

# A Study on the Mental Health and Psychological Flexibility during COVID-19 Pandemic

Preeti Sinhal\*

## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic is spread across the globe, during the initial month of year 2020 brought a global shutdown into all sector of industry and brought about a scenario where in severe decision like isolation and lockdown was put into effect many countries had to forcefully bring about this change for the benefit of this people. But little did they realize, the repercussions that this isolation or lockdown would bring amongst common people, this study explores the mental health and psychological flexibility experienced by common people in the so said lockdown situation. The study highlighted the various factors that impacted the mental health of people and showed significant increase in anxiety and fear levels. It was also observed that there was drastic change in the sleeping and eating habits of people where as many a people also felt that they were able to get dedicated time to explore oneself and catchup with family in friends using technology.

**Keywords:** Mental Health, Psychological Flexibility, COVID-19 Pandemic

## INTRODUCTION

Vulnerability, whether born with it and/or acquired as a result of a traumatic threat or event, is the internal state of an individual or group that causes harm due to a dynamic process in which various factors interact. People tend to feel anxious and unsafe when the environment changes. In the case of infectious disease outbreaks, when the cause or progression of the disease and outcomes are unclear, rumors grow and close-minded attitudes eventuate. Fear is a known, yet common response to infectious outbreaks and people react in many and individualized ways towards the perceived threat.

Fear of the unknown, in this case, the spread of the disease and the impact on people, health, hospitals, and economies,

for example, raises anxiety in healthy individuals as well as those with pre-existing mental health conditions, Individuals, families, and communities experience feelings of hopelessness, despair, grief, bereavement, and a profound loss of purpose because of pandemics. Feelings of loss of control drive fear and uncertainty as the trajectory of the pandemics is constantly evolving;

People's responses to fear and intolerance of uncertainty lead to negative societal behaviours. Uncertainty increases feelings of alarm resulting in behaviours targeted at reducing uncontrollable situations which people fear. For example, we have seen people clearing shelves of supermarkets resulting in global shortages of food and essentials such as toilet paper. Poor self-rated health status was significantly associated with greater psychological impact of the outbreak and higher levels of stress, anxiety and depression. Specific up-to-date and accurate health information and particular precautionary measures were associated with lower psychological impact and lower levels of stress, anxiety and depression.

In the realm of infectious diseases, a pandemic is the worst-case scenario. When an epidemic spreads beyond a country's borders, that's when the disease officially becomes a pandemic.

A pandemic is not just a medical phenomenon, it affects individuals and society and causes disruption, anxiety, and stress. The behaviour of an individual as a unit of society or a community has marked effects on the dynamics of a pandemic that involves the level of severity, degree of flow, and aftereffects. Rapid human-to-human transmission of SARS-CoV-2 resulted in the enforcement of regional lockdowns to stem the further spread of the disease. Isolation, social distancing, closure of educational institutes, workplaces, places of worship, and entertainment hubs confined people to stay in their homes to help halt the chain of transmission. However, these restrictive measures have undoubtedly affected the social and mental health of individuals.

\* Assistant Professor, AISSMS College of HMCT, Pune, Maharashtra, India. Email:preeti.yogesh@gmail.com

The psychological state of an individual that contributes toward the community health varies from person-to-person and depends on his background and professional and social standings.

Quarantine and self-isolation can most likely cause a negative impact on one's mental health. A review published in *The Lancet* stated that the loss of freedom, boredom, separation from loved ones, and uncertainty can cause a deterioration in an individual's mental health. To overcome this involves measures at the individual and societal levels to manage the dire situation. Under the current global situation, both children and adults are experiencing a mix of emotions. They can be placed in a situation or an environment that may be new and can be potentially damaging to their health.

## NEED OF THE STUDY

As understood that the impact of COVID-19 on mental health of people and that has an effect on the psychological flexibility of various factors. The study is extremely important to understand the various mental effect on people in country, the psychological impact result of the mental health and what changes needed to bring in the life style to manage that stress of people.

## DEFINITION

*Pandemic* - A pandemic is an epidemic of an infectious disease that has spread across a large region, for instance multiple continents or worldwide, affecting a substantial number of people.

