

## Social and psychological implications of Covid-19 pandemic

Himanshi Upadhyaya<sup>1\*</sup>

### ABSTRACT

The global pandemic which has resulted due to the spread of covid-19 all over the world is prone to have various social and psychological implications on the general public. With more than 4,000,000 live cases presently and around 280000 direct deaths around the world, this situation has affected every class of the society. This report has been written to highlight the mental health impact that this pandemic may have on people due to the impending uncertainty about the future. Personal losses, domestic abuse, alcohol/drug abuse and other indirect casualties which may have resulted due to the pandemic have also been discussed and effort has been made to provide certain suggestions to tackle with the situation.

**Keywords:** Covid-19; mental health; crime and prevention; pandemic

The spread of Covid-19 has gained momentum since late 2019 and has had significant repercussions throughout the world. According to the worldmeter for corona virus which records the number of cases throughout the world, as of 25<sup>th</sup> May 2020, a total of 5,568,772 cases have come into the picture with 346,901 people dead as a result of this catastrophic infection. The transmission has been seen to be quick especially as a result of close contact with affected individuals (Li Q *et al* 2020). The common cold like symptoms of this fatal condition can lead to severe pneumonia, respiratory failure and death. The detection of SARS-CoV-2 by PCR testing of the nasopharyngeal swab confirms the diagnosis of the presence of COVID-19 (Lipsitch M *et al* 2020). Factors such as old age and prior health conditions have been seen to be hazardous and increases their vulnerability to the virus. Loss of loved ones, de-motivation to do regular chores, feeling of loneliness, immobility due to lockdown regulations and the uncertainty that looms over the world are adversely affecting the mindset of vulnerable people. These conditions have resulted in various psychological issues such as insomnia, anxiety, panic among the masses, need to resort to substance abuse and supposedly suicidal tendencies (Zhang C *et al* 2020). Other than the regular masses, health care professionals have also been drastically affected by the pandemic which has further resulted in social distress and ambiguity regarding the situation. Unavailability of sufficient personal protective equipment (PPE), shortage of staff in hospitals, extreme stress at work and inability to spend time with loved ones are some of the reasons that are likely to influence of health of health care workers (Williamson V *et al* 2018).

<sup>1</sup>MRes Forensic Science, Department of Forensic Science, University of Derby, Derby, UK, DE13PS

\*Responding Author

Received: May 11, 2020; Revision Received: June 10, 2020; Accepted: June 25, 2020

## Social and psychological implications of Covid-19 pandemic

Lately a new term, Coronaphobia, has been devised to define the irrational or rational fear of being affected by COVID-19 or an intense fear of a loved one being affected by the virus. This sentiment has been associated with post-traumatic stress disorder in regard to adverse health conditions (Sun L *et al* 2020). Apart from the uncertain circumstances, this sentiment is also seen to be propelled by the irresponsible media coverage which may disperse false information resulting in panic among the masses (Taylor S and Asmundson GJG 2004). The psychological well-being of an individual may range from shock and denial to acceptance passing through other stages such as anger, bargaining and depression as defined by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. The first phase is highly threatening because it may result in deliberate spread of the virus due to possible non-compliance towards the social guidelines that should have been followed diligently otherwise (Zarghami M 2020). This phase is applicable to both; general public and those in power which may thereby result in a tragic delay in not only following but also issuing effective control measures. These instances can result in aggression towards health care professionals that can pose as a serious threat towards effectively curbing the spread of the virus as it may hinder their work ethics negatively. Other social factors which have had an adverse effect on the psychological state of people include 1) Unusual cremation practices for close ones due to the unfortunate situation 2) Inability to meet family and friends which may result in psychological distress 3) Abnormal work settings which may result in reduced productivity 4) Loss of a source of income which may result in economic stress 5) Lower self-esteem possibly due to idleness and boastful social media updates by other people.

