

Research Paper

Religious Belief During the COVID-19 Lockdown: Coping Mechanism or Faith Commitment?

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ABSTRACT

Background: The world was profoundly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Individuals are strongly connected to in the collectivistic society like that in India. Friends and relatives participate not only in happiness and grief of the individual but also celebrate their religious beliefs. Lockdown was a measure to control the spread of the disease but radical psychosocial changes were also experienced. **Objectives:** aim of the present study was to explore the influence of COVID-19 lockdown phase on various aspects of the belief in God. **Method:** For the purpose case study method was employed, where, 12 cases (40-75 years) were taken from district Almora, Uttarakhand. **Result & Conclusion:** Changes in the levels of belief in God were revealed. More statistically sophisticated researches should be done to unveil the various facets of the area explored.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown & belief in god

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a drastic social change. Recession and restriction towards social connectivity (like familial or peer gatherings) were psychosocial challenges for the society, especially for the collectivistic societies like that in India. These challenges were associated with highly significant levels of psychological distress that, in many cases would meet the threshold for clinical relevance (Xiong et. al., 2020). Disruption to lifestyle physical activities or social interaction is a leading risk factor for mental health and well-being (Giuntella et. al., 2021). Since the COVID-19 pandemic is currently one of the biggest health issues worldwide, a higher demand emerges for research concentrating on the worsening of psychological well-being among the general and the quarantined population, as well as on individual coping strategies that may moderate the occurrence of psychopathologies (Kolodziejczyk, 2021).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Prazeres et. al., (2021) examined COVID-19 related fear & anxiety: Spiritual-religious coping in health care workers in Portugal. For their study purpose a cross-sectional quantitative online survey was performed. 222 health care workers (median age 37 years) participated in the study, 74.3% were female and 81.1% were physicians. Socio-demographic details & health data were collected and Duke University Religion Index,

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Received: March 29, 2026; Revision Received: September 22, 2026; Accepted: September 28, 2026

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spirituality scale, Fear of COVID-19 scale and corona virus Anxiety scale were administered. Results revealed participants with higher levels in the hope/optimism dimension of the spirituality scale showed less coronavirus-related anxiety.

DeRossett et. al., (2021) examined individuals use of religious coping during the COVID-19 pandemic among national sample of 370 individuals located within the USA recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (M Turk). Findings indicate religious coping is most strongly associated with COVID-19 anxiety, as higher levels of negative religious coping were positively related to COVID-19 anxiety.

Kowalczyk et. al., (2020) studied whether the exposure to COVID-19 enhances the faith. For this study purpose 324 subjects surveyed (50.6% were men & 49.4% were women). For assessing the essence and the practice of prayer and importance of faith/spirituality and its strengthening & influence Likert scale & yes/no questionnaire were administered. Results revealed that women more often declare strengthening their faith/spirituality in the face of the corona virus hazard.

Wani et. al., (2020) explored fear & the use of faith as a coping mechanism used by the health care workers in the present pandemic. An online self-report questionnaire was developed to assess fear and faith. Result revealed that most of the participants feared for their own life and life of loved ones. Faith had helped them to maintain a positive look and to gain a sense of security and comfort.

An article stated (Goodman 2020) "people who made more use of positive religious coping methods had better outcomes than those who struggled with god." When people engage in 'religious deferral' they believe god is in charge of their well-being and may not take the necessary steps to protect themselves.

Zhang et. al., 2021 explored a qualitative study on religious and spiritual struggles and coping strategies in the context of COVID-19 pandemic & stated that in context of a traumatic event such as a pandemic, people's faith can be shaken & their worldview disrupted (e.g., if god is all loving and powerful, why would god cause or allow the pandemic to occur?).

Most of the available literature is based on western culture & most of the studies had done on health care workers despite of normal population. There is a paucity of information available in Indian context regarding the impact of COVID-19 lockdown on faith. So, the present study will significantly contribute in highlighting the role of faith during COVID-19 lockdown in Indian context and provide a brief idea about one's involvement in religious practices during the time of uncertainty. On that account, the objective of the present study is to explore the influence of COVID-19 lockdown phase on various aspects of belief in god.

