



# Expanding the Self Behind Closed Doors: Exploring the Role of the Lockdown in Self-Realization Among Young Adults

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## Abstract

Self-realization or the path which involves the elaborate process of knowing oneself leads people to a meaningful and fulfilling life. The present study aims to examine how the COVID-19-led lockdown proved to be an opportunity for emerging adults to reflect on and eventually discover their true selves. This study particularly explores the factors that facilitated the self-realization process during the lockdown. An online survey was conducted on 1280 Indian university students. The age of participants ranged between 18 and 29 years. An eight-item scale was developed to measure self-realization during the lockdown, which was thereafter administered along with other study variables. The results showed that factors including family bonding, social comparison, self-image, and a positive orientation toward life help young adults in the process of self-realization. Furthermore, the participants who employed adaptive ways to cope with the COVID-19 stress reported higher levels of self-realization. The present study showed that the interaction of young adults with their significant others, solving their daily problems, and having a positive outlook toward themselves and the future, helped them during the COVID-19 imposed lockdown and led them on the path of self-realization.

**Keywords** Self-realization · COVID-19 · Lockdown · Self-image · Indian youth

## Introduction

The search for the self is a never-ending process for most people. However, it becomes essential in difficult times. This search for the self can help in the search for meaning in life so that one can fight and survive in a time of personal or social crisis (Frankl, 1959). The COVID-19 pandemic, which infected millions of people worldwide and brought the life of billions to a standstill, was a crisis that reminded everyone about the significance and fragility of life. Moreover, the pandemic led to multiple lockdowns that paved the way for several individuals to reflect on their lives and think thoroughly about where they should be heading. Self-reflection often leads to positive feelings and outcomes (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999), however, sometimes self-reflection may cause regrets as well. Many researchers believe that even

these regrets can serve as a significant experience and bring about a positive change in life (Landman, 1993; Zeelenberg, 1999), and hence deliver positive outcomes. Therefore, though the lockdown has had several negative impacts on the human life with regard to economic, social, and psychological aspects (Pillay & Barnes, 2020), it has also allowed many people to think about their past, present, and the future, and to participate in the rewarding process of self-realization.

Self-realization, a process of knowing oneself, has its roots in ancient philosophy and holds importance even in the modern management sciences. As the classic statements given by Plato and Aristotle on the concept exemplify, it is only through self-realization when people unlock their complete potential, that they will be able to realize where their unique happiness lies and ways for distinctive flourishing (Nielsen, 1973). In management language, Simms (2008) juxtaposes self-realization with self-fulfillment where it operates similarly as a drive to be at one's fullest potential and capabilities. Over time, while defining self-realization, scholars have equated it with similar concepts such as self-fulfillment, self-connectedness, self-knowledge, and most commonly with self-actualization. For instance, Maksimenko and Serdiuk (2016) defined self-realization as

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the “process of actualization and implementation of the individuality of a person, his/her internal positive and creative pursuit of development, psychological maturity, and competence” (p. 93). Similarly, Martela and Pessi (2018) stated it as the modalities of self-connectedness, authenticity, and realizing the ability to express oneself through one’s work. The idea of self-realization thus seems to be synonymous with the constructs like self-connectedness, self-fulfillment, self-actualization, and the like. Though there is some evident overlapping in these self-related concepts, it will be an error to treat them as the same. For example, the process of knowing one’s potential is self-realization and the state of achieving one’s fullest potential is self-actualization (Friedman, 1976).

Friedman (1976) argued against the popular psychological notion of self-realization as the ultimate goal of human life, saying that self-realization cannot be a goal in life. Instead, it is a by-product of life. He believed that people self-realize through interaction with the real world firsthand. It cannot be planned but rather, it is carried out spontaneously. Self-realization is not a potential that we possess, which one will find/reach someday. It does not lie inside us, “but between us and what calls us out” (Friedman, 1976, p. 12). This idea of self-realization is quite different from the idea laid down by humanistic psychologists like Maslow (1943) and Rogers (1961), not only in terms of conceptualization but also in terms of how to attain it. Similarly, Nielsen (1973) countered the argument made by self-realization theorists that the ultimate goal of human life cannot be to develop as many capabilities as one can. He also refuted Aristotle’s belief that contemplation is the essential feature of human nature, and that it has the highest value in terms of social activities. Furthermore, he argued that sometimes self-realization might make people face bitter truths about themselves, and therefore, impede the attainment of instant happiness.

