

## Mental Health and Psychological Resilience of Unorganised Sector Workers During Covid-19 Pandemic

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### ABSTRACT

The unorganised sector is regarded to be the backbone of the Indian economy. They don't get much job security and allowances, yet they nonetheless make a significant contribution to the Indian economy. They are typically financially disadvantaged and lack educational qualifications. The informal economy has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 issue. Many people in the informal economy are unable to afford further shutdowns due to the complex nature of their jobs. Their survival and livelihoods are dependent on day-to-day struggle and staying at home may mean they are unable to provide for their family's fundamental requirements. This research is conducted to study mental health factors and psychological resilience of unorganised sector workers. **Methods:** Data were collected from 63 respondents in Oddanchatram, Dindigul district. DASS-21 scale, and Brief Resilience Scales were used to measure the intended variables. **Results:** It was found that mental health challenges were high among lower economic strata. Also, mental health variables and psychological resilience are inversely correlated which implies that when psychological resilience is higher mental health challenges will be low. **Conclusion:** To improve mental health among the unorganised sector workers, further studies must be conducted to enhance their well-being and make them resilient to face future pandemics.

**Keywords:** Mental Health, Depression, Anxiety, Stress, Resilience, COVID-19, Unorganised Sector

The COVID-19 disease has altered our understanding of the world. The lockdown has also allowed the government time to prepare for a probable rise in cases in the following weeks when the cases due to the COVID-19 pandemic are expected to peak. Nonetheless, India's population of 13 billion people spread throughout many states, as well as the prevailing health inequalities, rising economic and social disparities, and diverse cultural values, provide unique obstacles. It's tough to put public health measures in place. However, these life-saving measures have had a negative impact on the economy, resulting in catastrophic losses. The government's unexpected enactment of the lockdown seems poorly prepared, putting already vulnerable groups at risk. There has been a large flight of

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migrant labour, and fears of famine among those employed in the informal economy are growing.

### ***Impact of Covid-19 on Unorganised Sector***

ILO's (2020) predictions show that 93 per cent of the world's workforce would face some form of workplace closure. More lockdown or the adoption of containment measures on a regular basis to deal with the virus's second waves is predicted to severely impair economic activity and labour markets. In comparison to countries with higher per capita income, informal employment is largely concentrated in countries with lower per capita income. As a result, informality is more widespread in developing countries (Narula, 2020).

The majority of actors in the informal sector go unnoticed and are not counted in official statistics. Furthermore, even if they were registered, they may fall outside the scope of labour law, social protection, and occupational safety. Workers in the informal economy are usually there because there are not enough opportunities in the formal economy. In general, informal labourers are a vulnerable group of people who have little employment or income stability. The informal economy has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 issue. Many people in the informal economy are unable to afford further shutdowns due to the features outlined above. Their survival and livelihoods are dependent on day-to-day struggle and staying at home may mean they are unable to provide for their family's fundamental requirements.

### ***Mental Health and Psychological Resilience Of Unorganised Sector Workers***

Mental health influences our thought process and the way we feel and behave. It is responsible for our social and psychological well-being. Mental health issues and disorders can present with a variety of indications and symptoms that vary from person to person. Mental health also influences how we deal with stress, interact with others, and make decisions. Depression, anxiety, and stress are among the mental health issues that are examined in this study.

Resilience in a person reflects a dynamic union of things that encourages positive adaptation despite exposure to adverse life experiences. In the psychological aspect, resilience can be defined as the capability of a person to recover from trauma and stress. Resilient persons experience positive emotions even in the mid of stressful events, understand the advantages related to positive emotions, and use this data to their advantage when addressing negative emotional events (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2021).

Brooks *et al.*, (2020) studied the psychological impact of quarantine and observed that negative physiological effects are found among people during the lockdown. Of 3166 papers found, 24 are included during this review. Most reviewed studies reported negative effects including confusion and anger. Stressors are mostly infection fears, frustration and stigma. Some researchers have suggested long-lasting effects.

Kumar *et al.*, (2021) under the title psychological impact of COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown on migrant workers studied the mental health factor of the migrant labourers. About three-fourth of the participants (73.5%) were found to be screen positive for depression and about half the participant (50%) were found to be screen positive for anxiety. About one-fifth of the participants were depressed.

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Dubey *et al.*, (2020) studied the psychosocial impact of COVID-19 on multiple layers of the population. It says that the migrant workers' population generally have a high prevalence of common psychiatric disorders, like depression and a poor quality of life. Losing jobs leaves these individuals unable to make both ends meet and this sudden misfortune of income poverty adds to their guilt, frustration, depression and pain, ultimately resulting in functional impairment and increased rates of suicide.