METHODOLOGY

Case study method was employed in the present study, where, 12 cases (5 males and 7 females) from age range 40-75 years were interviewed before and after lockdown phase from Almora district, Uttarakhand. The sampling was incidental. All the cases did not report any kind consumption of psychological medication. Subjects were informed about the purpose of the study and their consent was taken before collecting the data. For the collection of the data, subjects were interviewed twice, before lockdown when Uttarakhand was safe from COVID-19 outburst and secondly, during COVID-19 period after lockdown.

For the present study the cases was limited only to those whoever contacted before COVID period. The followings tools were administered for present study:

1. **Personal Data Schedule (PDS):** PDS was created by the researcher to take the preliminary information, socio-demographic details and consent of the subject.
2. **Case Study Performa (CSP):** CSP was created by the researcher to take complete history regarding COVID-19 lockdown.
3. **Religious Attitude Scale (RAS-RM):** This scale was developed by Rajamanickam (1988). This scale has been developed to assess a person's stand on the value of religion. The scale consists of 60 items and measure six dimensions- nature of God, prayer and worship, formal religion, priests, future life, spirits and spiritual world. The responses were provided on five points scale, that is, strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree. Items are positively and negatively scored. The reliability of the scale is 0.89 and the intrinsic validity of the scale was 0.94.

CASE ILLUSTRATION

Case 1- Mrs. S., is 58 year old housewife, she lives in her hometown Almora with her husband. She has 2 children (1 son & 1 daughter). She was contacted twice formerly on 17th March, 2020 before lockdown and later on 20th December 2020. She reported, she feels pain in her whole body & due to an accident few years ago she had to operate on one leg. She feels some mentally engaged with stress, tension and over thinking. Her religious beliefs are moderate & she occasionally participates in familial, social or religious functions.

On asking her thoughts over COVID, she stated the whole world is suffering from this and people are facing many problems (like, financial issues, losing their loved ones) in comparison to this she stated her issue was not big. Her participation in social places quite decreased & religious practices were decreased because of decreased social connectivity. In starting period of lockdown she was tensed but later she did not feel any kind of stress or anxiety. She was satisfied that during lockdown liquor shops were closed so, her husband did not drink resulting in peace in the family. During lockdown she used to watch Ramayana & Mahabharat, listen Satsang (for mental satisfaction), play games and used internet.

Case 2- Mrs. L., is 46 year old housewife. She lives in a family quarter in Almora with her husband. She have 2 sons. She was contacted twice former on 20th February 2020 before lockdown and later on 30th December 2020 after lockdown during first wave of COVID. Her psychological status was healthy. She was suffering from diabetes (since 5 years) and hypertension (since 2 year) and presently under medication for the same. Her religious beliefs are moderate and she tends to participate in religious, familial & social gatherings.

On asking her thoughts over COVID, she stated it is a natural disaster, to maintain balance in nature. She was quite anxious for children because they were not in home. Initially, lockdown was little stressful and boring because there was no social connectivity & they were not able to join Navratri kirtan but after 2 or 3 week they were habitual of it. She also stated that there was positive effect of lockdown on nature. At some points social relations are also affected by COVID because the participation in religious and familial gatherings is quite decreased but she had a good time with her family during lockdown because she used to watch Ramayana and Mahabharata & listen Bhagwat on YouTube.

Case 3- Mrs. V., is 46 year old working woman, she lives in her hometown Almora with her husband and 1 son. She was contacted twice, formerly on 13th March 2020 and later on 26th

December 2020 for collecting data and interview. She moderately believes in god and sacred things. Before COVID she was keen on religious, familial and social gathering. She is completely well.

On asking her thoughts over COVID, she reported many changes in her life that after this pandemic her social relationships are affected in negative terms because she is unable to meet her close ones in their sorrow and happiness, household work has increased such as cleaning, washing clothes after coming back home from outside, taking precautions in diet, there is a fear always in mind and she is facing difficulty in adjusting with all these changes. In starting period of lockdown she was happy because got so many holidays but felt bored later with same routine. Now, she is waiting and hoping for the corona to end soon and then they can get back to their normal life.

