

**PSYCHOLOGICAL CHANGES DUE TO COVID-19 INFECTION****Dr. Kedar Athawale\***

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**ABSTRACT**

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the whole world, with over 80,00,00,000 cases and 17,00,000 confirmed deaths reported to date. India alone has more than 1,00,00,000 diagnosed patients. Such widespread outbreaks are associated with adverse mental health consequences. No preventive medicine or vaccine availability and incidence of sudden deterioration of the health condition and death are the two factors which seem to have increased the fear about the disease. This has led to varied mental and psychological issues which need to be studied. Available evidence suggests that symptoms of anxiety, depression and stress are common psychological reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of my study is to try to find the behavioral and psychological changes in CoVid-19 infected patients who had been quarantined. In conclusion, mental health problems are a common response to the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a need for more research about the issue and find the ways to avoid it as well as plan to treat the issues.

**KEYWORDS:** COVID-19, Anxiety, Depression, Stress, Public health.**INTRODUCTION**

CoVid-19 infection started in China sometime in early 2020 and spread rapidly throughout the world taking a form of a pandemic. There are more than ten million diagnosed patients in India alone. More than 1.7 million people have died in the whole world so far. Fast spreading nature of the disease has forced the health authorities to implement stringent public health measures to curtail the spread of COVID-19.<sup>[1]</sup> One of these is quarantine of the infected individual for two to three weeks. This along with fear of death and spreading of disease to the near and dear ones has led to many psychological issues. Psychiatrists across the world are aware of these issues and they need to make strategies to manage them. Not only the general population infected by the virus it is seen that healthcare workers are also vulnerable to the emotional impact of COVID-19 infection<sup>[2]</sup> due to both the pandemic and its consequences worldwide.<sup>[3,4]</sup>

Fear seems to be the basic cause of all the psychological issues related to CoVid-19 infection. The fear is because of rapid increase in number of infected cases, inadequate and anxiety-provoking information provided by media.<sup>[5]</sup> The reactions can be – Panic attack, collective hysteria, feeling of hopelessness and desperation. The most feared one is increased incidence of suicidal behavior.<sup>[3]</sup>

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

It was an online survey carried out in November 2020. It was conducted using Google Forms. Link was provided through platforms like WhatsApp, Telegram and Google mail. Anonymity of the participants was maintained. Only interested candidates were included in the survey. Invitation clearly stated that the participants have the right not to participate in the survey. A questionnaire was prepared and was sent to those who had shown interest to take part in the survey. The survey took 2-3 minutes to complete. Total of 200 individuals took part in the survey.

**Inclusion criteria**

1. Any gender
2. Age more than 18 years.
3. Had positive CoVid-19 infection test.
4. No severe symptoms like breathlessness or positive disease signs on Chest radiograph or HRCT.

**Exclusion criteria**

1. Unwilling individuals.
2. Chest radiograph and HRCT showing positive signs of infection.
3. Hospitalized for treatment.

The individuals who had signs of infection on Chest radiograph or HRCT were purposefully excluded from the study to avoid bias in the results.

The questionnaire consisted of details like age, gender, total period of quarantine, behavioral changes, emotional changes, psychological changes and changes in daily chores after the quarantine. Multiple choices were given and the individual could select one or more choices. Space was provided if the individual wanted to add any special complaints or comments.

Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were performed with SPSS version 18.0.

## RESULTS

200 participants were included in the study group. It included 130 males and 70 females. Following were the results –

### Behavior change

Easily irritated – 55 percent

No change – 39 percent.

Loose temper easily – 31 percent

Have become more calm – 20 percent

Started acting with humbleness with coworkers – 19 percent.

### Emotional change

No change – 40 percent

Have become stubborn – 20 percent

Don't react to emotional feelings of others or to emotional scenes on television – 18 percent

Have become more emotional – 17 percent.

### Psychological change

No change – 45 percent.

Feel prone to anxiety like symptoms – 25 percent

Feel depressed – 20 percent

Suicidal thoughts or think of death more often – 2 percent

### Change in daily chores

Eating healthy – 80 percent

Started or increased exercise – 60 percent

Spend more time with friends and family – 50 percent.

Started a new hobby/ completing tasks in bucket list – 30 percent

No change – 10 percent.

In my study it was found that anxiety and depression was seen in around 50 percent of the individuals. Concerning was four individuals who had suicidal thoughts. Such individuals need urgent intervention, evaluation and treatment. Feeling irritated and losing temper easily was one of the major behavioral changes noticed.

Apart from all the negative changes seen nearly around 40 percent individuals stated that there was no effect of the disease on them mentally. This is one of the positive things noted in the study. Other positive effects were maximum individuals started regular exercise or increased its frequency. Many started following good eating habits. Around 50 percent started spending more

time with their friends and family members. Around 30 percent started following a hobby. All these positive findings will help the infected in attaining good health, not only physical but also mental in long run. Many individuals stated that in first week of quarantine they passed much of their time watching online stuff however from next week they got bored to it and slowly realized importance of real people interaction. Only a minority of the respondents took psychiatry help and they were started on antidepressant or anti-anxiety drugs.

## DISCUSSION

Most relevant psychological reactions to COVID-19 infection are -

### 1. Nonspecific fear related to infection

This is one of the most common psychological reactions to any pandemic. Several studies demonstrated that those infected develop fears due to varied causes like – fear about their health, worries to infect friends and family members.

### 2. Anxiety

One of the preventive measures to limit the virus spread was social isolation or quarantine. These are linked to feelings of uncertainty for the future and fear of less known infective agent - causing increased anxiety. Anxiety may lead to sensorial deprivation and feeling of loneliness which may lead to depression and post-traumatic stress. In healthcare workers anxiety may cause fatigue and reduced performance.

### 3. Frustration and boredom

Frustration and boredom are directly caused by solitary confinement, reduced social or physical contact and limitation of performing routine chores or habits.

### Preventive strategies

Considering the varied psychological effects of CoVid-19 pandemic a multi pronged preventive strategy is needed to tackle them. It includes –

1. Implementing effective communication
2. Providing psychological services

These can be achieved educating the people about the virus infection. This can be done through print as well as digital media. Social platforms can also play a major role in this.

Early diagnosis of psychological symptoms needs to be done with adequate sessions with the quarantined patients. Tele-medicine does play an important role in it. The health workers should provide appropriate information to reduce the impact of anxiety, frustration, and all the negative emotions. A helpline should be started to help those who feel a need to talk with the health worker.

## CONCLUSION

As of now there are very few studies especially examining the psychological effect of CoVid-19

pandemic. However it is proved beyond doubt that the infection and measures taken to prevent its spread do affect large number of individuals. The doctors especially psychiatry trained ones have a large role to play in preventing and treating the psychological issues which people will face in coming months. Detailed study is also needed for individuals who are from low socio-economic strata and do not consider psychological issues that relevant in their life.

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