

My House and Coronavirus: Experiences of the Pandemic Full Lockdown

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Abstract

On March 2, 2020, Saudi Arabia announced the first coronavirus case. A complete lockdown started in Makkah on April 2, 2020. The holy capital of Islam has always been packed with pilgrims, but the situation was different with COVID-19. The full lockdown continued in Makkah even during the holy month of Ramadan. This study discusses the experience of full lockdown in the context of Makkah with its unique status as a holy city, with the longer period of its complete lockdown compared to other Saudi cities. The article presents a case study focusing on the interior design students at Umm al-Qura University in Makkah. The students' experiences of the pandemic and the full curfew are discussed using descriptive and analytical methods. This article highlights the students' challenges and difficulties regarding their emotions, specifically concerning the house and considers the functionality of its interior space. The study concludes with an evaluation of the inconveniences and discomforts of the domestic space. This article highlights some key observations, such as the lack of fresh air and natural light in some zones. Finally, the study notes several cultural issues that had a major impact and suggests some recommendations for future house planning.

Keywords: Makkah, pandemic, lockdown, curfew, COVID-19, experiences

Introduction

One cannot isolate the self with its feelings and reactions from the physical atmosphere of the house and its surroundings. Overstreet (2021) argues that a home is one of the most significant architectural typologies we experience throughout our lives. It serves as a significant private space; a home represents safety, ownership, and a sense of respite away from the rest of the world. She adds that a home has historically been a place of routine, where we both begin and end our day, following the same patterns through different home rooms we utilise (Overstreet, 2021). This approach broadens the definition of a home or a house, which the study will reflect upon by considering a specific period of the pandemic curfew. The human angle is also explored in an article on the physiology of taste, in which Caan (2011) claims that the interior space is "a second skin or an extension of human identity" (p. 83) and concludes that "designing interiors is always simultaneously an addition to, and an intervention in, the human experience" (p. 83). Therefore, in this context, a home or a house is a physical container for the self, and the human experience is considered as the key factor in this environment. This is why the house which is 'my house' in this study cannot be detached from Makkah as a whole, simply because it is within its larger urban skin. What happened during the pandemic in Makkah as a holy city, affects the inner soul of its inhabitants.

The significance of Makkah comes from its status and its location at the heart of the Islamic world. Makkah had a rich history and a profound religious identity even before Islam, as a crossroad of trade (Al-Murahhem, 2021). This study highlights the long-term experience of the full lockdown during the pandemic in Makkah. The holy capital of Islam has always been packed with pilgrims, but with COVID-19, it has gained another spiritual dimension. Saudi Arabia announced the first coronavirus case on March 2, 2020, and then the prayers in the two Holy Masjids in Makkah and Madinah were suspended on March 19, 2020 (Ministry of Finance, 2020). That is, two days after the ban of *Jum'a* (Friday prayer) and *jama'a* (congregation) to control the spread of the virus. Accordingly, no one could visit the Holy Masjid to pray, and the masjid of each district could call for prayer *azan* only. We were listening to the call for prayer with a phrase that was heard for the first time: "pray in your homes." The lockdown of the Holy Masjid was a worse scenario; the experience was far too difficult to express. It was an exceptional moment for the holy city; Muslims around the world were watching al-Masjid al-Haram, but prayers were banned for the first time. The suspension of the prayers of the *Jum'a* and *jama'a* was a precautionary measure in many countries.

