

## Boredom and sleep dysregulation during COVID-19 lockdown period

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### ABSTRACT

The onset of novel infectious disease known as Corona-virus disease (COVID-19) and its outbreak that has contagiously spread at a global level came to light on December 31, 2019 when the number of cases related to respiratory infection of an unknown cause in Wuhan City started increasing and China informed the World Health Organization (WHO) about it that subsequently started spreading rapidly to the rest of the world. The WHO declared the outbreak a pandemic and Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020. The government of respective countries ordered nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against COVID-19, restricting and limiting the movement of entire population by adopting social distancing, mass quarantine, stay at home ordinances and that have proven effective in breaking the chain of virus from spreading and infecting others. However, a prolonged home-stay has been observed to have an undesirable consequences concerned with mental, physical and emotional health like Boredom and Sleep dysregulation along with their impact on well-being that will be addressed in this article as the impact of COVID 19 is not only limited to human infection and death, other associated issues, as mentioned, need to be taken into account

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Pandemic, Boredom, Sleep Dysregulation

**B**oredom is generally viewed as an unpleasant emotional state in which the individual feels lack of interest and difficulty concentrating on the current task. In other words boredom can be experienced as a crisis of desire to do something meaningful or being completely idle and purposeless. “The condition corresponds more precisely to the French ennui, an existential perception of life’s futility”. Ennui is a consequence of unfulfilled aspirations (Goodstein, 2005).

We must have experienced Boredom in some way at some point during our lives. Specifically during the period of lockdown and social distancing by staying at home, life has become dull, repetitive and monotonous for many of us. That eventually impacting an individual’s behaviour in negative ways as it has been observed to be linked with loneliness, frustration,

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Received: April 05, 2020; Revision Received: May 11, 2020; Accepted: May 25, 2020

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anger issues, sadness, over thinking and excessive worrying. As Kierkegaard remarked, boredom is “*the root of all evil.*”.

“Any experience that is predictable and repetitive becomes boring. In general, too much of the same thing and too little stimulation can cause in its victim an absence of desire and a feeling of entrapment”. (Toohey, 2012). Being chronically bored associated with higher risk of drug addiction, compulsive gambling, eating and other kinds of escapes.

“An inability to know what will make one happy can lead to a more profound existential boredom. Not knowing what we are searching for means that we lack the capacity to choose appropriate goals for engagement with the world” (Eastwood, 2012).

A 2012 paper “*The Unengaged Mind : Defining Boredom in Terms of Attention*” published by psychologist John D Eastwood summarized boredom as “The aversive experience of wanting, but being unable to engage in satisfying activity”. Eastwood bases that definition on the synthesis of four rival theories for the phenomenon. These are-

- Arousal
- Existential
- Psycho-dynamic
- Cognitive theories of Boredom

The Arousal theory is most relevant to boredom induced by the lockdown. Eastwood in his paper defined it as the “nonoptimal arousal that ensues when there is a mismatch between an individual’s needed arousal and the availability of environmental stimulation (Berlyne, 1960; Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1990; De Chenne, 1988; Hebb, 1966; Klapp, 1986; Zuckerman, 1979). In simple words our environment and surroundings are not able to satisfy the need which we urge to be stimulated. COVID-19 lockdown has restricted our stimulating environment to our homes only.

The York university academic explained the Existential theories behind boredom that it is caused by a lack of life meaning or purpose when an individual gives up on or fails to articulate and participate in activities that are consistent with his values. (Bargdill, 2000; Fahlman et al., 2009; Frankl, 1984; Maddi, 1967, 1970; A. White, 1998). He further described existential boredom as: A sense of emptiness, meaninglessness and a paralysis of agency- the bored individual is unable to find impetus for action. This could be related with the fact that during pandemic lockdown everything seem to have lost it’s meaning and purpose like staying at home 24x7, daily routine has got upset, life seems aimless as people don’t have that fixed timings and regular schedule to be followed for job or business and it is but obvious that they feel bored even after being occupied by using internet or electronic gadgets.

Psycho-dynamic theories argue that boredom is caused by an inability to consciously determine what is desired because the desire is threatening and therefore repressed. As a result, the bored individual looks to the external world to find satisfaction, but inevitably feels deprived and frustrated when the external world does not resolve the problem (Fenichel, 1953; Greenon, 1953; Wangh, 1975). This could be explained with the fact that during lockdown where people remain restricted or confined to their homes, totally cut off from external environment has generated a sense of repressed desire to go out and live lives the

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normal way as before but at the same time knowing the reality and allocated restrictions, people tend to feel frustrated because of that unfulfilled desires.

Boredom shifts attention to alternative goals and experiences, research also suggests that boredom is associated with greater mind wandering. “Mind wandering” refers to shifts in attention away from a current task and toward unrelated cognition and feelings. When mind wandering occurs, the executive components of attention appear to shift away from the primary task, leading to failures in task performance and superficial representations of the external environment (Smallwood J, Schooler JW, Psychol Bull. 2006). When people sitting idly or aimlessly in condition where they are not involved in any purposeful activity that requires focus or attention, their minds tend to wander and that eventually disrupts the concentration and ability to think in certain direction with frequent distraction.

### **LONLINESS DURING LOCKDOWN**

There is on-going research keeping tabs on well-being during lockdown. People have been confined to their homes, self-quarantined on being in a containment zone to restraint the spread of the virus. While some are living with their families, friends or roommates, others might be living alone and they can't travel and move during lockdown. So, many of them might be missing our friends, family members and relatives and at times, they might find themselves lonely, isolated, or even bored.

Well, regardless of whether you are living alone or with family members, still there is a possibility that you may be feeling lonely right now. Loneliness is an unpleasant experience that occurs from within when you perceived yourself as being isolated from society, social interactions and have that unfulfilled desire to be more connected to others. People may feel lonely even when they have people around or even in the presence of their family members as they don't feel that emotional connectivity with them. Being alone and physically distant from other people can make you feel socially and emotionally disconnected.

This lack of social and emotional connectedness can cause an adverse effect on physical and mental health. One might find it more difficult and challenging to deal with stressful and tough situations. Loneliness can also cause sleep disturbance, an increased levels of stress, helplessness, depression, and anxiety. On physical level, loneliness has been observed to be linked with poor immunity that is the matter of concern in accordance with the current situation.

### **SLEEP DYSREGULATION DURING LOCKDOWN**

Everyone is staying at home, working from home by being completely home arrested. Undoubtedly many people, especially old aged had been suffering from sleep disturbance and dysregulation before the onset of corona virus but unfortunately, the pandemic has made the condition even more worst for the sufferers and also created for those who previously had no sleeping problems.

Life has changed drastically during the period of lockdown, our usual daily routine right from the lifestyle to meal timings, sleep-awake schedules, sleeping patterns- number of hours we tend to sleep before has been altered either increased or decreased. All of these changes impact our natural circadian rhythm, which is linked to body's internal “clock” that plays a key role in regulating our sleep-awake cycle. Also the amount of time we spend on mobile phones, electronic gadgets like television has affected our sleeping schedules during lockdown as we don't have that fixed well defined morning routine to be followed next day moreover the news regarding cases, death from corona virus has been observed to increase stress level, fear and anxiety among population that eventually disrupt the sleeping pattern.

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### Acknowledgements

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

### Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

**How to cite this article:** Hasmukh, N., & Parmar, V. (2020). Boredom and sleep dysregulation during COVID-19 lockdown period. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 8(2), 434-437. DIP:18.01.258/20200802, DOI:10.25215/0802.258