Karibeeran *et al.*, (2020) conducted a study which aimed to understand the stress and anxiety issues faced by the general public during COVID-19 pandemic. It was found that nearly one-third of the respondents were experiencing mild anxiety and a meagre amount of respondents had experienced severe anxiety.

Kathirvel (2020) from the Institute of Mental Health, Singapore has done his research on the mental health challenges faced during the pandemic. He says that a surge in psychiatric illness is expected after the COVID-19 pandemic. For such a large-scale event as COVID-19, the impact on mental health can be long-lasting.

Pieh *et al.*, (2021) compared the mental health before lockdown and six months after lockdown through research. It is found that lockdown is one of the important reasons for the mental health problems among the public. Given the high number of people experiencing depressive, anxiety, and insomnia symptoms, it is important to ensure adequate mental health care and support during and after the COVID-19 pandemic to those at risk.

Song *et al.*, (2020) studied the resilience factor among the general public in China. It was also found that the strength of psychological resilience and active coping style was protective against depression, while passive coping style and anxiety severity were risk factors for depression. Similarly, optimism of psychological resilience was a protective factor for anxiety while passive coping style and depression severity were risk factors.

### ***Importance of the Study***

This study would contribute to the knowledge base regarding mental health issues faced by the workers in the unorganised sector during this COVID-19 pandemic. Through analysing the data collected, insight will be provided into the level and types of mental health issues prevailing among the respondents and preventive measures can be planned accordingly.

The resilience factor has not been studied much in the Indian context. Results of the resilience assessment will describe whether it functions as a protective barrier against mental health issues. It is necessary that every individual should have proper mental health, especially during this pandemic to cope with this stressful situation. So, it is important to study the mental health of vulnerable categories such as unorganised sector workers to understand and identify the mental health challenges they face.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This research focuses on finding the mental health challenges faced by the unorganised sector workers and also learning about their psychological resilience. This study uses a descriptive design and a quantitative approach to accomplish that. The field of study is Oddanchatram Taluk in the Dindigul District of Tamil Nadu, India. The sampling used was non-probability convenience sampling. Data were collected among 63 respondents, a gender

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homogeneous male group, in the vegetable market of Oddanchatram using an interview schedule.

Socio-demographic details of the respondents were collected using a self-developed questionnaire. Depression, anxiety and stress of the respondents were measured using the Depression, Anxiety and Stress (DASS)-21 scale (Lovibond and Lovibond, 1995) which is a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 3. Cronbach's alpha for the subscales depression, anxiety and stress have the values of 0.81, 0.89 and 0.78 respectively. For the questions related to psychological resilience, the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) (Smith et al., 2008) was used. Cronbach's Alpha for Brief Resilience Scale is 0.71.

### RESULTS

*Table No. 1 Depression among the demographic characteristics of the respondents*

Demographic characteristics of the respondents		Level of Depression					Mean	Std. deviation
		Normal	Mild	Moderate	Severe	Extremely Severe		
Age	18 - 28	2	2	2	0	0	2.00	0.894
		33.30%	33.30%	33.30%	0.00%	0.00%		
	29 - 39	3	0	5	3	1	2.92	1.311
		25.00%	0.00%	41.70%	25.00%	8.30%		
	40 - 50	2	1	14	8	1	3.19	0.895
		7.70%	3.80%	53.80%	30.80%	3.80%		
	Above 50	5	0	5	4	5	3.21	1.548
		26.30%	0.00%	26.30%	21.10%	26.30%		
Educational Qualification	No formal education	0	1	0	0	0	2.00	0.000
		0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%		
	School level	6	2	16	6	4	3.00	1.206
		17.60%	5.90%	47.10%	17.60%	11.80%		
	College level	6	0	10	9	3	3.11	1.231
		21.40%	0.00%	35.70%	32.10%	10.70%		
Marital Status	Unmarried	2	2	1	0	0	1.80	0.837
		40.00%	40.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%		
	Married	10	1	25	14	6	3.09	1.195
		17.90%	1.80%	44.60%	25.00%	10.70%		
	Divorced	0	0	0	1	0	4.00	0.000
		0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%		
	Widowed	0	0	0	0	1	5.00	0.000
		0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%		
Occupation	Shop owner	5	0	11	6	4	3.15	1.287

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		19.20%	0.00%	42.30%	23.10%	15.40%		
	Manual Labour	0	2	4	2	1	3.22	0.972
		0.00%	22.20%	44.40%	22.20%	11.10%		
	Accountant	5	0	5	4	1	2.73	1.387
		33.30%	0.00%	33.30%	26.70%	6.70%		
	Others	2	1	6	3	1	3.00	1.155
		15.40%	7.70%	46.20%	23.10%	7.70%		

*Note.* Nearly half of the respondents (41.3%) have experienced moderate levels of depression. A little less than one-fourth of the respondents (23.8%) have experienced severe depression. Few respondents (11.1%) have experienced extremely severe depression. Nearly one-fifth of the respondents from the income group of 10,000 - 20,000 rupees have faced moderate level of depression and few of them have faced severe depression (7.9%). It could be understood that depression is more prevalent among the lower-income groups.

