

The Impact of the Pandemic on Mental Health: Risk and Protective Factors

Data Analysis from Responses by Muslim and Arab Christian Participants

Abir K. Bekhet

In 2019, a strain of coronavirus was identified in China and by March 2020, the virus was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021). The coronavirus pandemic resulted in high rates of hospitalization. Without a doubt, the pandemic impacted not only the physical but also the mental health of people. This report provides an overview regarding the impact of coronavirus on socialization and mental health among approximately twenty participants. Most of the participants are women, immigrants, and Muslims.

One of the identified themes as a risk factor was “loneliness and isolation”. For example, one participant indicated that some of the less desirable outcomes of the pandemic have included isolation from family and friends especially during Ramadan season and changing her job from a preschool teacher to an at-home school teacher for several children, including her own. Another participant indicated that even though she could attend funerals and other significant events over virtual platforms, it wasn’t a full substitute for personal contact, especially during times of grief and healing. Another participant stated that during the pandemic, she relied mostly on internet/ apps for connectivity and that many more people were struggling with mental health and loneliness.

Another theme was “positive outcomes as a result of the pandemic”. Some participants were able to see the positives during the pandemic, which were protective factors that help them to move forward. One participant stated that there are positive outcomes of the pandemic including: drawing closer to her faith, spending more family time together, her children learning more effectively in their online Islamic studies classes than they did in-person over the last five years, and connecting with geographically distant family more often. Also, she has been able to teach her kids about being active in social justice initiatives like Black Lives Matter, which she and her family, as well as her mosque and nearby Islamic centers, have been active in supporting both theologically and by showing up. Another participant indicated that one of the biggest positives was the virtual Zoom and FaceTime platforms, which empowered the respondent to create an online Bangladeshi language learning class for children across the nation. Another

participant found that her faith took an internal turn where she spent a lot of time in solitude and isolated prayer.

Another recurrent theme was “life adjustment”. Many participants indicated that they had to do life adjustment to cope with the pandemic and to protect their mental health. One participant shared that he was not able to see family outside his household in person but maintained contact through FaceTime. He was able to practice his religion on a personal level, but virtual participation was limited due to lack of access to apps, Facebook, that his Mosque used. Another participant indicated that he had to adjust his life during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, he has begun working from home, spending more time with his family, and has been able to rely on his religion to help him through this time. He has been able to communicate with friends and family through apps focused on video and/or audio communication. He has also been able to connect with his faith through having more time to read and watch videos connecting him and his family closer to the scripture.

In summary, resilience is the interaction between risk and protective factors in face of adversity. As shown in the report, many participants were able to identify risk and protective factors during the pandemic. Without a doubt, despite of the challenges and the losses that we face and endure during the pandemic, we will grow into healthier and stronger persons. Throughout the responses, there was a hope about the impact of the vaccine as a remedy and the faith in science that will help us to overcome this international pandemic crisis.