



Long-Term Effects of COVID-19 on Mental Health: A Public Health Perspective

Renuka Jyothi S, Uma Bhardwaj, Jaskirat Singh, Dr. R. Latha, Dr. Suwendu Narayan Mishra, Trupti Rekha Pradhan, Dr. Varsha Agarwal,

Assistant Professor, Department of Biotechnology and Genetics, Jain (Deemed-to-be University), Bangalore, Karnataka, India, Email Id- j.renuka@jainuniversity.ac.in, Orcid id- 0000-0003-3248-337X

Professor, Department Of Biotechnology and Microbiology, Noida International University, Uttar Pradesh, India. vc@niu.edu.in 0000-0002-6414-9731

Centre of Research Impact and Outcome, Chitkara University, Rajpura- 140417, Punjab, India. jaskirat.singh.orp@chitkara.edu.in <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-0914-4700>

Department of Microbiology, Aarupadai Veedu Medical College and Hospital, Vinayaka Missions Research Foundation (DU), India. Orcid- 0000-0001-5196-6735

Professor, Department of Psychiatry, IMS and SUM Hospital, Siksha 'O' Anusandhan (Deemed to be University), Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India, Email Id- suwendumishra@soa.ac.in, Orcid Id- 0000-0002-0309-1310

Assistant Professor, Department of Nursing, Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India, Email Id- truptirekha.nursing@sathyabama.ac.in, Orcid Id- <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-4884-4689>

Director, ISME, ATLAS SkillTech University, Mumbai, India, Email Id- varsha.agarwal@atlasuniversity.edu.in, Orcid Id- 0000-0001-8406-9213

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 (C-19) pandemic has enduring effects on Mental Health (MH). The research intends to examine the longitudinal alterations in MH issues from the first peak of C-19 to its aftermath amongst the general population. Anxiousness, depression, and sleeplessness were evaluated substantially across the national group of 1500 adults throughout the initial peak of C-19 and its period utilizing the Client Health Survey-9, Generalized Stress Conditions-7, and Sleep deprivation Severity Indexes. The research employed generalized evaluating formulas and mixed linear methods to investigate parameters linked to prolonged psychological symptoms of C-19. Throughout the five months, psychological problems persisted at elevated levels (baseline 47.2%; monitoring 43.2%). Long-term sadness, anxiousness, and depression were linked to various private and occupational variables, such as isolation (adjusted odds ratio for any mental health symptoms), increased work burden post-resumption, job-related danger to C-19, and residing in areas severely impacted by the initial C-19 peak or resurgences. Adherence to self-protective measures, including the use of face masks, has been correlated with a reduced long-term risk of psychological disorders. The results indicate a significant and enduring mental state impact from the first C-19 peak. It is imperative to consistently assess the mental well-being of at-risk groups during the C-19 pandemic.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Mental Health, Public Health, Long-Term Effects*

INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the globe confronted one of the most consequential pandemics of the past two distinct generations. Daily, thousands globally succumb to this novel coronavirus, while countless others become infected due to its highly contagious characteristics. In people, it typically induces respiratory tract infections that can vary from a typical cold to severe conditions such as Mid-East Respiration Sickness (MERS) or Severe

Abrupt Respiratory Sickness (SARS) [1]. The recently identified coronavirus (CoV-2) [11] has precipitated the COVID-19 [3] (C-19) pandemic, exhibiting a higher fatality and transmissibility rate than those that preceded it. The health implications are not the sole worry about the virus and the ongoing pandemic [2]. The swift propagation of a virus has impacted institutions and governments globally [12]. Numerous countries implemented swift and practical efforts to avert the spread of the virus, including border closures, preemptive loneliness, and quarantine measures [4]. Yet, despite these steps slowing the spread rate, they have severely impacted their economies and cultures.

Economic effects on employment stability: On a social level, emphasizing and exacerbating the disparities between class distinctions and social spectrum, particularly among disadvantaged and marginalized populations such as linguistic minorities, immigrants, and people experiencing homelessness [5] [6]. Emphasizing the necessity for virtual classrooms to actualize distance learning has highlighted disparities in rural and low-income regions.