*Mental Health* - Mental health refers to cognitive, behavioral, and emotional well-being. It is all about how people think, feel, and behave. People sometimes use the term "mental health" to mean the absence of a mental disorder. Mental health can affect daily living, relationships, and physical health.

*Psychological Impact* - Psychosocial impact is defined as the effect caused by environmental and/or biological factors on individual's social and/or psychological aspects. Several psychiatric disorders may affect psychological and social aspects of individual's lives.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Anant Kumar and K. Rajasekharan Nayar (2020) in their research 'COVID 19 and its mental health consequences, *Journal of Mental Health*' cite that during this pandemic there was a major crisis in some countries in form of lack of mental health professionals, practitioners, counselling staff and to some extent medical facilities. They went on to mention that in a country like India this would be a greater challenge since such professionals are available in very limited numbers. They went on to suggest having a package being made available to such individuals who are affected by this pandemic which covers aspects of being emphatic and supportive, to be listened to with compassion and kindness, provision of online counseling services and also an opportunity can be provided to the department of psychology of universities to address such crises.

Anna V. Mattioli, Susanna Sciomer, Camilla Cocchi, Silvia Maffei and Sabina Gallina (2020) in their research 'Quarantine during COVID-19 outbreak: Changes in diet and physical activity increase the risk of cardiovascular disease' state that the people who were in quarantine during COVID-19 pandemic are associated high risk of stress and depression which leads to unhealthy or poor diet and reduces physical activity to a great extent. During isolation, the intake of vegetables, fruits, antioxidants and vitamins is also reduced to a great extent which could fuel the troubles further. They suggest that physical activity and healthy diet should be made a global mandate during isolation.

Arati Prabhu (2017) in her research 'To Study Health and Fitness Motivation of Hotel Guests, and its Influence on Hotel Buying Decision' reasons that in the last decade or so one has seen a lot of awareness amongst people regarding health and fitness. This is no longer limited to a few elite people or athletes. She also mentions that due to the change in the lifestyle of people has brought around a big change in the health and fitness regime of people. Long working hours, frequent travel and diet are important contributors to this awareness.

Gautam R., and Sharma M. (2020) in their research '2019-nCoV pandemic: A disruptive and stressful atmosphere for Indian academic fraternity' mention that due to the

pandemic and lockdown situation the teachers of small schools and other institutions especially who are working on Adhoc basis and visiting basis are facing tremendous stress and anxiety due to a grinding halt in their income. This situation is also seeing building up stress levels in students as well. Many students who have taken education loans to study abroad are finding EMI's being paid for but the restricted transmission has delayed their joining process. This is giving many of the sleepless nights and building up their stress & anxiety levels. The authors also go on to say that this pandemic has also taught us to use the online teaching methodologies which are being adopted at various levels of the education fraternity.

Maria Casagrande, Francesca Favieri, Renata Tambelli and Giuseppe Forte (2020) in their research 'The enemy who sealed the world: Effects quarantine due to the COVID-19 on sleep quality, anxiety, and psychological distress in the Italian population' clearly pointed out the change in the mental state of people. Their respondents were facing issues like high levels of anxiety, lack of sleep and increase in mental distress. They stressed on the fact like similar to China even in Italian population there was a relationship between sleep, general anxiety and psychological distress with PTSD symptoms.

Rasika Jamadagni and Meyola Fernandes (2018) in their research 'Counselling in College Settings: Impact of Personal and Career Counselling by Teachers on Students Development at Under Graduate Level' mention that due to change in the environment students find it difficult to adjust to colleges that they get admitted into. They suddenly find themselves in a turmoil where they get stressed upon with personal goals and expectations. These expectations come in the form of adjusting to the college environment, peer pressure, expectations of parents, self-expectations and more. Such students face issues like loneliness and low self-esteem. They suggest the use of counseling techniques which will enable the student to channelize their own expectations and goals amongst the chaos that they face.