Maksimenko and Serdiuk (2016) believe that a self-realized individual is the author of their life and is determined and internally motivated. The characteristics of a self-realized person include self-knowledge foremost, a coherent personality that permits the expression of the self, embracing and bearing human nature, and a better understanding of the human condition. Self-realization may be initiated by ideals and factors which lie outside of oneself and be about one’s society or community at large (Mahmood, 2005). Participation in socially relevant and ethically admissible tasks is affected by the realization of personal moral ideals. Self-realization, therefore, is a self-determined process, which may lead one to personal growth and development. Self-knowledge and awareness about oneself are not synonymous with self-realization but are a part of it in such a way (Doren & Kang, 2016) that having a precise understanding of one’s strengths and weaknesses can help individuals and prove to

be an advantage so they can get the most out of this knowledge (Wehmeyer, 1999).

In other contexts, self-realization has been explained in the backdrop of happiness and well-being. Happiness in the eudaimonic tradition is particularly emphasized in the philosophy of Aristotle who defines it as self-realization, which is realizing one’s true self *daimon*, meaning the expression and fulfillment of inner potentials. From this perspective, a good life results from living according to one’s *daimon*, i.e., true self (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2009). When one lives life in absolute congruence with his/her sense of self including the ontological concepts of being and becoming, and is capable of living up to their true potential, it leads to the greatest sense of fulfillment in the future (Waterman, 1993). Yet another explication of eudaimonia as psychological well-being was given by Ryff (1995). She identified six basic characteristics of eudaimonia: self-acceptance, autonomy, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, and environmental mastery (Ryff, 1989). Over the years, many scholars have taken to this eudaimonic view of a meaningful life in contrast to the hedonic view of a happy life (Huta, 2012; Huta & Waterman, 2014, Luo et al., 2017). Individual studies on the subject have shown repeatedly that, unlike the hedonic motive, the eudaimonic motive urges people more to think about their real selves (Huta, 2012), and reflect deeply on their past and future (Baumeister et al., 2013).

The roots of self-realization can also be traced to Eastern thoughts, particularly as transcendence in Indian philosophy. The quest for “Who am I?” is answered by Eastern philosophy as the attainment of self-realization (Rao, 2019). Given that India has many religious and spiritual practices, the primary religion followed by most is Hinduism which sees the quest for life as the ultimate source of self-knowledge, and it is only human beings among all other living creatures that can pursue the quest for liberation, enlightenment, perfection, and self-realization. Not only this, India is the birthplace of yet another major religion in the world, Buddhism, which also explains self-realization as a state of pure consciousness called Nirvana, i.e., freedom from all suffering and achievement of the ultimate state to be followed by humans. Thus, “the Indian concept of self does include physical, social, and metaphysical self, but the metaphysical self is considered the real self, and the objective of human life is to realize the real self” (Bhawuk, 2011, p. 71).

## Present Study

The objective of the present study is to explore the role of lockdown in self-realization among young adults. It follows Friedman’s (1976) view of self-realization, where self-realization is not considered the ultimate goal of human life

but a by-product of day-to-day interaction with the outside world. As mentioned earlier, knowing one's potential is self-realization, while achieving one's fullest potential is self-actualization. Therefore, self-actualization is not possible without self-realization. However, mere self-realization does not necessarily lead to self-actualization. In the present study, self-realization is conceptualized as a process through which individuals know themselves and develop a profound understanding of who they are, what they want from their life, what are their potentials and dreams, and what are their dislikes and shortcomings.