This influence on wellness and interpersonal and economic domains directly correlates with psychological suffering and manifestations of mental illness [13]. Despite the existing scholarship, which requires augmentation through extensive clinical knowledge and study, authors are commencing the identification of initial psychological issues associated with the C-19 pandemic, including stress, episodes of nervousness and depressive disorders, drinking, problems with eating, malnutrition, and ambiguity regarding future events, among other people. Specific authors identified severe trauma associated with the loss of friends and family, occupational stresses, social standing, and the manifestation of C-19 signs [7]. Symptoms such as anxiety, despair, sleep deprivation, and heightened incidents of gender aggression during the lockdown elevate short-term Mental Health (MH) treatment requirements [8]. A worldwide epidemic resulting in roughly 10 million infections and over half a million fatalities is likely to precipitate Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD), sleep deprivation, generalized panic disorder, and panic akin to the aftermath of past calamities such as storms, tsunamis, wars, and terrorists [14]. Psychologists and psychiatrists globally should recognize these signs and get ready for what is anticipated as the "post-pandemic wave," the MH repercussions of C-19.

MH [9] offerings, defined as anything that encompasses care in advancing, avoiding, therapy, and recovering psychological issues and disorders—including psychological hospital stays, inpatient consultations, and providing psychological and neurological medications—are essential for navigating this new, challenging context. This study aims to synthesize the knowledge on MH disorders associated with the C-19 epidemic and the governmental interventions implemented globally [10].

Methods

2.1. Research Methodology

The research performed a longitudinal cohort study, recruiting individuals via the Joybuy health section of the website. Joybuy is a substantial e-commerce and data service structure that offers online well-being services and goods, boasting 460 million active users across all 36 province-level areas [15]. Its registration, primarily composed of young and well-educated people, is obtained through an online application with a yearly fee. Coinciding with the initial maximum of C-19, all registered users were permitted to access a link on the wellness page of the Joybuy web page to finish the starting point survey, ensuring that the convenience group encompassed all 36 province-level areas. A follow-up poll was conducted, during which the primary C-19 outbreak was primarily contained, and security precautions were eased for around six weeks. In the follow-up survey, the research employed two strategies to recruit respondents. Initially, questionnaire answers were disseminated using the Joybuy messaging system to all benchmark subjects who were identifiable by their identifiers. Simultaneously, to enlist fresh respondents, the research placed a hyperlink to the second-wave study on the wellness site of Joybuy, enabling potential subjects to engage in the study willingly. Both the initial and follow-up surveys included links to purchasing online coupons.

Individuals who completed both questionnaires were considered in the final evaluation to facilitate comparing benchmarks and monitoring. The ethics board authorized the study. Online informed permission was obtained by those who participated before the commencement of the surveys.