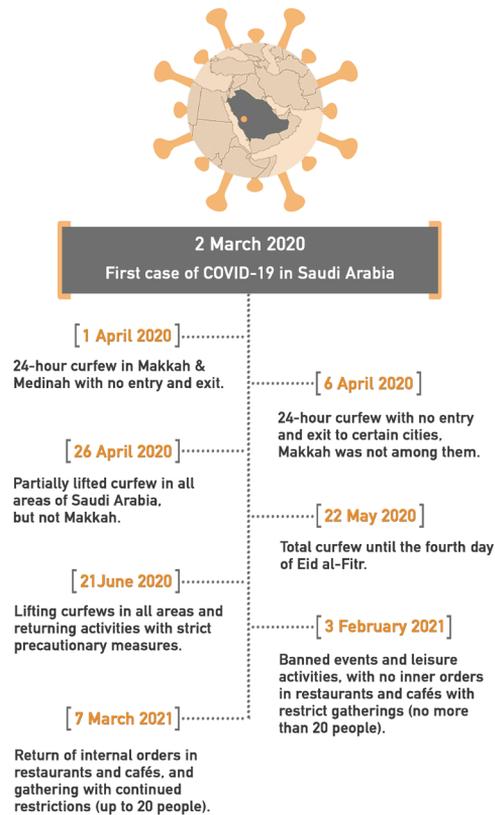


Figure 1
Timeline of coronavirus in Makkah (Image by author, based on government official data (Ministry of Finance, 2020; Saudi Press Agency, 2020))

When Makkah started lockdown, no one could enter or exit the city. By April 26, 2020, restrictions were partially lifted in all Saudi cities, except the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah. However, only Makkah continued with the full lockdown until May 26, 2020, including the last week of Ramadan and the four days of Eid. The *Jum'a* and prayers in Masjid were allowed on May 31, 2020, in all Saudi cities apart from Makkah, but people were allowed to go out from 6:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. The first restriction was lifted on June 21, 2020, with no gathering events and fines levied for breaching the rules. On February 3, 2021, the government limited any gathering or family event to twenty people (Ministry of Finance, 2020). Thankfully, on October 17, 2021, pilgrims at al-Masjid al-Haram were allowed to stand for prayer with no distance requirements for the first time (Figure 1). This experience taught us how to value the status of Makkah as being the neighbour of al-Masjid al-Haram, which all Muslims are passionate about. Paradoxically, the full lockdown in Makkah occurred during the holy month of Ramadan. Makkah usually celebrates this month of fasting with a unique routine, including prayers at night (*Tarawih*) and a special pilgrimage (*umrah*). This spiritual journey which could be

performed at any time of the year has a special significance during Ramadan. Accordingly, Makkah accommodates a massive number of pilgrims during Ramadan; they seek to benefit from such a reward (equal to performing *hajj*, the fifth pillar of Islam). It was heart-breaking for Makkans not to enjoy the spirituality of the *Tarawih* prayer in al-Masjid al-Haram, or to perform *umrah* in Ramadan. With the pandemic, Makkah has another dimension of spirituality. The macro condition of the city affected the micro aspects within the house, as will be shown in this study.

The Case Study: Experiences of Pandemic Lockdown in Makkah

The purpose of the study is to examine what the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed and how we experienced our built environments during curfew. First, the study documents the experience of the holy city of Makkah during the full lockdown, where the usual Muslim crowd gathering in holy places is suspended. The study focuses on the interior spaces' functionality in terms of layouts and specifications. It also explores the vital requirements in the house that may normally meet socio-cultural norms but not during the lockdown situation. The study also examines reflections on the academic strategy that may benefit the students. This article provides an analytical and descriptive study of some of the experiences of female university students of interior design at Umm Al-Qura University in Makkah. Their experiences demonstrate their routine daily difficulties, their reactions to the curfew, and the mental health impact. This study links with one of the second-year theory courses, *Planning and Designing Interior Spaces*, which lasts for one term (three months). The case study data were collected from a group project with three to four students. The project lasted for five weeks, consisting of two parts. The project's aim was to assess the course knowledge via the real firsthand experience of the houses' layouts and inhabitants. This was a significant opportunity for them to interact and communicate with each other, via any medium, away from the online classes. For some, it was a remedy for such a long period of lockdown without any socialising. For the others, it was a self-reflection or a therapeutic expression through writing or drawing.

