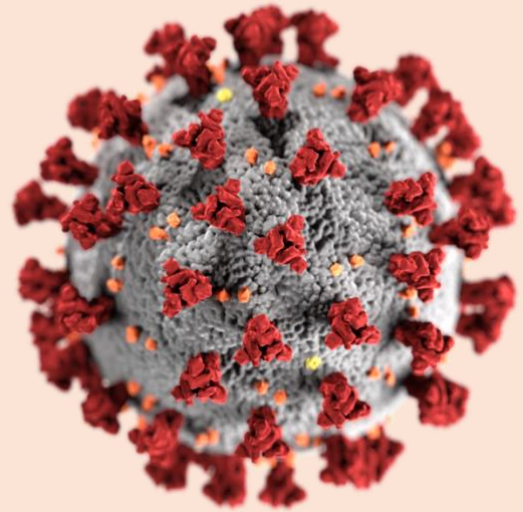


IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HUMAN BEHAVIOUR, HABITS AND HOW SHOULD ONE TACKLE THE PROBLEM

What is COVID-19?

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), also known as the coronavirus or COVID, is a contagious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The first known case was identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The disease has since spread worldwide, leading to an ongoing pandemic.



Preventive measures include physical or social distancing, quarantining, ventilation of indoor spaces, covering coughs and sneezes, hand washing, and keeping unwashed hands away from the face. The use of face masks or coverings has been recommended in public settings to minimize the risk of transmissions. Several vaccines have been developed and many countries have initiated mass vaccination campaigns.

As the world approaches the one-year anniversary of the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers are studying the psychological dimensions of this disease and the impact ongoing protective measures are having on public behavior.¹

Restricting Measures Due to the Pandemic²

Terminology on Quarantine, Social Isolation, and Social Distancing

In the context of COVID-19 pandemic, the terms “social distancing,” “social isolation,” and “quarantine” have been used mostly as synonyms in the media, in communication with the public and even in scientific papers. However, there are great differences between these designations, even though there is not always an agreement on the terminology. “Quarantine” refers to extreme restrictions of movement of those exposed or potentially contaminated by the virus, in order to minimize the spread of the pathogen. Moreover, the term “quarantine” ought to be used in the context of groups or at community level. “Social isolation” refers to the restriction of social movement of those infected with the disease. Meanwhile, “social distancing” is a preventative measure recommended to the general population to flatten the curve of the contagious disease. In this scenario, people are advised to stay at home and use services as little as possible, as well as to avoid agglomerations, maintain the recommended distance of one meter from each other and take precautionary measures to avoid infection (Covid-19, 2020). Nevertheless, the use and the comprehension of these terms should not be so inflexible. In fact, the term “social isolation” has also been used to express the source of subjective feelings of solitude that may accompany the social distancing measures, especially for those who are already at enhanced risk of suffering from loneliness. Notwithstanding, the term “social disconnection” is used in this review to encompass this framework.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coronavirus_disease_2019

² <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.566212/full>

Source of Psychological Impact Related to the Restricting Measures

It is undeniable that the restricting measures imposed to contain the COVID-19 pandemic have a severe impact on the mental health of the population. Nonetheless, it is yet unclear what promotes such negative effects. It is possible that these repercussions derive directly from the restrictive strategies and reduced social mobility. However, the emotional and psychological outcomes of the pandemic may also be secondary to the intrinsic changes that the restricting measures cause in lifestyle habits and socioeconomic scenario.

In the wake of the closures of their universities and labs, psychological scientists around the world are experiencing new demands on their time as they adjust to teaching remotely, overseeing dispersed labs, and managing family caregiving. At the same time, many have found themselves on the front lines of exploring the psychological factors that can help the public understand the impact of COVID-19.

A collective crisis heightens sensitivity to social interactions:

This is a situation that can have both positive and negative effects as a function of it being a collective crisis. On the positive side, there is a sense that we're in it together, and we see many amazing examples of people supporting one another. On the negative side, we see some people respond to this with a sense that they need to "protect their own," and it is "us versus them."³



Many people are feeling both impulses at the same time. They're obviously going to feel fear because of the uncertainty, the present threat, and the potential threats. And the social cues around people right now are going to raise their perception that we're in danger. Then there's the talk of the long-term impact to the economy too, and you have a real recipe for people to be anxious and frightened.⁴

Children learn many of their own fears and anxieties from what they hear and what they see. In other words, seeing something scary on television, hearing something scary on the news, or seeing their parents look nervous or afraid are common learning mechanisms for young children. The recommendation for parents here is to be aware of the emotional information and the factual information about the coronavirus that is being transmitted to children, as they are apt to learn from whatever information happens to be around them.

Moral responsibility can be a powerful motivator:

If your worldview is that you're always asked to make sacrifices and you never get anything out of it, maybe you don't want to comply with [social distancing]. But if you have a worldview that tells you it's important to help others, then maybe you're happy to make these sacrifices. You're looking around to see what people are doing. If you take your cues from other people, you might be more inclined to take strong action yourself because you see other people doing it.

