

## The mental health of the Algerian individual in light of the Corona pandemic

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### Abstract

The current study aims at identifying the psychological and physical effects caused by the spread of Corona pandemic on the mental health of Algerian individual. In order to achieve this purpose the descriptive analytical approach was employed as well as two methods of focus group and content analysis which were directed to different age groups (children, young people and the elderly). It was relied upon the interview as a study tool. The following results would be reached later:

- There is a set of psychological effects that the Corona pandemic left on the mental health of the Algerian individual (children, young people and the elderly). Those effects are represented by a group of psychological and physical symptoms.

**Keywords:** Mental health ; Psychological symptoms ; Physical symptoms ; Corona pandemic.

## الصحة النفسية للفرد الجزائري في ظل جائحة كورونا

### الملخص:

هدفت الدراسة الحالية إلى معرفة الآثار النفسية والجسدية والتي كان سببها انتشار وتأثير جائحة كورونا على صحة الفرد الجزائري. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف تم توظيف المنهج الوصفي التحليلي واستخدام طريقتي المجموعة البؤرية وتحليل المحتوى وتم التوجه إلى فئات عمرية مختلفة (الأطفال، الشباب، المسنين)، أما بالنسبة لأداة الدراسة تم الاعتماد على المقابلة، وليتم التوصل فيما بعد إلى العديد من النتائج مفادها وجود مجموعة من الآثار التي خلفتها جائحة كورونا على صحة الفرد الجزائري (الأطفال، الشباب، المسنين)، والتي تمثلت في مجموعة من الأعراض النفسية والجسدية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الصحة النفسية؛ العرض النفسي؛ العرض الجسدي؛ جائحة كورونا.

### Introduction - problematic:

The most important thing that distinguished the world in 2019 was the spread of Corona pandemic, or what is known as the Covid 19 pandemic. The world is still under the control of this pandemic which has effects on all fields, economic, social, and health. The whole world is facing an unprecedented challenge with this unknown virus and rushing to contain it, especially after recording terrible numbers of deaths. According to local statistics on the Corona virus, the number of the estimated infections on July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020 in Algeria is about 24,278 cases. Whereas, the

estimated number of deaths is 1,100. These numbers are constantly changing (from the electronic daily Elaph, 2020).

All these data and others, fear and the preventive measures to confront the crisis including the quarantine has changed the course of Algerians` lives due to social isolation and the lack of personal contact between individuals. In addition to, the great influence left by the media in dealing with this health crisis and the unprecedented and intimidating presentation of the virus risks, especially with the first infection with it. All those factors have contributed in a way or another in affecting the mental health of individuals and the emergence of some psychological and physical effects (symptoms). This is what we have found in a recent study that was conducted in February 2020 by "Huang" and "Ning Chau". It took place in China and aimed to assess psychological risks and physical disorders resulting from the Corona virus. It is a prospective study that assigned different age and occupational groups. The study has concluded that the burden of mental health among health workers was high as a result of anxiety and depression symptoms. In addition the sleep hours among young people have been increased due to the outbreak of the pandemic (about the Future Center for Research and Future Studies, 2020).

The lack of local studies on the Corona virus and the effects it has on mental health of the Algerian individual due to the novelty of the phenomenon and the importance of treating it from a psychological point of view, has led us to conduct this study which includes the following research question:

What are the symptoms caused by the Corona pandemic on the mental health of the Algerian individual?

We will try to answer the following two main questions:

What are the psychological symptoms that a person experience because of Corona pandemic?

What are the physical symptoms that a person experience because of Corona pandemic?

### **Partial hypotheses**

There are psychological symptoms that the Algerian individual experience as a result of the Corona pandemic spread.

There are physical symptoms that the Algerian individual experience as a result of the Corona pandemic spread.

### **The theoretical side**

#### **1-Definition of Covid 19:**

Covid 19 is a disease caused by a new strain of Corona virus (Corona), and the English designation for the disease is derived as follows:

-CO are the first two letters of Corona

-VI are the first two letters of Virus

This disease was initially called the new Corona 2019. It is a new virus related to the family of the viruses which caused the syndrome disease that was behind the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and some types of common cold (UNICEF, 2020). The new name of the virus Covid (19) was approved by the World Health Organization on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020. This is based on the guidelines which are previously established by both the World Organization for Animal Health, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (World Health Organization, 2020).