**Table 2 Anxiety among the demographic characteristics of the respondents**

Demographic characteristics of the respondents		Level of Anxiety					Mean	Std. deviation
		Normal	Mild	Moderate	Severe	Extremely severe		
Age	18 - 28	6	0	0	0	0	1.00	0.000
		100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%		
	29 - 39	9	2	1	0	0	1.33	0.651
		75.00%	16.70%	8.30%	0.00%	0.00%		
40 - 50	21	2	2	1	0	1.35	0.797	
	80.80%	7.70%	7.70%	3.80%	0.00%			
Above 50	9	2	4	1	3	2.32	1.529	
	47.40%	10.50%	21.10%	5.30%	15.80%			
Educational Qualification	No formal education	1	0	0	0	0	1.00	0.000
		100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%		
	School level	24	2	4	2	2	1.71	1.244
		70.60%	5.90%	11.80%	5.90%	5.90%		
College level	20	4	3	0	1	1.50	0.962	
	71.40%	14.30%	10.70%	0.00%	3.60%			
Marital status	Unmarried	5	0	0	0	0	1.00	0.000
		100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%		
	Married	39	6	6	2	3	1.64	1.151
		69.60%	10.70%	10.70%	3.60%	5.40%		
Divorced	1	0	0	0	0	1.00	0.000	

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		100.00 %	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%		
	Widowed	0	0	1	0	0	3.00	0.000
		0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%		
<b>Occupation</b>	Shop owner	16	5	3	0	2	1.73	1.185
		61.50%	19.20 %	11.50%	0.00%	7.70%		
	Manual Labour	7	0	1	1	0	1.56	1.130
		77.80%	0.00%	11.10%	11.10 %	0.00%		
	Accountant	11	1	1	1	1	1.67	1.291
		73.30%	6.70%	6.70%	6.70%	6.70%		
Others	11	0	2	0	0	1.31	0.751	
	84.60%	0.00%	15.40%	0.00%	0.00%			

*Note.* It is found that most of the respondents (71.4%) have experienced a normal level of anxiety. Very few of the respondents have faced extremely severe and severe levels of anxiety (4.8% and 3.2% respectively). In the income group 20,000 - 30,000 rupees, few respondents (4.8%) have experienced extremely severe levels of anxiety. From this, it could be understood that as the income level decreases, the level of anxiety increases. This could be due to the shortage of economic resources.

**Table 3. Stress among the demographic characteristics of the respondents**

Demographic characteristics of the respondents		Level of Stress					Mean	Std. deviation
		Normal	Mild	Moderate	Severe	Extremely Severe		
<b>Age</b>	18 - 28	6	0	0	0	0	1.00	0.000
		100.00 %	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%		
	29 - 39	8	0	3	1	0	1.75	1.138
		66.70%	0.00%	25.00%	8.30%	0.00%		
	40 - 50	12	10	2	1	1	1.81	1.021
		46.20%	38.50%	7.70%	3.80%	3.80%		
Above 50	10	0	6	2	1	2.16	1.344	
	52.60%	0.00%	31.60%	10.50 %	5.30%			
<b>Education Qualification</b>	No formal education	1	0	0	0	0	1.00	0.000
		100.00 %	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%		
	School level	20	6	5	1	2	1.79	1.175
		58.80%	17.60%	14.70%	2.90%	5.90%		
	College level	15	4	6	3	0	1.89	1.100
		53.60%	14.30%	21.40%	10.70 %	0.00%		
<b>Marital</b>	Unmarried	5	0	0	0	0	1.00	0.000

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<b>status</b>		100.00 %	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%		
	Married	31	9	10	4	2	1.87	1.161
		55.40%	16.10%	17.90%	7.10%	3.60%		
	Divorced	0	1	0	0	0	2.00	0.000
		0.00%	100.00 %	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%		
	Widowed	0	0	1	0	0	3.00	0.000
0.00%		0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%			
<b>Occupation</b>	Shop owner	15	4	5	1	1	1.81	1.132
		57.70%	15.40%	19.20%	3.80%	3.80%		
	Manual Labour	5	2	1	0	1	1.89	1.364
		55.60%	22.20%	11.10%	0.00%	11.10%		
	Accountant	9	0	5	1	0	1.87	1.125
		60.00%	0.00%	33.30%	6.70%	0.00%		
	Others	7	4	0	2	0	1.77	1.092
		53.80%	30.80%	0.00%	15.40 %	0.00%		

*Note.* It is found that married unorganised sector workers are more prone to stress than the other marital categories, the level of stress is higher in a single member earning family than in the other categories and that lower-income groups are prone to experience stress more than the higher income groups.