In the first part of the study, students were required to read several articles on the impact of COVID-19 on our way of living and the house layout.¹ This part of the project aims to encourage students to express their reactions to the curfew from the perspective of interior designers—that is, to understand the course objectives of designing

¹ The students were assigned to read articles from several design magazines as references (Bahadursingh, n.d.a, n.d.b; Wigglesworth, 2020; Zilli, 2020).

and planning the interiors from experience and to compare with global case studies. Thus, they could read and analyse the interior layouts based on the given data alongside the articles they read. Sketches of some areas chosen within the house that they wanted or managed to change during the lockdown were also requested. The project also aims to encourage students' participation with their peers and the house inhabitants, and to practice from real learning experience. Therefore, reading articles from journal and online provides a further learning opportunity. Whereas the students' reflection is a process where students describe their learning, how it changed, and how it might relate to future learning experiences ("The purpose of reflection," n.d.). In this assignment students are setting aside time to think and learn about a particular situation or practice and then identifying and planning actions. This process may lead them to learn from colleagues, by observing and talking, or by asking for feedback.

The second part of the project was designed to study the inhabitants' requirements and to think visually and creatively as designers. More importantly, the objective was to illustrate the current situation and to imagine the post-pandemic scenario. Some articles were assigned to study and to reflect on, then the students depicted an imaginative scenario and used their ability to express the scenario visually. Two depictions were requested: the first refers to the format in one of the articles the students read (Ruth, 2020), where they ought to draw their own scenes and interpretations (as seen in Figure 2, 3, and 4), and the second was a free-image scene, such as a drawing, collage, print, or mixed media² (as seen in Figure 5, 6, 7, and 8). Overall, the aim of the whole project was to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the course. The project's outcome was represented verbally in a written form and visually to express their challenges or trauma. These experiences involved emotions, psychological reactions, and spatial reading of aspects of the houses design. The students' feedback may shape the idea of houses in the post-pandemic future. The outcomes indicate some similarities in the houses' layouts and the students' reactions, but some case studies articulated the impact of the crisis differently.

Findings from the Full Lockdown Experiences

The analysis of the students' responses illustrates what is available and what is needed in the house during the pandemic. It stresses how life was different and what we discovered in the house and

²The students refer to the image format in articles such as Overstreet (2021), Singh (n.d.), Myers (2020), and Stone (2020).

inside ourselves. It examines what we need more compared to the current situation, how society's culture drives us to design our homes accordingly, and how to survive during the pandemic curfew. It raises the importance of mental health during crises and how the house as an environment could promote feelings of well-being. The critical situation within the house was when one of the family members was infected with the virus. Being isolated as a victim of COVID-19 and being isolated as a city—in particular as a holy city—is another dimension to illustrate. Special occasions in the holy capital of Islam have another spiritual story. This discussion emphasises the students' experiences of the daily life routines and the special occasions of Ramadan, Eid, and *h*ajj.

The daily life routine was never the same during the pandemic, especially being stuck in one space. Yeung and Johnston (2022) claim that "our homes became our castles to defend against the pandemic, but they have also become our prisons, where we must remain with our families and roommates, or alone" (p. 4). The scene looks similar, even in Makkah, as the students stated:

The situation during pandemic has changed our perception. During the pandemic the home has become our world and our life begins from it, and we have realised the importance of the house and well-being. (Student 1)

It is difficult to be separated from your family members or some of them, simply, not to see your loved ones for a long time. I could not see my aunts from both parents' sides, but we remain in lockdown to safeguard my parent's health and the rest of the family. I learned to be content with everything that happened to me, without tiring or getting bored and to give up some of my desires, rather than expose others to danger. (Student 2)

This student illustrated her daily routine and her proud monthly achievements in a well-organised portrayal (Figure 2). When I asked her about her reflections on her achievements, she said she felt sad because she was planning to attend a competition of the Quran—recite by heart—when the full lockdown began. This observation explains her images of studying the Quran with a precise awareness of time; the images of her interiors reflect her personality and the self-success.



