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Probing Covid-19 stress and coping in India: Lessons for the second wave**Kanika K. Ahuja***University of Delhi, India*

Statement of the Problem: The second wave of COVID-19 in India that caught everyone unaware has sparked nation-wide panic and outrage. Consequences of safety measures such as lockdowns and social isolation during the first wave led to fear, panic, loneliness, boredom, and anger, all of which are risk factors for psychiatric disorders. The current paper examines the psychosocial stressors that Indians face as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, using a self-constructed COVID-19 Stress Scale (CSS). It also explores coping strategies that people are using to deal with this pandemic, and to see which were helpful. Methodology: The sample comprised of 1009 Indians, aged 17-83 years (Mean age 38.02 years). An online questionnaire comprising of CSS and an adaptation of Ways of Coping Scale (Folkman & Lazarus 1988) was administered. Conclusion & Significance: Stress experienced due to COVID-19 is comprised of five dimensions: Vexation with Others, Immediate Concerns, Routine Disruption, Uncertainty about the Future, and Systemic stressors (abbreviated as VIRUS). Stress is contributed most by disturbing visuals and repetitive messages seen on social media and news channels that lead to panic and anxiety. This is followed closely by systemic stresses, caused due to inadequate Government response and lack of infrastructure. With regards to coping, although seeking social support was the most used strategy, no significant correlation was found between the use of any coping strategy and COVID-19 stress. This suggests that none of the coping strategies- emotion-focused, problem-solving focused, and seeking social support is helping in dealing with stress emanating from COVID-19 stress. Strategies need to be devised urgently to especially help people engage with social media, as also systemic stressors. Volunteering and helping others were effective coping mechanisms to reduce stress during the first wave, and could prove to be helpful this time too.

Biography

Dr. Ahuja has about 22 years of teaching, research and professional experience. Her areas of interest are psychometry, social psychology, and organizational behavior. She is the editor of The Learning Curve, a peer-reviewed journal published by Lady Shri Ram College, since 2018. She has published over thirty articles in leading journals, authored a book, and written three course texts for Indira Gandhi National Open University. She has presented several papers and key note addresses at conferences. She conducts workshops for leading schools in the country, as also soft skill training and psychometric projects for corporates. She has done research projects on conflict resolution and peace building in Kashmir, creating sustainable global partnerships in higher education, gender gap in mathematics, body image, enhancing self-esteem among young school girls, and patient treatment adherence. She also delivered a TED-X talk titled "Mirror Mirror on the wall."

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