Garcovich, S., Bersani, F. S., Chiricozzi, A., and De Simone, C. (2020) in their research 'Mass quarantine measures in the time of COVID-19 pandemic: psychosocial implications for chronic skin conditions and a call for qualitative studies' discuss that many European countries adopted the policy of mass quarantine and isolation in order to curb the COVID-19 pandemic similar

to that were taken during the earlier pandemic like SARS and plagues. They emphasize that the current isolation of people generated a variety of psychopathological conditions like; anxiety, increased irritation levels, emotional instability, increase in anger frequency, symptoms related to depression and PTSD. Many times these symptoms may lead to life threatening situations, in fact many studies are already showing effects on various skin ailments due the prevailing conditions during isolation.

Vidyadhara Suryadevara, Chakravarthy Adusumalli, Pramod Kumar Adusumilli, Sri Harsha Chalasani and Rahul Radhakrishnan (2020) in their study 'Mental Health Status among the South Indian Pharmacy Students during COVID-19 Pandemic Quarantine Period: A Cross-Sectional Study' state that with the COVID-19 pandemic hitting India very seriously and that there was enough awareness spread regarding its severity, being highly contagious, having lack of specific treatment initially and reporting a high risk of re-infection. Their respondents who were college students reported a very high rate of depression, high-stress levels and anxiety symptoms. They also mentioned students showing an alarming impact on mental health due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation and the factors mentioned earlier. They further have mentioned the need of appropriate psychological techniques to be involved to address this mental health situation.

Jie Zhang et al. (2020) in their research 'The differential psychological distress of populations affected by the COVID-19 pandemic' state that their study was aimed at population having being exposed to COVID-19 at different levels and intensity. Their study involved the population's vulnerability to psychological distress which included of the length of being isolated, what kind of social support was provided, how much of media exposure was involved and if they had any specific experiences. They go on to suggest that these distresses should be identified within a time frame and should be classified into needs and this should help facilitate actions to be taken in case of any such pandemic.

Shen Zhu et al. (2020) in their research 'The immediate mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic among people with or without quarantine managements' mentioned that the Chinese government had brought about very strict quarantine rules for the public in general.

They also highlighted that the frequency of disturbances in mental health amongst people was very high and that being quarantined was not the only factor related with the mental status of people whereas disturbances caused in their day to day life was one of the major factors involved in the same.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To understand the mental health of people during COVID-19 pandemic.
- To know how the pandemic is affecting the mental health of human being.
- To learn the various psychological effects during COVID-19 pandemic.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The various mental and psychological Impact due to the stress and fear of COVID-19 in India have been compiled by carrying out a difficult survey across various age group. These strategies were floated in the form of questionnaire and the feedback was collected on the basis of survey. This questionnaire was circulated amongst people of different age. This survey was specifically carried to evaluate the mental health and psychological flexibility during pandemic COVID-19. To understand the mental health, the psychological impact of those and the different ways to cope up with pandemic. Research has further scope to understand them and provide or suggest the solution or different methods to people.

## TYPE OF RESEARCH

A descriptive research was used to study the mental health and psychological flexibility during pandemic COVID-19 in India along with that the participating age groups, profession.

## METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

*Primary Data* - It was collected from the people of various cities in India which is the scope of the study.

Primary data was collected through survey in following ways:

- *Personal Interviews*: The answer was sought to a set of pre-conceived questions through personal interviews and the data was collected in a structured way.

- *Questionnaires*: Considering the Reviews, and the additional inputs, one schedule was prepared, it was the questionnaires designed for the residents.

*Secondary Data* - It was collected from published/unpublished literature for collection of data. In the recent scenario of pandemic there are so many latest articles available from the journals, Newspapers, and research publications, past records pandemics, their reports and other relevant sources from internet.

