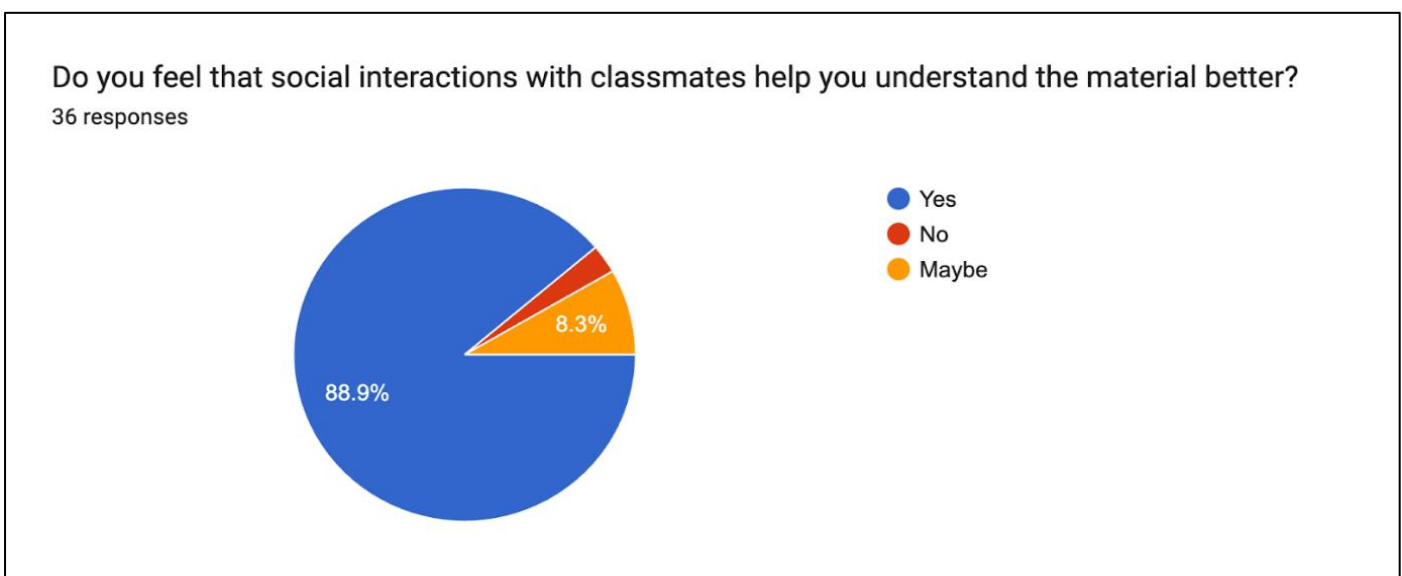


Fig 6 Do you Feel that Social Intrection with Classmates Help you Understand Material Better?