Case 4- Mrs. A., is 53 old housewife, lives with her family in her hometown Almora. She have 2 son. She was contacted twice, formerly on 14th March 2020 before lockdown and later on 23rd December 2020, for collecting data and interview. Psychologically she is well but she has a problem of joint pain and she occasionally takes painkillers. She moderately beliefs in god and she occasionally participates in familial, social & familial gatherings.

On asking her thoughts over COVID, she stated because of this there is a fear and doubt always in mind. Her social life is affected, now she does not attend any social gathering & places. Its impact is negative in our society because many youngsters lost their jobs, we are not able to go in someone's sorrow and happiness. During lockdown she used to watch Ramayana & Mahabharata and that was helpful to maintain positivity in their life and she had a good time with her family.

Case 5- Mrs. K., is 45 year old working women, lives in her hometown Almora. She has 1 son. She was contacted twice formerly on 17th March before lockdown and later on 25th December 2020 after lockdown during first wave of COVID, for collecting data and interview. She extremely believes in God and very deedful towards religious practices. She occasionally attends familial, social & religious gatherings because of shortage of time due to her job.

On asking her thoughts over COVID, she stated that after COVID she is very conscious towards hygiene maintenance, a strange fear has settled in the mind, the earlier social life is no more, official and housework has increased, she still have a phobia, insecurities increased, she avoids social place, only visit when it is requisite, now one cannot live freely without any fear in mind. She stated it is an international scientific issue, from which everyone is suffering and she also feels nature might balancing itself. She was concerned about the financial losses incurred by the people during lockdown. Her unhappiness was evident from her facial expressions. She explained many people lost their jobs but in present scenario unlock might be more harmful than lockdown in terms of spreading corona because everyone is careless these days & now everyone is waiting for the development of vaccine. During lockdown she was working from home and work responsibilities were increased and she stated she got more time for religious practices which was good & religious practices gives her a mental satisfaction and fulfils her day with positive vibes.

Case 6- Mr. R., is 50 years old and a working man. He lives in his hometown Almora with family. He has one son. He was contacted twice formerly on 18th March 2020 before lockdown and later on 25th December 2020 after lockdown during first wave of COVID. He

is well psychologically but he is a patient of hypertension and under medication since 10 years. He is neutral towards religious beliefs. He occasionally participates in religious, familial and social gatherings.

On asking his thoughts over COVID, he stated now one cannot live freely as before, there is always a fear in mind while meeting people. He stated we need to take precautions and have to live according to the guidelines until development of vaccine. He stated there was no effect of corona in his personal life because his family was safe from the disease and he was receiving salary timely so there were no financial issues.

Case 7- Mr. M. is 75 years old, who is retired from army and his pension is approx. 20,000. After retirement he was settled in his hometown, Almora with his wife and he has 4 children (1 son and 3 daughters). He was contacted thrice, formerly on 17th March 2020 before lockdown when COVID was not prevalent in Uttarakhand. Secondly he was contacted on 21 December 2020 after lockdown during first wave of COVID and later he was again contacted telephonically for collecting data and interview. Mr. M. has not reported any mental illness but on physical status he reported heart problem since 8 years and he is under medication. He is very deedful towards religious practices and believes. He was keen on religious function, social and family gatherings before COVID.

On asking his thoughts over COVID, he stated it is a scientific weapon related to international political affair. He reported some routine changes after COVID pandemic like, more conscious about hygiene & more precautions towards health whereas, not that much conscious before. Now less tend to participate in family and social gatherings by keeping his and family's health in mind. There was no psycho physiological effect of lockdown and COVID. Subject has a good time during lockdown because their family was completely safe from corona but some anxious thoughts are always in mind because their children's was far away from them. Internet usage was quite increased during lockdown because he used to talk on video call with children and family friends & to listen Bhagwad, Ramayana & Satsang on YouTube.