A few implications of this psychological distress such as domestic abuse; use of illicit drugs and alcohol; crime; suicidal tendencies and impact due to indirect casualty of a loved one have been identified.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Various platforms such as google scholar, med-line, science direct and research gate were utilized to review the studies that have shown impact of unusual circumstances such natural calamities or terrorist attacks on the social and psychological well-being of the society. Keywords such as “pandemic”, “COVID-19”, “mental health”, “crime rate” and “quarantine” were used to select articles of interest via the aforementioned websites. Media articles by BBC, Reuters, NY Times and Forbes were also selected for understanding the current impact of COVID-19 on different parts of the world. A brief report has been formulated to address the problem and suggest certain measures to deal with them.

### **DISCUSSION**

Previous addiction studies suggest that addiction increases under unusual circumstances which may bring about stress or shock (Patanavanich, R., and Glantz, S. 2020). This stands true for the current situation because a significant rise has been reported in liquor sales across the world due to stringent quarantine guidelines which have been imposed in most parts of the world. Republic National Distributing Company in USA has reported a 55% spike in the sale of alcohol since the pandemic hit the country (Micaleff JV 2020). While tequila sales saw the biggest rise (75%), wine sales increased by 66%, closely followed by beer sales which saw an increment of 42%. It is interesting to note that despite sharing a similar name with corona virus, the sale of corona beer has soared by 50% as reported by Constellation Brands which produces the said beer. Similar observations have also been made in other countries such as United Kingdom where liquor sales have topped £1.1bn solely in the month of March 2020 (Kantar 2020). People have resorted to illegal production of home-made liquor due to soaring prices of liquor in India amidst the lockdown resulting in a significant

## Social and psychological implications of Covid-19 pandemic

increase in the seizure of illegal alcohol by police officials (Jadhav R and Thomas C 2020). An alcohol ban has been imposed in South Africa which has resulted in curbing alcohol toxicity cases by 34.3% (Harding A 2020). A similar suggestion has also been made by WHO to restrict the sale of liquor during the pandemic in order to reduce the vulnerability of people to the virus because it has been proved previously that alcohol negatively impacts the immunity of an individual, thereby making them susceptible to the virus (Correa G 2020).

It has also been reported that smokers with COVID-19 infection are at a greater risk of developing respiratory complications (Patanavanich, R. and Glantz, S. A. 2020). With the closure of several e-cigarette outlets due to regulate social distancing measures, it is highly likely that the e-cigarette users may resort to tobacco use. Dependence on illicit drugs such as cocaine, heroin and unprescribed opioids is hampered since access to such drugs is difficult owing to strict quarantine regulations all around the world. This may result in overdose of similar substituents such as morphine-based pain killers, adderall, xanax and dextromethorphan thereby leading to lethal drug poisoning (Marsden J *et al* 2020). These drugs can also interfere with other regular medications which may result into serious health alteration or even death. Therefore, it is essential to report any form of self-medication in case of an emergency to avoid accidental poisoning. Short term prescription of short acting benzodiazepines can be administered to anxiety patients; however, they should be only given if the person doesn't suffer from a severe respiratory problem (Liu K *et al* 2020).

Due to these addiction problems during the COVID-19 pandemic, a rise in cases of domestic abuse, arson, break-ins, suicide and public violence have been reported widely. According to a report published by BBC (April 24<sup>th</sup> 2020), Met police is making nearly an average of 100 arrests a day in regard to domestic violence complaints which has rendered potential victims more vulnerable and isolated. The governments are implementing stricter measures to reduce such atrocities during COVID-19 pandemic although safeguarding such women and children is still posing as a challenge for law enforcement all around the world since it has become harder for them to reach out for help during quarantine. Suicidal cases as a result of coronaphobia have so far been reported in India, Bangladesh and Italy although many other cases are still under investigation (Sahoo S *et al* 2020; Mamun, M. A. & Griffiths, M. D. 2020). The difference in the frequency of such cases may be due to varied lockdown measures in various of the world and hence it may affect the citizens differently. Public outrage as a result of mistrust in the government, shortage of staff in hospitals, decline in global economy and failure to obtain basic necessities has been observed in various parts of the world. Another major concern is indirect casualties resulting from grave health conditions or fatal accidents which couldn't be attended on time due to the overwhelming number of COVID-19 cases (Takian, A *et al* 2020). Fire related incidents have also been on a rise due to inebriation and other psychological factors such as anxiety and depression. In a report published by NY Times, about 100 cases of setting wireless towers on fire have been reported in United Kingdom owing to the spread of a baseless conspiracy theory which linked the escalation of the pandemic with wireless technology (Satariano A and Alba D 2020). In a study conducted by Ashby MPJ (2020) on the change in the rate of crimes such as vehicle theft, burglary and serious assaults in 16 different cities in US, it was observed that while serious assault in public places did not increase; burglary showed an inconsistent pattern in different cities. The pattern of serious assaults can be attributed to the fact that they are mostly personal and hence are not largely affected by the lockdown. Serious assaults are also known to be done by a smaller percentage of the population and hence will not have a drastic impact on their occurrence (Jennings et al. 2012). While Chicago, Los Angeles and Memphis showed decline in burglary related cases, they've been reported to have increased in cities

