

## Depression Among Roman Catholics Due to Fear of Death or Impracticability of Sacrament of Penance During Covid-19 Lockdown Days

Goodwin Solly<sup>1\*</sup>

### ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has created a greater impact on the life of both living and non-living organisms. Amount of people suffering from COVID-19 is increasing day by day. The government has implemented lockdown in the whole country. During the time of lockdown, all the churches and temples were closed and only the rituals were taken place with the only presence of priests. People become more stressed when they lost their freedom to do their rituals in churches. Pieces of evidence suggest that Faith has great importance in the life of human beings. In Catholic teaching, the Sacrament of Penance is the method of the Church by which individual men and women confess sins committed after baptism and have them absolved by God through the administration of a Priest. When lockdown begins such rituals were stopped and it may lead to a small amount of depression. The result of the research says that according to the data collected from 14 participants, it's very clear that they are not much depressed even though they are not able to practice their religious rituals, also people who are having religious beliefs are not at all depressed and they have someone to share their problems. Family members, friends and priests are there to talk to them even if they face any troubles. Confession helps to open up suppressed information towards a priest.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Faith, Depression, Confession, Lockdown

COVID-19 has created a greater impact on the life of both living and non-living organisms. Amount of people suffering from COVID-19 is increasing day by day. The government has implemented lockdown in the whole country. People started to practice a new way of living in a society without socializing much to avoid the spread of Coronavirus. Social distance is the only method to stop the spreading of this disease. The government advises people to sit in the houses and promoted online mode of work and classes. People are using the online platform for all types of works such as data collection, E-learning, online shopping, E-banking, chatting, etc. COVID-19 not only affected basic needs of human-being but also the psychological needs also such as mental health and spirituality. During the time of lockdown, all the churches and temples were closed and only the rituals were taken place with the only presence of priests. People become more stressful

<sup>1</sup>Student, Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, Kerala, India

\*Corresponding Author

Received: May 15, 2021; Revision Received: July 12, 2021; Accepted: August 03, 2021

## Depression Among Roman Catholics Due to Fear of Death or Impracticability of Sacrament of Penance During Covid-19 Lockdown Days

when they lost their freedom to do their rituals in churches. Pieces of evidence suggest that Faith has great importance in the life of human beings. A growing body of evidence suggests that people who hold religious beliefs live longer, happier lives than those who don't (e.g., Kim, Nesselrode, & Feaherman, 1996). It's because beliefs lead to having more healthier lifestyles by providing some type of restrictions such as not to smoke and drink etc.

According to Christianity especially in Roman Catholic's and Latin's, there are 7 sacraments which should be compulsorily done by Christians of these castes. In that sacrament of penance is having great importance. The root of the verb to confess is the Latin word *confessare*, which means to utter, to speak aloud. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, to confess means: "To declare or disclose something which one has kept or allowed to remain secret as being prejudicial or inconvenient to oneself; to acknowledge, own or admit; to make one's self known, to disclose one's identity" (Onions, 1947). Amongst the rituals for absolution (*prayashchit*), confession is most significant. Retaining immoral thoughts and memories of sins in mind pollutes the field of mental activity. It is as harmful to the mind as acute constipation for the body. The revelation of bad deeds acts like a "spiritual enema". It cleans the mind by driving out polluted thoughts (Pt. Shri Ram Sharma Acharya 2008).

In Catholic teaching, the Sacrament of Penance is the method of the Church by which individual men and women confess sins committed after baptism and have them absolved by God through the administration of a Priest. The Catholic rite, obligatory at least once a year for serious sin, is usually conducted within a confessional box, booth or reconciliation room. This sacrament is known by many names, including penance, reconciliation and confession (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Sections 1423-1442).

Confession is often a part of the psychotherapeutic process. In theological terms, the priest acts in *persona Christi* and receives from the Church the power of jurisdiction over the penitent. According to Christianity sacrament of penance will remove all the sins done by the person if he/she tells it to the priest who is the representation of God and also, they should must the ritual or the atonement what priest advised to do, if people die without confessing or without repentance he or she will fall into hell. We all do many mistakes in our life and feel guilty and shameful for them but when we say them in front of God, we relieve ourselves from these mistakes. It is one of the most important *tapas* among all the twelve *tapas* told by (Pt. Shri Ram Sharma Acharya, 2004).

Due to lockdown, people are not able to confess to the priest or they are not even able to attend holy mass physically and also not to intake holy eucharist which is the food of the soul. Death fear is one of the other factors which comes to the mind of the human being during the lockdown period. There are different types of death. Physiological death occurs when all the physical processes that sustain life ceases. Brain death is defined as a total absence of brain activity for at least ten minutes. Cerebral death means cessation of activity in the cerebral cortex. And social death refers to a process through which other people relinquish their relationships with the deceased (Thomas, 1992). During the time of lockdown, many types of death fears are forming between people such as death without confession, death with COVID-19, death anxiety, etc. Fears of death have been proposed to be a central and universal part of the experience of being human (Becker, 1973). There is evidence of humans grappling with death anxiety for as long as our species has been recording its history (Menzies, 2018b).