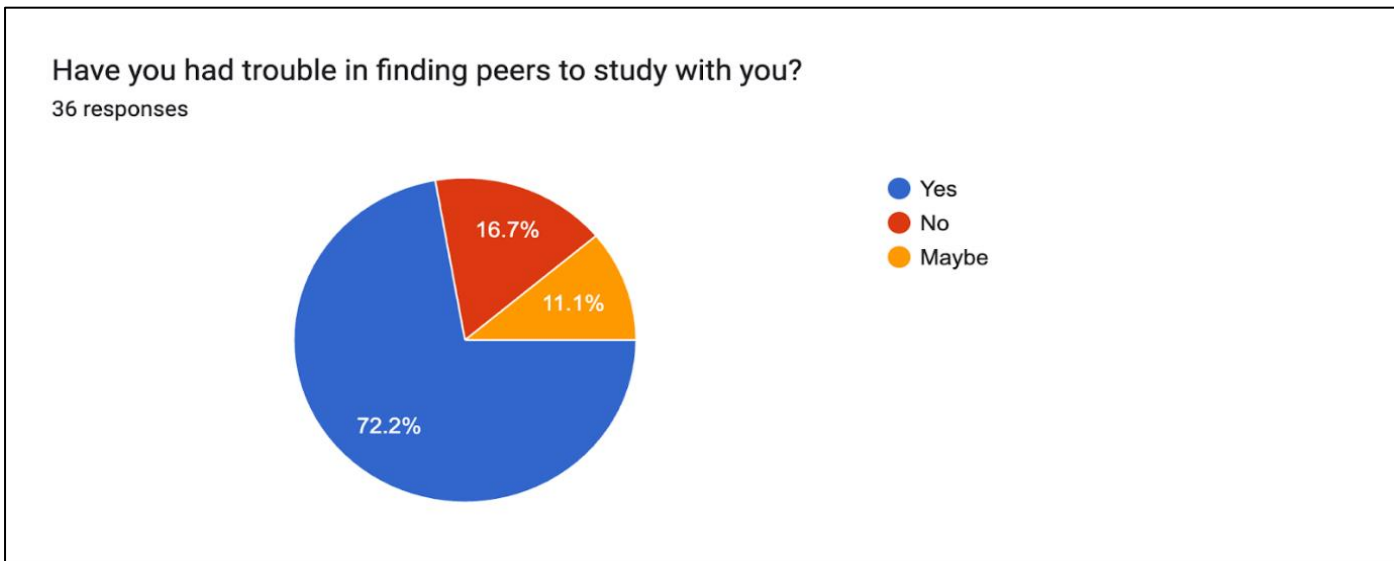


Fig 7 Have you had Trouble in Finding Peers to Study with you?

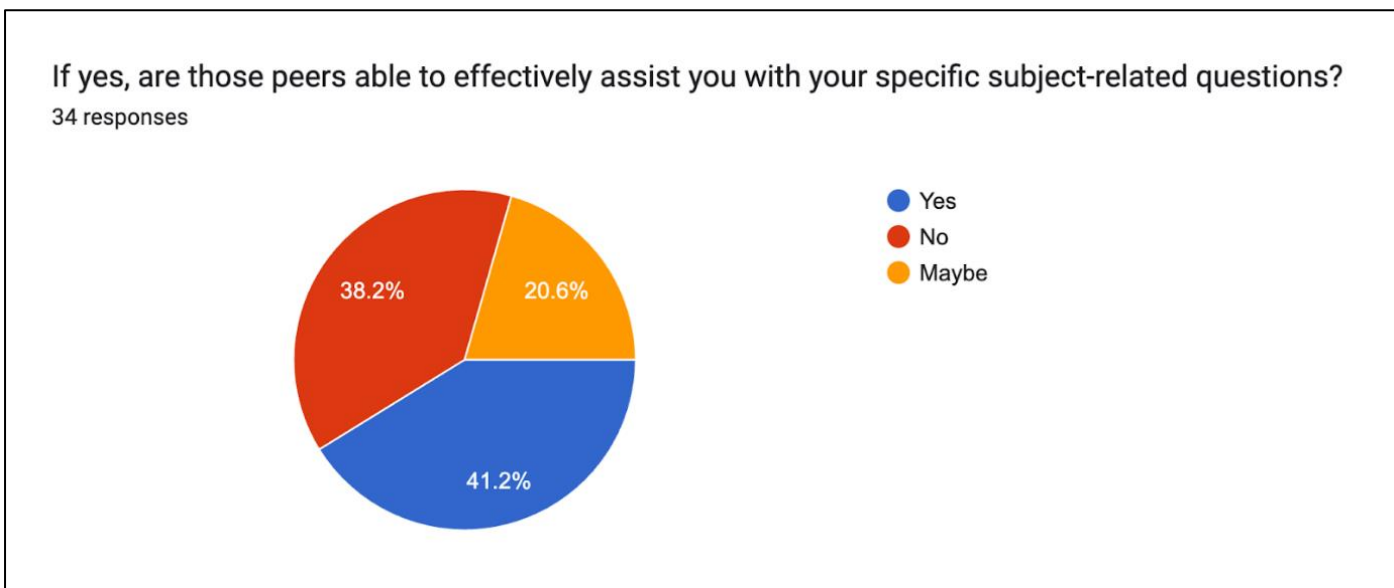


Fig 8 If yes, are those Peers able to Effectively Assist you with your Specific Subject-Related Questions?