2.2. Subjects

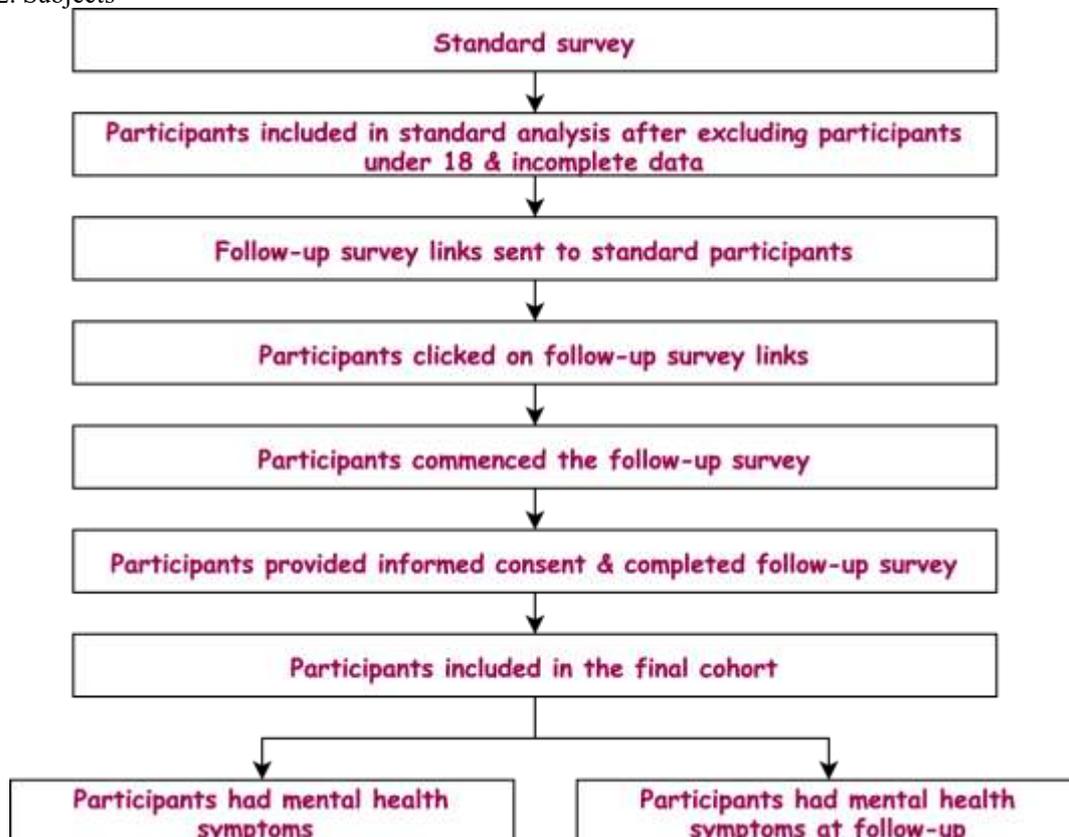


Fig. 1. Flowchart of participants selection

Everyone who took part in the two questionnaires has become with Joybuy. As described in other sources, 57k individuals with valid age data were considered at the starting point. During the contact of the 57k initial respondents to which the research distributed survey links, 18k engaged with the hyperlinks, and 11k initiated the questionnaire. 11k individuals from 34 counties were granted informed permission to participate in the questionnaires, resulting in a successful monitoring rate of 17.4%. The results of the two polls were manually matched based on unique ID values from the Joybuy web page. Comprehensive details regarding the search for and choice of those responding to the questionnaire are illustrated in Figure 1.

Metrics and Variables

Each survey lasted approximately 21 minutes and consisted of the sections. The initial section collected demographic data from the participants. The section inquired about matters related to the outbreak. The third section assessed quarantine circumstances and societal attitudes towards the C-19 epidemic. The research already supplied comprehensive information regarding these three components. The fourth section had three conventional scalings: the Chinese equivalents of the Patient Hardness Survey-9 (PHQ-9), Generalized Anxiousness Disorders-7 (GAD-7), and Insomnia Severity Indicator (ISI), which assessed symptoms of anxiousness, depression, and sleeplessness, etc. The PHQ-9 is a nine-item survey designed to diagnose severe depressive episodes by DSM criteria, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82, an accuracy of 0.87, and a specificity of 0.84 for detecting sadness. The GAD-7 is a seven-item survey recognized as a valid

instrument for identifying anxiety disorders, exhibiting a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82, a sensitivity of 0.84, and an accuracy of 0.88. The ISI is a seven-item survey with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91, demonstrating an average sensitivity of 0.87 and an accuracy of 0.85 in identifying clinical sleeplessness. The research computed the scores of the subjects and employed thresholds of 5, 6, and 9 to classify them as experiencing depression, anxiety, and sleeplessness signs, respectively. The research incorporated additional questions tailored to the follow-up survey to investigate new circumstances following the initial C-19 peak, such as C-19 revivals, voluntary face mask usage in public, voluntary reductions in events, the pursuit of psychological counseling, and self-assessed increases in work-related burden post-resumption of work.

The research examined three categories that might be characteristics linked to enduring mental health signs: Demographics: gender, age, residence, educational attainment, marital status, monthly household income, background of chronic illnesses, history of MH disorders, and familial history of MH problems. Personal variables related to C-19 include personal disease, disease of family members, residing in the region most seriously impacted during the initial highest point, undergoing isolation, living in areas going through an increase of C-19, freely sporting face masks in public, voluntarily decreasing social events, and seeking psychological support. Work-related variables: direct involvement in C-19 control measures, a self-assessed job-related hazard to C-19, and a self-evaluated rise in job stress upon the resumption of work.