Covid-19 is an infectious disease that began its outbreak in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019. It has now turned into a pandemic affecting the entire world. Among its most common symptoms are fever, dry cough and fatigue. Some patients may suffer from pains and aches, or nasal congestion, or throat pain. Some patients may be

infected, but their symptoms may be mild. About 80% of the contaminated recover without the need for treatment in hospital. However, the risk of severe complications increases in the elderly and people who have had previous health problems (World Health Organization, 2020).

## 2-Psychological health:

It has been mentioned in a definition of mental health of (Lauders et al., 1992) that is not a constant state but rather it is a state of balance between the physiological, psychological, social resources, mechanisms of protection, defence of the body on the one hand and the underlying disease-causing effects of the physical, biological and social surroundings from the other hand (Mr. Fahmy Ali, 2009, p. 25)

The World Health Organization considers mental health as an integral part of health. It identifies mental health as a state of well-being, happiness, physical, psychological and social adequacy. It is not merely the absence of disease (Boutros Hafez Boutros, 2008, p.29). Through this definition, we can rely on three basic points:

- 1- Mental health is an integral part of public health.
- 2- Mental health is more than just being unaffected.
- 3- Mental health is related to a range of behaviour and physical health.

It is clear from the above that this positive concept of health which considers mental health an integral part of it, confirms that health is not just a celebration of disease, but rather a state of adaptation and balance with oneself and with the human community as a whole. This is starting with the family.

However, this balance may be disturbed because health is not absolute. Either you are healthy or not. Mental health is similar to physical health. For example, the state of complete compatibility between the body parts is almost non-existent whereas, the degree of imbalance of this

compatibility is present. It makes the state of disease clearer than health.

So, mental health does not mean that there are boundaries between mental health and mental illness. It is certain that talking about mental illness leads us in one way or another to consider the next element when defining the symptom. It means that the individual's success in adapting to his environment is relative. This balance may be disturbed between the individual and his environment when the individual faces pressures and crises. Especially, if this crisis is represented by the Corona pandemic which threatens the life and health of all societies throughout the world as well as individuals of different age groups.

### 3-Display Definition:

Symptoms are behavioural signs indicating the existence of a disease as well as the difference between normal and abnormal (pathological) personality in terms of symptoms which are different in degree and not type. Symptoms may be related to the body complaint (such as fever or headache), or psychological behaviour (such as laziness, lack of the desire to eat). They express the body's reaction to a disease-generating condition. The symptom is not a diagnosis by itself especially if it is alone. However, it takes the form of the disease if it enters into a logically consistent system with other symptoms. As the same symptom can be found within different psychological diseases or disorders which differ in terms of severity, origin and relative treatment as well. The therapist in this situation has to place the symptom within his correct frame and intent for the expected diagnosis (Idris Abdel Salam Shahidi Al Wazzani, 2008, p. 34).

Therefore, determining a specific symptom is the first step in the diagnostic path. For the event to be a symptom according to this path, it must constitute clinical stability and temporal stability. It is observed from time to time

throughout the duration of the disease. The nature and quality of the symptoms are not dependent only on the characteristic of the disease-generating factor, but also on the psychological characteristics of the person concerned.

We may also point out that there is a group of symptoms and signs that are named the same as entire disorders. They contain among its components symptoms or signs, such as "anxiety" and "depression". Then, the use of these words must be distinguished when denoting symptoms of changes related to emotion. Those symptoms are found in many mental disorders when they are used to refer to disorders of the same name. Anxiety or depression is basic symptoms in a syndrome that includes a set of other basic symptoms. They are necessary to diagnose "anxiety disorder" or "depressive disorder."

#### Field side

\* **Approach:** The descriptive and analytical approach was adopted.

\* **Research tools:** Many tools have been used to collect and analyze information, the most important of which are:

-Content analysis.

- Focus groups.

Conduct the study with the focus group:

The procedural features of the Focus Group are considered a qualitative method of scientific research. This method aims to collect qualitative data on a specific topic by revealing perceptions and mutual agreements between the participating members. To achieve this method, we have followed the following steps which are briefly explained in the interpretation diagram of the focus group as follows:

#### 1. Introducing the participants :

Focus group 01	Focus group 02	Focus group 03	Focus group 04	Focus group 05
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10 cases	12 cases	08 cases	07 cases	09 cases
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## 2. Set up a network or interview guide

Here we have prepared the focus group interview guide as a tool for gathering data and information:

This guide or network is the basis of discussion within the group, the grill is the support of group discussions. For some researchers, it is a tool to revive the dialogue.