Figure 2
The daily routine
during the COVID-19
pandemic (Image by
Taghreed Bajaber)

The others visualised the interiors differently; for instance, a student used pastel colours and different types of windows to reflect a dreamy atmosphere (Figure 3). The use of the stairs within the interior was evident, which may indicate a tendency to escape. Interestingly, in her free image, she drew an imaginative depiction of a house tree with stairs going up and down, which may support the idea of the desire to flee (Figure 7). Another student drew her own setting to demonstrate the interiors; remarkably, she used black and white colours, which may define the time or the mood during the day of the chosen scene (Figure 4). In part one of the project, she expressed her sense of struggle and stated that there was no place to study apart from the bedroom, where she stayed most of the day. This may justify her black and white representation of spaces, especially the black interior of the study area and the sadness of being locked indoors in the one at the bottom.

For some, their home became a prison, which affected their mental health. Some students described the curfew as a new experience, and it may be unique, despite being annoyed about breaking their daily routine of going to university. In simple terms, they value what they had before, especially observing urban sceneries around them. For others, it felt like being locked in a circle. However, children suffered most during the extended lockdown, so parents had to find

creative solutions. Such experience was commonly expressed by a student who is the eldest sister in the family. Most of the problems were felt worldwide: The breaking of the daily routine and the use of the house, partly or fully. The home became the self and the whole world. Personally, as a teacher, I lived in a big family house while teaching online—I missed my privacy due to different times of online sessions for different education levels. At our college, the university lectures run from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., whereas elementary school online sessions run from 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Managing different time for online learning sessions during Ramadan was another story.



Figure 3
The imaginative
interiors (Image
by Alhanouf Atiwi
Ala'dali)

The Ramadan of 2020 (April 24 to May 23) was incredibly silent and exceptional, with no *umrah* pilgrims' crowd with their white costumes circulating the Ka'ba. The Makkans experienced seeing the Holy Masjid and the surrounding streets empty for the first time in their lives. One student said,

to our hearts, we used to pray *Tarawih* and the rest of the daily prayers in group (*jama'a*), recite the Quran and do *zikr* circles to fulfil the family atmosphere with tranquility. (Student 3)

They were performing some outdoor activities indoors, especially prayers after fasting. The story of education continued when teaching hours changed accordingly, and some students asked for tutorial sessions after breaking their fast (after the *Isha* and *Tarawih* prayers, which sometimes run from 9:00 p.m. to 10:30 p.m.). Teaching studio courses for 3–4 hours twice a week was a challenge for the teacher and the students. The students struggled to accommodate a proper study area in the house—to concentrate, they had to set up their own corner or workstation away from the noise. This problem was shown by the student who depicted the scene with a black interior to illustrate noise sources while studying (Figure 4).



Figure 4
The imaginative interiors and the experience from within (Image by Samaa Alhiydari)

Those who lived out of big family houses struggled a lot with observance of religious traditions. Also, they took the one-hour permission to shop for amenities and exchange it for visiting parents or very close relatives in a small group. Not gathering was an advantage for some but heart-breaking for others. The Eid celebration was exceptional, starting from shopping online for clothes and goods, to the disappointment and struggle to get them to Makkah during the full lockdown. Despite that, the celebration was a beautiful opportunity to counter the gloomy atmosphere of not meeting relatives. Paradoxically, performing the *hajj* was a privilege for a small number of pilgrims, under the condition of being victims of the virus or workers from the front lines. Makkans grieved at seeing streets empty during the *hajj* period. Then another Eid came to celebrate with a partial curfew, where we managed to go out and visit family and relatives in small groups of less than twenty people.

On all occasions, our homes accommodate our lives and our soul's needs, as some families experienced their loss badly during the full lockdown. Another scene was when the family could not grieve and attend a funeral to support relatives as usual, apart from one hour, via application; the house became like a prison. Culturally, the funeral grief takes three days in the house, where relatives and friends come to support the family. The scene now is different because of the full lockdown and the social distancing. This pattern of funeral norms has taught us a lesson. I wonder if this means different traditions for the current generation. On the other hand, being infected with the virus is another scary and sad scenario, as demonstrated by one of the students who tried to express her emotions (Figure 6)—the mental health of being isolated needs more than a perfect house during the pandemic. Generally, it appears that this crisis has indirectly affected our mental health and influenced our behaviours and lifestyles alike.