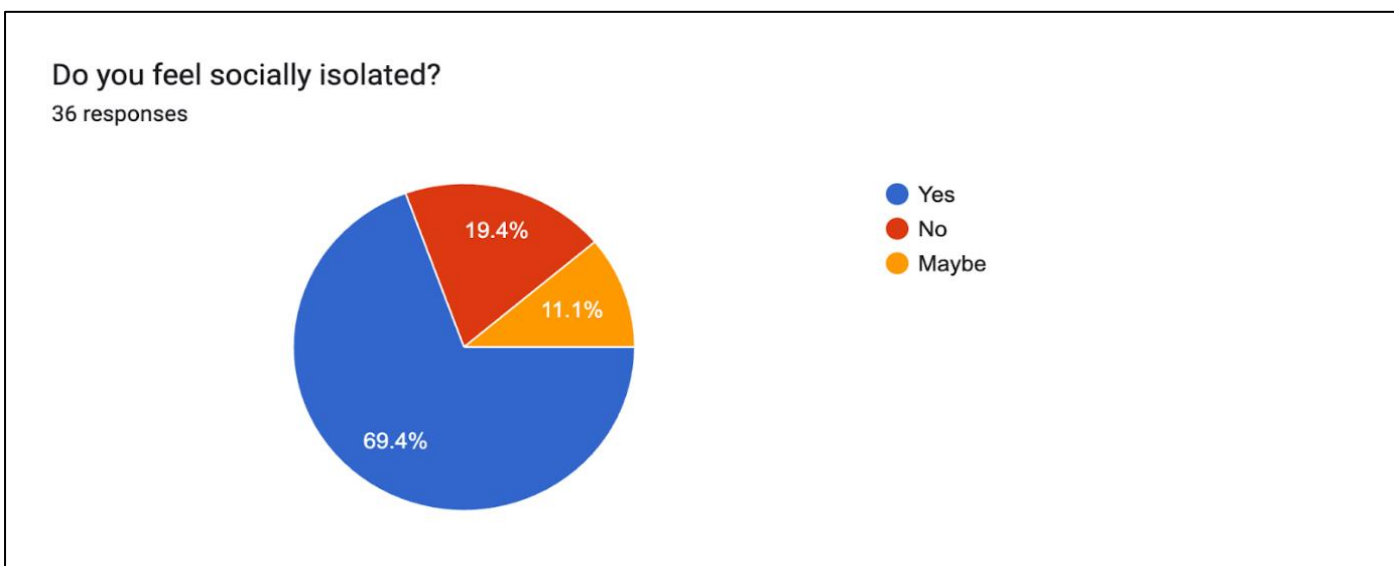


Fig 9 Do you Feel Socially Isolated?