Previous research in the related field shows that individuals who have adequate self-perception are more likely to engage in the process of self-realization since they know their strengths and weaknesses (Maksimenko & Serdiuk, 2016). Research also shows that having intimate and valued connections with others is a significant contributor to self-realization (Ryff, 1989). Therefore, a positive relationship with significant others can expedite the process of self-realization since it actively engages one in the process of reflection. Individuals who have mastered self-realization have supportive self-esteem, are sensitive toward themselves, are less likely to self-blame, perceive themselves as confident, feel competent, and have a positive approach toward life and self, overall (Maksimenko & Serdiuk, 2016). They see their life and themselves in a positive light and have an internal locus of control. They are determined to bring changes in their life by engaging in a variety of activities (physical activities, creative work, getting a degree, etc.), which then contribute to self-development and more achievements (Kudinov, 2013; Maksimenko & Serdiuk, 2016). Researchers also found that the values of self-realization among students played an important role in their flow experiences and personal expressiveness (Waterman et al., 2003). A study conducted on students shows that self-realization is negatively associated with control goals and positively with autonomous goals (Miquelon & Vallerand, 2006). That is, when students pursued a goal with self-interest and not because others wanted them to, they had better self-realization.

Only a handful of studies have shown the importance of self-realization among the young (Waterman et al., 2003; Miquelon & Vallerand, 2006). Moreover, the factors that helped them in the process of self-knowledge, especially in the time of a crisis are also explored less. Early adulthood or emerging adulthood as Arnett (2000, 2004) coined it is both the age of conflicts and identity explorations—the base on which adulthood stands. Emerging adulthood is the period where young people experience coming out of adolescence and taking up pathways to adulthood. This is another major transition that young adults go through after moving from childhood to adolescence. Yet, apart from Erikson's (1968) initial focus on young adulthood as a period of identity/ego

development, this important transition from adolescence to adulthood is often overlooked (Arnett, 2004). The essence of emerging adulthood is the blend of different worldviews with a garden variety of achievements and challenges in multiple domains of life. Arnett (2000, 2004), in his theory of emerging adulthood, brought up five important features that characterize this period which has not received due attention in academia. These include the feeling of being in-between, identity exploration, age of self-focus, instability, and possibilities. Nelson et al. (2015) also identified five different indices of this period in which possibilities overlap with that explained by Arnett (2004). Yet another research by Nelson and Padilla-Walker (2013) brought to the fore a host of positive outcomes and flourishing that emerge through the successful navigation of this crucial time of an individual's life. Therefore, knowing oneself at this age will not only help them have a better understanding of themselves/their identity but will also help them in making major choices in their life in the upcoming years.

Developing on Arnett's idea of emerging adults focusing on themselves, we were inquisitive to explore if the COVID-19-led lockdown has been utilized by emerging adults to reflect on their selves. The lockdown coerced many individuals to stop and think about their past, present, and future. These self-reflections could have positive consequences (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999), but could also lead to negative implications (Landman, 1993). Irrespective of the consequences, the process was unavoidable for most, especially emerging adults who are in the age of identity exploration and self-focus (Arnett, 2004), and are attempting to answer the immemorial question, "Who am I?" (Nelson, 2018). Against this backdrop, the present study aims to investigate how emerging adults in India have dealt with the difficult months of lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic and explored their sense of self in the process when they were forced to stay indoors with their families 24/7, deprived of any kind of physical interaction with the outside world.

This study answers the following research questions specifically: How has the lockdown served as a period of self-exploration and helped in the process of self-realization? What role have family relationships, self-image, and life orientation played during this important period of identity formation? Does social comparison facilitate the process of self-realization? What is the role of individuals' interaction and dealing with the COVID-19 situation in self-realization?

## Method

### Participants

The study included a total of 1280 university students from undergraduate and postgraduate programs. The mean age

of participants was 20.521 ( $SD = 2.249$ ) with the age range being 18–29 years. The numbers of female and male participants in the study were 1023 and 257, respectively. Most participants, i.e., 1033, were enrolled in undergraduate programs, and only 247 participants were from postgraduate programs. As self-reported, 1215 of these participants were living at home during the lockdown and only 65 participants were living at the hostel or in the accommodation for paying guests.

