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## PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is an extremely communicable disease which is caused by coronaviruses. Coronaviruses were identified in 1930's but they caused disease only in animals specifically chickens. The first coronavirus which effected humans was recognized in the year 1960. This virus caused common cold in humans. **Error! Reference source not found.** Later, researchers and scientists found a group of coronaviruses that can cause disease in humans as well as animals. These viruses had crown like projections on their outer surface so they were named as coronaviruses.

In December 2019, Wuhan a city in China experienced an outburst of a novel coronavirus. In the beginning the WHO China Country Office was informed of cases of pneumonia unknown etiology (unknown cause) detected in Wuhan City. World Health Organization (WHO) was informed about the 44 cases of patients with pneumonia of unknown etiology by China on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2020. The agent of this pneumonia was not known. A week later National Health Commission China found that the outburst of this disease is linked with seafood market in Wuhan City. After some research the cause of the disease was identified as a virus of coronavirus family. Later it was discovered that this virus belonged to the  $\beta$  group of coronaviruses. Some researchers called this novel virus as Wuhan coronavirus, or 2019-nCov). The International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV) named the virus as SARS-CoV-2 and the disease as COVID-19. In no time this epidemic spread to all over the world and became a pandemic. At present around 213 countries in the world are effected by Covid-19. As per the daily report of WHO, On 9<sup>th</sup> June 2020, there are more than 7 million cases and the total number of deaths are 4, 00,000. Countries like USA, European countries, Brazil are severely affected. The number of cases in India is rising exponentially. The major concern about this disease is the higher rate at which it spreads. Many countries in the world have imposed nationwide lockdown in order to contain the virus. By imposing a strict lockdown countries like New Zealand succeeded in eradicating Covid-19.

WHO has issued guidelines and steps to stop the spread of Covid-19. The various precautions suggested by WHO include- washing hands regularly to rinse of the virus if it is at your hands, if hand wash or soap is not available one can use sanitizer, use of mask, maintaining at least 1 meter distance with everyone, avoid social gatherings, avoid touching your face, eyes, nose and many more. Amid this situation of pandemic a thing which is very bothersome is the psychology and mental health of people. People have become infodemic, social media is flooded with messages about corona virus, various myths about corona, wrong and

misinterpreted information, misleading and misguiding information. This infodemic is creating panic among masses and affecting the psychological and mental health of people. In this paper the major psychological effects of Covid-19 is discussed along with the possible solution.

## 2. HISTORY

Coronavirus was first discovered in 1930 and later it was found that there are seven types of human coronaviruses that can transmit and infect humans.

Human Coronavirus	Diseases and Symptoms
1. 229E 2. NL63 3. OC43 4. HKU1	These four viruses are very common and they may result in common cold or lower respiratory tract problem.  Symptoms- headache, cough, fever, sneezing, runny nose.
5. SARS-Cov	Disease-Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome(SARS), Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS)  Symptoms- fever, lower respiratory tract illness, pneumonia
6. MERS-Cov	Disease- Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS)  Symptoms- mild to severe upper respiratory injury, pneumonia, renal failure
7. SARS-Cov-2	Disease- COVID-19  Symptoms- fever, dry cough, tiredness, aches, pain, headache, sore throat.

Table 1: Types of human coronaviruses and the diseases caused by them

Coronavirus can affect both humans and animals. There are certain types of coronaviruses which have affected almost every human at one or another point of time in their lifetimes. They basically caused common colds which are easily curable. But on the other hand there are certain human coronavirus that results in even death. First of this kind of human Coronavirus diseases came in light in year 2002. The disease was a Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). It emerged in southern China in 2002 and quickly spread to 28 other countries. Within 6 months of the outbreak n more than 8,000 people were infected SARS and 774 died.

In 2012 another coronavirus disease was reported. All the cases reported had a travel history related to Middle East and the disease was called Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). It was contagious and affected 2500 people and 858 people lost their lives. It was respiratory syndrome but it resulted in renal failure too.

In December 2019, outbreak of Covid-19 was reported at China. From china it spread throughout the world across 213 and So far more than 7 million people are infected by it and almost 4 lakh people lost their lives. World is still going through it and there is no medicine for it.