Lessons Learned from Interior Experiences During the Pandemic

The lessons learned from the pandemic underscore what should be improved in the design of our houses in relation to our health and well-being as users. Yeung and Johnston (2020) claim in their study that indoor and outdoor environments may threaten health, and buildings can spread disease. This analysis focuses on common spatial mistakes or problems with the houses' layout from students' perspectives. It discusses their essential needs as interior design students. It stresses their efforts to improve their environments, including their own rooms or the house as a whole. It also touches on some of the students' psychological impacts arising from the pandemic curfew. Some written comments and pictorial depictions were chosen from some students' cases to demonstrate the common issues concerning the domestic interior raised by the students as discussed in the following sections.

Common spatial inconveniences and spatial requirements

The findings reflect the actual requirements, based on an understanding of each house's layout, its zones, and spatial arrangement. It explains the satisfaction (as well as lack of satisfaction) of the inhabitants on a day-to-day basis. For instance, one of the students stated:

The house could not fulfil our needs. ... You do not see or feel the outside world; there are no balconies or open areas to spend time in. I wanted to feel the sun, the air, and nature around me, so badly. (Student 4)

This quotation explains the consequences of the long curfew in a small flat, which may represent the economical state of a family. The student described the house's layout and the suffering as one of the inhabitants, and such inconveniences were the common experiences of most students during the curfew.

First is the lack of fresh air and natural light, especially in the living rooms as some have small windows or none at all. The curfew raises many health issues based on this absence within the interiors. One study argues that spaces with well-positioned windows guarantee the recycling of air and soften the separations between interior and exterior, which improve the environment significantly. Indoor air pollution is the central contribution of what is called 'sick building syndrome,' as it is sometimes worse than outdoor air (Estudio Guto Requena, 2021). Whereas, Yeung & Johnston (2020) cited that the World Health Organization identified indoor air quality and unhealthy buildings (which can be 2–5 times worse than outdoors) as a health major concern over 30 years ago. This could be deadly or cause serious health problems during extended lockdowns. They also cited that a recent Harvard University study found that higher air pollution rates are correlated with higher COVID-19 deaths in the United States. This might justify why the students raised this issue, which reflects their mental state unless they became so fragile and intolerant due to the pandemic curfew.

Natural light was one of the main factors the students were complaining about. Bhattacharjee (2020) cited that a report in the *Journal of Architectural Engineering* found that inappropriate lighting systems can affect occupants' natural circadian rhythms and hormonal patterns, thus having an impact on their comfort level. Light with high luminous intensity helps people perform very complex and intricate visual tasks accurately and without much fatigue (Bhattacharjee, 2020). As interior design students, they learned the importance of the house's layout in relation to windows and views (Figure 3). One student said,

With the absence of a courtyard within the house, I discovered that the windows' location could be better, so the sun's rays enter more into the interior, to help family members to feel active and rejuvenate. (Student 5)

It was a lesson in how interior designers play a prominent role in improving air quality through efficient design. They all admitted the necessity for open spaces, such as balconies, inner courtyards, upper decks, or even indoor green areas.

Second, a lack of some special amenities such as a study area and storage was noted. As stated by the students,

One of the problems was the lack of a good study place, especially since my subject requires me to continue working for long periods, so I started thinking about what the most appropriate place is for study. (Student 6)

The fact that the room is shared would have made it difficult to work at any time and become associated with those with you. Perhaps if the work area were separate and overlooked an outside garden or an open place, it would give it a sense of focus. (Student 7)

The absence of a workstation affected the student's productivity; however, sharing the place may cause stress. It is proven that noise is a leading cause of stress. Humans also have a natural affinity for daylight. Air quality can impact cognitive performance. Having ample personal space makes us feel good. Yet, our needs and physiology are different; therefore, facilitating a sense of personal space for the users is an essential aspect of design for well-being (Gillis, 2020; Paine & Baltimore 2020).

