

The Psychological and Socio-emotional Impact of the Lockdown. Case study: Morocco.

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Abstract

The pandemic Covid19 affected the social, emotional, and mental well-being of the entire planet, and Morocco is no exception. Various works are focused on understanding the epidemiology, transmission patterns, vaccines' distribution, and management of Coronavirus pneumonia. Nevertheless, few studies deal with the outbreak's impact on psychological health and well-being during the lockdown. The mental health crisis and the pandemic are deeply interconnected. Long-term isolation is a breeding ground for mental fragility in people. This paper aims to explore how Moroccans faced the current mental health challenges during the lockdown. It also examines the necessary support mechanisms to assist them in maintaining their mental health and well-being throughout the lockdown.

Keywords: Covid19 effects, Lockdown, mental health, psychology, children, socioemotional outcomes, Moroccan population.

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I. INTRODUCTION

After the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of the Coronavirus disease 2019 SARS-CoV-2 /COVID-19 a pandemic, and to slow down a rapid spread across and within countries, Morocco, as several other nations around the globe, reacted with strict measures. These measures include lockdown with school and workplace closures, self-isolation and social distancing, border closures, restrictions of travel to reduce the transmission of the virus. Subsequently, the World Health Organization validates the potential impact of the pandemic health crises on the mental welfare of the population. [1]. The gravity of the measures adopted by Morocco to restrain the outbreak has led to serious concerns about the mental health of the global nation with calls for urgent and immediate actions. The outcome of quarantine, isolation, and social distancing has led some people to feel anxiety, depression, and sleep disorders. After the 1918 influenza pandemic, some survivors reported sleep disturbances, depression, mental distraction, dizziness, and difficulties coping at work.[2] Morocco adopted long periods of lockdown to minimize the pandemic outbreaks in its society. The consequences of the lockdown in Morocco are massive since the population felt job insecurity, social isolation, economic hardships, domestic violence, substance abuse, and media consumption. The lockdown impacts the mental health and social-emotional development of the Moroccan community as well. Actually, all Moroccans experienced the complications related to the pandemic and the lockdown however, it seems that young adults and children suffered from further psychological and socioemotional issues linked to the current situation.

1.2 Methodology

We conducted an online survey intended for the public in Morocco in June 2021. We adopted this procedure to practice physical distancing with people and to follow the rules set by the Moroccan authorities about social distancing. The sampling procedure is non-probability, and the study uses the snowball technique. We provided a 25 questions survey questionnaire through the Google Forms platform, and we shared it with organizations on Facebook and WhatsApp applications. We also communicated the inquiry via emails to friends and family members. Each participant should answer the questionnaire just once. We took into consideration the confidentiality of the answers. The participants had spontaneously and willingly returned all questionnaires without exception. They had the right to quit the survey at any time or change their answers. To minimize missing data, we designed answer fields mandatory before proceeding to the next question. No personal information was collected or stored. We are not using a timeframe for data collection. All data are anonymous, and it's impossible to identify the participants. The study questionnaire included demographic characteristics

such as age, gender, occupation, COVID-19 awareness, opinion about the lock-down, noticed challenges caused by the lock-down, and substance use. We also examined the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health and well-being of the participants. Our study represents adults and young Moroccans and carefully estimates the heterogeneity by age, gender, and socioeconomic elements like education degree and job situation. We are aware that the questionnaire participants didn't answer the questions precisely.

When we surveyed this subject matter, we wanted to investigate how Moroccans are still affected by the pandemic and its outcomes. With this approach, we get a close insight into the problem issued by the pandemic. Our findings give a clear idea of the answers to the questionnaire and are just a report on the respondents' feelings and disturbances. Additionally, we described the shared perceptions of the population studied. As a researcher, we respected all the regulations of ethics in our fieldwork. Ultimately, our poll makes 76.9% of participants are Moroccans, 23% are non-Moroccans living in Morocco and 92% are between the ages of 18-25 years old.

II. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

One of this research's bases is its purpose of studying the psychological and socioemotional issues produced by the pandemic lockdown and the measures adopted by the government in restricting social communications between individuals.

The results showed that 18.5% answered they have already been diagnosed with anxiety symptoms, and 50% reported having mental health issues and prevalent anxiety. And only 33% identified their symptoms as depression. In addition, 62.5% never went out throughout the Lockdown, and the rest spent less than one hour outdoors within their neighborhoods. Concerning the quality of sleep during the pandemic, 20% have poor sleep quality and insomnia. In reply to the anxiety and stress related to the pandemic, 55.5% affirmed suffering from extreme worries, stress, or fear. Regarding the specific challenges faced during the Pandemic Lockdown, 50% reported distress, anxiety, and depression. Furthermore, 54% reported challenging family relationships.

One of the striking negative psychological aftermaths of this pandemic in Moroccan society is that the divorce pace increased after the Lockdown, and people are reporting domestic violence and substance abuse. Experts in the field speculate that this is another health emergency following the pandemic.

To sum up, in our study, the Moroccan community experiences emotional disorders such as distress, worry, and anxiety during and after the Lockdown.

