



## UP RISE OF PANDEMIC FATIGUE

**Dr. SABINA RACHEL HAROLD**

Assistant Professor

Department of Business Management

University College of Commerce and Business Management

Mahatma Gandhi University, Nalgonda

drsabinaharold@gmail.com

### Abstract

*COVID'19 is a disease that is marked with isolation. The battle against the virus is long drawn, and when the battle is long drawn there is exhaustion that creeps in, the will to continue the fight wanes. For almost two years now, the entire world has been grappling with the COVID'19 pandemic and its repeated waves which don't seem to cease, people have reached a saturation point with respect to their tolerance of the pandemic.*

*The pandemic has been draining the physical and mental reserves of people around the world; the exhaustion has led us to the situation known as Pandemic Fatigue. The present paper addresses this new phenomenon Pandemic Fatigue that has emerged among populations across the globe in relevance to the COVID-19.*

*Key Words: Pandemic Fatigue, COVID-19, Corona Virus, Protective Behaviours*

### Introduction

The world that we knew as is no longer the same, more than a year into the COVID'19 pandemic and the end to it seems to be nowhere in sight. The COVID'19 pandemic which swept across the globe has ravaged nations. Irrespective of all the differences that mankind is plagued with; be it nationality, religion, race, economic status the COVID'19 pandemic had infected everyone likewise. If one were to trace the COVID'19 pandemic lifecycle from its initial stage of recognition to the present stage, there is a realisation there are no barriers that can withhold this virus. Surviving the pandemic depended on the Response.

Response to the pandemic is of utmost importance, how people respond dictates whether one will be infected or escape infection. At the recognition stage of the pandemic, all that we knew was that the virus was very virulent, easily transmitted and in many cases would accelerate and become life threatening. To avoid being infected it was strongly advocated that we follow social distancing, wear masks, religiously follow a hygiene routine of sanitizing and washing hands at regular intervals upon contact with any disinfected surfaces, confine oneself to the their houses and avoid going out unless necessary. The Response to pandemic in its nascent stage was motivated by the fear of the unknown. Many Behavioural Scientists also supposed that it is in the Human DNA to survive and when the unforeseen pandemic hit us, the survival instinct in us kicked in and all, with very few exceptional cases strictly followed the SOP's (Standard Operating Procedures) laid down by respective Governments. The protocols required behavioural changes in society, hitherto unheard of and never followed, it was a difficult transition. Lockdowns became the new norm, movement



restrictions were enforced. Socializing was a complete no-no; people were confined to closed spaces. It was just them and their household members left to tend for themselves.

### ***Slow and Steady Sets in the Fatigue***

COVID'19 is a disease that is marked with isolation, for many those infected and non-infected their struggle with the pandemic was the forced isolation, characterised with both a physical cum emotional distancing from the ones you cared for. When the battle is long drawn, there is exhaustion that creeps in, the will to continue the fight wanes. For almost two years now, the entire world has been grappling with the COVID'19 pandemic and its repeated waves which don't seem to cease, people have reached a saturation point with respect to their tolerance of the pandemic.

The pandemic has been draining the physical and mental reserves of people around the world; the exhaustion has led us to the situation known as Pandemic Fatigue. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines Pandemic Fatigue as “de-motivation to follow recommended protective behaviors (wearing a mask, avoid gatherings, reduce personal contacts and meetings, and increased hand hygiene)”. So why is there this fatigue that creeps in, it may be attributed to two important reasons:

One, over the past two years the novelty of COVID'19 threat has faded, people have become more used to the pandemic's existence. Many Governments across the world called on a state of emergency due to the pandemic; everything thing came to a halt: schools, offices, factories everything was shut unless it was an essential service. Strict restrictions were in place with regard to directly meeting up with people, work came to a standstill. Movement restrictions and protective behaviors came into effect.

The fact cannot be ignored that livelihoods of many in society depends on interactions with others. Avoiding going out, avoiding direct contact with people meant no work, directly affecting their economic status; and as the pandemic dragged on in order to survive, going out and working became necessary, many had to take the risk of being infected by the virus. Many have been forced to adapt to the risk, it is a trade-off between taking the risk and surviving or lose the chance to survive by not taking the risk. People became accustomed to the pandemic.

Being accustomed to something for long enough however difficult the situation, it will be perceived as normal. Hence, coined the term “The New Normal”. Wearing a mask, carrying a sanitizer at all times, following hand hygiene, social distancing, getting temperature checked at every outlet, all these protective behaviors became the new normal. When one assumes normalcy has returned, it is easy to be lax about the rules and regulations to be followed. The same has happened in the case of the COVID'19 pandemic, right now we are at a stage where we are presuming things to be normal and being lax about the protective behaviors that need to be followed. Risk perception towards the pandemic has changed, why has it has changed? The more accustomed we are to a way of life the less we perceive the risk to be.

Every day, more number of people are flouting the rules with regards to the corona virus, we see more number of people in public without masks, social distancing is not being followed, and social gatherings have increased. The reason may be due to the decreased number of corona virus cases being recorded, as the figures go down and the number of people being vaccinated increases, there is a growing confidence that we have succeeded in combating the pandemic.

### ***The Lull before the Storm***

Right now, the situation if analyzed seems to be under control with low cases, no new variants on the horizon, and sky high vaccination rates. It is easy to assume we have almost eradicated the Corona Virus, but most experts have and continue to reiterate the fact that the virus is not gone, globally we are far from completely eradicating the virus, there could be more new waves before the pandemic becomes an endemic and comes to the proportions of being managed easily. So the question that most have been asking is “WHEN”, when will we be rid of the corona virus and the answer is “OVER TIME”, one day we wake up we cannot suddenly expect the corona virus to magically vanish, in due time the virus will become less virulent and just as we are able to handle the flu outbreaks we should be able to handle the corona virus outbreaks, till such time there is the need to follow all the protective behaviors.

