

Covid -19 and the question of taming compassion fatigue

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Abstract

The present paper underlines the effect of Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health of young adult men. It is a cross-cultural realist ethnography of South Asian natives from Indian sub-continent who immigrated to middle-east Ras-al-khair. Their experience to adversities during the breakdown of pandemic in 2020, was the subject of research. The study reflects the psychological state of the covid infected respondents identified as Compassion fatigue or the negative cost of caring others. It confers to a qualitative research design. Participant observation and focused group discussions were the study tools used on selected case studies. Higher intensity of compassion fatigue was experienced by the adult males who faced lack of social support, loneliness, were married with a child and had either nuclear or solo households in their respective native places.

Keywords: Compassion fatigue; Covid-19; Mental health; Young adults

1. Introduction

Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her own community (World Health Organization). According to Human Factors and Ergonomics fatigue is generally of two types-

- Physiological fatigue is the fatigue when a person works and spend his energy.
- Psychological fatigue is the fatigue when a person does not works or spends all his energy. Psychological fatigue is further divided into:
 - Boredom fatigue is experienced when a person becomes dull due to monotony or repetition in doing the same type of work
 - Frustration fatigue is experienced when a person becomes irritated due to lack of positive outcome in doing a task despite of expenditure of time and energy.
 - Compassion fatigue is experienced when a person becomes too empathized with the suffering of others that it starts deteriorating his own mental health (Mullick, 2009)

1.1. Rationale

The present study was undertaken to verify the fact that human psychology irrespective of the geographical and cultural diversification is negatively affected in the absence of a firm social support system, and loneliness. The distressed times not only significantly weakens the individual's psychological stability but also creates a cloud of anxiety and compassion for the kinfolks which tends to have a long term impact on the entire household.

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Objective

To understand and describe the effect of Compassion Fatigue in educated young men during Covid-19.

2. Review of Literature

A careful review of the existing work continues to narrow the options of the subject matter or the subject in question, which provides structural elements in favoring an argument that is more impactful for the research work. As a result, the outcomes of several and overlapping fields have a valid direction for future work. For the purpose of studying “Effect of COVID -19 on mental health of young adults ”, following existing studies have been reviewed.

- According to Purgato et. al., (2019), Impact of COVID 19 on Mental health of youths resulted in depression, anxiety post-traumatic stress disorder, substance use disorder, as well as domestic violence.
 - According to Tang et al.,(2021), Youth exhibited more depressive symptoms and higher levels of stress, worry, concern, and fear related to COVID-19 than younger children.
 - According to Ravens- Sieberer et al.;(2020),Youth who tend to be optimistic and confident about their future were found to have a higher health-related quality of life with fewer depressive symptoms.
 - According to Keles et al.,(2020), Some youngsters may not necessarily experience an evident feeling of loneliness, as they may compensate for this by spending more time with their family members and also by increasing their time spent on social media.
 - According to Loades et al., (2020), Social isolation and loneliness precipitate depression and anxiety in children and adolescents.
 - According to Rubin & Wessely et al.,(2020), Fear of the unknown, in this case, the spread of the disease and the impact on people, health, hospitals, and economies, for example, raises anxiety in healthy individuals as well as those with pre-existing mental health conditions
 - According to Levin et al., (2019), Individuals’, families, and communities experience feelings of hopelessness, despair, grief, bereavement, and a profound loss of purpose because of pandemics.
 - According to Han, Zikmund-Fisher et al.(2018),Feelings of loss of control drive, fear and uncertainty as the trajectory of the pandemics is constantly evolving; so is the advice on the action to be taken to stop the spread of a pandemic. Perceived mixed messaging from government or health officials can also lead to public confusion, uncertainty, and fear.
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3. Methodology

The study was conducted on respondents of Ras-al-Khair, a town and port on the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia 60km north of Jubail. It is also known under its project name of “Minerals Industrial City” (Wikipedia). A realist ethnographic approach was used where an objective account of the situation was written by the researcher from a third person’s point of view and information gained from participants at the field’s site is then reported. During pilot study 25 respondents were randomly selected for the study. But it was found that only 20% of the respondents fulfill the inclusion criteria. Using simple percentage method 5 respondents became the subject of the case study. Following inclusion criteria was undertaken:

- Only those respondents were considered whose educational qualifications confers to a professional undergraduate or postgraduate degree in courses other than health care sector, like B.Tech/ M.Tech/ MBA etc.
- Only young adult men who were in the age group of 30-39 years (Research gate) employed in tertiary sectors, Maaden Aluminium, a Saudi mining company manufacturing aluminium pellets formed the sample.
- Only those respondents who had spent at least 3 months in middle-eastern town were included.
- Only those respondents were selected who were tested positive for alpha variant of novel CORONA virus during first wave of the pandemic
- Only married respondents were selected who had atleast one child of pre-school age(Table1)