Results

The weighted incidence of MH problems remained consistently high, decreasing from 45.3% in the initial survey to 47.2% in the follow-up questionnaires. At the same time, this drop was minor yet of statistical significance. Anxiety rose markedly from 31.5% to 34.8%, while sleeplessness escalated dramatically from 28.1% to 37.4%. The signs of anxiety diminished from 36.4% to 31.9%. The medians of PHQ-9 scores rose from 0.0 to 3.0, whereas ISI values went from 4.0 to 5.0. GAD-7 scores diminished from 1.0 to 0.0. The result illustrates the alterations in the incidence and ratings of psychological related to mental health within the cohort, as well as the modifications in scores for sadness, nervousness, and sleeplessness from benchmark through follow-up.

Psychological symptoms decreased from the starting point to follow-up in girls, middle-aged or elderly individuals, urban dwellers, those with low educational attainment, respondents with moderate to high revenues, and married individuals (Fig. 2). Insignificant variations in the proportion of behavioral health indications were observed from the beginning to follow-up among boys, students, rural people, and highly well-informed and destitute individuals.

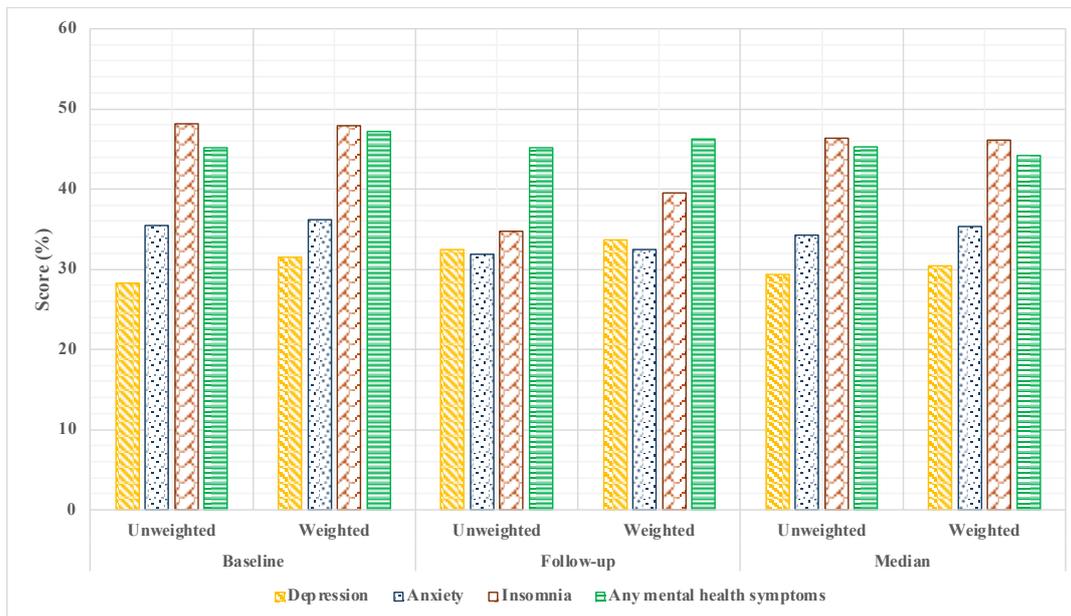


Fig. 2. Prevalence analysis of symptoms

Symptoms of mental illness diminished from baseline to follow-up among people who were not related to C-19 patients, residing in areas most adversely impacted by the initial highest point, lacked isolation events, occupational exposure risk, C-19 revival encounters, or heightened work burdens, as well as among those who utilized face masks, voluntarily curtailed socializing, or refrained from seeking mental discussion throughout follow-up. Persistent psychological signs were noted among relatives of C-19 patients, individuals with isolation events, those at professional risk of C-19 contact, individuals experiencing increased work burdens post-resumption, residents in areas with C-19 revivals, and those who were not wearing face masks in public or minimize social interactions. The average incidence of psychological symptoms within these categories exceeded 40% in both polls, with no economically substantial modifications detected between the initial and follow-up interviews.