You're probably going to have a hard time not scratching your nose, no matter how much you want to. But moral responsibility can be a powerful motivator. The potential consequences start to feel real when you spend just a couple of minutes considering the people you know who are at heightened risk of complications due to COVID-19—people like your parents or grandparents, that friend whose husband has a heart condition, or your colleague with diabetes. Even if we can make only a 5-percent difference, we really should try.

Children learn many of their own fears and anxieties from what they hear and what they see. In other words, seeing something scary on television, hearing something scary on the news, or seeing their parents look nervous

³ APS Fellow Bethany Teachman, University of Virginia

⁴ APS Fellow Valerie Reyna, Cornell University

or afraid are common learning mechanisms for young children. The recommendation for parents here is to be aware of the emotional information and the factual information about the coronavirus that is being transmitted to children, as they are apt to learn from whatever information happens to be around them.

One of the most important things crisis communications research tells us is that our leaders should be honest and transparent. Insincerity is very alienating, and it leads to distrust. Empathy from our leaders, honesty from our leaders, and being frank with the uncertainty, not promising more than can be delivered, is likely to help us through this crisis. In contrast, contradictory messages or insincerity are probably going to exacerbate the distress level. Moreover, we do know that once trust is lost, it's very difficult to regain it.

Impact of the Information About COVID-19 Presented by Media on Social Psychology in India

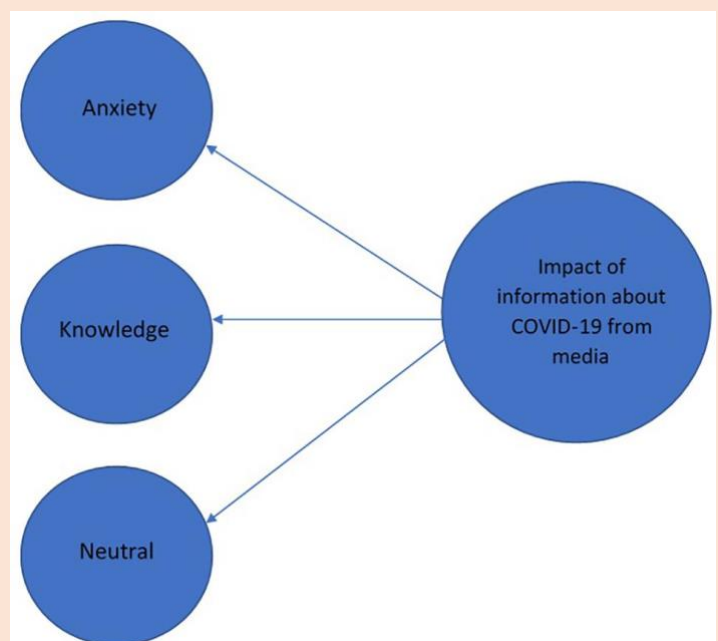
Based on the responses that were received from the subjects, the impact of COVID-19 information presented by media on the social psychology in India can be classified into three themes— (a) anxiety; (b) knowledge; and (c) neutral.

India was under lockdown (a 21-day lockdown, followed by an extension of 19 days) since 24 March 2020 (BBC News, 2020), due to which the availability of physical sources of information are limited, underlining the role of media in sharing information regarding COVID-19. Information shapes social psychology and public opinion, therefore, individuals having negative belief apropos media feel that misinformation causes anxiety and depression. However, it is challenging to measure the myriad of misinformation. The disagreement among different sources of information leads to ambiguity in general public.

It appears that some of our respondents believe the information and treat it as a significant contributor to their knowledge. According to them, information is a vehicle that helps masses sail through the crisis by serving as a liaison between people and the government. The information also cautions masses about the consequences of committing mistakes. Through experiential sharing, the media makes people appreciative of social distancing and makes them aware of the administrative and infrastructural arrangements. However, during these testing times, media needs to play a responsible role in creating public opinion, failing which, people may develop negative opinion toward this important pillar of society (World Health Organization, 2016).

India is broadly an informal economy filled with migrant labour. The lockdown has resulted in job losses for thousands of migrant laborers, who were left with no option but to walk till their hometowns, leading to lockdown violations. Worries of the masses are further aggravated by the fear of uncertainty regarding economic security resulting from the potential job losses due to lockdown and the long-term effects of COVID-19.