The interview protocol for focus groups is as follows:

- 1- What are the psychological symptoms that you feel as a result of experiencing Corona pandemic?
- 2- What are the physical symptoms that you feel as a result of experiencing Corona pandemic?

## 3 Analysis and reporting the results

### 3-1 - The first focus group: frequency = 45

Questions	First focus group				
What are the psychological symptoms that you suffer as a result of experiencing Corona pandemic?	Children	Dimensions	Categories	Q	Dimensio n %
		anxiety	Children suffer from anxiety	02	22.22%
			Following the virus news with concern	02	
			Hyperactiviy	A lot of movement	
		Lack of control over children's movement	01		
		Lack of motor focus	01		
Fear of diseases	Fear of the virus	01			



			Night scares	01	
Young people	Dimension	Categories	Q	Q	Dimension %
	Anxiety in girls	Anxiety upon hearing a nearby infection	02	02	17.77 %
		Extreme tension when an infectious person dies	02	02	
	Fear in girls	Fear and do not leave the house	02	02	
		Fear of persons	01	01	
	Anxiety in boys	Some anxiety in males	01	01	
The elderly	Dimension	Categories	Q	Q	
	Fear of their children	They are afraid when children go outside because of the possibility of transmitting the virus	03	03	15.55%
		They are afraid of male offspring because	01	01	

			they do not restrict to quarantine measures		
		Delusional disease	Delusion of the disease	01	
			Nightmares of infection	01	
What are the physical symptoms that you suffer as a result of experiencing Corona pandemic, despite of not being infected?	children	Dimension	Categories	Q	Dimension %
		flue symptoms	Permanent stuffy nose and fear of infection	02	11%
			High temperature	02	
	Frequent wounds and injuries	Frequent wounds on the hand and leg and considering it to be Corona virus	01		
	Young people	Dimension	Categories	Q	Dimension %
		shortness of breath	A feeling of suffocation	02	15.55%
contracted chest			02		
Digestive problems		Stomach pain	01		
	Stomach and intestinal pain	02			

	The elderly	Dimension	Categories	Q	Dimension %
		Shortness of breath	Persistent shortness of breath	02	17.77 %
			sadness	02	
		Arthritis	Pain in most joints of the body	01	
		Digestive problems	Pain in the body and colon	02	
Stomach and colon pain	01				
Tota				99.97	

l = 45

### 3-2- The second focus group: Frequency = 39

Questions	Second focus group				
	Childre n	Dimensions	Categories	Q	Dimension %
What are the psychological symptoms that you suffer as a result of experiencing Corona pandemic?	Fear	Fear	Suffering of fear	02	15.38 %
			Anxiety accompanied with	01	
			Asking Many questions about Corona	02	
	Delusions	Delusions of the illness	01		
	Young people	Dimension	Categories	Q	Dimension %
Carrelesnes in boys	Carelessness to advices and	03	17.94 %		

			instructions		
			Non-compliance to quarantine procedures	0 1	
		Some fears	Fear of hearing infections and deaths among neighbours	0 1	
		Anxiety	Some anxiety as a result of their contact with some people suspected of being infected	0 1	
	The elderly	Dimension	Categories	Q	Dimension %
		Loneliness	Feeling of loneliness as a result of the quarantine	0 2	17.94 %
		Fear	Fear of infection	0 3	
		Feeling of being threatened	Feeling as though the virus is threatening their existence	0 1	
			Permanent sense of infection	0 1	
What are the physical	children	Dimension	Categories	Q	Dimension %

symptoms that you suffer as a result of experiencing Corona pandemic, despite of not being infected?		Cough	Cough	0 1	7.69 %
			High temperature as a result of tonsils inflammation	0 1	
			Tonsillitis and sore throat	0 1	
Young people	Dimension	Categories	Q	Dimension %	
	Changes in body temperature	Overheating sometimes	0 1	17.94 %	
		Sometimes cold in the body	0 1		
	Extreme fatigue	Feeling of tiredness	0 2		
		Permanent fatigue	0 1		
Some sleep disturbances	Difficulty falling asleep due to excessive thinking and fear of infection	0 2			
The elderly	Dimensions	Categories	Q	Dimension %	
	Shivering	shivering in the body	0 3 0 2	23.07 %	
	High diabetes and	High diabetes for	0 2		

		blood pressure	no reason		
			High blood pressure despite of taking medication	0 2	
			Sweating for high blood pressure	0 2	
				Total	99.96
l = 39					

