



COVID-19: PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND RESPONSE

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ABSTRACT: *The coronavirus or COVID-19 has emerged as the serious threat for all the nations around the globe. The disease has been declared as Pandemic by World Health Organization (WHO) and has paralysed the cycle of global village with stress and anxiety. Covid-19, started from the Hubei province of China, has now reached to more than 200 countries on the planet. Rapid spread and limitations of healthcare facilities are causing extensive panic and anxiety among individuals in every part of the world. The outbreak of this virus has triggered the equal level of crisis in countries of developed, developing, and underdeveloped world.*

KEYWORDS: Coronavirus, Pandemic, Psychological Issues, Global Challenge

INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus or COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as a serious threat that has unveiled unprecedented challenges for the nations around the globe. It has turned out to be the most severe stress for the comity of nations and the international organizations. World Health Organization (WHO) and other relevant sources suggest that the virus has infected hundreds of thousands and the number of resulting deaths is increasing with every passing day since December 2019¹, which is an alarming situation for nations around the globe. Analysts, journalists and politicians are trying to evaluate and comprehend the emerging situation that will unleash new health, economic, political, and social challenges in this globalized world. However, the psychological implications of this pandemic are very critical as they will have a long-lasting impact on the individuals and collective behaviour of every nation. The growing number of infected populations in every corner of the world has posed serious challenges for the psychological state of masses.

Started from China in December 2019, COVID-19 has now penetrated into more than 200 countries and territories,² raising issues of extensive panic and growing anxiety in individuals. It has already brought a pause into the lives of the people drawing a line of 'before' and 'after' Corona. Some people have given up their recreational activities such as traveling and socializing for some the ground from under their feet and they may not stand again, and some have lost their jobs. The social and economic impact of this crisis has become ubiquitous in every walk of life. The forced lockdowns and other restrictions of mobility by the authority have sacked a large number of populations particularly daily-wage earners from their means.

¹ "World Health Organisation" Available at: <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>

² "Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Report – 78", *World Health Organization* (7 April 2020) Available at: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200407-sitrep-78-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=bc43e1b_2



The micro-entrepreneurs are undergoing a mental agony hence no certainty of running their businesses is looming in the nearer future. The current Coronavirus pandemic is leading towards a global pandemic of unemployment.

It is fascinating to know that the developed regions particularly Europe and the US are more vulnerable as compared to the rest of the world in the face of COVID-19.³ It has appeared as a dual edged -sword threatening their personal health and their economic prosperity. We observed a staggering and baffling behaviour from the so-called the most civilized part of the world when they were asked to confined to homes trimming their proclaimed freedom and liberty of movements. They remained reluctant to follow the order by the authorities, eventually they are facing serious situation is the dell toll is ringing aloud every passing day. Today this disease strongly fixed its lethal jaws in countries like Italy, the US, and Spain, and they have now become the epicentres of new coronavirus cases.⁴ Fighting against, COVID-19, may soon get over with the invention of vaccines, but provision of appropriate earning sources for millions of people around the globe who have consequently lost their jobs will be the next gigantic task for the world. In addition to this serious financial challenge, a numerous population will be suffering from severe psychological ailments.

CORONAVIRUS: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

Coronavirus disease is affecting everyone in the world in one way or another, with no exceptions of religion, language, occupation, age, sex as well as social and financial background. At various epochs of history several past events such as epidemics, World Wars and revolutions have affected the course of history in different ways. These events to result in redefining and restructuring future trends. This pandemic COVID -19 is not only affecting the political and financial structure but also the social structure.

Relationships and social connections are an important factor in our lives. People who often complained about having no time for simple joys of life are now blessed with an abundance of time. It could be blessings in disguise for those who were berated by their loved ones for sparing no time, they have a chance to win their hearts now. The children, who used to protest against their parents for not giving them time and importance, are now overwhelmed with their company. People must be finding innovative ways to love their beloveds.

Since long we have been neglecting our health, our family and our home. In the time of self-quarantine, it is an opportunity for us to take care of ourselves and our loved ones and rebuild the house into a home and to nurture relationships at home. By eating junk food, taking soft drinks and drinking contaminated water, we put our health in danger. Now is the time to take healthy food, exercise and rest for your physical as well as mental health because a healthy mind resides in a healthy body.