4. Findings

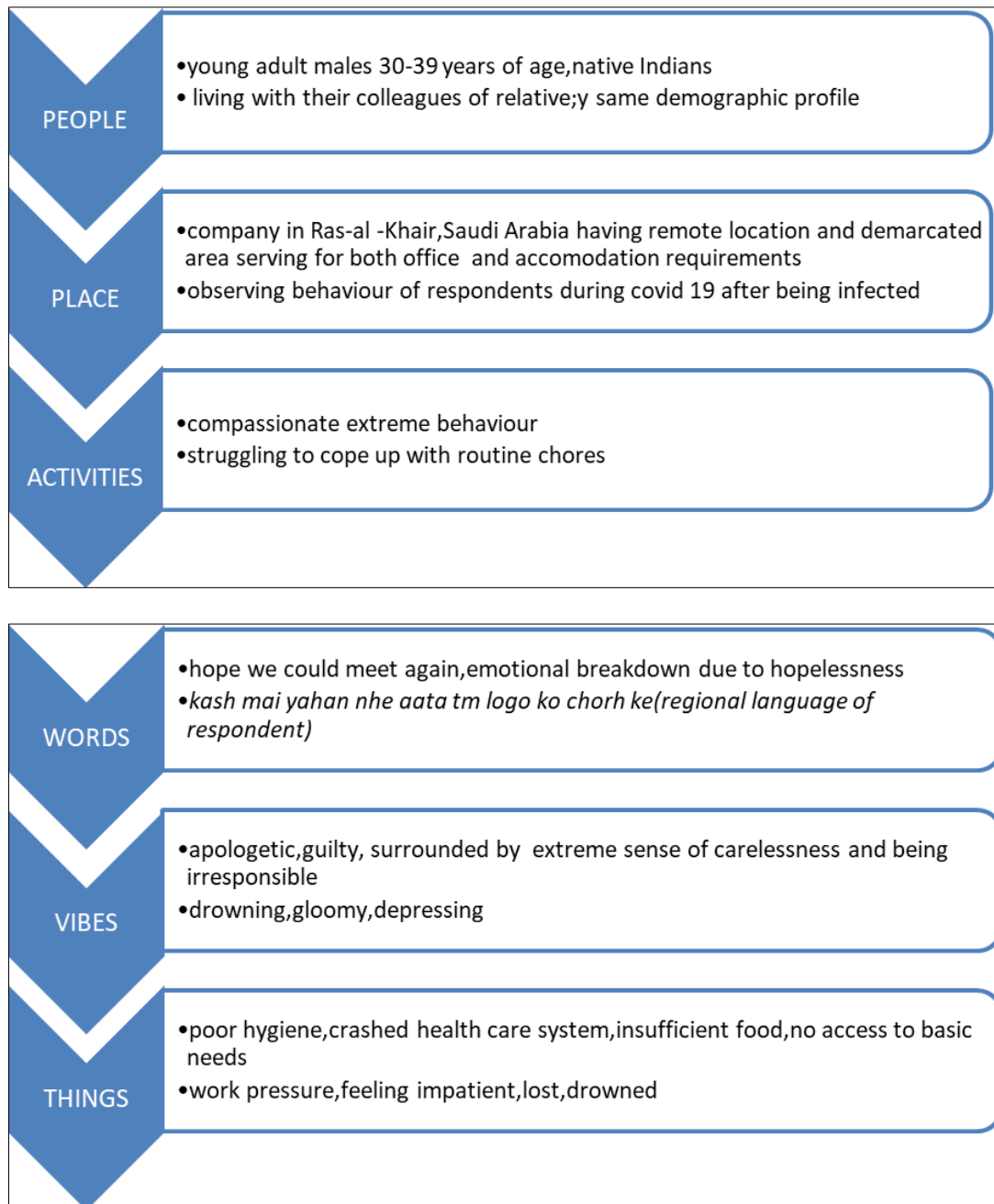
Following factors contributed to the Compassion fatigue of the sample studied.

- Food- The sample faced huge problems related to daily food service. Tiffin system was started owing to closure of canteen that too with fixed timings restrictions. The repetition of recipes, limited amount of servings and lack of variety further led to frustration among respondents.
- Physical environment- The respondents were living in rooms shared by 2-4 members, the washrooms were common and sanitation was poor. This created anxiety due to high probability of getting infected.
- Health care- Primary health care like first aid was provided. No critical support system for prevention or treatment of respondents was initiated. This led to a sense of fear.
- Social support- People were in a state of panic, social support system collapsed due to high level of transmission of the pandemic leading to a sense of loneliness.
- Law and order- Stringent COVID protocols were announced by the Saudi government and they were strictly followed. Testing of respondents for COVID positive results led them for forceful relocation to isolation centers, where they were mistreated and tortured and instigated them to face near to death like situations. This drowned them into a deep sea of hopelessness.
- Work load- More pressure was on the shoulders of existing employees who recovered from COVID due to shortage of manpower being ill, also have to accommodate client demands.