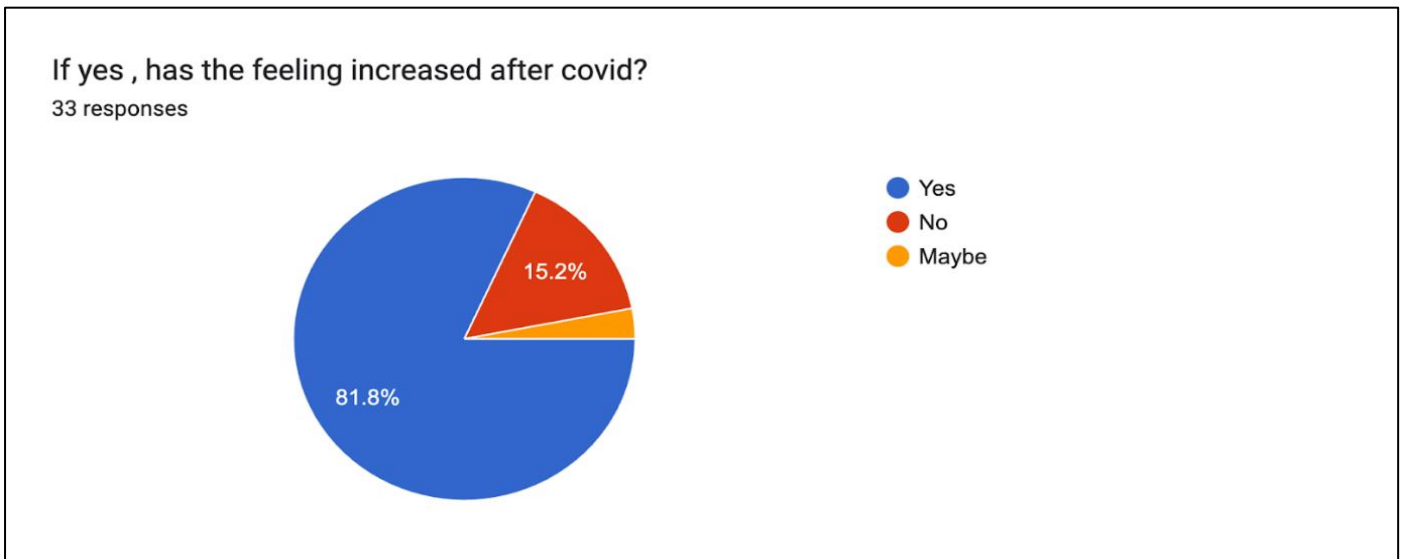


Fig 10 If yes, has the Feeling Increased after Covid?

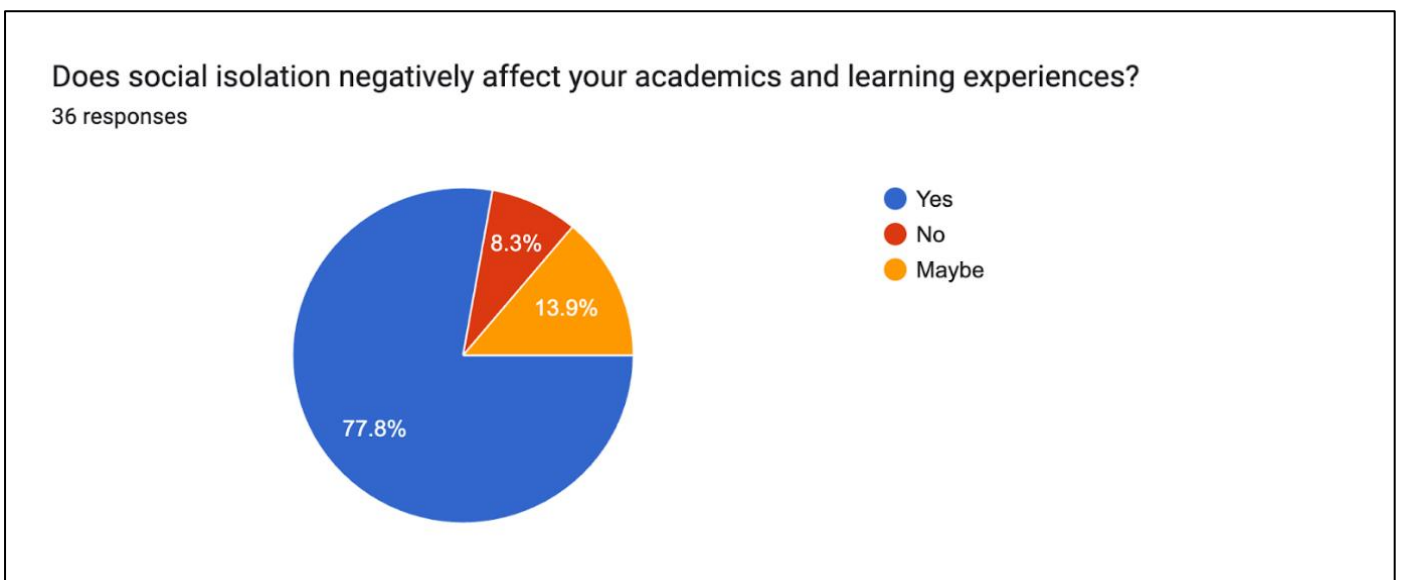


Fig 11 Does Social Isolation Negatively affect your Academic and Learning Experiences?