Altogether, the impact of media on the social psychology of a majority of people was found to be negative (causing anxiety), while it was neutral (causing caution) and positive (causing knowledge enrichment) in a few cases. The role of media is immensely significant during these testing times as people need to be precisely

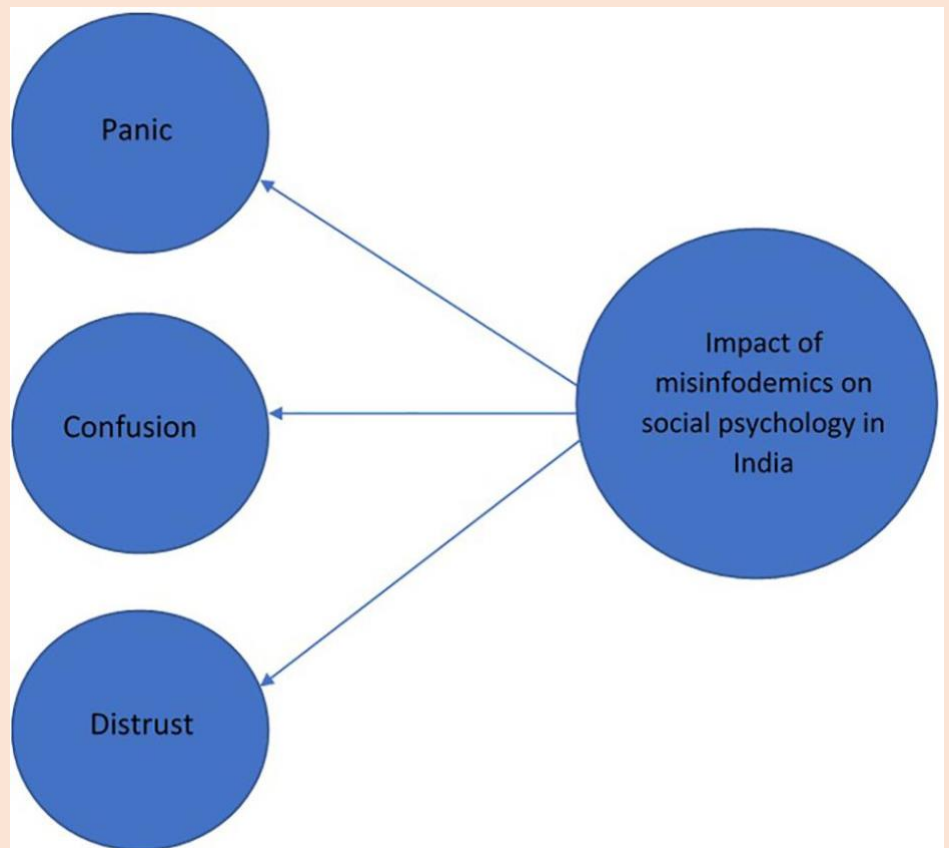


informed about the do's and don'ts in order to be sufficiently prepared to deal with the pandemic. As a result, the negative and neutral feelings of anxiety and caution, respectively, may get transformed positively into knowledge enrichment. The policy interventions at the level of governmental and non-governmental bodies may be directed at ensuring the timeliness and precision of the information flow regarding COVID-19.

Impact of Misinfodemics on Social Psychology in India

Misinfodemics refers to the spread of false information during a pandemic with or without any maleficent intention. While the information is reliable for the most part, it can be inaccurate at times. The spread of misinformation worsens the impact of the pathogen and creates a feeling of uncertainty amongst individuals. Furthermore, the uncertainty generates ambiguity and creates a situation of (a) panic, (b) confusion, or (c) distrust among masses.

In our study, we also observed that the respondents were agitated and frustrated, which is detrimental to their mental well-being. Concurrently, amidst the pandemic, conventional public health responses are not enough to supersede these contemporary digital sources. Online connectivity makes people xenophobic toward the infected ones, and they may take wrong medications that affect their physical as well as mental well-being. It is often found that the availability of precise and timely information plays a positive role in building a harmonious situation.

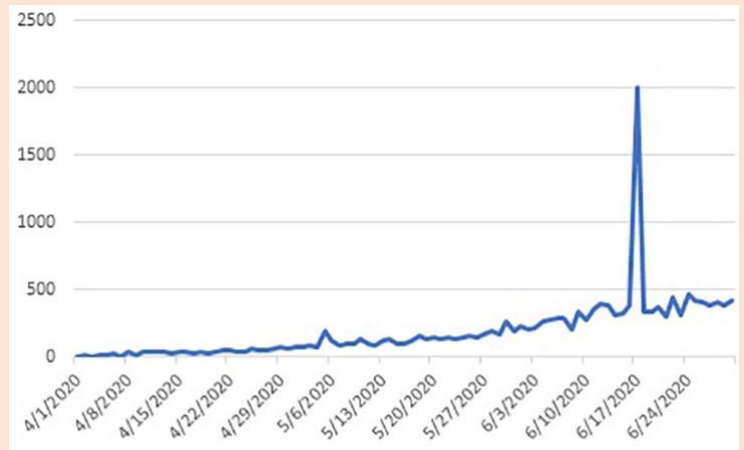


The lockdown of major economic activities in India has caused a steep fall in the agricultural, manufacturing, and service activities

in the country. The spread of unreliable information about lockdown and its impact on the national economy, the resultant job losses, and slowing down of the economy further affect social psychology in the country. This uncertainty adds fuel to the fire by causing chaos and confusion among masses, leading to irrational decision making. For instance, the misinformation regarding working of public transport in Mumbai led to a stampede at a train station (NDTV, 2020). All these factors are responsible for causing a feeling of distrust among masses, thus significantly hampering social psychology. Similarly, in the past also, misinfodemics have affected the treatment and renormalization of depression, even leading to suicides. Certain cases of suicide have also been reported in India as a result of the panic caused by COVID-19. It is indispensable for media to compile and publicize accurate information, and therefore, the masses need to exert some control over the information and forward it responsibly.

