

The SARS-COV2 pandemic: Changing the way we live

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Adaptation to change is the way a species manages to survive the natural phenomena that jeopardize the existence of life. Late 2019 marked the start of a different type of natural disaster that threatened the lives of all human beings who watched what was happening incredulously, forcing them to change.

It was the perfect storm: a new virus for human beings, an unknown form of coronavirus to which our immune system had never been exposed. It placed all the human beings inhabiting the planet at the time at risk of becoming sick from this infectious agent. This highly contagious virus was transmitted through the respiratory tracts of those who had contracted the disease but, in many cases, had begun to spread it before presenting symptoms. This prevented contagious patients from being aware of their condition. They only self-isolated when they had already been in contact with other people, meaning that the disease continued to spread (Fang, Nie, & Penny, 2020). At the same time, the 21st century has seen an enormous increase in the possibility of travelling from one place to another anywhere in the world in just a few hours. In this century, people have enjoyed more mobility than at any other time in history and as we have learned, population movements were linked to the spread of the disease.

It is difficult to grasp the fact that a single person infected with this new infectious agent could transmit the disease to another human being, beginning a chain of transmission as a result of which, by the end of April 2022, 500 million people had officially suffered from the disease (Worldmeters, 2022). The actual figure is not known but is undoubtedly much higher than reported.

Surprise and disbelief, the former an emotion, the latter an inability to rationalize that emotion, marked the start of a cascade of attacks on our mental homeostasis. Once we had been forced to “accept” this reality, fear and uncertainty set in. Fear is another emotion that could not be controlled due to the lack of certainty in science since everything was unknown even for those responsible for studying pandemics (epidemiologists) and viruses (virologists), and particularly so for the political leaders of governments who already had an agenda and could not conceive that something invisible would destroy their plans for the growth of an already divided world society.

Control measures caused isolation and loneliness, which only increased the stress levels of a population with already high levels of anxiety in a world plagued by inequality, insecurity, poverty, and lack of education. In many cases, this was followed by the loss of loved ones, which not only caused pain and mourning due to the absence of the deceased person, but also a sense of impotence at being unable to accompany them at the end. This increased fear and anguish in a world that was unable to control the pandemic, as shown by the studies conducted by Laura Cristina Silva-Santo and Consuelo Cervantes in Brazil and Mexico, published in this issue of *Salud Mental* (Silva Santos, Carvalho Silva, & Faro, 2022; Cervantes-Muñoz, Mora-Ríos, Saltijeral-Méndez, & Ramos-Lira., 2022).

After two years, pandemic fatigue has set in, with the rejection of all the symbols reminding us of these difficult years. It is altering the rhythm of life, making people leave the classroom before the class is over, run before they can walk and attempt to forget what is still present.

The pandemic has affected all age groups. Children who have been kept in a care bubble have been deprived of the natural opportunity to cope with other infectious agents.

Soon, this could be reflected in the onset of diseases at different ages, which might not only have unusual manifestations, but also have different patterns of severity.

Young people have replaced verbal with digital communication. We do not know what impact this may have in the coming years, or whether it will be expressed as insecurity, indifference, or lack of commitment. All this could be the result of the social isolation to which they have been subjected. Economically active adults have had to continue to function as leaders, giving peace of mind to their families, continuing to work to maintain households and, in many cases, having to defray unforeseen health expenses. Domestic violence has seen the greatest increase in recent years. The elderly, who had been socially neglected even before the pandemic in many cases, have now also lost what little interaction they had with their contacts, experiencing physical and cognitive deterioration that is becoming increasingly evident (Webb & Chen, 2022).

In 2020, 2021, and 2022, people's mental health has been put to the test. Unfortunately, most of us have failed and it will be necessary to create programs that will help change the course this could take in the immediate future. An increase in anxiety, depression, and suicide is already evident in many populations.

This issue of *Salud Mental* attempts to shed light on the issue and includes a set of studies undertaken in Mexico, Chile, and Brazil focusing on the repercussions of the SARS-COV2 pandemic on vulnerable populations such as the LGBT community and children with autism. (Urzúa, Barrientos, Guzmán-González, & Ulloa, 2022; Pérez Liz, Torres, Ramírez, Montiel Nava, & Grupo REAL, 2022).

This is the challenge. In the face of threats, animals accompany each other and look for leaders who will lower the anxiety levels of the group. As human beings, we also have intelligence, which should be used to work, unite, and help each other not only to recover from the pandemic, but also to become a species that is more aware of nature, social coexistence and the support that must exist between us.

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