## Social and psychological implications of Covid-19 pandemic

such as Austin, Louisville and Minneapolis. Burglary was expected to increase in non-guarded buildings such as offices or shops which are shut because of the lockdown guidelines; however, this wasn't observed to stand true for every city except the cities mentioned above. They also observed that while vehicular theft increased in cities such as Austin and Los Angeles, they decreased significantly in Tucson and Chicago. This can be explained by the change in the location of vehicle parking during lockdown and the increase in the number of unattended vehicles.

### CONCLUSION

It is a need of the hour to cater to the aforementioned problems that may result in grave outcomes. Efforts should be made to reach out to such vulnerable individuals by means of online counselling either in the form of hotlines, webinars or social media. Use of technologies such as artificial intelligence can be proved to be effective to save lives from afar as has been previously successfully demonstrated in China (Wang Y 2019). Psychiatrists, therapists and crisis intervention specialists can work hand in hand to fight this situation since it has been proved in the past that telepsychiatry is a logical solution in case of emergencies. Media houses should be held guilty for aiding in the spread of unverified news and such articles should be effectively taken down from the internet. Stricter measures should be implemented in order to offer support to victims of domestic abuse and families of drug abusers. Cremation procedures should be carried out with respect so that the lives of the patients are honoured despite the lockdown. Online interventions can be planned for individuals that are addicted to illicit drugs. It is essential for the government officials to pacify the citizens with regular updates so that they don't have to resort to baseless rumours. Administration of anti-anxiety medicines or co-administration of different drugs should be reviewed to avoid occurrence of respiratory complications which will increase their vulnerability to the virus. The difference in the rate of crime in different cities can be explored further by studying the difference in changes which have been put into practice in cities, suburbs and remote areas. This will be helpful in understanding the impact of COVID-19 on crime rate in multiple settings. Future studies can be conducted by dividing the world on the basis of their cultural habits, geographical location, population density, economy, mental health facilities and political affirmation before conducting a world-wide study since these may heavily impact the outcome in different parts of the world.

Since, a clinical solution has not been formulated for COVID-19 virus yet, it is important to curb the spread by responsibly following the lock down guidelines and reaching out for help in times of crisis. A social policy to deal with the after effects of the epidemic can be devised and efforts should be made to report any dubious activity that comes to attention.

### REFERENCES

- Coronavirus: Met police making 100 domestic violence arrests a day. [cited on: April 24<sup>th</sup> 2020] Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-52418650>
- Coronavirus Cases:. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>
- Correa G (2020). Coronavirus should not hinder your recovery from addiction. [cited on: 24<sup>th</sup> April 2020] Available from: <https://www.addictioncenter.com/community/coronavirus-should-not-hinder-your-recoveryfrom-addiction/>
- Harding A (2020). South Africa corona virus lockdown: Is thee alcohol ban working? [cited on: April 20<sup>th</sup> 2020] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-52358268>
- Jadhav R and Thomas C (2020). India lockdown sends grey market booze price soaring. [cited on: April 20<sup>th</sup> 2020] Available from: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health->