Year	Virus	Disease	Origin	Infected patients	Recovered	Death
Nov 2002	SARS-CoV	SARS(Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), ARDS(Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome)	Guangdong, China	8098	7322	776 (9.6% mortality rate)
Sept 2012	MERS-CoV	MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome)	Saudi Arabia	2494		87
Dec 2019	SARS-CoV-2	Covid-19	Wuhan, China	123882	67051	4473 (3.61% mortality rate)

Table 2: Summary of coronavirus diseases

### 3. IMPACTS OF COVID-19

There are a number of ways in which Covid-19 is making an impact on the society.

#### 3.1. PHYSICAL HEALTH

Many countries of the world adopted a lockdown to deal with the pandemic. The main objective of the lockdown was that people should stay at home and this epidemic should not spread. The slogan of stay home stay safe was given during lock down. It was also beneficial for everyone. The movement of people was restricted, all the places with public gathering were closed and only essential commodities and essential needs, facilities were provided.

Running, jogging, cycling, swimming and other physical activities were restricted; many big sports events like summer Olympics had to be postponed. In this period of pandemic, care of health was the most important thing. But there are people who are aware of this fact are resorted to healthy lifestyle and ways to boost their immunity. Being physically active helps one to manage weight, reducing the risk of many health problems like- heart disease, blood pressure, diabetes etc. Physical activities help to improve the mental health also.

### **3.2. IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH**

This pandemic has a major impact on the mental health of the people, quarantine, social distancing, being stuck at home, refrained from going outside, socializing with people, closure of malls, picnic sports, no travelling has made a major impact on the mental health of people. There is an uncertainty about future nobody knows when the situation will become normal, when offices and schools will open. Students are worried about their future, Medicare professions who are working day and night are going through stress. The Personal Protection Equipment that they have to wear is quite tedious task, in one way or other everyone is going through stress. Everyone needs to take care of their mental health too.

### **3.3. IMPACT ON SOCIAL BEHAVIOR AND LIFESTYLE**

A new way of living has emerged due to lockdown and pandemic. Social distancing has become an indispensable part of lives. All the public gathering places like malls, restaurants, places of worship (temples, churches etc) were closed to stop the spread of the virus. There were restrictions on the gathering of people, one have to take permission from higher authorities before organizing a gathering. There were restrictions, even on the number of people that can attend a funeral.

There is a change in travelling pattern. One cannot travel from one place to another. Permission from the authority in the form of a pass is required. Public transports were at halt.

Work from home culture has been adopted. According to a number of surveys and reports work from home style of working has increased the productivity of the employees. There is more satisfaction among people working from home.

### **3.4. ECONOMIC IMPACTS**

The Indian economy is affected by the lockdown. The international oil price fell drastically; the stock market and interest rates also came down. Demand in automobile sectors has come down, and the economist says that a similar situation may persist by the end of the year. Due to the ban on export and import, people bought only the essential commodities; all the industries which were related to export imports had a great impact. Construction and real estate sector activities also stalled. Government projects were halted.

### **3.5. EDUCATION**

Schools, colleges, universities and other educational institutions were closed due to lockdown. The lockdown was imposed in India at the time when school board exams were to be held and semester ending exams in colleges. In such a situation, the exams became indefinitely postponed due to which the students became worried about their future. Conventional classroom teaching is replaced by online teaching. Various applications, platforms are used to teach the students from home. This online teaching method has made teaching more flexible. Students can learn anytime and anywhere. They can go through the same lecture again and again. Many final year students who got selected in many big companies could not join and had to lose their jobs.

### **3.6. ENVIRONMENT**

Our environment was heavily polluted. Due to the lockdown, all types of industries, means of transport, construction work were stopped, due to which all kinds of pollution such as air, water, land were greatly reduced. Air became very pure; it had a positive effect on not only the air but also the quality and wild life of water. Because the quality of water, air and soil was improved, it had an impact on plants and farming as well. Plants are growing better by getting pure air

### **4. PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS**

There are many psychological impacts of covid-19. There is anxiety among people, some are getting panic attacks or are even depressed. A number of cases of suicides were also reported.

