

Socioeconomic and Traumatic Stress During COVID-19

Predict PTSD Symptoms Among South Asians

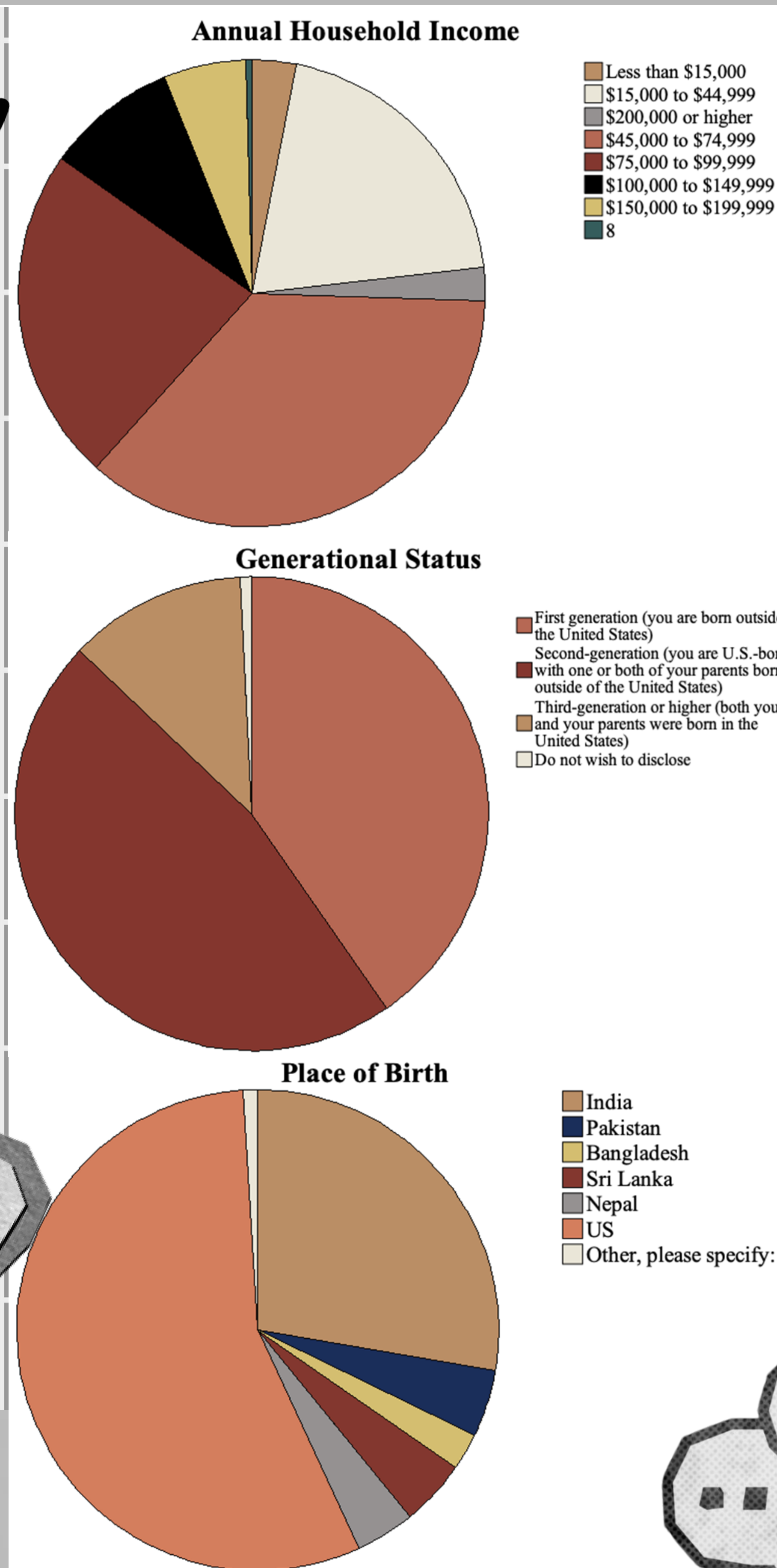
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Introduction