Readying for Actions

The World Health Organization (WHO) has advised all nations on ways to mitigate the virus's transmission and reduce mortality from C-19 until a safe and effective vaccine is available, with MH treatment and psychological assistance. These measures encompass the ongoing activation of all governmental spheres and society to avert new instances, manage sporadic and clustered incidents, restrict community spread, and mitigate mortality through sufficient healthcare services. One of the principal short-term initiatives is to create the above safe and effective vaccination. MH, the principal actions were proposed as the provision of fundamental needs to avert potential MH harm, effective risk sharing, the enhancement of support networks, basic behavioral care, and the maintenance of health services.

Potential scenarios of spreading CoV-2 without medication in the post-pandemic phase are contingent upon variables such as seasonal spread variability, immunity duration, cross-protective immunity levels among CoV-2 and other viral infections, and the breadth and length of management measures. A renewed virus outbreak occurs following the initial global epidemic wave, potentially leading to extended or sporadic social estrangement in the forthcoming years, amplifying MH strain on families, individuals with pre-existing wellness or mental health conditions, medical personnel, and the community. Epidemics exert personal and communal mental effects that surpass the impact of the global outbreak itself. The ongoing C-19 epidemic has resulted in significant levels of stress, worry, sadness, drowsiness, wrath, and dread in

society, particularly among the most susceptible populations. Further research is necessary to produce enough consistent evidence regarding the effects of the C-19 pandemic and potential future epidemics and formulate behavioral therapies that could enhance the MH of the population.

Prioritizing behavioral health services is essential across all ages (kids, teenagers, older adults) for individuals with pre-existing MH and considering factors such as race, ethnicity, displacement status, homelessness, incarceration, hospitalization, and chronic illnesses. Interventions must target the specific requirements of each recognized at-risk population and the public health measures employed by each nation, contingent upon the current stage of the global epidemic. Risk education must be a fundamental component in managing future health incidents, fostering inclusion, and mitigating prejudice against those infected and frontline employees; this can be achieved by enhancing communications regarding health that will bolster medical measures, including vaccination efforts. Training health groups after the pandemic is essential due to the prolonged neglect of psychological repercussions, leading to transmission and separation. It is crucial to guarantee the requisite protection and education for their roles, alongside maintaining their MH, to prevent further burdening them.

Coordinating and enhancing social support methods facilitate incorporating local epidemiological monitoring with overall health and MH care standards. The revision of administration protocols for a global epidemic psychological care must integrate scientific evidence and adhere to the standards developed by the WHO and various governmental entities, ensuring that measures are tailored to each recommendation's socioeconomic and cultural setting. Both governments and society must persist in implementing and enhancing initiatives to foster multifaceted mental wellness teams, thereby increasing investment in MH promotion and avoidance. This issue should not be regarded as secondary; addressing it through preventive measures should be a primary objective of health policies. Using the internet, such as telecommunications- and the web, is essential for providing adequate amenities and resources, establishing a service system, and reinforcing existing ones for community mental wellness. , it is crucial to recognize those who are at elevated risk for psychological illness and to promote empirical study that yields evidence-based treatments, thereby fortifying MH policies. Initial care in both face-to-face and distant behavioral health settings must evolve to ensure sustained service delivery, adjusting current methods to enhance access to psychological treatment and maintain ongoing treatments, thereby preventing referral-related continuity spaces, a fundamental strategy for medical facilities. Particular emphasis should be placed on behavioral healthcare practitioners, as the initial wave of C-19 revealed a significant level of burnout within this group.

Conclusion

The extensive statewide cohort research identified vulnerable people during the first C-19 peak who experienced lasting long-term MH consequences beyond the peak period. The demographics were relatives of C-19 patients, individuals with quarantine events, inhabitants of highly impacted areas during the initial highest point, and those with job-related risk to C-19. The research found many new vulnerable groups that arose following the original peak, including individuals residing in areas affected by C-19 revival, those seeking psychological counseling due to C-19, and those facing increased work burdens upon returning to work. However, the importance of these findings in practical applications requires further validation in further study. The analysis indicates a significant and persistent MH cost throughout the C-19 global epidemic, highlighting the necessity for ongoing and systematic treatment for MH illness during the entirety of the epidemic. The oversight will encompass the development of population- and phase-specific MH therapy techniques during C-19.

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