**3-3- The third focus group: frequency = 55**

Questions	Third focus group				
	Childre n	Dimensions	Categories	Q	Dimensio n %
What are the psychological symptoms that you suffer as a result of experiencing Corona pandemic?	Childre n	Fear	fear of the virus	0 2	18.18 %
			Permanent fear	0 1	
			Daily inquiry and follow-up news about the virus	0 2	
		Intense fear of infection	0 1		
		Anxiety	Permanent tension	0 1	
	Hyperactivit y	Excessive movement and disturbance	0 2		
		Inability to control the child's movement and activities	0 1		
Young people	Dimension	Categories	Q	Dimensio n %	
	Feeling of	Psychological	0	12.72 %	

		imbalance	imbalance	1			
			Inability to focus and balance	0 1			
			It disturbed my life and I am always in panic	0 1			
			Aggressiveness	0 1			
		intellectual and housework are affected	Inability to master household chores	0 1			
			Disruption of intellectual activities	0 1			
		Obsession	Obsessions from others as soon as you see them	0 1			
		The elderly	Dimension	Categories		Q	Dimension %
			Fear of infection	Fear of people visiting them		0 2	14.54 %
Fear of children when they leave the house	0 2						
Extreme fear when someone close to you is infected	0 2						
Anger	Anger at the behaviour of others		0 2				
What are	Dimensions	Categories	Q	Dimension			

the physical symptoms that you suffer as a result of experiencing Corona pandemic, despite of not being infected?	children				n %
		Increased heart rythms	Increased heart rythms	0 2	7.27 %
			Chest tightness and heartbeat	0 2	
	Young people	Dimensions	Categories	Q	
		hard breathing	difficulty breathing	0 3	18.18 %
			Choking on hearing nearby infections	0 3	
		Sleep problems	Inability to sleep on time	0 2	
			insomnia	0 2	
		The elderly	Dimensions	Categories	Q
	Numbness in the body		Sensation of numbing in the knees	0 2	29.09 %
			The body looks anesthetic and unable to move	0 3	
	Fatigue and exhaustion		Feeling of fatigue and exhaustion	0 3	
	Disorder of their chronic disease		An increase in diabetes in the blood	0 3	
			Increased heart rythm	0 2	
			Hypertension	0 3	
Tota				99.99	



l = 55

**3-4- The fourth focus group: Frequency = 35**

Questions	Third focus group				
	Childre n	Dimensions	Categories	Q	Dimensio n %
What are the psychological symptoms that you suffer as a result of experiencing Corona pandemic?	Childre n	Fear	Tension when hearing the virus news	0 2	14.28 %
			Fear of infection	0 1	
		Motor hyperactivity	Excessive movement and comments due to the quarantine	0 1	
		Feeling depressed	Melancholy and being bored	0 1	
	Young people	isolation	Staying at the room at day and night	0 2	17.14 %
				Excessive isolation	
		Avoiding others	Avoiding other people and fearing that they may be infected	0 2	
		Feeling lack of psychological security	Fear of losing the salary	0 1	

	The elderly	Dimensions	Categories	Q	Dimension %
		Delusion of disease	Constant feeling of infection	0 4	25.71 %
		Night and day nightmares	Suffering of nightmares	0 2	
			Daytime fears and daydreams of the virus	0 3	
		Feeling insecure	Fear of the fragility of the retirement fund		
What are the physical symptoms that you suffer as a result of experiencing Corona pandemic, despite of not being infected?	Children	Dimensions	Categories	Q	
		hard breathing	Feeling anxious and choking	0 2	8.57 %
			unable to breathe and the desire to get out of home	0 1	
	Young people	Dimensions	Categories	Q	
		hard breathing	Feeling of suffocation and constriction	0 2	14.28 %
				Headache	
		Permanent headache	0 1		
	The	Dimensions	Categories	Q	

	elderly				n %
		Digestive problems	Stomach and intestinal pain	0 2	20 %
			Permanent stomach ache	0 3	
		Fatigue and exhaustion	Fatigue and muscle weakness	0 2	
				Tota	99.98
l = 35					