Problems	• Reasons
Loneliness and Boredom	• Isolation, Quarantine and staying at home
Fear and anxiety	• Uncertainty, fear of getting effected, losing job
Insomnia	• Disturbed body clock
Depression	• Prolonged form of stress
Lack of Concentration	• No prioritization of tasks, decreased productivity
Technology Addiction	• Resorting to gadgets to overcome boredom

Figure 1 Common Psychological problems due to Covid-19

#### 4.1 LONELINESS AND BOREDOM

Due to lockdown many people feel lonely and often get bore. Loneliness is termed as a negative emotion or an unpleasant emotion. In this particular situation of “stay home, stay safe”, “social distancing” the extrovert people are likely to suffer from loneliness and boredom. Extroverts are specially habituated to be socially active and be surrounded by people always. It isn’t that only extroverts are vulnerable to loneliness; there are a number of categories of people who are prone to loneliness. According to a number of studies prolonged loneliness may lead to depression and it may affect the mental as well as the physical health.

People often complain that they are bored while living at home. Loneliness and boredom during this pandemic can be reduced by indulging in activities which gives one pleasure and mental peace. Some of the activities that can help to reduce boredom are – gardening, painting, and cooking. To get rid of the feeling of loneliness one can try to socialize – virtually not physically. Video calls, other apps and games which can create a feel as if you are playing with your families, game challenges etc.

#### 4.2 FEAR AND ANXIETY

Covid-19 has created a state of insecurity among people. This insecurity leads to anxiety and fear. There are a number of reasons for fear and anxiety – being so much infodemic, fear of job security, accumulation of necessities. Getting so much information, can sometimes leads to over thinking and anxiety. In this current situation, there is a shortage of jobs many companies are paying late salaries to their employees and even in some cases a part of salary is paid. These kinds of circumstances create a feeling of insecurity and fear of losing job. Another

reason which primarily contributes to uncertainty is the supply of essential goods. Once the lockdown was announced people started stocking up the essential goods and other items out of their fear. There were a number of cases where people faced the situation of essential items were out of stocks.

#### **4.3 INSOMNIA**

According to psychologists our body clock is controlled by sunlight. Our sleeping time, our waking time, all of this is controlled by our body clock. Due to the lockdown, we are all committed to stay at our house and if someone stays without sunlight for a long time then there is a lot of possibility that the person may become a victim of insomnia. Insomnia can take the form of depression in a worse situation.

#### **4.4. DEPRESSION**

Stress is an undeniable situation in this tough situation of pandemic but it is also equally true that stress after a certain extent becomes depression. Right from the outbreak of this pandemic and imposing lockdown emphasis is laid on improving physical health but the other aspect-our mental health is equally important. The front line workers, doctors, essential service providers, police and other medical professionals are working day and night and are isolated from their families they are likely to get stressed. The covid-19 patients and their families are stressed. So, different people are exposed to stress at different levels. If stress is ignored for a long period of time, it will become depression. A depressed person may even commit suicide. Government is well aware of the mental health of the people; they have launched certain help line numbers. These helpline numbers help to reduce the stress and anxiety of people.

#### **4.5 LACK OF CONCENTRATION**

Work from home is a blessing for some people on the other hand there are certain group of people who are not comfortable with this idea. People complain that they are not able to concentrate on their work or study from home as they were when they were doing from their designated workspace. The first reason behind it is lack of proper planning and prioritization of jobs and second reason is that one must create a workspace at their home for working or studying. In short one must mimic their normal workday routine to be more productive during this lockdown period.

#### **4.6 TECHNOLOGY ADDICTION**

Since schools, colleges and offices are closed in lockdown; all are working and learning from home. This “learn from home”, “teach from home”, “work from home” cultures has resulted in an increased the screen time of students and people who are working from home. Everyone is well aware of the fact that increased screen time affects our eyes and physical health but it also has adverse effects on our mental health also. According to psychologists increased use of gadgets and technology gave rise to isolation, disturbed sleep patterns, loss of concentration and in some severe cases depression too. We turn to the internet and other gadgets to remove our boredom. Actually it is a very wrong way to overcome boredom. We can resort to something else like a hobby, a little physical workout. , Talk to your friends or talk to family etc.



## 5. CONCLUSION

It is well known that this situation will prevail for long or till no vaccine for it has been designed. We have to live with this situation. The best way to live with this situation is not to panic but to be calm and try to maintain a balance between things. One should restore to yoga, meditation, or give time to their hobbies to maintain mental health as well as physical health. Feel the pain of others and help others, if this situation is refraining from physical meetings with closed ones, one should opt for virtual meetings, through video calls. The mantra for dealing with this crucial period of covid-19 is stays connected with loved ones and do things which give you mental peace.

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