## Measures

The main aim of the study was to understand self-realization in emerging adults during the lockdown. However, to understand that, a few personal and social variables were also included in the study such as the participants' family relationships, self-image, social comparison, positive life orientation, and adaptive coping with stress. For many of these study variables, a few standard scales exist. However, while reviewing the scales, it was realized that most of them were not suitable for COVID-specific situations and could hardly be applied in the Indian context. Therefore, for a few study variables including self-realization, authors developed items/scales that can be specifically used in the pandemic/lockdown context and were suitable for Indian emerging adults. Although, the variables for which scales were available for Indian culture such as positive life orientation and coping with stress, the standardized scales were used.

The items were constructed in the English language since the target population was college-going students hailing from various parts of India. Therefore, English which was a common and preferred language for them was chosen for the present study. Initially, the authors of this paper had prepared the draft items that were revised with the help of an area expert. The final items of all the self-constructed scales were evaluated by three experts in order to establish content validity. A brief description of each scale, developed or adapted, is given in the following section.

## Self-Realization

Self-realization is conceptualized as a process through which individuals come to know themselves and develop a profound understanding of who they are, what they want from their life, what their potentials and dreams are, and what are their dislikes and shortcomings. To measure self-realization during the lockdown period particularly, an eight-item scale was developed. The questions included "I am able to understand myself better," "It gave me enough time to figure out clearly 'Who am I'" (the complete list of items is provided in the Appendix). The responses were recorded on the five-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. The maximum score on the scale could be 40 and the minimum could be 8. A higher score meant higher self-realization during the lockdown period. The Cronbach's alpha of the eight-item scale was found 0.912. Furthermore, in order to check the content validity of the scales, three subject area experts were consulted. Based on their ratings for each item about whether the item was essential or not to measure self-realization, we calculated the content validity ratio (CVR). The average CVR turned out to be 0.833, which confirmed the high content validity of the scale. Since the items were construed under a single dimension, therefore, to check the unidirectionality of the scale, exploratory factor analysis was performed. The results of the factor analysis (see Table 1) confirmed that all the items belonged to one dimension only.

## Family Relationship

To measure the nature of family relationships during the lockdown period, we developed four items for measuring closeness with family members during the lockdown such as "I have developed a better bonding with my family" (the complete list of items is provided in the Appendix). The responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The maximum

**Table 1** Factor analysis of items measuring self-realization

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Factor loading
1.I am able to understand myself better	3.693	1.088	.734
2.It gave me enough time to figure out clearly 'who am I'	3.564	1.105	.797
3.It helped me to see my dreams clearly	3.538	1.079	.806
4.It helped me to find out what I really want from my life	3.221	1.069	.796
5.It helped me to become a person I would ideally like to be	3.452	1.082	.836
6.It helped me to bring out the best in me	3.314	1.075	.824
7.It helped me to pursue the interests/hobbies, which I always wanted	3.525	1.121	.757
8.I realized that I became a more compassionate person	3.419	1.025	.721
Eigenvalue			4.924
% of Variance			61.594

$N = 1280$ . Since items are loaded on a single factor, rotation could not be performed

and minimum scores for this variable were 20 and 4, respectively. A high score on this scale meant that an individual had a good family relationship/bonding during the time of lockdown. For the four-item scale, the CVR came to 0.917, and Cronbach's alpha was found to be 0.834.

### Self-Image

Twelve bipolar adjectives assessed self-image where participants were asked to select one adjective from each pair based on how they felt about themselves during the lockdown period, e.g., complete or incomplete, worthy or worthless, etc. (the scale is provided in the Appendix). Positive adjectives were allotted a score of two and their bipolar negative adjectives were allotted a score of one. A participant can get a minimum of 12 and a maximum of 24 as a score for the self-image. A higher score meant that the participant had a positive self-image and a lower score meant that the participant held a negative self-image. The scale's average CVR came to 0.861 and Cronbach's alpha was found to be 0.865.