The WHO (World Health Organization) acknowledges that many nations have been experiencing the pandemic fatigue among their populations, and it poses a serious threat to the efforts to control the spread of the virus. One of the key strategic considerations that the WHO suggests is identify priority population groups – Those that show signs of demotivation in following the protective behaviour protocols. (WHO, 2021)

### ***COVID Briefs***

Following the COVID-19 pandemic across the globe, a review of literature reveals the following:

In managing the pandemic, effective measures of quarantine, isolation and physical distancing are crucial intervention strategies. Such measures have been reported as the most efficient ways to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 infection in Asia (Silva et al., 2020).

A cross sectional study was conducted in Istanbul, Turkey to assess the knowledge and attitude of the participants regarding COVID-19, also precautionary measures taken by the participants in response to COVID-19 was assessed. The survey revealed that 64.1% of the total participants were experiencing physical and mental fatigue due to COVID-19. (Morgul et al., 2020)

The COVID-19 literature on psychological problems has focused primarily on stress, anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and PTSD. Fatigue has rarely been studied as a psychological

problem. In the COVID-19 lockdown study conducted in Poland, as many as 75% of 260 respondents reported feeling fatigued. (“COVID-19 Lockdown Fatigue,” 2021)

Jordan, a country located in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) was not very much affected by the first wave of the COVID- 19 because of stringent mitigation measures in place, but was severely impacted by the pandemic in the second wave. Various factors could be behind the severe second wave, the evolving new variants of SARS-CoV-2 along with the pandemic fatigue which includes failure to sufficiently adopt the recommended COVID-19 precautionary behaviors among the public. (Al-Tammemi et al., 2021)

According to Lilleholt et al. (2020), constraining the COVID-19 pandemic, requires tremendous economic and psychological sacrifices on the part of the public and ultimately depend on people's constant willingness to follow guidelines and restrictions, in recent times several countries have reported an upsurge in the number of people who no longer sufficiently adhere to restrictions or keep themselves informed about COVID-19. This developing trend has been attributed to Pandemic Fatigue.

A study was conducted measuring Pandemic Fatigue, using quota-representative survey data from Denmark and Germany (overall n = 12,191), the findings indicate that Pandemic Fatigue is related to adherence or non-adherence to recommended health-protective behaviors.

In research from Labrague and Ballad (2021), the levels of lockdown-induced fatigue and its association with personal resilience, coping skills, and health in college students was studied. This study included college students enrolled in different colleges and universities in Western Samar, Philippines. The study reported a relationship between personal resilience and fatigue associated with the lockdown measure. In, conclusion it advised that Government take measure to build the resilience and coping skills among its populations.

Early 2021 saw India export crores of vaccine doses abroad — an initiative much lauded by recipient nations, come April 2021 State Governments were faced with vaccination shortages, many experts perceived that the central government came to the decision of exporting on the presumption, for some reason, thought that the pandemic was over and India would be a global exception in being spared a second wave. But it was not so, the second COVID wave in India was preceded by a near-return to normal amid falling case numbers. Fueled by the Pandemic Fatigue of Public – Their itch to return to normalcy as things were before COVID, the public flouted protective measures.

Even as the authorities continued to urge caution and observance of precaution measures, among the public there was a clear disdain towards preventive measures such as masking, social distancing. Stringently not following the protective behaviors is attributed as one of the reasons for the exponential surge in COVID-19 cases during India's second wave. (Ghosh, 2021)

## ***What Next***

Be it the WHO or any expert on any panel across the globe, there is a consensus among all that the end to Corona Virus is definitely not in the nearby future. As most of the nations are tiding the Corona Virus waves, the end can happen only “**when**”

- *There are no new variants of the SARS COVID-19*
- *The virus becomes an endemic*
- *Most of the populations are vaccinated, able to fight off the virus*
- *When the population has achieved herd immunity*

Now, that we know when it will end the next question is “**how**” can we achieve it, taking each when into consideration, there are some within our control and some beyond the control of mankind.

- *Limiting Mutation of the Corona Virus is not really within human control, this is something that we can hope for but not control*
- *How can the virus become an endemic, only when we are able to stave off large outbreaks*
- *For most populations to be vaccinated, the respective governments need to have a public policy in place that promulgates vaccination*
- *Vaccination and Herd Immunity are linked, as more numbers are vaccinated the better the public resistance towards the virus, indirectly boosting herd immunity*

Underlying all the “**When**” and “**How**” is the public adherence to the protective behaviors of masking, sanitizing, social distancing etc., in other words following the SOP's laid down to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before the when will the COVID-19 end and How can we end the COVID-19, it is important that we be cautious – do not let fatigue followed by a complacent attitude hinder following the protective behaviors.

Mitigation measures of COVID-19 include physical or social distancing, quarantining, and 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. (“COVID-19,” 2021)

As reports of Pandemic Fatigue continue to seep in, it becomes essential that governments develop strategies to find ways to keep the public motivated enough and not become complacent in following the protective behaviors.

## ***Winding Up***

The only two plausible solutions to warding off another COVID-19 outbreak are to get vaccinated along with preventive measures being followed stringently with no room whatsoever for complacency. What the governments need to do

- Assess the level of Pandemic Fatigue in society
- Identify the vulnerable groups most susceptible to pandemic fatigue
- Identify the causal factors of pandemic fatigue, such as what demographic factors along with psychological factors trigger fatigue
- Address the groups by developing practical intervention and mitigation strategies

Research addressing the above information needs to be conducted so to provide valuable information for policymakers and mental health professionals, embattling them against COVID-19.

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