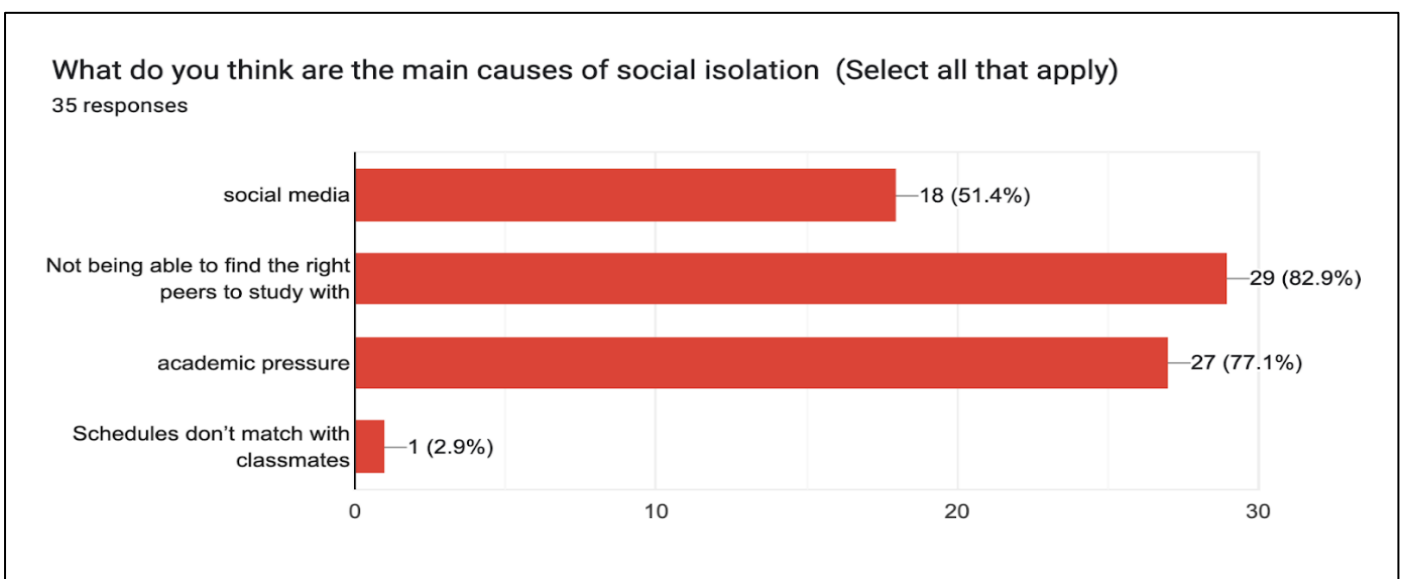


Fig 12 What do your Think are the main causes of Social Isolation (Select all that Apply)