### Social Comparison

Three items were used to measure social comparison. The participants were asked how much they have compared themselves during the lockdown with other similar people, people belonging to the lower strata of the society, and the people from the higher strata of the society. The responses were taken on the five-point Likert scale with a maximum score of 15 and a minimum score of 3. The higher the score, the higher involvement in social comparison. The scale's average CVR came to 1.00 and Cronbach's alpha was found to be 0.736.

### Positive Life Orientation

For measuring positive life orientation, five items were taken from the Positive Life Orientation scale by Agarwal et al. (1995). The items were selected based on their usefulness in the COVID-19 context. The selected items were as follows: (1) Whatever happens, always has something good in it; (2) I am much better off than others; (3) Grief and hardships make a person strong; (4) My problems are less painful than that of others; (5) My troubles appear too small when I see others' suffering. The items were measured on a five-point scale and Cronbach's alpha was found to be 0.745.

### Adaptive Coping with Stress

To understand how individuals dealt with the stress caused by the lockdown, their involvement in adaptive coping with stress was assessed. For this purpose, thirteen items focusing on adaptive coping with stress were taken from Stress

Coping Techniques Scale developed by Lakshmi and Narain (2017). The scale was originally developed for young Indian adults and therefore, proved to be ideal for the present study. Participants were asked to rate the items for dealing with COVID/lockdown-related stress only. The items were measured on a five-point scale, where the maximum score could be 65 and the minimum could be 13. The Cronbach's alpha for the scale was found to be 0.832 and the complete list of items is given in the Appendix.

### Design and Procedure

Due to COVID-19 safety measures and the lockdown imposed in various parts of the country, the data were collected through an online survey. The survey was designed on Google Forms, and the link was circulated among the students of various higher academic institutions/universities/colleges across India via e-mail, WhatsApp, and other social media platforms. The survey was a part of a larger project on "the impact of lockdown on youth." It included an introduction to the study and an informed consent form along with the questions. Participants filled out the electronic-informed consent form before responding to the survey. Participation was voluntary, and there was no monetary or any other compensation given for the same. The data were collected in June 2020, immediately after the first phase of the lockdown.

### Data Analysis

A total of 1413 responses were received. However, 88 responses had a high number of missing values and therefore, they were removed. Hence, only 1325 responses were found to be valid, out of which 45 were below the age of 18 or above the age of 29. Therefore, the data of only 1280 emerging adults were considered for the analysis of the present study. The data were cleaned and missing values in each item were substituted. The missing value for each item was less than two percent on an average, therefore, they were replaced by the series mean. To analyze the relationship between various study variables, we calculated the Pearson correlation and to find out how various variables contribute to the self-realization process, we conducted hierarchical regression.

### Results

Table 2 shows the Pearson correlations between various study variables along with Cronbach's alphas and descriptive statistics. Results show that self-realization is positively correlated with family relationships. This illustrates that good family relationships facilitate the process of discovering their true selves in individuals. However, it is also possible

**Table 2** Descriptive and bivariate analysis

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Family relationship	15.784	3.429	.834	–					
2. Social comparison	8.169	3.024	.736	–.062*	–				
3. Positive life orientation	18.811	3.389	.745	.214***	.085**	–			
4. Self-image	18.915	3.702	.865	.328***	–.145***	.082**	–		
5. Adaptive stress coping	45.469	8.387	.832	.310***	.028	.306***	.240***	–	
6. Self-realization	27.729	6.777	.912	.343***	.104***	.273***	.415***	.348***	–

*N* = 1280. \**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01, \*\*\**p* < .001

that self-discovery helps individuals to develop better relationships with others. Apart from self-realization, the family relationship also shows strong and positive relationships with all other study variables except social comparison. These results highlight the importance of family relationships, especially during the lockdown when the majority of the participants were living with their family members. Social comparison shows a significant positive correlation with self-realization. Results show that social comparison is negatively related to a positive self-image. However, social comparison does not show a significant correlation with coping with stress, which reflects that comparing oneself to others may not help in coping at the time of a social crisis or coping does not facilitate social comparison. Positive life orientation, on the other hand, shows a positive relationship with self-realization, which implies that participants' general orientation toward life was directly related to their self-knowledge and growth. Interestingly, positive life orientation shows a weak relationship with self-image, signifying

that young adults can hold an optimistic view about the future without having a positive self-image and vice versa. Expectedly, self-image and self-realization were found to be positively related to each other. This means that participants who hold a positive view about themselves have higher self-realization and vice versa. Notably, Table 2 shows that self-realization positively correlates with adaptive coping with stress. The result reflects how people deal with problems or crises that are directly related to their knowledge about their potentials and shortcomings.