## Depression Among Roman Catholics Due to Fear of Death or Impracticability of Sacrament of Penance During Covid-19 Lockdown Days

We are the only species that we know of that has the cognitive capacity to contemplate and anticipate our death, yet this impressive ability comes with a downside; we are destined to live our lives ‘forever shadowed by the knowledge that we will grow, blossom, and inevitably, diminish and die’ (Yalom, 2008, p. 1). On the one hand, people may develop adaptive ways of coping with their fear of death, such as building meaningful relationships and leaving a positive legacy (Yalom, 2008). On the other hand, awareness of death may also produce a powerful sense of fear or meaninglessness and may drive several maladaptive coping behaviours (Menzies, 2012). In the Holy Bible apostle, Paul stated that “If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and is justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved”. (Romans 10:9-10). Also, it is stated that people who do good things will be placed in heaven and others will be thrown to hell. Confession is seen as a necessary process to receive forgiveness from *Ishvara*. It can rejoin the broken link between God and human beings. Terror management theory (TMT), a social psychological theory based on the work of cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker, is the leading psychological framework for explaining this effect of death fears on human behaviour (Greenberg et al., 1992).

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Sample*

- **Sample:** The data was collected from Catechism teachers in the age group between 41-60 who is working currently in this field.
- **Sample Size:** Fourteen participants took part in this study. This includes five males and nine females. Participants were from the Catechism Department of a Church in N.Paravur, Ernakulam district, Kerala, India. All the participants were well educated and the interview was taken place in the Malayalam language. Subjects were found directly and their consents were verbally asked initially. Consents were given by 15 participants and 1 person was not interested. All the interviews were done by using both online and offline methods (WhatsApp & phone call). 10 people in the age category of 41-50 and 4 of them between 51-60. The mean age is 49.35.
- **Sampling Method:** Convenient sampling method is used.

#### *Instruments*

A self-prepared questionnaire was made for conducting the interview. (Appendix-A-English, Appendix-B- Malayalam) along with socio-demographic questions.

#### *Procedure*

The study aims to find out the depression among Roman Catholics due to fear of death or impracticability of the sacrament of penance during COVID-19 lockdown days. The research used a qualitative methodology. Qualitative research defined as market research which is because it leads to direct conversation communication to collect in-depth data. Qualitative research is based on the disciplines of social sciences like psychology, sociology, and anthropology. In this method, the interviewer can collect data more conveniently and detailed manner based on their response where the interviewer/researcher also tries to understand their motivation and feelings. There are different types of qualitative research methods like an in-depth interview, focus groups, ethnographic research, content analysis, case study research that are usually used. Data will be more descriptive and inference will be easier. Qualitative research methods originated in the social and behavioural sciences. In today's world, we are not able to understand what people think or perceive. Today online

## Depression Among Roman Catholics Due to Fear of Death or Impracticability of Sacrament of Penance During Covid-19 Lockdown Days

platforms are increasing our opportunity to understand that as it is more communicative and descriptive.

Phenomenological research design using structured online interview method was used to collect data in this research. Phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. The fundamental goal of the approach is to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). This research method helps to seek information about an individual to know about their social, cultural, political and historical contexts. Thematic analysis is the method used in this qualitative research. It emphasizes identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning (or "themes") within qualitative data. Structured interviews enable the interviewer to ask each respondent the same questions in the same way. A tightly structured schedule of questions is used, very much like a questionnaire. And also, the interviewer asks for more clarification if the answer is not clear or detailed.

### RESULT

Each question and their summary of the answer are given below.

- 1. Do you have strong faith in God? Do you keep faith in God at every moment of your life?*

All the participants are having strong faith in God. All are having faith which does not vary depending on life situation. They consider everything happening in their life is for something good. Whatever happens in life all are ready to keep the faith.
- 2. How many days before Covid-19 did confession take place in you? (Max number of days between two adjacent confessions)*

Ten people confess twice a month and four people confess once in 2 to 5 month's intervals. Also, chance or time to confess is an important factor for these four people who confess in 2-5 months. Most of them are always ready to reduce their soul's weight by confessing to a priest.
- 3. Is it making difficulty in you since you are not able to confess?*

All are having some sort of difficulty since they are not able to confess. Most people who confess twice in a month are more depressed compared to people who confess within the period of 2 to 5 months in a year. Even though people have some difficulty they are ready to accept the current situation (COVID-19), also religious leaders are allowing Spiritual confession (Confession directly to God or Ishvara - Often through prayer is called Spiritual Confession).to cope up with the situation.
- 4. Do you have a feeling that you don't have a place to share your problems?*

All are having someplace to share their problems. Most of them have family members, friends, spiritual leaders etc. to listen to them directly or indirectly (by using a video call, Phone call etc.). No one has a depressed state also most of them are engaged in different sorts of works.
- 5. Can you share your feelings that you get after confession? Are you able to reduce your mental stress after confession?*

Most of them reported that after confession they are becoming happier, feel of weightless, feels like a new person or a new beginning. Many of them stated they can reduce their stress and tension after this divine process. But the main factor is that

## Depression Among Roman Catholics Due to Fear of Death or Impracticability of Sacrament of Penance During Covid-19 Lockdown Days

they will be able to feel it if and only if they confess fully without hiding some sins. Advice and prayers provided by a priest are also helping them a lot not to do that sin again and not to feel guilty by thinking about old sins. If confession happens intrinsically, it will be more effective compared to confession by an external force.