The curfew revealed the lack of some areas which are now required, such as spaces for prayer. A favourable arrangement substitutes the need to go to the masjid for prayers, as spirituality could be the remedy for all this insecurity and instability. The need for sports or a gym corner was also raised (Figure 3 and Figure 4). More importantly, the need for a new hygiene zone was noted. This was the aspect that most of the families struggled with during the lockdown and the pandemic period. The situation was crucial and may cause psychological pressure for families who have elderly or someone with less immunity. Most of the students illustrated this issue visually, reflecting their fear and trauma (Figure 5, 6, 7, and 8), as they illustrated later in the course via imaginative drawings to express themselves and imagine the situation creatively. A student depicts the trauma of a hygienic atmosphere and the virus transmission as pollution (Figure 5). She illustrates a green and non-polluted open area in the middle of the scene as a dreamy hope. Meanwhile another student reflects on the hygiene aspect differently through the images that depict the suffering of isolation (Figure 6).



Figure 5
Hygiene and
coronavirus (Image by
Mzoon Mohammed
AlSaleh)

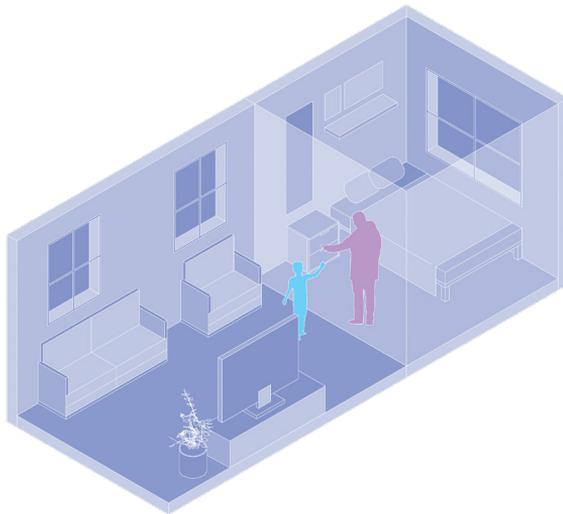


Figure 6
Suffer during the
COVID-19 pandemic
(Image by Farida
Miyajan)

The dreamy situation is also depicted by other students in Figure 7 and 8; in the latter, the student isolated the scenes in different closed areas. The clock on the wall in the two depictions may tell the difference between the original one and the one melted on the wall with a sleeping person. In contrast, the other two rooms on top

of each other tell another story. The one at the bottom illustrates an open space with a green floor and a cloudy sky on the wall to represent freedom and hope. However, the upper room with a brown wall and a desk with a person wearing a hospital costume is a reminder of the current situation of the pandemic crisis. Interestingly, the room where the family socialises in the upper zone of the whole depiction indicates the value of the scene. The strong colours and the complete enclosure may also reveal the strong impact of the pandemic as a whole.

Figure 7 (left)
The imaginative
interiors depiction
(Image by Alhanouf
Atiwi Ala'dali)

Figure 8 (right)
The depiction of the
imaginative and the
lockdown situation
(Image by Ghala Sau'd)



Third, some students emphasised the conflict between luxury and basic needs: wasted or underutilised areas within the house were discovered where clutter and unnecessary furniture overwhelm actual requirements. One student claimed that the house's entrance was full of furniture, which made it more vulnerable to dust. Studies have shown that residents who perceive their homes to be overloaded with material possessions can experience related stress reactions and low mood, sometimes leading to insomnia (Marco et al., 2020). If, in a normal situation, the material possessions that overwhelm the space could affect the household's quality of life, health, and happiness; the current situation with coronavirus may affect them desperately further. Such a situation led to another complaint about large guest areas versus small living rooms. This is also a cultural debate, as hospitality is important to the Arabs. As Muslims, we value this aspect dearly and believe that the blessing of

the house is based on it. It is stressed in the Prophet's saying in the hadith of Abu Hurairah (May Allah be pleased with him):

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, 'He who believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him show hospitality to his guest; and he who believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him maintain good relation with kins; and he who believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him speak good or remain silent.' (Riyad as-Salihin 705, 1, Hadith 26, Chapter 94)

The pandemic situation raised a question: Are we on the way to changing social cultures?