Impact of Quarantine and Isolation on the Social Psychology of Indians Battling COVID-19

Our findings reveal that quarantine and isolation are causing (a) cognitive dissonance or (b) adaptability in Indians. Amidst the pandemic, individuals are experiencing swelling of health, economic, and humanitarian crisis through every dimension of their social fabric. The way people bounce back from the state of cognitive dissonance to the state of adaptability as a result of the pandemic and restrictions resulting from the pandemic suggests that the society is moving toward a new normal. Initially, the individuals were found to resist such a situation due to mobility constraints and the fear of no escape and losing livelihood. However, in the course of time, it appears that they are willing to perform multiple tasks. Another fear among masses was the compulsion to stay together with their families without having any outlet to move out for long. This belief arouses the feeling of restlessness, confusion, frustration, and stress, due to which, people tend to lose trust in the system, leading to deterioration of their mental well-being.



COVID-19 deaths in India

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On the positive side, these conditions have developed the idea of appreciative inquiry among masses, as they are able to appreciate that their captivation will effectively help in controlling the disease. Individuals, during self-quarantine, feel that social distancing has given them an opportunity for psychological explorations and developing their intelligence- and emotional-quotient. For instance, they have ample time to spend with themselves, their family, and in natural surroundings, and they are able to acknowledge the fact that psychological communication is the key to bonding. The masses are also able to admire the idea of achieving a work–life balance and look forward to innovative ways of working from home.

COVID-19 Backgrounders

Each backgrounder features the assessments, research, and recommendations of a renowned subject expert in the field of psychological science.

• Remaining Resilient During a Pandemic⁵

What does psychological science say about the human quality of resilience?

Resilience is one of many possible outcomes to life challenges. We consider people to be resilient when they are able to maintain stable mental health despite being exposed to a serious stressor. This resilience to stress can be part of a person's intrinsic nature, but it can also come from external factors, including support groups and social resources.



How does resilience relate to epidemics?

Generally, in the case of an epidemic, resilience is about dealing with the ongoing stress and distress in order to keep them at a minimum during a time of crisis. This is especially true for people who fall ill. In these cases, resilience is being able to maintain a trajectory of good mental health—keeping spirits up and minimizing depression, worry, and anxiety.

How does resilience relate specifically to COVID-19, considering the course of events to date?

As our nation and the world deal with COVID-19, the key psychological objective for most people is to keep stress at a minimum. Everyone is adapting to the new reality, which includes the fear of viral spread and contagion, self-quarantine, and supply shortages. More seriously, some are coping with illness and fear of death. To overcome the stresses of these situations and remain resilient throughout, it is important to use the tools we already have at our disposal, including:

- Staying optimistic
- Relying on the support of others
- Bonding with those close to us
- Keeping informed but not overindulging in media consumption
- Distracting oneself
- Finding ways to laugh and have fun through things like watching movies and reading
- Most especially, finding ways to minimize isolation with joint family activities, and keeping in touch with friends and colleagues by phone, video, email.

People should understand that there is no magic bullet. Research has shown that no single factor determines resilience for a population. It is therefore up to each person to try different ways to cope to see what works best for them.

⁵ George A. Bonanno, Columbia University

What are the most relevant psychological science findings the public should know and understand?

We can cope with this. My research (and the research of others) has shown repeatedly that the majority of humans cope well and are resilient to just about any adversity.

There is no single best way to cope for everyone. Often, we see popular articles about the 3 or 5 or 7 keys to resilience. Research has shown many different factors predict resilience, but the effects of all of these factors are small because they don't always work or they don't work for everyone.

Research also shows that we need to be flexible and adapt. This means paying attention to what is happening to us and being nimble so we can adjust to what the situation is calling for. Each person should try different ways of coping and adapting to see what works best for them.

What is the one message people should know that psychological science teaches us?

This is not easy, but we can do it. Human beings have shown abundant psychological resilience in the face of just about any adversity imaginable.

• **Social Impact on Children**⁶

What does psychological science say about socializing for children?

Social interaction is important for everyone, but it is especially important for children to have social contact with their caregivers. Caregivers are children's primary regulator in times of stress, especially for the youngest children who have trouble regulating stress responses on their own. The way that children often cope and recover from some of the more serious forms of stress is by having a responsive parent nearby. When children are crying or upset, mothers usually hug or rock them as a form of soothing. Hugs or any form of touch can reduce stress hormones like cortisol in the body and even lower heart rate. The point is that physical comfort is important in reducing children's distress.