Case 8- Mr. R., is 63 year old, he is retired from Uttarakhad police and his pension is approx. 18,000. His hometown is in Haridwar district but he lives in Almora with his family for many years and he has 3 children (1 son & 2 daughters). He was contacted twice, formerly on 15th March, 2020 before lockdown and later on 26 December 2020 after lockdown during first wave of COVID for collecting data and interview. Mr. R. is psycho-physically well. He extremely believes in God and he is tending to religious, familial and social gatherings.

On asking his thoughts over COVID, he stated that it is a natural disaster and it has happened due to playing with nature and polluting the environment. His life is not affected by COVID that much, he didn't reported any change & fear of COVID. He was prone to maintain hygiene before COVID but now he is more conscious. He had a good time with his family during COVID, he didn't stopped his participation in familial gathering because of COVID & he used to read sacred book during Lockdown.

Case 9- Mr. S., is 66 year old, who is retired from post office but he don't have pension & financially he depends on his savings & on his sons. He lives in a joint family with his wife and children's (2 sons) in his hometown Almora. He is physically and psychologically well. He is moderate towards religious practices and rituals. He occasionally participates in

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religious and familial gatherings. He was contacted twice formerly on 15th March 2020 before lockdown & later on 23rd December 2020 after lockdown during first wave of COVID for collecting data and interview.

On asking his thoughts over COVID, he has not reported any change during COVID but little hygienic (like, washing hands, use of sanitizer). He had a good time during COVID with his family and neighbors & they had many discussions about religious rituals, they used to watch Ramayana & Mahabharata together but he was quite upset about those who lost their jobs and facing financial issues.

Case 10- Mr. D., is 69 year old, he runs a shop of dry-cleaning and his monthly income is approx. 8,000. He is settled in Almora for many years, lives with his wife & he has 2 children's (1 son & 1 daughter). He is completely (physically & psychologically) well. He was contacted twice formerly on 17th March 2020 before lockdown & later on 21st December 2020 after lockdown during first wave of COVID for collecting data and interview. His believes are extreme in God and he is keen on religious, familial & social functions. He very frequently visits in sacred places.

On asking his thoughts over COVID, he stated corona as an international disaster through and whole world is fighting again this disease & we all need to be precautious until a vaccine is developed. He had a good time during lockdown because his all family members were safe and there was no financial stress because his son used to send them money. During lockdown he used to see religious programs and news on TV and thought a lot about this pandemic.

Case 11- Mrs. C., is 70 year old housewife. She lives with his husband in her hometown Almora, she settled in Almora after his husband's retirement. She don't have any children, she is dependent on his husband. She is psychologically well but she is a B.P. patient and under medication since 15 years. She tends to be religious, familial and attends social gatherings. She was contacted twice, formerly on 27th February 2020 before lockdown & later on 27th December 2020 after lockdown during first wave of COVID.

On asking her thoughts on COVID, she correlated corona with God & stated it is natural disaster to maintain balance of nature and to control population. She was quite anxious and precautious towards her health, and she was avoiding social gatherings or religious places by keeping her age and health in mind. She was quite upset about present situation. During COVID & lockdown she did not reported any change in her personal life.

Case 12- Mrs. L., is 62 year old housewife, lives in her Hometown Almora with her husband. She has two daughters & she lost her son because he was suffering from cancer. She is totally well. She is neutral towards sacred things and God. She always participates in religious, social & familial gathering but before COVID she rarely used to participate. She was contacted twice formerly on 14th March 2020 before COVID & later on 23rd December 2020 after lockdown during first wave of COVID to collect data & interview.

On asking her thoughts over COVID, she stated it is a disease, that affecting whole world and she is quite anxious and stressed because of unexpected news during COVID period. She stated she is thoughtful about present situation and hoping for normal situation. She reported her life was not affected due to lockdown she had normal routine during lockdown she used spent her time in religious and household activities & denied social places.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

To identify change (before and during COVID) in one's religious belief and faith in God religious attitude scale was used. Changes in individual's religious attitude before and after lockdown are shown in Table 1 & Table 2.

