



## Mental health in times of COVID-19 in Brazilian society

### Saúde mental em tempos de COVID-19 na sociedade brasileira

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#### **RESUMO**

The COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the SARS-COV2 virus, is a global phenomenon of unique characteristics, in the sense of its extension, speed of growth, general impact on the population and on health services, and also because it occurs in a context of access to a lot of information in a very short time. Thus, some of its impacts are similar to those of other epidemics, others are only being seen at the present moment, and certainly, in the future, the perception of this pandemic will still be modified.

**Keywords:** Pandemic, COVID-19, mental health.

#### **1 INTRODUCTION**

The COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the SARS-COV2 virus, is a global phenomenon of unique characteristics, in the sense of its extension, speed of growth, general impact on the population and on health services, and also because it occurs in a context of access to a lot of information in a very short time. Thus, some of its impacts are similar to those of other epidemics, others are only being seen at the present moment, and certainly, in the future, the perception of this pandemic will still be modified.

Therefore, due to this rapid spread of the virus, social isolation was recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO), which caused consequences in the routine of the population and generated impacts in their lives, among them, the mental health of the Brazilian society, a term used to describe the level of cognitive or emotional quality of life or the absence of mental illness, and ended up being greatly affected.

Thus, this theme has extreme relevance, both socially and scientifically, since, in addition to elucidating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health, the study contributes to



the dissemination of the theme to the scientific community and to the population in general. In this sense, this research seeks to verify the relationship of the pandemic and the index of depression, anxiety and stress, which provoke momentary and future consequences in the lives of Brazilians.

## **2 OBJECTIVES**

This research aims to verify the effects of Covid-19 on the mental health of the Brazilian population regarding anxiety, depression, and stress. As a specific objective, to analyze what factors contribute to the increase in anxiety, depression and stress in the lives of Brazilians, which are important in the study regarding the mental health of individuals in times of pandemic.

## **3 METHODOLOGY**

This is a descriptive research, seeking to observe, describe and analyze the data collected. It will be exploratory, bibliographical, explanatory, using the inductive-deductive method, and prospective with a quantitative approach. In our research there will be, mainly, a literature review based on the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data.

The topics to be addressed, respectively, within this research are: the effects of Covid-19 on the mental health of the Brazilian population, mainly, with regard to anxiety, depression, and stress. Thus, there will be an analysis of the factors that contribute to the increase of anxiety, depression and stress in the lives of Brazilians.

The data were collected through research in journals, websites, and articles of great scientific credibility, such as Revista Brasileira de Medicina de Família e Comunidade, Revista Brasileira de Análise do Comportamento, Revista Enfermagem e Saúde Coletiva da Faculdade de São Paulo (FSP), Revista de Estudos de Psicologia de Campinas, Revista Epidemiológica e Serviços de Saúde de Brasília, Revista Ciência e Saúde Coletiva, and websites, such as the official data collection of the Federal District Health Secretariat and the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS).