The results presented in Table 3 show the hierarchical regression analysis. Model 1 includes only demographic variables, while Model 2 and Model 3 include study variables along with the demographic variables. Results show that the impact of gender which is significant in Model 1 becomes nonsignificant when other study variables are included in the analysis. However, no significant effect of age or education is found on self-realization. The results further show that family relationship significantly predicts

**Table 3** Regression analysis predicting self-realization

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
Age	–.069	1.645	–.069	1.940	–.064	1.828
Gender <sup>a</sup>	–.070	2.209*	–.045	1.652	–.035	1.298
Education <sup>b</sup>	.069	1.737	.063	1.848	.055	1.652
Family relationship			.181	6.582***	.148	5.317***
Self-image			.360	13.305***	.336	12.431***
Positive life orientation			.194	7.443***	.156	5.887***
Social comparison			.163	6.352***	.155	6.123***
Adaptive stress coping					.157	5.669***
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.010		.290		.310	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> change	–		.280***		.020***	
<i>F</i>	3.780**		64.905***		62.401***	

Hierarchical regression was performed. Values reported in the table are standardized coefficients along with *t* values. Model 1 included demographic variables. Model 2 included demographic variables along with family relationship, social comparison, positive life orientation, and self-image. Model 3 included all the variables of model 2 plus adaptive stress coping.

<sup>a</sup>Female = 0, Male = 1

<sup>b</sup>Undergraduate = 0, postgraduate = 1

\**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01, \*\*\**p* < .001

self-realization, even when the demographic and other study variables are controlled. This implies that a harmonious and satisfying relationship with family members may help individuals to discover their real selves. The social comparison also predicts self-realization significantly, which suggests that participants compared themselves with others—especially considering where they stand in life as compared to others—to know themselves better. Moreover, results show that a positive life orientation predicts self-realization as well. That is, individuals who have an optimistic view of the future even in such a time of crisis demonstrate gaining knowledge about their real selves. The results further show that the strongest predictor of self-realization is the self-image of the individual. This implies that participants who were able to maintain or develop a positive image of themselves during the pandemic crisis showed higher self-realization than those who had a negative self-image. Model 3 shows the significant role of adaptive coping with stress on self-realization, which refers to the possibility that participants learn about themselves while dealing with their problems. The more they deal with their problems in adaptive ways, the better are the chances of developing a sense of self-realization. The overall results show that family relationships, social comparison, positive life orientation, self-image as well as adaptive coping with stress significantly predict self-realization.

## Discussion

The complete lockdown imposed in India and other parts of the world to prevent the rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has been a plight for many without a doubt. At the same time, it has also been a boon to take a break from hectic lifestyles and think about oneself and reflect on one's life, though forcibly. As Yang puts it, "the anxiety aroused by the pandemic can awaken us to an ontological mode of existence in which we are authentic, aware, responsible, and transcendent" (2020, p. 662). The opportunity for self-realization was one such mode of being. The primary goal of this study was to explore the role of lockdown in the realization of self among emerging adults in India.