**Table 4. Karl Pearson's correlation of the DASS-21 Scale and the Brief Resilience Scale**

Karl Pearson's Correlation					
		Level of Depression	Level of Anxiety	Level of Stress	Level of Psychological Resilience
<b>Level of Depression</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.609**	.538**	-.568**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0	0	0
	N	63	63	63	63
<b>Level of Anxiety</b>	Pearson Correlation	.609**	1	.533**	-.477**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0		0	0
	N	63	63	63	63
<b>Level of Stress</b>	Pearson Correlation	.538**	.533**	1	-.418**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0		0.001
	N	63	63	63	63
<b>Level of Psychological Resilience</b>	Pearson Correlation	-.568**	-.477**	-.418**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0.001	
	N	63	63	63	63

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Note.* There's a negative moderate degree of correlation between psychological resilience and level of depression (-0.568) with 0.01 significance. It is inferred that there is a negative moderate correlation between the level of psychological resilience and level of anxiety (-0.477). It is mentioned that there's a negative moderate correlation between the level of psychological resilience and the level of stress (-0.418).

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Through this table, it is understood that there's a moderate degree of negative correlation between psychological resilience and the mental health of the respondents. That is, when the psychological resilience is higher the presence of mental health challenges will be low and conversely when the psychological resilience is low, the presence of mental health challenges will be higher.

### **DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study aimed to measure the mental health variables such as depression, anxiety, stress and also the psychological resilience of the unorganised sector workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was found that nearly 23 per cent of the respondents have experienced severe depression, more than 71 per cent of the respondents have experienced normal anxiety and more than half of the respondents have experienced a normal level of stress. It was found that mental health challenges are higher in the lower-income groups. To be precise, depression and anxiety are more prevalent among the lower-income groups than the higher-income groups. From this, it could be understood that as the income level decreases, the level of anxiety and depression increases. It could be due to the shortage of economic resources for the lower-income group. It is understood that married unorganised sector workers are more prone to stress than the other marital category. Nearly half of the respondents (42.9%) are having high resilience. In all given occupation category, the level of resilience is high among the respondents. Furthermore, level of resilience is higher in families which have more than two earning members. Through correlations test, it is inferred that when the psychological resilience is high, the mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression and stress will be low.

From the data analysis, we can come to a conclusion that by improving the mental health of the individuals, they can be made more resilient to disaster situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. To achieve that, mental health awareness programs can be conducted among the unorganised sectors and educate them so that they can handle the upsurge in psychological illness due to the COVID-19. There is also a stigma attached to seeking mental health services among the respondents. Through community-level campaigns, these things can be addressed among the target population. By using community health volunteers, the stigma about seeking mental health services can be addressed. Community-level mental health services/camps should be made more available. Access to mental health services like early assessment and psychosocial support must be also enhanced for the vulnerable population like the unorganised sector workers. There is a notion that normal people can't afford mental health services as therapy sessions are expensive. These myths should be broken down by the government by making mental health services available at the primary health care level. Also, the researcher found that the respondents weren't aware of mental health helpline numbers provided by the government. Efforts must be made to publicize such numbers so it reaches the people.

Social workers can play a huge role in handling crisis situations like COVID-19 and providing early psychological support. Government should encourage social work researches regarding the unorganised sector workers so it can identify the at-risk members for socio-economic and mental health issues and provide early intervention thus improving the quality of life of the individual as well as the community. Considering all these advantages, psychiatric social workers must be appointed by the government in more numbers considering the frequency of disasters in the recent period.



## **CONCLUSION**

The Government of India's strict lockdown measures to combat the spread of COVID-19 has had a substantial impact on economic activity, which has had a negative impact on the labourers who rely on those economic operations to make a living. The unorganised sector is regarded to be the backbone of the Indian economy. They do not get much help from our government, yet they nonetheless make a significant contribution to the Indian economy. They are typically financially disadvantaged and lack educational qualifications and fine skills, which is why they choose to work in unorganised sectors. With a fall in production and a loss of hours and employment figures, this sector has faced severe impacts. Because of the underutilization of health services in general and psychological state services in particular, there is a high risk of mental health challenges. To address this, a targeted approach is needed to ensure that psychological health services are available to them in the community. Resilience is associated with lower vulnerability and the ability to adapt to adversity or deal with a situation. Considering all these, mental health services to improve social and emotional well-being should be made easily available to vulnerable groups such as the unorganised sector workers.

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

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