**3-5 - The fifth focus group: frequency = 40**

Questions	Fifth focus group				
What are the psychological symptoms that you suffer as a result of experiencing Corona pandemic?	Children	Dimensions	Categories	Q	Dimension %
		Fear	Fear of the virus	02	17.5 %
			Night fears and nightmares	01	
			Stress and anxiety	Nervousness	
		Constant anxiety and stress		02	
	Irritation	Extreme irritation more than usual due to lack of exit	01		
	Young people	Dimensions	Categories	Q	Dimension %
		Insomnia	Insomnia and staying up during the night	01	17.5 %
Fear				Fear of the future	

			following news eagerly	01	
			Fear of losing the beloved ones	01	
		Relying on other means to relax	Singing and dancing to avoid the extreme fear	01	
			With Ramadan reading the Qur'an and avoid meeting others when they visit us	02	
	The elderly	Dimensions	Categories	Q	Dimension %
		Dispersion	A sense of intellectual distraction	02	17.5 %
			Feeling out of focus	01	
		Delusion of disease	Feeling infected for any simple reason	02	
		Extreme fear	Fear of infection	01	
			Fear of others	01	
What are the physical	children	Dimensions	Categories	Q	Dimension %

symptoms that you suffer as a result of experiencing Corona pandemic, despite of not being infected?		Coughing	Feeling of infection when coughing	02	5 %
	Young people	Dimensions	Categories	Q	Dimension %
		Contracted chest	Feeling of suffocation and restlessness	02	10 %
	Narrowness of personal freedom		02		
	The elderly	Dimensions	Categories	Q	Dimension %
		Anorexia	Sometimes the inability to eat and loss of appetite	03	32.5 %
			A sense of muscle failure	Physical discomfort	02
		Feeling of tiredness and fatigue		03	
		Shivering	Fear and trembling	03	
			Shivering when an infectious person dies	02	
Total				100	
l = 40					

**Overall results for the five focus groups:**

4-1- The psychological and (psycho-physical) effects of the Corona pandemic on children in the Algerian society, the most important of which are:

-Fear of infection with the Corona virus. -The emergence of excessive motor activity -Some anxiety - nervousness - Shortness of breath. -Numerous wounds, injuries, and delusional infection with the virus. -Cough -Cold -Increased heartbeat for fear of infection.

2- The psychological and (psycho-physical) effects of the Corona pandemic on young people in Algerian society, the most important of which are:

\*In girls:

-Fear and extreme anxiety-Feeling constantly threatened  
-Feeling of psychological imbalance -Impact on household and intellectual chores -Some obsessions -Shortness of breath  
-Digestive problems -Sensation of a change in body temperature -Fatigue.

\* In young males:

-Anxiety -Show indifference -Reduced personal freedom  
- A sense of psychological insecurity resulting from fear of losing financial stability at the level of income (fear of a decrease or interruption of the monthly salary). -Digestive problems -Night insomnia - Headache

**4-3- The psychological and (psycho-physical) effects of the Corona pandemic on the elderly people in Algerian society, including:**

Fear of their children because of the possibility of transmitting infection. Delusion of the disease-Avoiding others  
Some nightmares at night and day-Financial fear (fear of the fragility of the retirement fund)-Shortness of breath-  
Digestive problems-Joint pain due to fear- Shivering, especially when hearing news of virus infections or deaths  
Symptomatic disorder of chronic diseases (diabetes, blood pressure ...)-A sense of numbness -Fatigue and weakness  
-Loss of appetite

**Conclusion:**

Finally, after the previously listed research stages and the results reviewed, it seems clear that the spread of the

Corona pandemic has had effects on the mental health of the Algerian individual of all ages (children, youth, and the elderly). Those effects are prevalent through psychological and physiological symptoms especially with the data that accompanied the spread of the phenomenon. This is due to its ambiguity and the lack of both scientific and medical research carried out about it and the health measures taken to confront it, especially the quarantine and the policy of social distancing. In order to contain these symptoms and prevent them from developing into complex mental disorders, it is useful to take a set of recommendations in order to deal with them wisely. They are included in the following:

-Programming classes for psychologists to accompany the contaminated during the quarantine as well as programming citizens or a private channel to take care of them and talk to them to explain their psychological and physical conditions so that they can reassure them.

Citizens can seek psychological help through behavioural or cognitive therapy, or the practice of relaxation and some psychological treatments. This can be done via the Internet.

- Staying at home makes individuals, especially children, feel bored, anxious and depressed. Thus, it is necessary to maintain a timetable for practicing life activities under these circumstances. This could be achieved through maintaining bedtime and regular meals, playing some games with children and with the family in addition to practicing walking and sports in an open place.

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