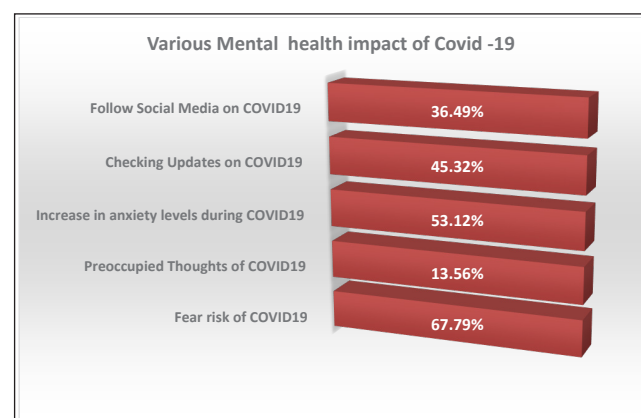
*Questionnaires - Design and Implementation*: The Questionnaire design was done to achieve the objectives of study. The questionnaire was administered to the sample population and sample size.

*Sample Techniques* - For this study different age groups of people living in India were considered. The sample size was about 150 respondents across various age groups.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The data collected was analyzed using basic and advanced analytical tools. This also includes a detailed examination of the data which was conducted with the purpose of achieving the set objectives of the research. Mentioned below is the analysis which is presented graphically and in tabulated form for better interpretation. The Analysis of the collected data was done by drawing inferences from the collected evidences after the analysis of the study.

### Various Mental Health Impact of COVID-19



**Fig. 1**

*Observation*: The response were collected from 150 respondents in that 36.49% follow social media for

COVID-19 news, 45.32% people frequently check updates, 53.12% says their anxiety level has increased during COVID-19 pandemic, 13.56% says they are always preoccupies with the thoughts of COVID-19, 67.79% fear the risk of getting COVID-19.

*Interpretation* - According to the observation it can be interpreted that people have various kind of mental health effect during COVID-19. Among that the highest effect observed is the Fear of getting COVID-19 along with that the anxiety level increased with unknown fear of changed environment. It has been observed that close to half people are checking updates more often on COVID-19 to know the situation in world and India. Checking social media updates has also impacted the mental health of people. Though people felt they are less occupied with the thoughts of COVID-19.

### Physiological Impact of Mental Effect

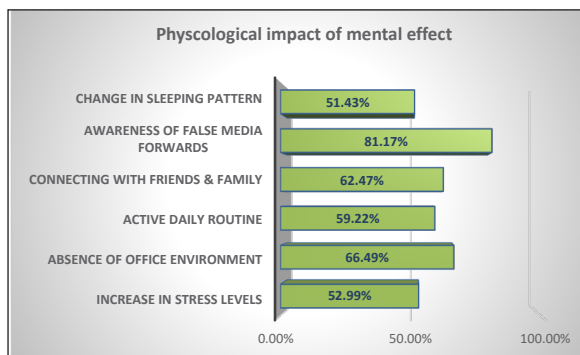


Fig. 2

*Observation:* On the basis of the collected responses it was observed. 51.43% amongst the respondent have said that their sleeping pattern has changed during COVID-19, 81.17% respondent says they were having awareness of forwards on social media, 62.475 respondents says that during COVID-19 they have connected more with their families and friends for their health conditions, only 59.22% respondents says that their life is as active as it was earlier COVID-19 but rest feel that it has changed during this period, 66.49% respondent feel the absence of environment impacted their work, and 52.99% respondent felt that their stress level has increased a lot during this COVID-19 period.

*Interpretation:* According to the observation it can be interpreted that the psychological impact on people's life during COVID-19 has effected them in different ways. In effect of that the highest impact was they became more aware about social media forwarding and felt more responsible about that as it was effecting their psychological health. It has been observed that the absence of work environment has impacted them at highest as the home was not a work-friendly, among people the care and affection has increased towards their friends and families health and they have started more frequents checks on them, Respondent felt that their daily routine is still as active as it was earlier but their stress level has increased a lot with unknown and uncertainty of the COVID-19 situation.