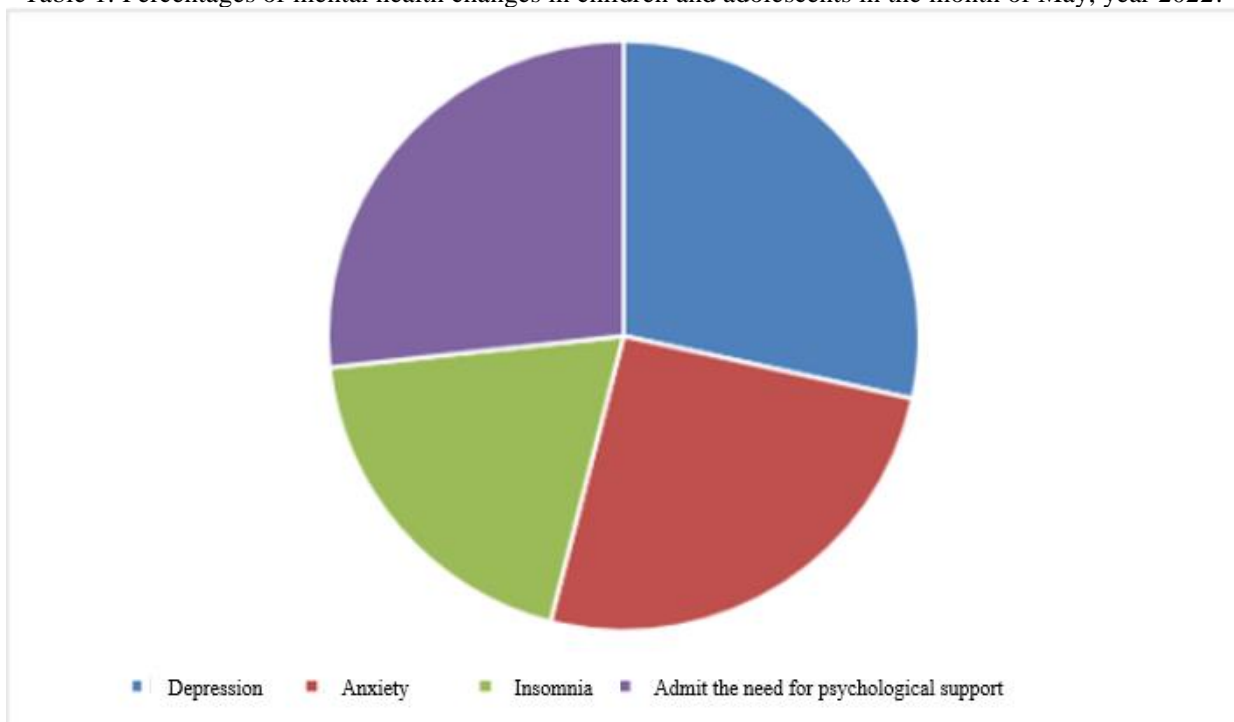
Thus, 19 articles, an occupational accident protocol, and publications from the official sites of the World Health Organization (WHO) and colleges, such as the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), were used. The renowned authors are considered important in Brazilian scientific research, since they contribute daily with updated studies, such as: Guilherme Nabuco, Maria Helena Pereira Pires de Oliveira, Marcelo Pellizzaro Dias Afonso, Francisco Edimar do Nascimento Júnior, Daniely Ildegardes Brito Tatmatsu, RayanneGabrielle Torquato de Freitas, Marilisa Berti de Azevedo Barros, Margareth

Guimarães Lima, Deborah Carvalho Malta, Célia Landmann Szwarcwald, Renata Cruz Soares de Azevedo, Dalia Romero, Paulo Roberto Borges de Souza Júnior, Eraldo Carlos Batista, Aldecir Ramos de Oliveira, Josiane Alves Rolim, Paulo César Dias, Berta Rodrigues Maia, Renata Gracie, Maria de Fátima de Pina, Danilo Rodrigues Pereira da Silva, André de Oliveira Werneck, Crizian Saar Gomes, Giseli Nogueira Damacena, Ísis Eloah Machado, Luis Otávio Azevedo, among other authors.

#### 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the data collected, it is clear that Covid-19 is related to the modification or loss of mental health. The graph below demonstrates the changes obtained by children, adolescents, and adults affected by this factor. During the pandemic, adolescents reported high rates of depression (50%), anxiety (45%), and insomnia (34%), and (47%) admit to needing psychological support, according to the United Nations Brazil (BARROS, et al., 2020).

Table 1: Percentages of mental health changes in children and adolescents in the month of May, year 2022.



Source: United Nations.