## Social and psychological implications of Covid-19 pandemic

coronavirus-india-liquor/india-lockdown-sends-grey-market-booze-prices-soaring-idUSKCN21W1RF

- Kantar (2020). Coronavirus: Shoppers stock up alcohol amid lockdown. [cited on: 25<sup>th</sup> April 2020] Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-52226488>
- Liu, K., Chen, Y., Wu, D., Lin, R., Wang, Z., and Pan, L. (2020). Effects of progressive muscle relaxation on anxiety and sleep quality in patients with COVID-19. *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*, 101132.
- Li Q, Guan X, Wu P, Wang X, Zhou L, Tong Y, *et al.* (2020). Early transmission dynamics in Wuhan, China, of novel coronavirus-infected pneumonia. *N Engl J Med*.
- Lipsitch, M., Swerdlow, D. L., & Finelli, L. (2020). Defining the epidemiology of Covid-19—studies needed. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 382(13), 1194-1196.
- Mamun, M. A., & Griffiths, M. D. (2020). First COVID-19 suicide case in Bangladesh due to fear of COVID-19 and xenophobia: possible suicide prevention strategies. *Asian journal of psychiatry*, 51, 102073.
- Marsden, J., Darke, S., Hall, W., Hickman, M., Holmes, J., Humphreys, K & West, R. (2020). Mitigating and learning from the impact of COVID-19 infection on addictive disorders. *Addiction*.
- Micaleff JV (2020). How the Covid-19 pandemic is upending the alcoholic beverage industry. [cited on: 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2020] <https://www.forbes.com/sites/joemicallef/2020/04/04/how-the-covid-19-pandemic-is-upending-the-alcoholic-beverage-industry/#6e4761384b0b>
- Patanavanich, R and Glantz, S. A. (2020). Smoking is associated with COVID-19 progression: a meta-analysis. *medRxiv*.
- Sahoo, S., Bharadwaj, S., Parveen, S., Singh, A. P., Tandup, C., Mehra, A. & Grover, S. (2020). Self-harm and COVID-19 Pandemic: An emerging concern—A report of 2 cases from India. *Asian Journal of Psychiatry*.
- Satariano A and Alba D. (2020). Burning cell towers, out of baseless fear, they spread the virus. *NY Times*. [cited on: April 24<sup>th</sup> 2020] Available from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/10/technology/coronavirus-5g-uk.html>
- Sun L, Sun Z, Wu L, Zhu Z, Zhang F, Shang Z, *et al.* (2020) Prevalence and risk factors of acute posttraumatic stress symptoms during the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan, China. *MedRxiv Preprint*.
- Takian, A., Raoofi, A., & Kazempour-Ardebili, S. (2020). COVID-19 battle during the toughest sanctions against Iran. *Lancet (London, England)*, 395(10229), 1035.
- Taylor S, Asmundson GJG (2004) *Treating health anxiety: A cognitive-behavioral approach*. Guilford Press.
- Wang Y (2019) The Chinese suicides prevented by AI from afar. *BBC World Service*, Nov 9, 2019. [cited on: 19<sup>th</sup> April 2020] <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-50314819>
- Williamson V, Stevelink SAM, Greenberg N. (2018). Occupational moral injury and mental health: systematic review and meta-analysis. *Br J Psychiatry* 212:33946.
- Zarghami, M. (2020). Psychiatric Aspects of Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) Infection. *Iran J Psychiatry Behav Sci*, 14(1):e102957.
- Zhang C, Yang L, Liu S, Ma S, Wang Y, Cai Z, *et al.* (2020). Survey of insomnia and related social psychological factors among medical staffs involved with the 2019 novel coronavirus disease outbreak. *SSRN*.

### Acknowledgements

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

## Social and psychological implications of Covid-19 pandemic

### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author declared no conflict of interest.

**How to cite this article:** H Upadhyaya (2020). Social and psychological implications of Covid-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 8(2), 683-688. DIP:18.01.080/20200802, DOI:10.25215/0802.080