

## **THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC: A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH**

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### **ABSTRACT**

No one in this world would have expected such an unprecedented pandemic, which swept the five continents of the globe at a lightning speed, with unparalleled dramatization and contradictory view points and interpretations. The belief was that the coming of the twenty-first century signaled the dawn of a new era for the world thanks to its significant scientific and technical progress and that its immunity against epidemics was, therefore, taken for granted. However, all that proved to be untrue and the illusion of the universe and nature being under control was soon shattered. Governments re-imposed confinement, lock down and emergency states as a primitive way to confront an invisible enemy called the New Corona Virus. The present study seeks to lay bare the psychological impact of this new reality, in all its various manifestations, on individuals, families and society. In other words, it tries to examine the way(s) the Covid 19 pandemic has impacted the psychology of individuals, families and society alike.

**Keywords:** anxiety, corona virus, disorders, impact, Morocco, pandemic.

### **INTRODUCTION**

No one in this world would have expected such an unprecedented pandemic, which swept the five continents of the globe at a lightning speed, with unparalleled dramatization and contradictory view points and interpretations. The belief was that the coming of the twenty-first century signaled the dawn of a new era for the world thanks to its significant scientific and technical progress and that its immunity against epidemics was, therefore, taken for granted. However, all that proved to be untrue and the illusion of the universe and nature being under control was soon shattered.

The economy collapsed, the prevailing paradigm changed and the scientific and technical dogmatism was wiped. As result of this, the world's pride cracked and panic and fear of everything and of the other suddenly pervaded; people deserted public places, football fans left cafés, terraces and bleachers; curtains of dancing and music festivals went down; many of the chaotic and informal jobs disappeared. Only doctors, nurses, paramedics, police, security people, local authority officials, public education staff and media people remained in the front line.

Governments re-imposed confinement, lock down and emergency states as a primitive way to confront an invisible enemy called the New Corona Virus, known as Covid 19. The present study seeks to lay bare the psychological impact of this new reality, in all its various manifestations, on individuals, families and society. In other words, it tries to examine the way(s) the Covid 19 pandemic has impacted the psychology of individuals, families and society alike.

As a matter of fact, we think it is too early to talk about the multifaceted repercussions of this pandemic; in-depth and multidisciplinary studies are needed to discern and understand all the different dimensions of this phenomenon. However, given the specificity of the circumstances we are currently experiencing on the one hand, and the nature of the psychological approach adopted to discuss this pandemic, we will only look at some of the psychological disorders connected to this unprecedented pandemic, based on our accumulations thereto in order to come up with credible scientific conclusions.

In this context, it is important to note that of psychology-based studies, are scarce and address the the Covid 19 phenomenon from different perspectives; in fact, existing studies have dealt with natural disasters in general, such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and other human disasters, namely wars and terrorist operations. This being the case, one cannot but stress that psychological studies of such phenomena as the Corona pandemic must be taken with great caution, not only because it (the Covid 19) is still at its beginning, but also because of its heavy economic and social consequences. The losses, moreover, are significant and severe, with about 700,000 deaths and about 16 million contaminated.

Such losses have certainly left unprecedented social and individual horror.

Needless to say that by the time it has disappeared, the pandemic will have left a heavy and difficult legacy, of which the psychological repercussions on human behavior, habits at home, within family, society, and institutions are difficult to predict, a fact which may be ascribed to the inertia and paralysis (i.e., the difficulty to move within the family sphere).

It will also have unforgettable effects and significant complications at all levels. Worse is that no one can predict the size, duration and end of these consequences; these very factors are perhaps among the most important sources of fear that has befallen humans and made them see an ambiguous, unjust and mysterious future, a future fraught with a terrible fear of the unknown. All this is such that to overshadow and harm the individuals' psyche and increase the complexity of their troubled psychological state.

## **1. A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH**

### **1.1. The Pre-Corona psychological structure**

Hijazi (2013) believes that the situation in underdeveloped societies is very different from that in developed societies, especially regarding the way epidemics and disasters are psychologically approached. Therefore, as developing countries, we do not have a long-standing and well-established tradition in terms of democracy and civic behavior, especially if we invoke the superstructures related to psychological structures, the mindset guiding our existence. The quality of the relationship between humans and their surrounding world in underdeveloped societies, moreover, is characterized by the inevitable violence that nature has imposed on them, and which threatens their strength, security and health.