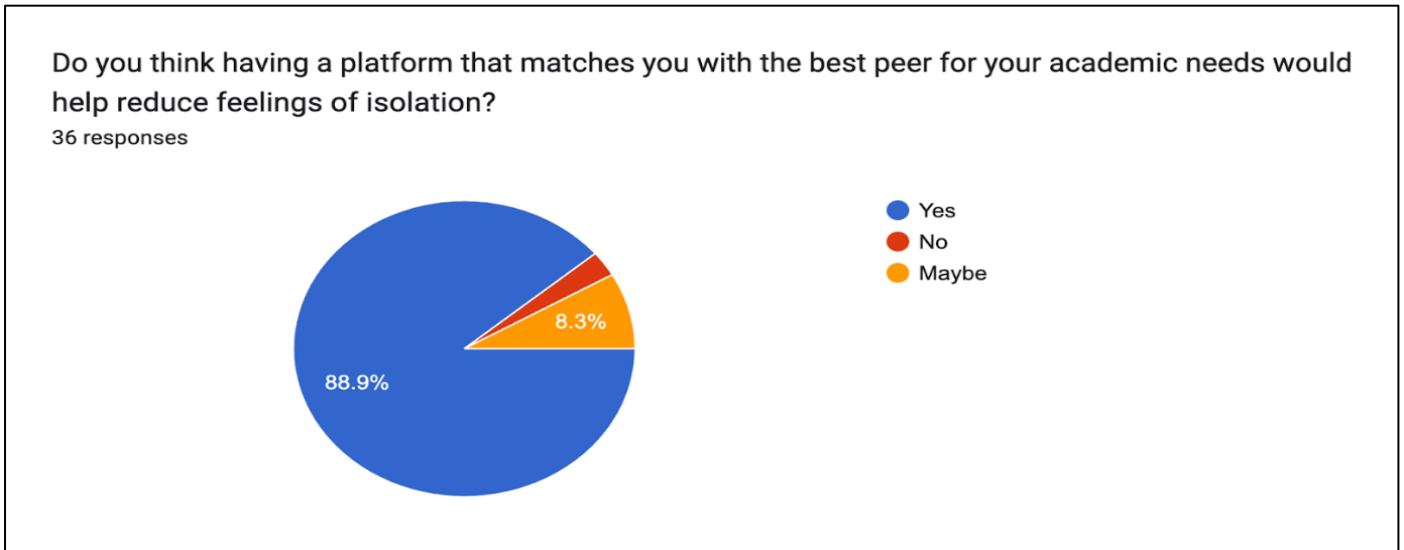


Fig 13 Do you Thinking having Platform that Matches you with the Best Peer for your Academic Needs would Help Reduce Feeling of Isolation?

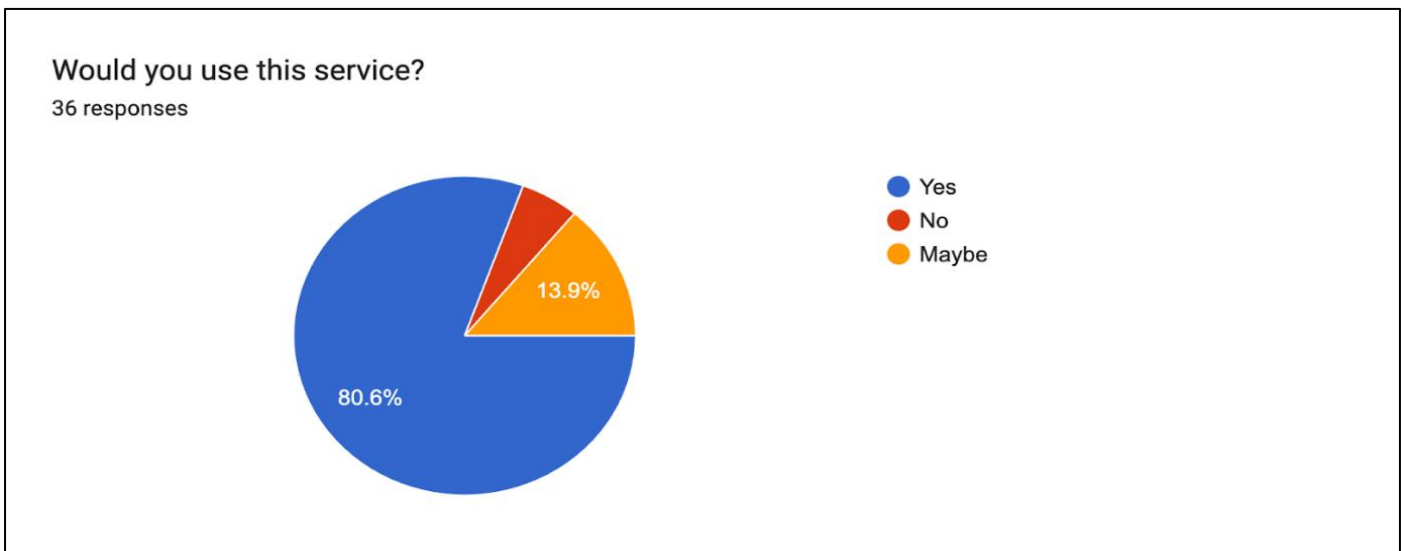


Fig 14 Would you use this Service?