³ Joe Penney, "U.S. Got More Confirmed "Index Cases" Of Coronavirus From Europe Than From China", *The Intercept* (13 April 2020) <https://theintercept.com/2020/04/12/u-s-got-more-confirmed-index-cases-of-coronavirus-from-europe-than-from-china/>

⁴ Alison Rourke, "Europe's coronavirus numbers offer hope as US enters 'peak of terrible pandemic'", *The Guardian* (6 April 2020) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/06/europes-coronavirus-numbers-offer-hope-as-us-enters-peak-of-terrible-pandemic>



The COVID-19 pandemic is perceived as a global hazard that needs to be dealt with prudent and cost-effective measures. In addition to the precautionary and preventive measure there is a desperate need of positivity for undoing the long-lasting damage of coronavirus. Now, it's time to remain optimistic in this creepy environment while having a constructive perspective for the future of humanity. In order to control the spread of the virus and protect more vulnerable members of the community, it's a crucial time to frame coronavirus as a collective rather than an individual threat, and for that a collective action could be desired help. The virus has brought the world to a standstill. We need to understand that this type of situation is not new, the world has experienced these kinds of crises before in history as well. All those crises and epidemics ultimately ended one way or another. Eventually, this coronavirus pandemic will also get over. After every difficulty, there is always ease. In the hustle and bustle of everyday life, we forget the real purpose of mankind. The most important for us is to help each other in these difficult times. We do not need to be panic or afraid of Coronavirus, but we should fight against it.

Since the end of February 2020, Pakistan is fighting an outbreak of the coronavirus that has infected around 6000 people so far.⁵ The COVID-19 disease is not merely a public health issue but a crisis that will touch every sector. The fear of Coronavirus has stopped public life in much of the world so as in Pakistan. The authorities in Pakistan have also imposed partial and complete lockdowns at the provincial level to control the spread of the virus. Across the country public gatherings are banned, schools, colleges, and universities are closed and all shops except groceries or medicines have been shut down.

In the wake of harsh initiatives of lockdowns, educational institutions across the country are closed and students are facing the enormous disruption in their everyday activities. They are confined to the boundaries of home with less opportunity for physical activities and socialization, which is essential for mental wellbeing. This sort of condition may inflict them with psychological problems such as worry, anxiety, and fear.

Blissfully, though Pakistan does not have the conditions that are in the US or Europe, but the economic crisis in the country is making it worse with every passing day. With 25% of the population living in extreme poverty⁶, people are struggling to survive in the Corona lockdown. People are fighting with Corona pandemic as well as hunger. Similarly, the healthcare professionals of Pakistan are also vulnerable as they lack self-protective gears and insufficient equipment to deal with and a large-scale flow of COVID patients. Given these evolving challenges, it's a high time for government and relevant institutions to take effective measures to curtail the loss. The government has announced a relief package, for the labour class, that needs swift implementation otherwise the situation will be severe and large.

Government needs to take immediate measures in order to provide food to the vulnerable section of society and equip the health sector with significant manpower and logistics. In order to keep our front liners motivated, the government has to ensure availability of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and medical machinery. Many private educational institutes are moving or have moved to online education. Many universities are offering virtual classrooms where students can log in and attend a live-session. This is a good activity to engage students in studies so they can come out from trauma like situations. By using this technique, the

⁵ "Coronavirus Pandemic", *Dawn* (15 April 2020)

Available at <https://www.dawn.com/live-blog/>

⁶ Mumtaz Alvi, "Corona to be fought with faith: PM Imran Khan", *The News International* (31 March 2020) <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/637285-corona-to-be-fought-with-faith-pm-imran-khan>



government can use state media and arrange lectures and question-answer sessions with researchers, psychologists, educationists, and motivational speakers to reduce the stress in public. Surveillance of healthcare facilities, security of staff, and swift implementation of policies will be inevitable for effective operations against COVID and limiting the psychological impact of this crisis.