This becomes even worse during disasters jeopardizing their security, such as diseases and epidemics that result in violence, and make them live on the primary necessities. The greater the

dangers of nature, the greater the feelings of disability and anxiety, a fact which makes people constantly concerned and worried about nature that threatens their existence, amplifies their feelings of disability in terms of health, livelihood and security.

Lack of security and fear of calamities that may befall them at any time makes men resort to metaphysics, and an excessive tendency towards the humanization of nature. This very fact makes men live regressively all childhood-suffered fears, anxieties, frustration, neglect and cruelty, which survive in their unconscious as punishment for an illusory sin they committed (Hijazi, 2013,38). Face to their incapacity vis-à-vis such feelings, men are helpless before nature and fate and the only way to explain such arbitrariness is through fate and proverbs. This violent relationship between men and nature is combined with another violent relationship imposed by reality.

## **2. The PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF CORONA PANDEMIC ON INDIVIDUALS UNDER LOCKDOWN**

### **2.1. Characteristics of the new psychological context**

In psychology, periods of pandemic make nature appear like a cruel mother that carries the danger of death and abandons her children, depriving them of love and affection. This results in the revival of childhood primitive fear (abandon, loneliness, inner emptiness) referred to as "desertion anxiety," which, in turn, actuates the highest degrees of aggressiveness and destructive vengeance in human life, and ultimately represents dangerous threats, especially the illogical, unlimited and existential panic known as the "annihilation anxiety" (Hijazy, 2013:91-92; Cacioppo et al, 2008). Perhaps, the most important defensive mechanism used by individuals is isolationism, insularity and withdrawal from confrontation, for they believe that their response may be inappropriate (Fiske et al, 2007); under such circumstances, individuals become helpless and short of tricks, and, thus, repress their desires to prevent feelings of pain and frustration.

On this basis, these individuals resort to what has come to be called "surrender to fatalism", which, in underdeveloped societies, means the law of arbitrariness in explaining cruel natural phenomena (Hijazi, 2013:162-163). Such feelings feed off deprivation and ignorance and represent a sort of solace, in so far as such ordeals are taken as expiation and atonement for committed sins. The frequency of these phenomena and interpretations may lead to the conversion of fatalism into a kind of duty that is associated with the necessity of accepting disasters and misfortunes as a test of faith and, therefore, should not be totally disobeyed or rejected. All that is allowed in such circumstances is prayer (Maliki et al, 2019).

The constant use of proverbs in ordinary human culture and discourse may, in a way or another, serves as organizer of events and phenomena and, subsequently, enables individuals to have a sense of control over their destiny. Proverbs, moreover, together with the violence of everyday life, serve as the legal texts of fatalism; Just like folk songs and jokes, they may help relieve psychological tension in so far as they provide a sort of rationalization or justification to life

experiences face to individuals' helplessness to influence the course of events (Hijazi, 2013:164; Maliki & Housni,2020).

## **2.2. Some Psychological disorders associated with the spread of the pandemic**

In order to examine the psychological pressures resulting from Corona virus, it is necessary to have a clear idea of what is meant by 'psychological pressures'; In common parlance, this term comprises various synonyms, including, inter alia, frustration, conflict, anger, fear. However, the most familiar sense of the term 'psychological pressure' is stress, which is said to include a series of biological, psychological, economic and social dimensions. Psychologists, like Passer & Smith (2004), for instance, adopt three fundamental methods to describe and explain psychological pressures, claiming that such pressures are based on three basic data elements. These data elements are external stimulus (accident, disaster, pandemic.), individuals' cognitive, affective/emotional or behavioral responses and finally the interaction between the stimulus and attitude (i.e., the interaction between individuals and their environment in a given situation).