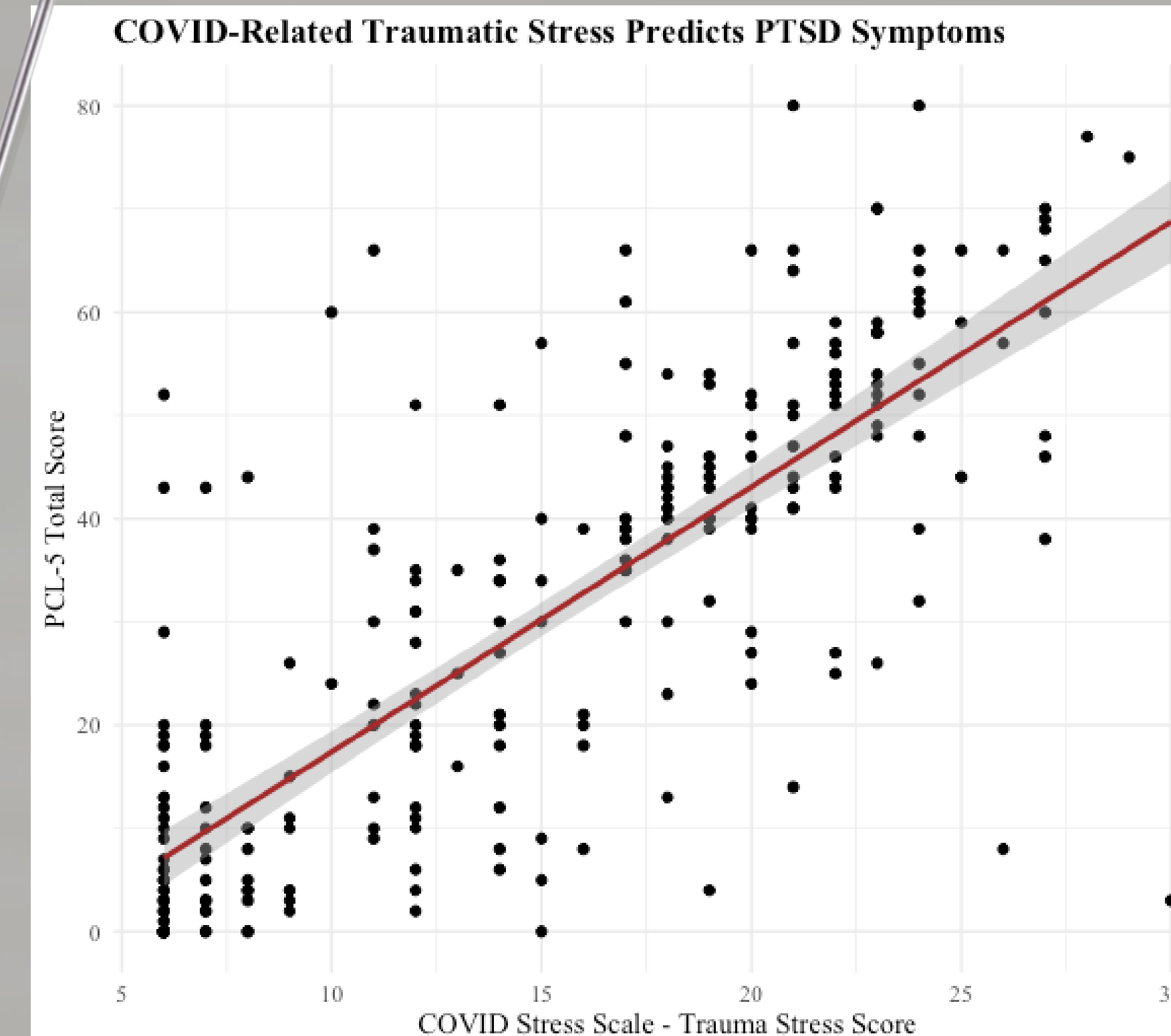
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals experienced an increased risk for mental health concerns (Tanha et al., 2024).
- Previous research found elevated levels of stress and anxiety related to pandemic-related stressors among South Asian populations (Tanha et al., 2024).
- Additionally, individuals experienced higher PTSD symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sarfraz et al., 2021).
- Socioeconomic disparities further increased the risk for PTSD symptoms among South Asians living in poverty (Khan et al., 2025).
- However, current literature has yet to directly examine the impact of COVID-19-related traumatic stress and fear of socioeconomic consequences on PTSD symptoms (Hossain, et al., 2021; Tanha et al., 2024; Medepalli, 2021).
- The purpose of the present study was to explore the impact of COVID-19-related stress on PTSD symptoms among South Asians.
- We hypothesized that fear of socioeconomic consequences related to COVID-19 is associated with higher PTSD symptoms in South Asians.**
- We also hypothesized that traumatic stress related to COVID-19 is associated with higher PTSD symptoms in South Asians.**