6. *Do you prefer to confess your sin to God in secret or to the priest?*

According to Christianity priest is the representation of a god. Spiritually God is listening to our sins and providing advice and atonements. This belief provides people to confess in front of the priest. People completely become happy when getting advice for improvement in life and when they get atonement. Spiritual confession or direct confession is liked by only two people but they also stated that both are a different experiences.

7. *What was done instead of confession during the lockdown?*

All of them watched online holy mass and confessed during that time spiritually. Individual prayer was another method done by them.

8. *Do you have death fear? (COVID-19 death, death with sin or death without repentance)*

Most of them do not have death fear. 2 people have a normal death fear. One person does not want to die with COVID-19. One said she wants to die only after spiritual confession. One woman said she is happy to die because her husband is already in heaven. People who cannot get to confession because of the coronavirus lockdown or another serious reason can go to God directly, be specific about their sins, request a pardon and experience God's loving forgiveness, Pope Francis said. "This is the right time, the opportune moment. An act of contrition done well, and our souls will become white like the snow," the pope said March 20 during his live-streamed morning Mass. These statements provide people with a great amount of strength to live happier without thinking about their sins. Also, they consider death as a common factor that happens at any time and we should not waste time by thinking that.

### CONCLUSION

The study focuses on the depression among Roman Catholics due to fear of death or impracticability of Sacrament of Penance during this Covid-19 lockdown. According to the data collected from 14 participants, it's very clear that they are not much depressed even though they are not able to practice their religious rituals, also people who are having religious beliefs are not at all depressed and they have someone to share their problems. Family members, friends and priests are there to talk to them even if they face any troubles. Confession helps to open up suppressed information towards a priest.

#### *Major findings are that,*

- People who confess in the time gap of 2-5 months stated that spiritual confession and sacrament of penance is similar and seems to have no much difference. So, this conveys a probability that they are not getting that much spiritual feel compared to others during the sacrament of penance. Spiritual confession will progress us towards the goal of being good towards God and truth in front of Ishwara.
- People also didn't move away from the faith in God during the lockdown period all of them spend time in personal prayers and Online Holy mass.

## Depression Among Roman Catholics Due to Fear of Death or Impracticability of Sacrament of Penance During Covid-19 Lockdown Days

- People are not having much fear about death because they are having good faith in God, even if they die without the sacrament of penance and with self-regret to the sin they had done. Confession bridges the gap between our isolation and our quest for intimacy.
- Participants were not that much depressed since priests are currently allowing spiritual confession and to intake the Holy body of Jesus without the sacrament of penance.

### REFERENCES

- Becker, E. (1973). *The Denial of Death*. New York, USA
- Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the catholic church* (2nd ed.). Our Sunday Visitor.
- Greenberg, J., Solomon, S., Pyszczynski, T., Rosenblatt, A., Burling, J., Lyon, D., & Pinel, E. (1992). Assessing the terror management analysis of self-esteem: converging evidence of an anxiety-buffering function. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 63, 913–922.
- Kim, J.E., Nesselroade, J. R., & Feaherman, D. L. (1996). The state component in self-reported world views and religious beliefs of older persons: The MacArthur successful ageing studies. *Psychology and Aging*, 11, 396-407.
- Menzies, R. E., & Menzies, R. G., & Iverach, L. (eds) (2018). *Curing the Dread of Death: Theory, Research and Practice*. Brisbane, Australia: Australian Academic Press.
- Onions, C.T. (1947). *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, prepared by W.Little,H.W.Fowler and J.Coulson, revised and edited by C.T.Onions, Third Edition, London:Oxford University Press.
- Sharma, R. (2004). *Pap Nashak aur Shaktiwardhak Tapascharyen*. Gayatri Mahavigyana.Yug Nirman Yojna Mathura, p.80.
- Shaver, P. R., & Mikulincer, M. (Eds.). (2012). *Meaning, mortality, and choice: The social psychology of existential concerns*. American Psychological Association.
- Thomas, J. L. (1992). *Adulthood and aging*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Yalom, I. D. (2008). *Staring at the Sun: Overcoming the Terror of Death*. San Francisco, USA: Jossey-Bass.

### **Acknowledgement**

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

### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

**How to cite this article:** Solly G (2021). Depression Among Roman Catholics Due to Fear of Death or Impracticability of Sacrament of Penance During Covid-19 Lockdown Days. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 9(3), 225-230. DIP:18.01.025.20210903, DOI:10.25215/0903.025