How does child/caregiver interactions relate to epidemics?

Epidemics likely produce stress for both parents and children, so I would suggest more social support from caregivers during this time.

How does social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic affect children and their parents?

⁶ Vanessa LoBue, Rutgers University

While social distancing is exactly what we should be doing during a global pandemic, it doesn't mean that parents who are social distancing with their children should avoid touching them. If a parent or child is sick, they should obviously refrain from physical contact temporarily; but in cases where families are healthy and social distancing together in the same household, parents should be encouraged to comfort their children physically. It can be beneficial for both the parent and the child in terms of coping with stress.

What are the 2-3 most relevant findings in your field that the public should know and understand?

- I. Children under the age of 5 don't have a complete understanding of illness and how it is transmitted. Further, research suggests that children will behave adaptively (avoid contaminated objects) when faced with the threat of getting sick only if they have a causal understanding of illness transmission. The practical recommendation here is not to give children rule-based information like "wash your hands" to encourage them to adopt healthy habits without explaining to them why the behavior is important. Talk to them about illness transmission and how it works, and what they can do to stay healthy.
- II. There is a very large literature suggesting that maternal depression and anxiety have a negative impact on children. In fact, this begins early in infancy. We've found in our own labs that infants of anxious mothers have more difficulty disengaging from threatening stimuli than infants from non-anxious parents, starting from infancy. The recommendation for parents would be to care for your own mental health, because your mental health can have an impact on your kids.
- III. Children learn many of their own fears and anxieties from what they hear and what they see. In other words, seeing something scary on television, hearing something scary on the news, or seeing their parents look nervous or afraid are common learning mechanisms for young children.

What is the one message people should know that psychological science teaches us?

I would highlight that there is a very large literature suggesting that parents' depression, anxiety, and stress have a negative impact on their children, starting from early in infancy. Even though this is an incredibly stressful time and parents are busy tending to the needs of their children, their family members, their co-workers, and possibly even the sick and in need, it's important to remember to also take care of your own mental health, if not for yourself, then for your children.

• Social Impact on Adults⁷

What does psychological science say about socializing and isolation?

⁷ Chris Segrin, University of Arizona

Human beings are inherently social creatures. We are not solitary; we thrive in the presence of other people, and separation from other people is harmful to most humans. Short-term social distancing is probably not a major problem for most people. However, over time this can become bothersome and stressful for people who long for meaningful face-to-face contact.



How does the human need for socializing relate in times of epidemics?

The human need for connection with other people is probably what fuels a lot of disease transmission. One could think of this as the price we pay for our inherently social nature.

How does social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic affect adults?

COVID-19 is increasingly requiring people to stay away from others, especially in settings where people normally congregate. Part of what makes the experience of a sporting event, seeing a concert or a movie in a theater, or eating at a restaurant meaningful is the presence of other people.

Even if we don't interact directly with them, their presence makes the event a more substantial experience. (For example, imagine the reaction of a crowd when a batter hits a home run at a baseball game—it wouldn't be the same if there was just one person in the stands.) Much of this is lost in the "stay at home" orders to slow the spread of COVID-19.

What are the 2-3 most relevant findings in your field that the public should know and understand?

When people's actual or achieved social contact falls below their desired level of social contact, they begin to feel lonely and loneliness is stressful.

The stress of loneliness degrades mental and physical health (e.g., cardiovascular fitness, immune fitness) through disruption of recuperative behaviors (e.g., sleep, leisure) and corruption of health behaviors (e.g., substance use, diet, exercise).

What should people be aware of as this crisis endures?

As short-term "social distancing" starts to become long term, people need to make adjustments in their communication behaviors in the service of their mental health. For those who are not well versed in the use of communication technologies, now would be a good time to learn how to use them.

If there is someone in your life (e.g., an elderly relative) who is not tech savvy, use “low-tech” means to communicate with them (e.g., the telephone) and perhaps try to coach them on using more advanced technologies that they might have available but just haven’t learned (e.g., audio/video conferencing over the computer or smart phone).

Make a conscious effort to check in with people in your social network who live alone. They are particularly vulnerable at times like these.

What is the one message people should know that psychological science teaches us?

Practice PHYSICAL distancing, not SOCIAL distancing. The term “social distancing” has an unfortunate connotation and is actually not an accurate descriptor of what public health officials are trying to achieve. Meaningful social contact can occur in the absence of close physical contact.

• Working Remotely⁸

What are the psychological science aspects of working remotely?

Many workers are experiencing full-time remote work for the first time. They may have concerns with regard to how this will impact their job performance, relationships with coworkers, social isolation, and ability to maintain work and non-work boundaries.