The sources of pressure, it is important to remember, differ according to their impact on individuals' psychology in light of the three afore-mentioned fundamentals and depending on the context in which these individuals interact with the situation they are in. It follows that the Corona pandemic, which threatens human existence, has negative effects that are beyond individuals' capacities, especially amid the physical and mood changes that can be summarized as follows:

First of all, there are behavioral pressures which result in negligence, forgetfulness (amnesia), anxiety and other psych-cognitive disorders. Such disorders affect certain mental activities, such as memory, attention and perception, which, combined, lead to a decrease in working individuals' motivation, energy and productivity (Tulving et al, 1975). The second type of effects are physiological. Such effects concern the increase in adrenaline hormone in blood, which may lead to complications in organ function, such as irregular heartbeats (arrhythmias) and circulatory system disorder, as well as abnormal hyperbolic secretions in relation to thyroid gland. Persistence of such disorders may lead to anorexia, weight loss, physical collapse, and increased liver cholesterol secretion that may result in arterial hardness, stomach disorders and skin irritation. and, ultimately, a decrease in immunity (Abou Asaad, 2015: 237).

The danger here lies in the fact that in the event of Covid 19 infection, individuals risk losing their life due to the great decrease in acquired immune deficiency. The same holds true for psychological aspects, in so far as all this may entail personal disorders, depression, continuous tensions, mood volatility and decrease in self-esteem may ensue (Cacioppo et al, 2008).

In the same vein, it is necessary to point out a series of other disorders related to the seriousness of Human beings' mental state during lockdown and the other harms caused by the way various media display the pandemic. Among the significant psychological consequences, we can cite panic, sweating, nausea, high body temperature, suffocation, all resulting in fear of death and phobia (Abou Asaad, 2015:246; Azdad, 2020). Besides the above-mentioned disorders, there are other neurological disorder, namely obsessive compulsive disorder, with its unreasonable

symptoms, such as hygiene obsession (Cottraux, 2017:179). All this is directly and intricately related to individuals' conditions of lockdown; their minds are dominated by a series of ideas arising from fear of infection and contagion; therefore, it is not surprising to see some strange behaviors, like excessive and repeated hand washing and disinfection. In this respect, psychology has proved that, as made clear by Chrystel Besche-Richard (2018: 81), while humans are persuaded that their behavior is not justified and illusionary, they are nevertheless not capable of refraining from or at least reducing it.

### **3. COVID 19 – RELATED FRUSTRATION AND ANXIETY**

The concern here is humans' perception and feeling that there exist obstacles and constraints that impede and hinder the fulfilment of their needs and objectives. Worse is that under the lockdown circumstances, there is a firm belief that achievement of certain goals has become impossible. Many Moroccans have undoubtedly undergone such a feeling, especially with regard to traveling during spring, going for picnics, practicing group sport, going shopping or leaving their home freely at any time. This has been the case for all age groups and social classes, with varying degrees depending on the availability or unavailability of comfort and amenities as well as on character, age, context, and other variables.

In addition to the above, if we consider these situations of frustration and anxiety, we will notice that they include certain basic elements, namely (i) individuals whose motivation force them to behave in a particular way, (ii) motives or desires, i.e., all behaviors that satisfy the needs that individuals want to achieve and (iii) obstacles or barriers to the achievement of goals, particularly the constraints that hinder needs fulfilment. At this point, it is important to note that, in the context of epidemic invasion and the state of health emergency, frustration and anxiety become prevalent in all groups, and this, we believe, is natural given the particular circumstances.

In this connection, it is important to remember that anxiety is a two-level one. The first level, which, in turn, falls into a primary and a secondary level, is often perceived at the very beginning of this feeling of anxiety and when individuals feel the presence of a specific need they should satisfy. The secondary stage of frustration is the most exciting one and starts when individuals are internally motivated to be fulfill such needs, but feel there are obstacles that interfere with this, as is the case with shopping that require individuals to take a series of precautions (mask, social and physical distancing measures, hand washing, avoiding touching spaces or objects, etc.).

The second level is also composed of internal and external elements. The internal aspect occurs when there are barriers that prevent the fulfilment of individuals' physical and psychological needs, such as exercising outdoors, eating out or leading a normal intimate life. The external aspect, on the other hand, is related to the state of affairs under lockdown and quarantine; in other words, the natural social environment does no longer allow individuals to fulfil their wishes, such as travel, movement, work and other things that they do in the course of their normal life (Abou Asaad, 2015:254).