4.1. Constitution of Research framework based on demography of respondents

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Age	30-35
Sex	Male
Religion	Muslim
Marital status	Married
Educational qualifications	B. Tech/ M. Tech
Nationality	Indian
Occupation	Engineer
No. of children	1-2
Type of Family	Solo household/Nuclear family
Job location	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
No. of earning members in the family	1-2



Source: UX Stack Exchange

Figure 1 The Ethnographic Case Study Framework

4.2. Results

The following results were concluded from the case studies conducted:

- Young adult men who belong to the expanding stage of family life cycle experienced more compassion fatigue compared to the one who belong to beginning and contracting stages. This is because, according to Nickell and Dorsey; management thinkers there are three stages in the concept of family life cycle: *Stage 1 The Beginning Stage* where the two individuals get married and start their family, *Stage 2 The Expanding Stage* where the family extends by arrival of child and expenses increases till the child grows up and take an occupation, *Stage 3 The Contracting Stage* where the grown up adult child gets married and detaches from the parent family and hence the expenses starts declining. Since the expenditure is maximum in the expanding stage so the adult men experiences maximum mental pressure of earning well and supporting family

- Males who had experienced at least one traumatic event in the clan since the outbreak of pandemic like accident, diagnosis of any life-threatening disease, or sudden death of a beloved one for reasons other than covid. This is because previous traumatic experiences leads to revival of old pain and makes one insecure as the future gets related to the past. This led to worsening of trauma.
- Man is believed to be a social animal. His ability to cope with challenges increases at the presence of a strong social support system. But with the emergence of nuclear family norms and decline in the joint family system the sense of loneliness dominates the individual psychology. Respondents whose kinfolks belong to either nuclear or solo household experienced more compassion fatigue due to the mindset that no one might be approachable if an emergency arises.
- Respondents who were sole earners in the family experienced more compassion fatigue because the over sense of responsibility in sustaining a household made them more vulnerable to the compassion.

4.3. Strength and Weaknesses of the Study

Establishment of rapport, empathy and personal connections facilitated and enriched the content of case study as the respondents were in a comfort zone with the researcher.

Probability of creeping in of personal bias was high.

5. Conclusion

Compassion fatigue is a mental health issue resulting from over-emphathazing with one's kith and kins. It arises due to job burn out to a great extent. Men generally have a weaker emotional health as compared to their female counterparts; who tend to embrace their fears in times of distress. In the absence of spouse men lose control in pulling themselves together. So the solution would be to have a support system at place of work. This is also attributed to under-paid jobs at the native place which forces men to migrate to a place with better opportunities and better future. The government should ensure better environment at place of work morally and ethically. Moreover not only in distressed times but as a part of lifestyle modification one should practice a regular sleep schedule, healthy diet, frequent exercise and release their pent-up emotions by communicating with someone about their feelings. Doing so can assist in turning compassion fatigue into compassion satisfaction.

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Author Biography

Dr. Zeba has completed her B.Sc and M.Sc degree in Home Science from AMU. She has further pursued B.Ed and qualified UGC-NET. She is the first candidate to qualify JRF in the Department of Home Science. She was appointed as Guest Faculty in 2009 and Assistant Professor in 2014. Her thrust area continue to remain in the field of Community Resource Management and Extension. She had worked on a project entitled "Awareness and Acceptability of Functional Foods Among the Educated Young Women ". Her research topic was "ROLE OF SKILL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES IN CHANGING THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF FEMALE BENEFICIARIES IN ALIGARH". She is extending her knowledge to student development programme's which are need based and curriculum-oriented. She has served as Resident Warden ,Abdullah Hall. She was also appointed as Nodal Officer under Gender Champions Scheme (Ministry of Women and Child Development ,GOI) for Faculty of Agricultural Sciences. She was conferred with the YOUNG SCIENTIST AWARD in JTACON-2020 held at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. She bagged the Best Paper Award in the national conference organised by Dept. of Commerce sponsored by National Commission for Women in February 2021. She was conferred with the AICPERT Inspirational Women Award 2021 in the category of Best Faculty (Home Sc.) and Best Young Faculty in 2022. She has several paper of National and International repute to her credit. She is an active member of various departmental committees. Her approach towards teaching aims to be progressive in thought and work-centered in content.