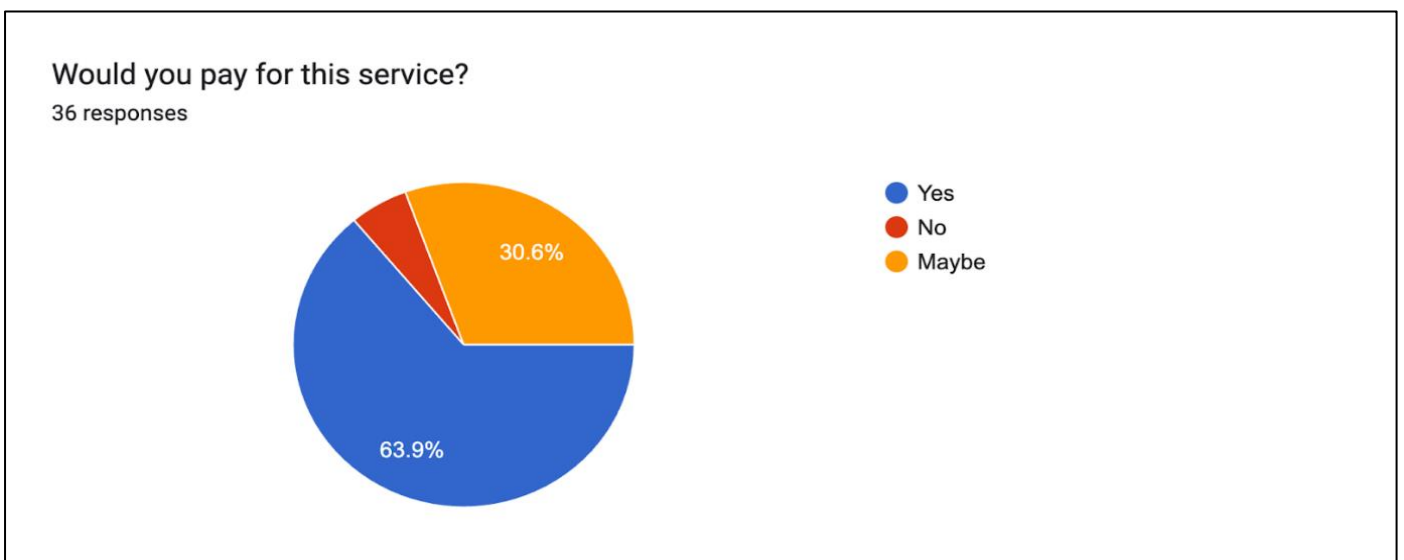


Fig 15 Would you Pay for this Service?

III. CONCLUSION

The descriptive statistics for the variables under examination, alongside their respective correlations, are presented in Table 1. The average values indicate that students face moderate learning and self-regulation challenges during online learning. Additionally, there is a consensus among students regarding the need for more social

interactions in the online learning environment. There is an agreement that social isolation leads to a lack of interest in academics and learning. The results of the parallel mediation, illustrating the relationship between the perceived lack of social interactions and learning and self-regulation difficulties in the online learning environment, are visually depicted in Figure 16.