### EFFECT ON SLEEP PATTERN DURING COVID-19

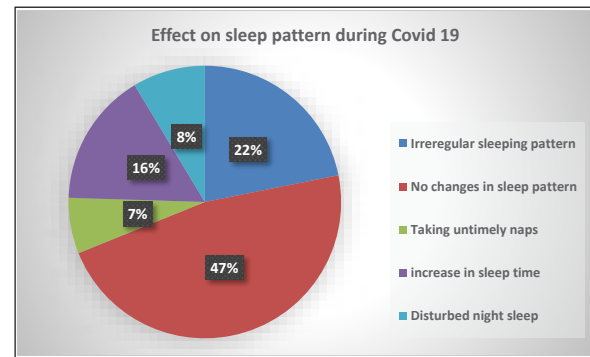


Fig. 3

*Observation:* As per the observation from the above pie chart it is seen that 47% people felt that there was no change in their sleep pattern whereas 22% has observed that they have disturbed night sleep during COVID-19 pandemic, 16% respondent found their sleep time has increased an 8% found their sleep pattern has become very irregular and 7% respondent were taking untimely naps.

*Interpretation:* According to the observation it can be interpreted that peoples sleep pattern has effected during COVID-19 this he psychological impact because of the mental health which results in change in sleep pattern or disturbed sleep. Different people behave in different manner as the results also speaks different for different people.

### Eating Habits during COVID-19

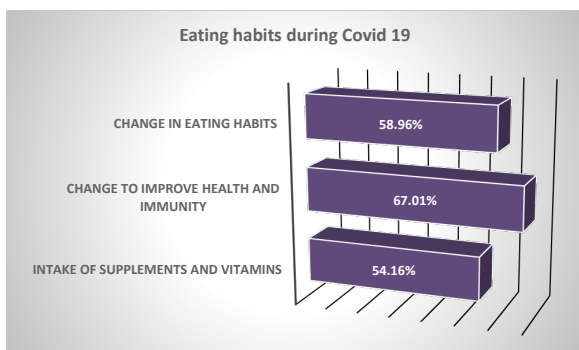


Fig. 4

*Observation:* On the basis of the collected responses it was observed that 58.96% respondents eating habits has changed during COVID-19, 67.01% people has changed their eating habits to improve their health and immunity and 54.16% respondent have increases their supplements and vitamin intakes.

*Interpretation:* According to the observation it can be interpreted that peoples have become more conscious about their health matter. The fear and anxiety of COVID-19 has brought more awareness about health and improvised the habits.

### Change in Decision-Making Capacity during COVID-19

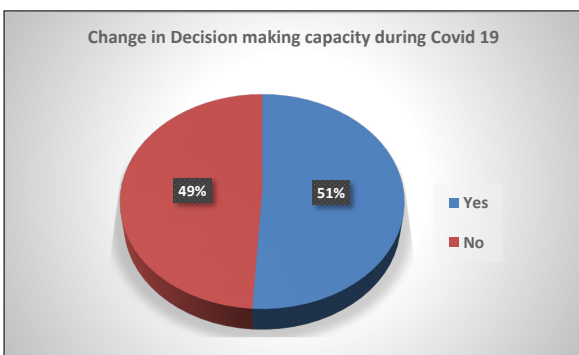


Fig. 5

*Observation:* As per the observation from the above pie chart it is seen that 51% people felt that their decision making capacity has changes during COVID-19, whereas 49% respondents observed there was no change in their decision-making capacity.

*Interpretation:* According to the observation it can be interpreted that almost half of the responded have effect on their decision-making capacity. This is another psychological impact of the change in environment, fear and uncertainty where people does have clarity on their decision as they have constant mental fear and hey continuously think about getting the infection.

### Ability to Take out Time for Activities Enjoyed by People

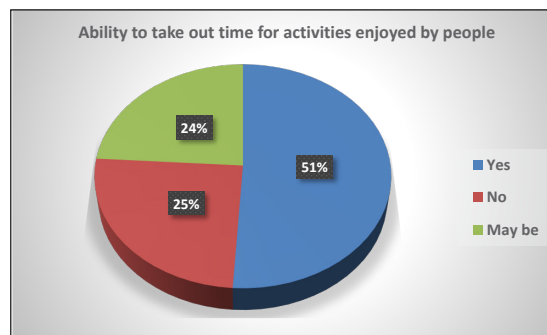


Fig. 6

*Observation:* As per the observation from the above pie chart it is seen that 51% of respondent felt that they are able to take out the time for the activities they enjoy during COVID-19, 25% respondent are not able to manage time and 24% respondents are not sure about that.

