

Triggers and effects of Anxiety in Maltese Non-anxiety sufferers during Covid-19

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In December 2019, China discovered the first cases of a new Coronavirus (Sars-Cov-2) which was reported to be potentially fatal. On March 11th, 2020, WHO declared the Covid-19 virus as pandemic. Beyond the potential health threats, the pandemic brought along several disruptions within the social, financial, and mental wellbeing aspects of individuals' lives. Mental health issues such as anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorders were on the rise. Despite the number of novel-anxiety-sufferers, very little information or targeted help was available for this population, especially within the Maltese Islands. Therefore, this study set out to explore the triggers and manifestations of anxiety in Maltese-residing non-anxiety sufferers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The global widespread that constitutes a pandemic, signifies that all individuals have the potential of being affected, whether by the pathogen or by the imposed restrictions to prevent the infection. Lader and Uhde (2006) argue that there is an adverse impact on the quality of life during the COVID-19 pandemic. Plunkett et al. (2020) sustain this and claim that the biggest impact of the current pandemic is the reduced social aspect of life. There are several factors contributing to this, which studies have identified in the past year since the outbreak. For example: the closing of all entertainment venues (theatres, bars, cinemas), travel restrictions, reduced spending power due to loss or potential loss of jobs and reduced interaction with loved ones.

Anxiety studies during the pandemic show significant similarities in the gender prevalence of anxiety disorders as those in non-pandemic conditions. For example, Solomou and Constantinidou (2020) report higher incidence in females during the pandemic in their study of prevalence during the pandemic. To follow on from this, in their meta-analysis of Covid-19 anxiety studies, Santabárbara et al., (2020) give their interpretation for this. Females, they report, are equipped with different brain chemistry than men; a reason which is also sustained by Cefai et al. (2020) in their study amongst Maltese school children. Females are usually the caregivers of the family, and therefore disruption of the normal routine and anticipation of severed ties with loved ones due to restrictions, are more sustained. Being the probable caregivers, also means that sometimes they care for vulnerable individuals and hence their concern in times of a pandemic is twofold (Santabárbara et al., 2020). This correlation is also noted by Khademian and associates, in their investigative study of depression, anxiety and stress during Covid-19, whereby they retain that, women who live or care for high-risk family members have an elevated risk of suffering from anxiety (2021). The experiences of 6 female participants with no pre-existing anxiety conditions were explored through semi-structured interviews and using IPA analysis. Five superordinate themes were found: 'The visible effects', 'The multiple shades of fear', 'Of People, Politics and Anger', 'Against the grain', and 'Taking the sting out'.

This study implicates the need for better designed help resources aimed at individuals who are experiencing anxiety or other mental health issues de novo and the need of continuous research throughout and beyond the pandemic lifetime on the long-term impact of the pandemic on mental health. This article is an abstract from the dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the Masters Degree in Psychology by the author at Arden University UK, which study was supported by the TESS grant scheme.