Among the positive results, we find increased sustained connections with family and friends in 70% of participants declaring they mind for family relationships after the pandemic Lockdown. Another aspect of our findings is the youth developing online devices to relate to the world and make virtual friends.

Restrictive measures applied in Morocco appear to be effective in restraining the spread of COVID-19. However, these measures have disrupted people's daily employment and daily activities and have critical implications on their psychological health and well-being. Health systems in Morocco have neglected the fragile and vulnerable people with chronic health conditions exposed to a lower quality of life during this Covid-19 lockdown. Moreover, the lockdown condition has produced conflicting emotions in the children, who are scared, nervous, lonely, sad, bored, and angry, and they also feel safe, calm, and happy with their families. These findings show the necessity for the governments to consider children inside the management of the current situation by emphasizing social and inclusive policies to help alleviate the possible effects that they may suffer from during the pandemic and the lockdown. We need to manage the psychological, educational, social, health, and well-being of children and those affected by comorbidities but physically active. We should be aware of the numerous frustrations linked to quarantine restrictions. The before-mentioned identification of the psychological and socioemotional issues can help the health policies to prioritize people who suffer from these impacts during this health emergency.

III. THE MOROCCAN POPULATION AND MENTAL HEALTH PERPLEXITIES DURING THE PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN.

A recent pandemic review examined studies on quarantined people because of disease outbreaks such as Ebola or SARS. Four studies compared the psychological outcomes of quarantined populations with those not quarantined. A survey of hospital staff who might have come into contact with SARS found that immediately after the quarantine period (9 days) ended, having been quarantined was the most imminent determinant of acute stress disorders [3]. In the same study, the quarantined team was significantly more likely to report exhaustion, detachment from others, anxiety when dealing with febrile patients, irritability, insomnia, poor concentration and indecisiveness, deteriorating work performance, and reluctance to work or reflection of resignation. In another study [4], the effect of being quarantined as a predictor of post-traumatic stress symptoms in hospital employees even three years later, approximately 34% (938 of 2760) of horse owners quarantined for several weeks because of an equine influenza outbreak reported high psychological distress during the pandemic outbreaks, compared with around 12% in the Australian population.[5] A study comparing post-traumatic stress

symptoms in parents and children quarantined with those not quarantined [6] found that the post-traumatic stress rates were four times higher in the quarantined children than those who did not quarantine. 28% (27 of 98) of parents quarantined in this study reported sufficient symptoms to justify a diagnosis of a trauma-related mental health disorder, compared with 6% (17 of 299) of parents who did not quarantine. The evidence on the direct impact of the lockdown on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people produces complex findings, with some studies indicating an increased probability of PTSD (Post-Traumatic and Stress-related Disorder) symptoms in quarantined children.

For a variety of reasons, quarantine can be traumatizing for some parents. In a study [7] on post-traumatic stress disorder in health-related disasters, 25% of isolated or quarantined parents found that parents were diagnosed with PTSD. The same study found links between PTSD criteria in adults and their children who have PTSD symptoms [8]. Duration of quarantine and consequent lack of social and physical contact with friends/family and the outside world is connected with increased PTSD symptoms. Similarly, it shows that social isolation and loneliness impact the mental health of adults. Other elements that prove to have an impact on the socioemotional wellbeing include the duration of quarantine, fear of infection, frustration and boredom, inadequate supplies and information (guidelines, rationale for actions, and degree of risks), loss of work or working more than usual [9], or COVID-19 related stressful life events.

Lockdown-related school closures have been one of the most significant public health measures across Morocco. For children and young people, this has been the first extended closure of schools in their times. Its impact on their mental health and wellbeing is critical to the already controversial nature of the effectiveness of school closures on disease containment. School is often the place where children seek help for their mental health and wellbeing. An extended period of school closures will impact the curriculum over the coming years. School is an emerging source of distress and worry for children, especially for teens who experience concerns about their education being interrupted and their future career opportunities remain unclear. Moreover, this case study of quarantined youth results in students living stigma upon returning to their studies due to their contact with infection [10], a crucial element to reflect upon should we experience more localized lockdown measures during future COVID-19 outbreaks.

Our quantitative study investigated people who have quarantined and who suffer from the psychological effects of this pandemic lockdown. The consequences are devastating. Anxiety increases in many people being afraid to contract or transmit the virus. Concerns about the health, social and economic effects of the pandemic occur inside the population. Even if socio-emotional development experiences are different, in general, they refer to the process through which children develop the ability to initiate and maintain trusting relationships with adults and peers; to understand and express emotions in an appropriate way; and to become independent, explore and engage with the environment and make responsible decisions. In short, socio-emotional development is concerned with how children think, feel, and act. As noted by Berk and al., [11] “the early childhood years are a crucial time for the development of self-regulation — an array of complex mental capacities that includes impulse and emotion control, self-guidance of thought and behavior, planning, self-reliance, and socially responsible behavior.” Furthermore, Kostelnik asserts that the social and emotional development of children affects their overall development and learning. [12]

Children learn about emotions and are managing them in the context of social interactions. They are by nature outgoing, and companionship is essential for their healthy psychological development and wellbeing. Social activity is a vehicle through which children learn about themselves and their world. Learning begins at home, high-quality Early childhood education and care settings play a significant role in supporting children’s social-emotional development [13]. Early childhood education can promote social and emotional skills in the classroom by providing children with a safe, nurturing, and predictable environment. Many other individual factors also affect young children’s socioemotional development. For example, Russell [14] Identified children’s health, gender, and a range of family and socioeconomic factors as having an impact on young children’s socio-emotional development. Finally, we found out in this research that the lockdown had a very negative effect on the socio-emotional development of children and young adults on a global scale.