*Interpretation:* According to the observation it can be interpreted that people are able to take out time for the activities they enjoy due to the lockdown but another half of respondent has opposite reaction so COVID-19 has brought changes in the mental health where people are more reoccupied with other management and not able to enjoy.

### Changes Brought about during COVID-19

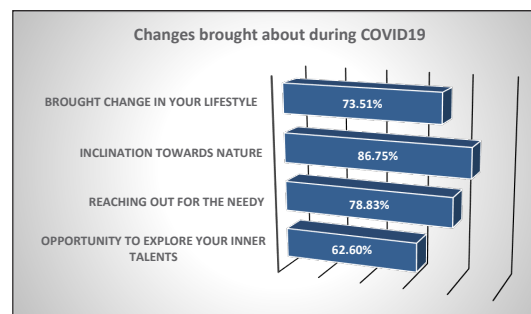


Fig. 7

*Observation:* On the basis of the collected responses it was observed that 73.51% respondents has brought changes in their lifestyle due to pandemic outbreak, 86.75% respondents says that they are now inclined toward the sunshine, fresh air and greenery. 78.83% respondent observed that in this COVID-19 situation they are reaching out to more people in case of help needed to them, 62.60% respondent felt that during lockdown they have got opportunity to explore their inner talent.

*Interpretation:* According to the observation it can be interpreted that peoples have become more sensitive about the natural resources for their immunity improvement, the responsibility towards society, the sensibility of caring for others, personal inner enlighten during COVID-19 has been observed.

### Focus on Maintaining Healthy and Positive Thoughts during COVID-19

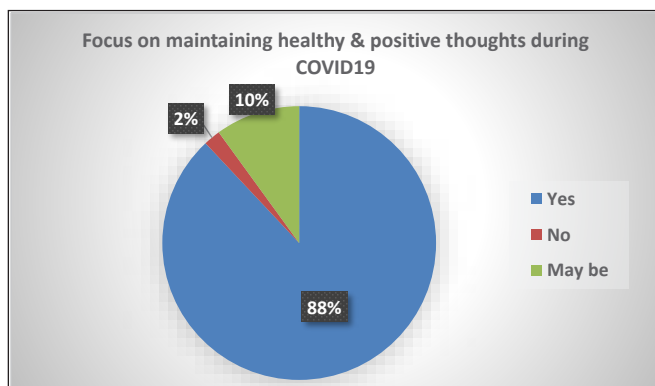


Fig. 8

*Observation:* As per the observation from the above pie chart it is seen that 88% respondent has brought their focus on maintaining healthy lifestyle and positive thoughts during COVID-19, whereas 10% observant were not able to do that and 2% was not sure about the changes focus

*Interpretation:* According to the observation it can be interpreted that peoples have shifted their focus on more of healthy lifestyle, and the importance of positive thought process. The COVID-19 situation has brought the self-awareness about the lifestyle.

### Stress Management Practices Included in Daily Life



Fig. 9

*Observation:* As per the observation from the above pie chart it is seen that 73% respondent has included the stress management practices in their daily routine, 27% respondent have not brought any stress management changes.

*Interpretation:* According to the observation it can be interpreted that the COVID-19 situation has increased the stress level among people with mind is preoccupied with uncertainty and fearful thoughts. To overcome with that or to manage that state of mental health respondents has included the stress management and relaxation practices in their life in the form if Yoga, physical exercise, meditation, Breathing exercise etc.

### CONCLUSION

The pandemic COVID-19 has a very impact on the mental health of the people in India. Fear of COVID-19, the constant thought of getting infection, and anxiety in behaviour has been observed. This has brought a big impact on their psychological flexibility whereas some were as well some negative as I can state by looking at the responses.

In the negative changes peoples sleep pattern changed a lot, media impact on state of mind, stress level has increased a lot the change of work environment has resulted an impact on work etc. The another aspect I have observed

there are many positive aspect has come in the form of health awareness has increased, people have incorporated the different ways to overcome the stress level by including various exercise routines in form of meditation, yoga and other ways. It has brought the attention of people about their eating habits, they have become more aware the nutrition and health, natural resources. The importance of friends and family, concern about their health, value of relationship got more emphasis on. People have become more sensitive towards their responsibility to society, the approach has become more sincere.