The results of the present study show that family relationships significantly predict self-realization among participants. This reflects that a good relationship with family members mitigated the effects of the lockdown considerably and helped in the process of self-realization. Family members may have helped the person in question directly by reminding them of their strengths and weaknesses. Most likely, their indirect support may help these emerging adults to uncover their hidden and unexplored selves. Self in the Indian context is firm to family values (Roland, 1988) and exhibits an amalgamation of independence and interpersonal

connectedness (Kagitcibasi, 2002) that has been witnessed in the legacy of family embeddedness. Self-orientations and group relations have been described by relatedness and not disconnection (Seymour, 1999). Although recent research has highlighted perceived complications in the relationships within family members and changing family dynamics resulting in a lack of connectedness and significant change in the ways of socialization (Sondhi, 2017), subsequent research supports the attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988). The latter emphasizes the role of secure parental attachments and trust in positive self-perception and life satisfaction (Žukauskienė et al., 2020). Ryff's work (1989) on eudaimonia also shows that positive relationships with others along with other qualities such as environmental mastery, self-acceptance, etc., enhance psychological well-being. The findings of this study also illustrate that the lockdown has probably given young people the time to revisit and reestablish their relationships with family members who in turn might have helped them in self-realization.

Results further show a significant impact of adaptive coping with stress on self-realization. This supports Friedman's (1976) notion of self-realization that the spontaneous activities of people while interacting and dealing with the world help in gaining self-realization. Following the perspective of Hindu thought, Paranjpe (1996) emphasized that self-actualization from the viewpoint of Maslow is a procedure of "becoming" rather than "being." Though major systems of Hindu thought believe in this surge of "becoming," the Vedantists (another major school of Hindu philosophy) see self-realization as finding and experiencing the true self, their "being," instead of a never-ending pursuit of "becoming." From the Indian viewpoint, the aim of self-realization is living truthfully as one's being, which is beyond seeking and knowing the truth (Rao, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic has brought up a situation where self-realization became a spontaneous response that occurred freely and found its way into the "being." It may probably not be wrong to say that while dealing with the crisis of pandemic, many young people might have learned about themselves and gained knowledge about who they are, what they can do, what they want, and so on.

From the results of the regression analysis, we can see that both self-image as well as positive orientation toward life, significantly predict self-realization. Previous research has shown that people adept in the process of self-realization are less likely to self-blame, perceive themselves as confident, feel competent, and have a positive approach toward life and self, overall (Maksimenko & Serdiuk, 2016). This is also supported by the model of self-expansion which postulates that there is a motivation in people to augment the capabilities of their 'self' through the acquisition of new experiences, understanding, identities, and additional resources (Aron et al., 2013). McIntyre et al. (2017) showed

that enhanced resources, identities, viewpoints, and capacities are related to the cognitive reorganization of the concept of self as an indispensable part of self-expansion.

Another important result could be the role of social comparison in self-realization. The regression analysis shows that social comparison significantly predicts self-realization even when other study variables are controlled. The finding establishes the importance of social comparison in the process of gaining knowledge about oneself. Festinger (1954) in his original work stated that people engage in social comparison to gain knowledge about their abilities, beliefs, etc. Since Festinger, research on similar lines has shown that social comparison helps people to self-evaluate (Collins, 1996; Klein, 1997). This self-evaluation-led self-knowledge does not necessarily provide happiness and might even make them face the bitter truth about their potential and capabilities (Nielsen, 1973). Nevertheless, the significance of social comparison in the process of self-realization cannot be ignored, whether it helps to gain positive or negative knowledge about the self.

The results also reveal that besides self-realization, good family relationships show a strong positive relationship with positive life orientation, positive self-image, and adaptive coping with stress among participants. Researchers have suggested parental support to be a key factor that drives positive behavioral transition, i.e., turning away from participation in risky behaviors toward healthier and positive behaviors among the young people (Animosa et al., 2018). Studies have shown that parents who have a secure adult attachment with their children offer adaptive coping guidance, while those who have an insecure attachment, subvert their parental ability, thereby communicating maladaptive coping guidance to their children (Abaied & Rudolph, 2010). Positive self-perception is known to be a result of parental monitoring where parental warmth has not only facilitated the participants' confidence but has also safeguarded them against the vulnerability to depression and aggression (Han & Grogan-Kaylor, 2013). A positive relationship with parents plays a significant role in successful adjustment during emerging adulthood, and such a relationship helps in the management of identity as well (Kaniūšonytė & Žukauskienė, 2018).