#### **4. THE IMPACT OF SPACE AS PSYCHOLOGICAL SPACE UNDER QUARANTINE.**

Several studies have been concerned with the space surrounding humans as a factor of psychological pressure, or what Gustave-Nicholas Fischer (2011: 60) refers to as the 'space pathology', in which he emphasizes the importance of space surrounding humans in their own psyche. One often hears that people believe that the territory around them underlies the particular behaviors they may produce, and that some pathological disturbances and deviations are closely linked to the nature of the public space, be it rural or urban. In some situations, there exist a causal relationship between the spaces in which humans live and the type of emotions they produce, where the space around them becomes a source of concern and a threatens their safety and psychological stability (Diener & Diener, 2008).

Many other psychological studies focused on the space manifestations that result in anxiety, such as noise, high temperature, insecurity and other factors that threaten the psychological security of individuals and subsequently lead to behavior disorders. The most important psychological disorder examined in relation to territory and living space is anxiety and psychological pressure. Fischer (2011) believes that individuals feel this space anxiety when they lose control over their environment; it may happen that individuals find themselves in a space that is full of noise and therefore feel that they cannot control it.

In the same context, Fischer (2011) admits that many studies on territory and pathological space, i.e., space pathology, have pointed out the existence of a pathological relationship between the individual and a particular territory. Many of such research works, according to Fischer, laid emphasis on those spaces that make individuals experience pathological anxieties, or to use a technical term, space phobia. Depending on our observation, it appears that such a situation applies, to a large extent, to Moroccans' living conditions during the state of health emergency and the quarantine imposed nationwide; many individuals, it should be acknowledged, suffered from phobia, be it agoraphobia or vast and empty space phobia.

One can invoke here those individuals living in vast spaces, such as upper class members or countryside dwellers, where the vast and open spaces become a source of pathological phobia projection because of their association with bad memories or because they evoke previous memories of pain and suffering. In parallel, there is a phobia of narrow and closed space or what is usually referred to as claustrophobia, i.e., a pathological fear resulting from the feeling of suffocation, which is most strikingly prevalent in city outskirts or suburbs, shared dwellings, insalubrious dwellings, villages and mountains as well as marginalized areas where poverty and vulnerability prevail.

#### **5. THE POST-CORONA PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS**

The concern here is the post-corona period from a psychological perspective, i.e., what psychologists refer to as the post-traumatic anxiety caused by the pandemic. This kind of anxiety, in psychologists' view and according to the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) published in 2013, is a special symptom that humans cannot easily understand. In such a case, humans feel lonely and lose their sense of intimacy; they, moreover, experience great fear, threat and powerlessness. As a result, they not only remember the painful

images and events that accompany them as long-disturbing dreams and nightmares, but also recall many painful scenes due to the emergence of internal and external signals that trigger their reappearance. Added to this is the state of isolation, decrease in vitality, lack of activity, and acute decrease in certain emotions (love and affection) and the meaninglessness of life ((Chrystal Besche-Richard 2018: 85). These symptoms will undoubtedly accompany many people at all levels in the post-traumatic period that Corona virus will cause.

### **Conclusion:**

The present study does by no means claim to have addressed all the aspects of the psychological consequences of the Corona pandemic; in fact, it is not easy to give a comprehensive view of such a thorny and multidimensional issue, of which the understanding requires a lot of time and efforts. Such an issue has been overstated due to humans' indifference and has also called into question all the previous perceptions about the scientifically, technologically and economically developed world.

The Corona pandemic will mark the contemporary history of mankind as the most famous modern-day brainstorming. However, its economic, political and social cost and the human losses should not blind our eyes to its psychological cost that cannot be confined to previous or immediate disorders during quarantine. Instead, attention should be paid to post-traumatic stress disorders, which will undoubtedly leave many victims suffering in silence for years.

Psychological disorders usually make victims leave in a complex and intricate cycle in terms of the cognitive efforts made to understand their disorders on the one hand and those made to hide their symptoms on the other; failure to conceal such symptoms will certainly make victims suffer twice, i.e. from the social stigma and from the difficulty of access to treatment, especially given the lack of adequate health facilities and highly qualified psychological health and wellness staff. Yet, one can say that the Corona pandemic together with the unfamiliar behaviours it has imposed represent an opportunity for individuals, society, institutions to carry out serious, effective and efficient multi-level assessments. Reasonable people will hopefully draw important lessons and reconsider priorities, especially the urgent need for building a new and agreed upon social contract.

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