Those who work primarily away from the office may face isolation and are less able to collaborate effectively with colleagues. Working from home may also blur family-work boundaries and lead to increased amounts of work during “non-work” hours. Telecommuting appears to confer the most benefits when practiced to a moderate degree, which is not happening under the current conditions.



How does transitioning to remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic affect people?

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced millions of workers to rapidly switch to remote work from home arrangements. However, many organizations and institutions remain unprepared to accommodate a remote workforce and lack insight into best practices as to how to promote the continued productivity and well-being of the workforce in such arrangements. Psychological science can be useful in helping people adjust to working remotely.

What are the 2-3 most relevant findings in your field that the public should know and understand?

Employees who have had to rapidly shift to remote work are vulnerable to feelings of uncertainty, being overwhelmed, and social isolation. At this time, it is essential that employers create opportunities and practices to help employees experience less ambiguity (e.g., providing clear expectations), reduce stress (e.g., offering

⁸ Tammy Allen, University of Southern Florida

employee assistance programs that provide short-term counseling and other confidential services), and maintain social cohesion (e.g., virtual happy hours and other social functions).

Maintaining high-quality interactions with managers and coworkers is important to worker performance and well-being within remote work situations.

What should people be aware of as this crisis endures?

The rapid shift to remote work is likely to impact both physical and psychological health. Millions of workers are currently working from their home sofa, kitchen table, or other makeshift home office spaces. These spaces are less likely to be ergonomically sound than offices within organizations. We could see an influx of muscular-skeletal disorders as a result. Moreover, the lack of work/non-work boundaries may make it more difficult to psychologically connect and disconnect from work, which has implications for psychological well-being.

The shift to working from home may have a greater impact on women than men. Many workers are struggling with balancing work and non-work issues, such as caring for dependent children who are home from school due to the pandemic. Most of the work of dependent care falls to women.

What is the one message people should know that psychological science teaches us?

With the need for social distancing, the ability to continue essential business functions through effective remote work arrangements is a key means of addressing the global health crisis. Workers need support from their supervisors and organizations in effectively making this transition. This includes accommodations for workers, such as parents providing at-home childcare, support and training for getting up to speed on new digital platforms required to maintain business functions, guidance on setting up a home office, and clear communication to help reduce uncertainty.

• Marriages and Close Relationships⁹

What does psychological science say about external stressors on marriage and other close relationships?

⁹ Paula Pietromonaco, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

A key component of close, well-functioning romantic relationships is that individuals see their partners as accepting, concerned with their welfare, understanding, and supportive. That is, they see their partners as responsive to their needs. The presence of external stressors—such as unemployment, economic hardship, and work stress—create a context in which it is more difficult for partners to be responsive to each other’s needs. When faced with external stress, individuals are more likely to communicate in ways that are overly critical or argumentative. They also tend to blame their partner and have more difficulty listening to their partner’s concerns and taking their partner’s perspective. Over time, they can become less satisfied with their partner and their relationship.



Fortunately, these negative consequences are not inevitable responses to external stressors. Couples can strive to communicate and behave in ways that are typical of successful marriages, including overlooking the occasional critical remark, forgiving hurtful behavior, taking the partner’s perspective, and avoiding expressions of blame, hostility, and contempt. Marriages also benefit when partners engage in activities that are relatively low in stress—such as playing a game together—or sharing positive experiences and memories, which enhance intimacy and closeness.

How does this relate to epidemics?

Epidemics are a form of external stress for couples and families, especially for those who are more severely affected (e.g., those who develop the disease, become unemployed, experience major financial losses). As with any stressor, spouses who can communicate more effectively when problem-solving, who can be responsive and supportive to their partner, and who can still engage in some positive interactions despite the stress of the epidemic will be more likely to maintain a good relationship.

Although we know little about how epidemics might shape longer-term outcomes such as rates of divorce, marriage, and birth, research on the effects of disasters, which are similar in some respects to epidemics, suggests that the nature of a disaster may determine how it affects marriage-related demographics. After Hurricane Hugo, for example, divorce, marriage, and birth rates increased in the following year in areas most affected by the hurricane compared to areas that were not affected.

How does this relate to COVID-19, considering the course of events to date?

The current situation with COVID-19 shares features with both natural disasters (e.g., the effects unfold over a period of months and possibly years), which have been linked to an increase in divorce, and terrorist attacks (e.g., many people have lost their lives, uncertainty and fear are pervasive), which have been linked to a decrease in divorce.

Couples who are able to maintain good communication and be supportive and responsive to each other throughout the COVID-19 crisis will likely remain together and possibly feel more connected for having weathered the storm. However, couples who have difficulty communicating and effectively supporting each

other may feel less happy with their marriage and possibly be more likely to separate or divorce. In addition, poor and lower-income couples are apt to be at higher risk for marital distress and dissolution, given that they are more likely to experience greater losses and hardships. In addition, the divorce rate is already higher for these couples compared to middle- and higher-income couples. As a result, the divorce rate may show a decrease, an increase, or no change following the crisis, depending on the quality of couples' relationships prior to the crisis as well as aspects of their broader personal and social contexts.