Overall, the common requirements for the students were study areas. Storage spaces were also needed to accommodate furniture and to adapt to the current situation. Other spaces were required to substitute outdoor activities, such as a prayer area or sports and entertainment corners, which were essential to balance life within the house. Other requirements relate to the main aspects of the virus' transmission—fresh air and interior airflow. Exposure to the sun was another facet of the open spaces. Open areas mean natural elements and green spaces that are important in supporting human wellness. The sterilisation area was a crucial zone as part of healthcare within the house. Therefore, homes represent the most important investment in our health. The built environment can play an important role in mitigating health and well-being, but it is not a solution in and of itself (Paine & Baltimore, 2020; Yeung & Johnston, 2020).

Required changes that took place during the pandemic

Based on the need for some functions, families managed to alter their houses accordingly. Some tried their best through colour paints and furniture arrangement, as any change can help. Studies have investigated the aesthetic and experience-based impacts of spatial organisation, form, colour, pattern, and texture on our physical, emotional, and mental health; these studies found that certain visual patterns affect one's mood, stress level, and heart rate, while the exposure to particular colours can affect performance (Ruth, 2020). Considerable evidence on paint colour shows how it affects mental health, changing the paint is a low-effort strategy with high potential impact (Gillis, 2020). One student stated,

I felt sad and depressed, as the interiors of the house have dark colours which irritate nerves, especially if the space is narrow. (Student 8)

She admitted that staying in such a place—she lives in a flat with no open spaces—for a long time affects our mental health. This student illustrated the image of the secluded room with a coronavirus-infected person (Figure 6), where she enveloped the scene with dull purple colour.

Other families managed to alter the house perfectly and swiftly, based on the house's size and economic status. They changed the decor of the house or redesigned the house's layout. This could be done by redistributing activities and spatial zones within the house or creating some activities and functions within certain spaces, such as a study area in a bedroom, a gym corner in a living room, or a cinema in a guest room. Adding spaces for entertainment was noticeable, as stated by a student,

It is undeniable that there were fun moments, new games appeared, and even old ones. Boredom made us look for any fun, even cooking has become a hobby. (Student 9)

One student described the changes as follows:

The living room was the most important part of the house, where the family gathers. The house looked narrow; it was not taking advantage of the space. The two largest rooms in the house were designated for the guests (a majlis and a dining area). I have suggested using these rooms for the family, to take advantage of the large area and the wide window overlooking the main street. We felt the grace of the natural light and the effect of the sun. We renovated the place and added a coffee corner and an entertainment area. The change made the house look bigger and functional. (Student 10)

Some students who managed to alter the house and helped in the new design stated proudly that "the profession of the interior designer has started." Families took advantage of the yards or open spaces in large houses by providing some flowers, herbs, or plantings. Gardening became the new family hobby during the pandemic. It was necessary to find useful activities to do from home to pass the time effectively, especially the neglected ones. Simply put, they went back to nature and the natural elements; this was the key to adopting the interior functionality. These aspects allow individuals to feel more personally tied to the spaces they occupy (Paine & Baltimore, 2020) Access to quality public green spaces has become critical to mental health management (Ruth, 2020). Overall, one may adopt the claim of *The Home Alive* in saying that:

(t)he fundamental programmatic elements of homes today don't reflect the way that we live and that the standard spaces don't match the activities we perform. Proposing giving residents just a structural framework where panels and boards are interchangeable, rooms are able to be redefined into unique spatial qualities, ever adapting and ever-changing based on the needs of individual residents. (Overstreet, 2021, para. 5)