Methods

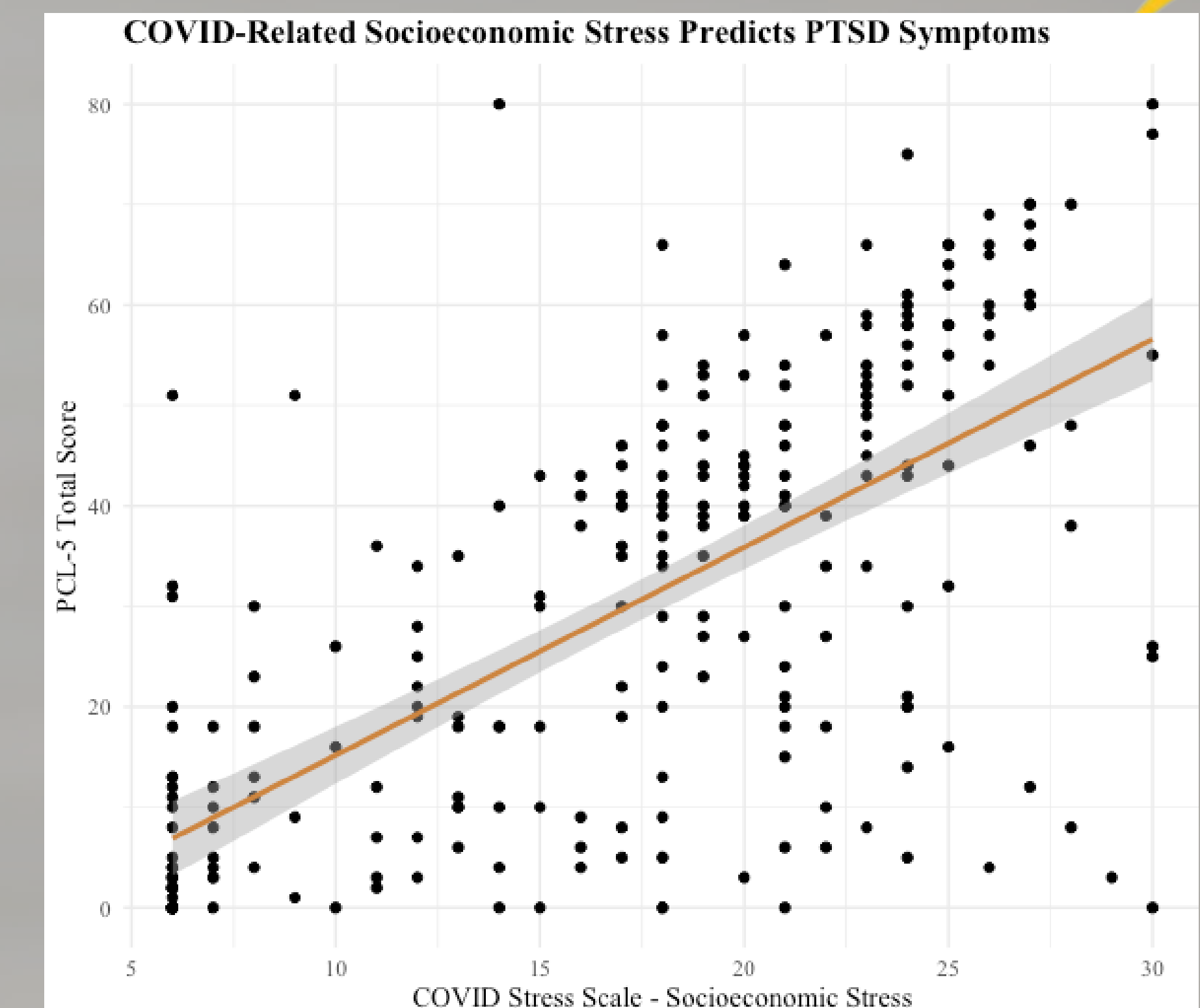
- Participants:** The sample included 263 South Asian individuals.
 - Age: 18–73 years old ($M = 34.15$, $SD = 8.45$)
 - Gender: Male ($N = 144$; 54.8%), Female ($N = 119$; 45.2%)
 - Household Income: Less than \$15,000 ($N = 8$; 3%), \$15,000–\$44,999 ($N = 53$; 20.2%), \$45,000 to \$74,999 ($N = 95$; 36.1 %), \$75,000 to \$99, 999 ($N = 61$; 23.2%), \$100,000 to \$150,000 ($N = 24$; 9.1%), \$150,000 to \$199,999 ($N = 15$; 5.7%), \$200,000 or higher ($N = 6$; 2.3%)
 - Place of Birth: United States ($N = 113$; 43%), India ($N = 56$; 21.3%), Pakistan ($N = 9$; 3.4%), Sri Lanka ($N = 9$; 3.4%), Nepal ($N = 8$; 3%), Bangladesh ($N = 5$; 1.9%), Other ($N = 2$; .8%)
 - Immigration/Citizenship status: US Citizen By Birth ($N = 166$; 63.1%), US Citizen By Naturalization ($N = 60$; 22.8%), Permanent Resident ($N = 27$; 10.3%), Immigrant Visa ($N = 9$; 3.4%), Prefer Not To Say ($N = 1$; 0.4%)
 - Generational Status: First generation: ($N = 106$; 40.3%), Second generation: ($N = 123$; 46.8 %), Third generation: ($N = 32$; 12.2%), Other: ($N = 2$; 0.8%)
- Measures:**
 - PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5):** 20-item self-report questionnaire that assesses the presence of PTSD symptoms as defined by the DSM-5 (Weathers et al., 2013). Participants responded to each item on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (“Not at all”) to 4 (“Extremely”). Following completion, a clinician scored the responses to evaluate the severity of the participant’s PTSD symptoms.
 - The Covid Stress Scales:** 36-item scale that assesses COVID-related anxiety and stress symptoms including the following fears of: danger and contamination, economic consequences, xenophobia, compulsive checking, and traumatic stress (Taylor et al., 2020). Items were rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (i.e., not at all) to 5 (i.e., extremely).