Table 1- Religious attitude in various dimensions of RAS before lockdown

Dimensions	Extremely religious (%)	Moderately Religious (%)	Neutral (%)	Moderately Anti-Religious (%)	Extremely anti-religious (%)
Nature of God	16.6%	75%	8.3%	0%	0%
Prayer & Worship	75%	25%	0%	0%	0%
Formal Religion	41.6%	25%	33.3%	0%	0%
Preists	8.3%	25%	50%	16.6%	0%
Future Life	16.6%	50%	8.3%	25%	0%
Spirit & Spiritual World	8.3%	33.3%	33.3%	25%	0%

Table 1 shows individuals belief in various dimensions of Religious attitude scale before COVID-19 lockdown. It indicates that how much percentages of subjects are extremely religious, moderately religious, neutral, Moderately anti religious or extremely anti religious in various dimensions of Religious Attitude Scale.

Table 2- Religious attitude in various dimensions of RAS after lockdown

Dimensions	Extremely religious (%)	Moderately Religious (%)	Neutral (%)	Moderately Anti-Religious (%)	Extremely anti-religious (%)
Nature of God	91.6%	8.3%	0%	0%	0%
Prayer & Worship	83.3%	16.6%	0%	0%	0%
Formal Religion	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Preists	0%	33.3%	66.6%	0%	0%
Future Life	8.3%	66.6%	16.6%	8.3%	0%
Spirit & Spiritual World	0%	16.6%	50%	16.6%	16.6%

Table 2 shows changes in Religious attitudes of all subjects after COVID-19 lockdown. Results indicate that from all six dimensions of religious attitude scale majority of cases reported change in first dimension i.e., nature of God. On one hand from all 12 cases only 2 cases i.e., 16.6% were reporting their extreme belief in God before lockdown. On the other hand when those 12 cases were contacted again from all those 12 cases 11 cases i.e., 91.6% reported their extreme belief in God. Overall scores indicate that individual's faith in God has increased after lockdown in comparison to before lockdown. This means that during COVID-19 lockdown one's faith in God has increased.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a challenging situation for all especially for those whose family members or children were far away from them. During interview it was observed from all 12 cases everyone was upset & anxious at some point, some were not accepting but their verbal expressions like their children are not with them, they are not able to join someone's happiness or grief indicate that they were not able to completely adapt the situation and afraid of it. In such situation religious practices or faith in God was a healing

balm for one's life because it gave them a kind of mental satisfaction to deal with the challenging situation or to divert their mind from all negative news. A previous study related to it states that during such ambiguity, especially in stressful times, religiosity and spirituality are known coping strategies for mental illness (Prazeres et. al., 2021). In our study, it was reported that the telecast of Ramayana and Mahabharata was very helpful for them during lockdown. Most of the individual reported that they used listen Bhagawad, Ramayana or Satsang on YouTube during lockdown & results also indicated an increase in their belief in God. Our individuals turn to religion to deal with unbearable and unpredictable life events, which aim to reduce or manage the emotional distress arising from the situation (Bentzen, 2019). When being exposed to threat we use various strategies of survival, faith being one of them, which allow us to keep hope as well as feel sense of security (Kowalczyk et. al., 2020). In our study when subjects were interviewed after COVID-19 lockdown they were reporting that to divert their mind from negative news they were trying to busy themselves with religious serials, religious YouTube channels, with some sacred books etc. As many have said this is a wonderful time to develop a stronger relationship with God by concentrating on personal religious activities like, reading sacred scriptures such as Bible, Quran, Bhagvad Gita; listening to or watching such program on radio or TV or otherwise engaging in private religious activities that are encouraged by one's faith tradition (Koenig 2020).

CONCLUSION

The initial lockdown phase was unpredictable and provoked anxiety in common public. Religious practices were observed as a healing balm over the triggering anxieties and stress. The results of the present study were largely coherent with the studies done previously indicating towards the universal behavior of turning towards the religious practices for finding console. More, statistically sophisticated studies are required in the present area of study to find the statistically significant results in reference to age, gender and influence of culture.

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Acknowledgment

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: Pathak, P., Kukreti, V., & Bhatt, P.D. (2026). Religious Belief During the COVID-19 Lockdown: Coping Mechanism or Faith Commitment? *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 14(3), 2555-2563. DIP:18.01.233.20261403, DOI:10.25215/1403.233