## REFERENCES

- Gautam, R., & Sharma, M. (2019). 2019-nCoV pandemic: A disruptive and stressful atmosphere for Indian academic fraternity. *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity*, 88, 948-949. doi:10.1016/j.bbi.2020.04.025
- Zhu, S., Wu, Y., Zhu, C. Y., Hong, W. C., Yu, Z. X.,... Wang, Y. G. (2020). The immediate mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic among people with or without quarantine managements. *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity*, 87, 56-58. doi:10.1016/j.bbi.2020.04.045m
- Zhang, J., Lu, H., Zeng, H., Zhang, S., Du, Q.,... Du, B. (2020). The differential psychological distress of populations affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity*, 87, 49-50.
- Kumar, A., & Nayar, K. R. (2020). COVID-19 and its mental health consequences. *Journal of Mental Health*, 1-2. doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2020.1757052
- Casagrande, M., Favieri, F., Tambelli, R., & Forte, G. (2020). The enemy who sealed the world: Effects quarantine due to the COVID-19 on sleep quality, anxiety, and psychological distress in the Italian population. *Sleep Medicine*, 75, 12-20. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sleep.2020.05.011
- Mattioli, A. V., Sciomer, S., Cocchi, C., Maffei, S., & Gallina, S. (2020). Quarantine during COVID-19 outbreak: Changes in diet and physical activity increase the risk of cardiovascular disease. *Nutrition, Metabolism and Cardiovascular Diseases*, 30(9), 1409-1417. doi:10.1016/j.numecd.2020.05.020
- Garcovich, S., Bersani, F. S., Chiricozzi, A., & Simone, C. D. (2020). Mass quarantine measures in the time of COVID-19 pandemic: Psychosocial implications for chronic skin conditions and a call for qualitative studies. *The Journal of the European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology*, 34(7), 293-294. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/jdv.16535
- Jamadagni, R., & Fernandes, M. (2018). Counselling in college settings: Impact of personal and career counselling by teachers on students development at under graduate level. *ATITHYA: A Journal of Hospitality*, 4(2), 30-34.
- Prabhu, A. (2017). To study health and fitness motivation of hotel guests, and its influence on hotel buying decision. *ATITHYA: A Journal of Hospitality*, 3(1), 39-44.
- Vidyadhara, S., Chakravarthy, A., Kumar, A. P., Harsha, C. S., & Rahul, R. (2020). Mental health status among the South Indian pharmacy students during COVID-19 pandemic quarantine period: A cross-sectional study. doi:https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.05.08.20093708
- Dong, L., & Bouey, J. (2020). Public mental health crisis during COVID-19 pandemic, China. *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, 26(7). Retrieved from https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/26/7/20-0407\_article
- Graham-Harrison, E., Giuffrida, A., Smith, H., & Ford, L. (2020, March 28). Lockdowns around the world bring rise in domestic violence. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/mar/28/lockdowns-world-rise-domestic-violence
- Jayakumar, P. B. (2020, April 1). Alcohol non-availability kills more than coronavirus in Kerala; foreign liquor served as 'medicine'. *Business Today*. Retrieved from https://www.businesstoday.in/current/economy-politics/alcohol-non-availability-kills-more-than-coronavirus-in-keralaforeign-liquor-served-as-medicine/story/399716.html
- Li, W., Yang, Y., Liu, Z. H., Zhao, Y. J., Zhang, Q., Zhang, L., Cheung, T., & Xiang, Y. T. (2020). Progression of mental health Services during the COVID-19 outbreak in China. *International Journal of Biological Sciences*, 16(10), 1732-1738. doi:https://doi.org/10.7150/ijbs.45120
- Liu, S., Yang, L., Zhang, C., Xiang, Y., Liu, Z., Hu, S., & Zhang, B. (2020). Online mental health services in China during the COVID-19 outbreak. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 7(4), 17-18. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(20)30077-8