Results



- A linear regression in SPSS showed that COVID-related traumatic stress was a significant predictor of PTSD symptoms in South Asians, $F(1, 261) = 441.83$, $p < .001$, accounting for approximately 62.9% of the variance in PTSD symptoms ($R^2 = .629$). For every one-unit increase in traumatic stress, PTSD symptoms increased by approximately 2.57 points ($B = 2.57$, $SE = 0.12$, 95% CI [2.33, 2.81]).



- A linear regression in SPSS revealed that COVID-related fears about socioeconomic consequences significantly predicted PTSD symptoms in South Asians, $F(1, 261) = 209.28$, $p < .001$, accounting for approximately 44.5% of the variance in PTSD symptoms ($R^2 = .445$). For every one-unit increase in socioeconomic stress, PTSD symptoms increased by approximately 2.07 points ($B = 2.07$, $SE = 0.14$, 95% CI [1.79, 2.35]).

Discussion

- The purpose of this study was to analyze the effect of socioeconomic stressors and traumatic stress related to COVID-19 on PTSD symptoms in the South Asian population.
- Results revealed that socioeconomic stressors and traumatic stress related to COVID-19 are predictors of PTSD symptoms in South Asians.
- Limited access to mental health services poses a significant barrier for individuals experiencing PTSD symptoms following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Our findings highlight the critical need to improve mental health service accessibility for South Asian communities.

Limitations

- The present study did not analyze PTSD symptoms post-COVID-19 pandemic.
- Majority of the sample was second-generation and lacked third generation South Asians.
- Future studies should focus more on first-generation South Asians and measure post-pandemic PTSD symptoms. Additionally, pre-pandemic and post-pandemic PTSD symptoms should be compared to further analyze the rise of PTSD symptoms.

References



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