Both partners may be trying to work from home, and couples with children have the added responsibility of caring for children while working, ensuring that their children complete schoolwork and remain safe from exposure.

In most cases, support from the couples' broader social network is limited—day care and schools are closed, and friends and relatives cannot come in person to help out. Despite these constraints, couples and families can cope effectively by connecting with their spouse (and children) through positive, fun activities, lowering expectations for what can be accomplished in this unprecedented situation, and, importantly, giving their spouse and children the benefit of the doubt when edges fray.

Maintaining social connections with friends and family through phone calls and video chats may reduce feelings of isolation, offer additional sources of support and reassurance, and allow couple members to provide support to their friends and family as well. Although people have speculated that the current pandemic will increase the divorce rate, this prediction is not straightforward.

What are the most relevant psychological science findings the public should know and understand?

Marriages and close relationships can survive the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the situation presents challenges, adverse effects on marriages and families are not inevitable. Individuals can strive to communicate and behave in ways that enhance relationships, such as giving their partner the benefit of the doubt, trying to understand what their partner wants and needs, engaging in constructive problem-solving when needed (and preferably when neither partner is overly tired or stressed), and taking part in some enjoyable, intimacy-building activities together.

People have a fundamental need for belonging, and they are most likely to thrive in the face of stress when they feel closely connected to significant others. Although marital and romantic relationships are likely the primary source of support for many people, maintaining broader connections with friends and family (e.g., through phone calls, texting, video chat) can help couples navigate through difficult times.

It is well-established that having supportive close relationships, including marital relationships, reduces health risks as much or more than well-known health-promoting factors such as quitting smoking, losing weight, and engaging in regular physical activity. Couples who work to create or maintain a good marital relationship, despite the current stress surrounding COVID-19, are making an investment in their longer-term emotional and physical health.

What is the one message people should know that psychological science teaches us?

Although couples will face multiple challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic, the stress need not harm their marriage, and many relationships may even grow stronger as a result of overcoming adversity together. At the same time, couples with limited resources, added stressors (e.g., caring for children or elderly parents), and significant financial or personal losses may have a particularly difficult time navigating this crisis.

Continued exposure and chronic anxiety can worsen outcomes.

This is unquestionably a period where people are experiencing an enormous amount of stress, given the large demands the situation is placing on our daily lives—the changes in our routines and structures that we typically rely on, and the uncertainty surrounding how long this is going to last and what the ultimate impact is going to be on our families, our communities, and our workplaces. Psychological science has taught us quite clearly that in situations of mass trauma or mass stress, like a natural disaster or a terrorist attack, there's a very clear link between the degree of media exposure that people have and their symptoms of anxiety, depression, and substance abuse.

Decades of scientific research show that how we make meaning out of situations can leave us vulnerable to unhelpful, out-of-proportion anxiety. When our environment is inherently ambiguous—open to interpretation and unknown outcomes—our interpretations matter. They matter a lot. Ambiguity breeds anxiety; more so when the “facts” change hourly.

Humans often can develop a robust and pathological fear of things that might not happen, to create realities that don't exist. In the old days, the virus update would be a mention on the 6 o'clock news, but today, it's tweets and Facebook posts 24/7. Fears can be learned. If you're communicating with people online who are afraid or are seeing people online who are afraid, that exposure is more likely to invoke fear in you.

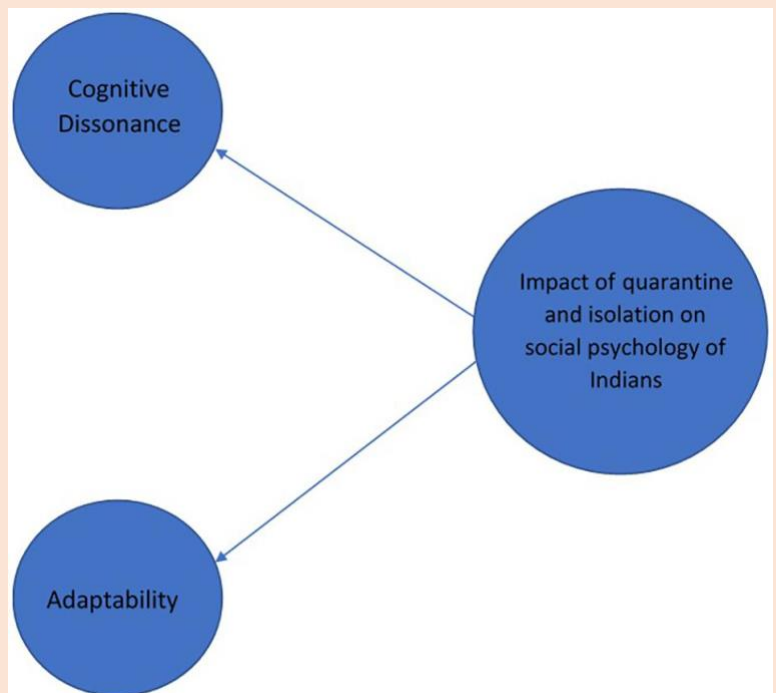
The very important role the media can play in coping with this kind of a crisis. I would be very cautious for people to seek out information from authoritative sources and to make sure that they check out the messaging that they're receiving to ensure that it's accurate. In addition, we want to encourage people to monitor how much time they're spending immersed in the news about COVID-19 and try to break away, engage in some sort of downtime so that they can cope as best as possible.