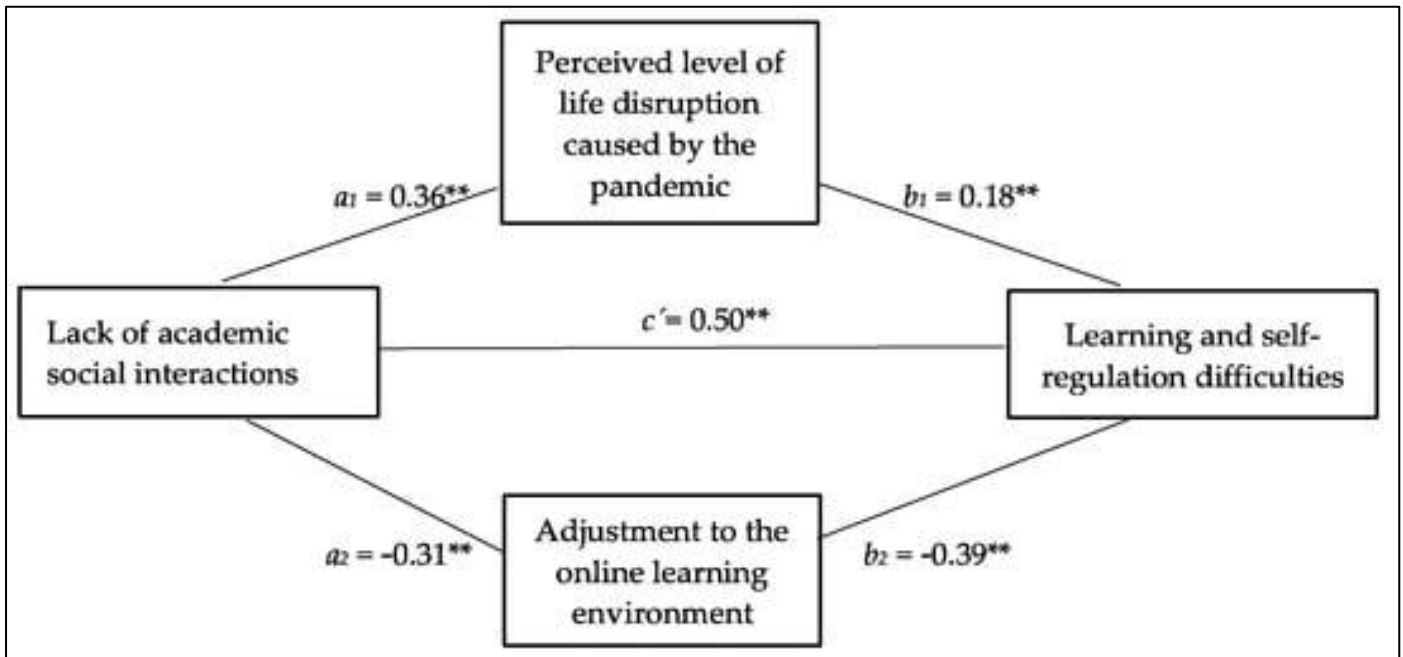


Fig 16 Multiple mediation analyses of the effect of a perceived lack of academic social interaction on learning and self-regulation difficulties during online studying for the two mediators: perceived level of life disruption caused by the pandemic and the adjustment to the online learning environment (standardized coefficients). Note: ** = $p < 0.001$.

The obtained results indicated that the perceived lack of academic social interactions caused by the pandemic has both direct and indirect effects on difficulties related to learning and self-regulation in an online learning environment. Results generally indicate that students who perceive a greater lack of academic social interactions also experience more learning and self-regulation difficulties during online studying. Furthermore, the indirect effects of the lack of social interactions through both mediators were significant. More specifically, students' perceptions of the lack of academic social interactions positively affect their perceived life disruption, and their perceived life disruption enhances their learning and self-regulation difficulties during online studying. On the other hand, students' general adjustment to the online learning environment also mediates the association between the perceived lack of social interactions and learning and self-regulation difficulties during online education. Hence, students who perceive a greater lack of academic social interactions also report a poorer overall adjustment to online studying and further encounter more learning and self-regulation difficulties in the online learning environment.

The results and findings imply that students who perceive a greater lack of social interactions also encounter more difficulties in learning and self-regulation during studying. Reduced social interactions and increased feelings

of isolation lead to decreased motivation, and this is amply demonstrated by research. Students' beliefs regarding the lack of social interactions within schools, societies, or any academic setting significantly impact their perception of life and self-esteem. This perceived disruption of life, in turn, contributes to challenges in learning and self-regulation. Students also withdraw from meaningful social interactions and fail to adjust to the learning environment. A direct proportionate relationship exists between the perceived absence of social interactions and difficulties in learning and self-regulation. Hence, students who perceive a substantial lack of academic and social interactions often exhibit poorer overall adjustment to the learning environment, leading to increased difficulties in learning and self-regulation.

Peer relationships are crucial in children's scholastic development. They cultivate a sense of belonging among classmates, thus facilitating active participation in classroom activities. For instance, in group projects, students are more likely to contribute and engage when they feel a sense of belonging and acceptance from their peers.

The findings of this study surfaced several crucial implications that require urgent attention from various stakeholders. First, students need to be more aware of the student isolation phenomenon, as it is very probable for

students themselves not to be aware that they feel isolated. This is a common situation where students miss their family and friends back in their home country – not realizing that this stress is due to their inability to familiarize themselves with the learning environment instead of missing the company of their loved ones. Secondly, instructors should be aware of signs of student isolation stemming from students' academic performances, social lives, and psychological development. Awareness of such signs would give instructors the proper guidance to address such issues and help them be more acclimatized to measures taken by the University to recognize and mitigate the student isolation phenomenon.

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➤ *Conflict of Interest* –

The author is setting up a business in field of education and this research is an in depth study of his business feasibility.

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