Millions of children have missed out on ECEC (early childhood education and care) due to the closure of their settings during the COVID-19 pandemic. These facilities closed with one day’s notice in March 2020 and continued to be closed for months, causing disruptions for children and parents. We do not know much about how these closures affected children and families during this time.

As the lockdown was an unprecedented experience, investigating experiences and gaining parental insights into the impact of the closures on their young children are believed valuable. This paper draws upon data gathered online from parents during the lockdown and provides insights into the socio-emotional impact of the COVID-19 crisis on young children.

We end up with children, and particularly teenagers feeling more anxious than before the Covid-19 pandemics. The several circumstances that affected the mental health of children and young people are loneliness, identified as a severe threat during lockdown for the mental health and well-being of children and

young adults. During this stage of development, lockdown loneliness is due to the loss of peer group comfort. Finally, worries about education and the future are determinants for young people's mental health and well-being. Ceasing critical periods of their life can have devastating effects on their future success as adults, both financially and for their self-esteem. The impact of Covid-19 on education and the economy will catastrophically impact young people's futures. Huge post-pandemic national debt and climbing unemployment will continue to impair the aspirations of Moroccans for many years. The pandemic has exacerbated societal inequalities and has left children from low-income families at least a year behind their classmates.

IV. THE POTENTIAL LONG-TERM MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS DURING THE LOCKDOWN.

According to Yuko Nippoda [15], a psychotherapist and spokesperson for the UK Council for Psychotherapy, many people suffer from anxiety, and their anxiety increases and their condition might worsen during the lockdown. Chronic loneliness brought on by social isolation or lack of meaning in life during the pandemic is another concern. Some people switched intentionally from the external world to experience feelings of security and become resistant to developing their social interactions. When people undergo pressure and anxiety outdoors, they can withdraw from that world and become lonely.

The lack of employment and decrease in income caused by the knock-on economic outcomes of the pandemic impacts long-term welfare. Numerous pre-Covid-19 studies link these determinants to depression, anxiety, unhappiness, or suicidal thoughts.. Meanwhile, the stress of Covid-19 is likely to have ongoing mental damage with this extreme life experience. "It might trigger the memory of the trauma consciously and unconsciously, which can affect you. In this case, the mental health conditions can become long-term, as it can open the lid of the trauma," explains Nippoda.[16] Ongoing unemployment or loss of revenue induced by the knock-on economic effects of the pandemic may affect long-term wellbeing, too. Numerous pre-Covid-19 studies link these factors to depression, stress, or suicidal thoughts. A new survey discovered that more than half of people who are jobless or have their salary diminished during the pandemic have already reached negative mental health status. Psychologists stress that the unprecedented nature and scale of the coronavirus crisis adds a layer of uncertainty compared to preceding financial disasters.

Until there's a global vaccine, it remains unknown when the various seriously broken industries as travel and entertainment will overcome this crisis. Nippoda suggests this presents a challenging situation for people who "are not good at dealing with uncertainty" or struggle to handle situations they can't control. [17] We live in unpredictable times at the moment. Some people fear uncertainty and the unknown. People worry about getting sick, how long the pandemic will last, whether they will get a job, and what kind of future they will have. Information overload, rumors, and misinformation make life unclear and uncertain. For all of these reasons, some people start to learn self-care strategies to help them through this tough time.

A study conducted at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, found out that the anxiety and stress of the COVID-19 pandemic have made it less likely for people to do an in-physical activity to maintain their mental health. The results show that people who remained physically active during the pandemic avoided mental health crises. For others, their mental health issues have become a hindrance to exercise.

V. CONCLUSION

Our study showed that the COVID-19 outbreak lockdown caused a lot of challenges to Moroccan society. We believe that a partial lockdown would have been better in this pandemic situation. Partial lockdowns help people maintain optimism, commitment, and a positive attitude despite the restrictions settled. Partial lockdowns rarely impact the psychological, socioemotional, and welfare of any population. We showed that health specialists are affected by the high level of anxiety, stress, and depression during the COVID-19 pandemics. We also expressed the need for support systems and coping strategies to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression during the lockdown. Moreover, acknowledging these challenges is crucial to strengthen the mental health of the entire population.

Our study humbly contributes to a better understanding of how a crisis affects people's well-being and raises awareness regarding mental health. The government should set strategies of help during the COVID-19 outbreaks to provide citizens with mid-term and long-term solutions to improve mental health and have proper socio-emotional development. Furthermore, the officials should set programs for children who are the first in line to suffer from the Pandemic Lockdown.

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