Human beings are inherently social, not solitary, creatures. When people's actual or achieved social contact falls below their desired level of social contact, they begin to feel lonely, and loneliness is stressful. The stress of loneliness degrades mental and physical health (e.g., cardiovascular fitness, immune fitness) through disruption of recuperative behaviors (e.g., sleep, leisure) and corruption of health behaviors (e.g., substance use, diet, exercise).

How we behave determines how we will cope:

It's reasonable to have some anxiety and sadness. At the same time, it's important not to get stuck there. There are a number of things that we can do to maintain as much of our normal lives as possible.

- ✚ Relationships. Social distancing does not have to equal social isolation. Those are two very different concepts and virtual interaction can make a big difference.



- + Thoughts and feelings. It really doesn't help us to spend 10 hours a day scrolling through newsfeeds and posts on COVID-19. So in a number of anxiety treatments, we encourage people to pick a couple of times a day when they focus on their worries and get the information that they need to problem-solve, but then spend the rest of their time living their lives as normally as possible.
- + Behavioral self-care. A lot of what helps at this time is healthy eating, sleep, exercise, and perspective-taking so that you don't get stuck in assuming the worst.

To live your values. Be kind to yourself and be kind to others. This is a stressful time and anxiety is normal. We have to give ourselves permission to experience the feelings that we're having and then to try to do as much as we can to maintain normality in the face of that situation.

Psychological science:

We not only have to understand our ability in our agency, but we also have to know the limitations of our minds. We really need to spend time trying to trust the experts. We have physicians and epidemiologists who are really good at explaining the effects of the virus on society. We also have psychologists who are really good at giving advice on how to cope with isolation, fear, and anxiety. In uncertain times like now, when it is impossible to have a full understanding of the situation, we need to rely on trusted sources of information.

We are not just passive recipients of what is happening. We can collectively work together to respond to this situation as a challenge, as opposed to appraising it as an impossible threat that we cannot manage.

Giving support to other people is just as effective at helping to reduce stress responses and the negative consequences of stress for our physical and mental health as receiving support from others. We know very clearly that exposing yourself to a lot of media coverage about the pandemic is going to increase anxiety. The more we can create positive habits and boundaries around our exposure to media, the better.

One of the most important fundamental findings that inform what we're dealing with right now is that people react to the gist of the events rather than the details and the facts. It's how people interpret reality that governs their emotions and their actions, not the actual reality itself. So we have to think about this torrent of information washing over everybody. How can we help people extract the bottom-line gist of that information so that they can take effective action?

We can cope with this. My research (and the research of others) has shown repeatedly that the majority of humans cope well and are resilient to just about any adversity. There is no single best way to cope for everyone. Research has shown many different factors predict resilience, but the effects of all of these factors are small because they don't always work or they don't work for everyone.

Research also shows that we need to be flexible and adapt. This means paying attention to what is happening to us and being nimble so we can adjust to what the situation is calling for. Each person should try different ways of coping and adapting to see what works best for them.

This is not easy but we can do it. Human beings have shown abundant psychological resilience in the face of just about any adversity imaginable.

Conclusion

This paper contributes to the theoretical field of social psychology by addressing the subjective perceptions of our respondents, and holds practical significance by informing the policymakers on tackling the panic amid pandemic. The semi-structured interview-based qualitative analysis conducted through this study on a sample of 59 subjects revealed that information, misinfodemics and isolation emerge as three prominent factors impacting the social psychology of Indians during the COVID-19 outbreak. We found that flow of information leads to anxiety, knowledge, and neutral approach in India. The governments may address the flow of information in interest of transparency, so that the outcomes in the form of anxiety and neutral approach may shift toward knowledge, thereby leading to management of the pandemic in a more effective manner. The sources of information in these critical times are limited, and the reliability of those is also questionable, which is reflected from the panic emerging from the misinfodemics. We suggest that to avoid panic in such critical times, the policymakers need to focus on misinfodemics, which are a result of fake news, in general. The encouraging fact of our study is that isolation is not observed to drive toward critical psychological patterns, such as depression. Rather, isolation drives Indians toward cognitive dissonance and adaptability, which is a sign of psychological strength. The governments need to plan the psychological interventions in such a way that the citizens can productively utilize the period of isolation.

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