In this sense, still according to the United Nations Brazil, another point to be addressed is the psychiatric illnesses developed during the period in which children, adolescents, and adults are affected by social isolation. Studies already indicate an increase in symptoms of



depression and anxiety in several countries, for example, a study conducted in Ethiopia in April 2020 reported a threefold increase in the prevalence of symptoms of depression compared to estimates before the epidemic. A survey by the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) of 1,460 people in 23 states shows that cases of depression increased by 90% in the span of just under a month, amidst social isolation measures to combat the new Coronavirus.

In addition, the data presented in this research showed that abrupt changes in habits, such as social isolation and the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), were determining factors for the increase in anxiety symptoms, since not all people managed to adapt well to this new lifestyle. Moreover, other factors contributed to intensify the anxiety picture of the Brazilian population, such as the fear and insecurity of people facing the volume of information about Covid- 19, because as a result of the way advertisements disseminate data related to Covid-19, most people have focused more on deaths and new cases than on the numbers of recovered people.

Furthermore, the research done by the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) reveals that 80% of the Brazilian population became more anxious in the pandemic of the new Coronavirus, the research heard a sample of 1,996 people over 18 years old. Therefore, the main conclusion of this research was that in this pandemic period of social isolation, people developed or increased symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression. Thus, this increase was assessed not only in Brazil, but worldwide, such as in Italy and China, where 80% of the population heard reported moderate and severe symptoms of anxiety, as well as 68% reported symptoms of depression, according to Agência Brasil.

Even with numerous data already obtained, which reveal a significant change in mental health, as deleterious effects, not only in the Brazilian population, but also worldwide, it is inferred other studies with larger populations and with the use of varied instruments that can bring new results and new strategies for coping with the pandemic. Moreover, this research highlights, by these results, the need to be attentive to the psychological effects of this pandemic, so that subsequent responses, in the mental health field, can be timely ensured.

## **5 CONCLUSIONS**

It is possible to state, even in an initial manner, that in Brazil, the pandemic has generated harmful effects on the mental health of children, adolescents, adults, students, health professionals, in short, the general population, due to the fact that it has placed them in a routine that is different from that in which they were inserted and in social isolation. The most common effects are anxiety,



depressive symptoms, sleep problems, and stress, which greatly interferes with the quality of life of the Brazilian population. Therefore, it is necessary to propose government strategies in order to reduce the impacts on the mental health of these subjects, as a way to guarantee their development. It is essential, therefore, to emphasize the need to expand the role of primary health care, as one of these government strategies, since it is the gateway to the Brazilian Health System, SUS, and has a key role in this pandemic period, previously mentioned as the identification of families with risk factors for mental illness, related to the pandemic, the intersectoral articulation to enable response to the demands of families in greater vulnerability, the guidance to the population that minimize mental illness during confinement, and the support to minimize the barriers to experience the mourning of those who lost loved ones.

Moreover, it is necessary, as another government strategy, the expansion of professionals such as psychologists and psychiatrists in Basic Health Units (BHU), as well as in Emergency Care Units (UPA) and Family Health Units (PSF), in order to increase the range of action in the Brazilian population and thus reduce the impacts on the mental health of these subjects. Moreover, it is of utmost importance to expand these actions in schools and universities, whether public or private, as the expansion of these professionals mentioned above, together with psychopedagogues, in order to help reduce these impacts on the mental health of Brazilian students, which, in the face of this research, proved to be necessary, since the levels of anxiety increased considerably in the pandemic.

Moreover, still with the purpose of directing the reduction of the impacts on the mental health of the Brazilian population, as a way to ensure its development, one should, therefore, plan new strategies in the way of disseminating the data regarding Covid-19, since, as exposed in the research, the massive exposure of data globally, at all times, in technological contemporaneity, leads to an increase in the levels of anxiety, stress, depression, and sleep problems.

Finally, this study was limited to presenting four possible relevant governmental strategies for coping during the Covid-19 pandemic. Future research can assess whether interventions based on the strategies pointed out by this study proved effective in preventing or altering the states of anxiety, stress, and depression or deleterious effects on the mental health of the Brazilian population experienced during this pandemic season.



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