Curfew reactions or advantages

The images by the students indicate how they react to the curfew during the pandemic, as well as the underlying advantages. First, the curfew gave opportunities for getting close to the family and understanding their actual needs. A student commented on the experience of curfew experienced:

Perhaps the individual's feeling of being isolated against his will exacerbates the matter. The curfew was like a closed circle; because it was long, it was as if I were spinning in a locked loop with no exit from it and returning to the same point. Perhaps the most frustrating thing was that there was no solution, we were waiting for a vaccine or a miracle to appear. (Student 11)

Second, the students identify the opportunities to know themselves better. This includes discovering abilities, talents, and other behaviours. Most students admitted that they discovered themselves and joined online courses that were not available before the pandemic:

During the curfew, I learned new skills, such as Arabic calligraphy; I even designed my own logo and photographed a lot of pictures. I wrote poems, read books, and recorded audio clips. It was a lesson for me that happiness stems from our hearts and what it means for a person to live a wonderful life by focusing on small details that add life to our lives. Above all, satisfaction and praise be to Allah for everything. (Student 12)

On the other hand, the curfew may suit introverts as teaching went online. Some students started using the blackboard system chat area to express themselves more freely. However, others kept complaining about being away from university and not being surrounded by friends.

The third advantage was learning how to experience, to express, and to value. They learned to accept the value of what they had and be grateful for what they own and their current being. I experienced the deep sadness of some people aged sixty and over when they were banned from performing *umrah* in Ramadan for the sake of their health. The feeling of spirituality and the everyday habitual with the masjid in each district calling azan five times a day was enormous grief. More importantly, due to cultural aspects, I thought that most students tend not to reveal their reactions and family status publicly. However, I have noticed the students' ability to express themselves has improved orally and visually:

In the end, I felt as if this epidemic was a warning to humanity to take a break and return to the life we have lost. We were warned to go back to the family and spend time together, to take more care of our parents and family members. This epidemic has had a positive side despite its many drawbacks. This is the philosophy and law of life, nothing without positivity no matter how bad it may seem. (Student 13)

Conclusion

The study highlights some of the houses' layouts, spatial issues, and inconveniences identified and experienced by the interior design students during the pandemic. The students identified many issues in their domestic interior, such as: how clutter and redundant furniture overwhelm actual space requirements; the lack of fresh air and natural light in the living rooms as a crucial wellbeing aspect; outdoor spaces are no less important than indoor spaces; and the requirements of green spaces in the form of a garden, a backyard, or a small balcony to breathe and be exposed to the sun or to spent time away from the indoors. Some families struggled to accommodate basic requirements, such as study area, prayer area, sports, or gym corner. In fact, the curfew demonstrated the need to separate working areas or corners from sleeping areas and bedrooms. However, some complained about the size of the living room compared to the guest rooms or area, whereas the latter tends to have the best position based on inherited cultural norms. This issue brings a lesson to learn in reconsidering what rooms we currently are accustomed to that we can live without. The findings of this study parallel Overstreet's (2021) claim that the way we live and the spaces we need have changed, and it is time to ask ourselves what a home truly is. More importantly, we—as Makkans—learned how to value our holy city and not to take it for granted, as now one needs to book via an application for prayer or *umrah*.

The decision to social distance led to innovative ways of thinking in providing a domestic interior without transmission of the virus. The ideas presented by the students range from minor modifications such as moving furniture to more rigorous measures such as demolishing walls to expand space, introducing artificial intelligence technology and reducing the human presence to reduce the risk of infection. Shopping for furniture online was a common and flourished trend. The experience of staying at home during the pandemic was an invitation to discover ourselves and our environment and primarily to establish healthy interiors. Students agreed that simple changes at home would not cost much but could reap impressive results. As designers, they noted the need for flexible space and adaptation to the existing home interiors. They conveyed the message to be the designer of your surroundings: think, alter, add, search, experiment, and share. This study suggests that the future perspectives on post-pandemic house design might adopt a new vision based on the recent experiences during the curfew. Truly, new needs and significant changes in our lives have happened due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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