Positive life orientation has been investigated in other studies for its impact on illnesses (e.g., Agarwal et al., 1995) in which the findings emphasized the positive role of variables such as optimistic orientation, active coping, and relationship with the family, among others, to meet the challenges. Studies conducted on happiness among millennials also show interpersonal relationships, positive self-evaluation, and prosocial behavior as the source of happiness among youth (Suar et al., 2020). The case may be the exact opposite where the family relations are strenuous or abusive. New ways of addressing a good family life and leisure might

provide better insights and deeper realizations about one's preferences and values, which may then help not only in coping with the adversities but ultimately growing through them and developing a purpose in life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

The abrupt announcement of the lockdown in India created a sense of confusion and disbelief as no one was sure about what to do. Every age group—especially students, the emerging adults—was initially inept in handling the unusual mandates. As Chaudhary and Shukla (2019) in their study on family, identity, and the individual in India asserted, like other cultures, the Indian concept of building a composite self is proficient at managing even conflicting positions owing to fluctuating demands. The Indian sense of self is more inclined to deal with intricacy and dissonance compared to other cultures that promote cohesiveness and consistency of the self. It is this quality of collective confusion and discrepancy of the self that might have been counter-productive and led those people who can understand and interpret it in a better way to come to terms with themselves. In India, it is especially true for emerging adults, who have been raised in such a way that they were forced to adapt to a multitude of different circumstances amidst the training comprising of constant uncertainty. This adaptability of Indian young adults may have led them toward deep self-realization against the uncertainties of the COVID-19 lockdown.

## Limitations

Despite the strengths of the present work, it has a few limitations. The first limitation is related to the self-constructed scales/measures. As mentioned already, due to the specific COVID-19 context and the uniqueness of the Indian population, many established scales were not found suitable and therefore, the authors had to construct a few scales, especially for the present study. Despite having high content validity and Cronbach's alpha, the scales were still far from being treated as standardized scales. The second limitation comes from the skewed gender sample where the majority of the participants were females. Another limitation of the study arises from the inclusion of limited variables. Although, the previous research and present context have guided the selection of the variables for the study, still, many variables could not be included in the study which might have played a significant role in the process of self-realization during the lockdown. Yet another limitation is the measurement of self-realization. Though the scale measures how much knowledge they have gained about themselves during the period of lockdown, no question was posed as to how much time they have spent on this process, which could also shed some light on the process of self-realization. The



final limitation is related to the college sample. The study, though aimed to understand self-realization among young adults, included only college/university students. The exclusion of young adults, who were not in college/university due to various reasons, has limited the generalization made by the study.

## Future Directions

The study gives insights into how young adults explored their selves during the lockdown. Future research may include a more diverse population, especially the young adults who experience marginalization and oppression to ascertain how they go through the self-realization process during a crisis like this one. Furthermore, the present work may also be expanded to include adolescents since they are in the age of identity formation, and such crises or incidents could influence their understanding of the self. In the future, it could be worth comparing the self-realization process in a collective crisis, like a pandemic, with a personal crisis to find out whether collective crises influence self-realization in different ways from a personal crisis.

## Conclusion

No matter how problematic the COVID-19 crisis has been, it has provided people with free time, which many people were unable to get as a result of our busy and over-sensational lives. Many unfinished tasks were reexplored including long-ignored passions. There was also the development of new hobbies/interests while spending every day in the same place with the same people. For many, this time was painful, boring, and unproductive. However, for many others, it was a time of self-discovery, bonding with family members, self-control, and so on. The present study which aimed to explore the role of the lockdown in self-realization among emerging adults shows that many of the participants believe that they have developed a better and deeper understanding of themselves during the lockdown period. Many factors such as good family relationships, social comparison, adaptive coping with stress, positive self-image as well as an optimistic view helped them in this process. The study supports the idea that self-realization or knowing oneself is a process and not a goal, where people learn about their strengths, weaknesses, likes, dislikes, etc., by actively interacting with others and solving the problems that they face. COVID-19 was an extraordinary crisis and therefore, dealing with this has helped many emerging adults to know who they are in a true sense.

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## Declarations

**Conflict of Interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest to disclose.

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