

**OPEN ACCESS**

SUBMITTED 18 September 2025

ACCEPTED 10 October 2025

PUBLISHED 14 November 2025

VOLUME Vol.05 Issue11 2025

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The Negative Impact Of The Infodemic On Human Psychology During The Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: This article is devoted to studying the negative impact of the infodemic on the human psyche during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has significantly affected not only physical health but also social and mental well-being. The infodemic – that is, the rapid spread of false information, conspiracy theories, and rumours – has intensified symptoms of stress, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress. The article analyses the psychological consequences of the COVID-19 infodemic and offers recommendations aimed at mitigating this problem.

Keywords: COVID-19, infodemic, psychological stress, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, social psychology, discrimination, desocialisation, emotional state.

“If the mind and soul are healthy, the body’s health will also be strong.”

Ibn Sino (Avitsenna) [10].

INTRODUCTION: In the recent past, humanity has

experienced a great pandemic. More precisely, at the end of 2019, a small virus that emerged in the city of Wuhan, China, spread within a few months to become a global pandemic — COVID-19. This novel coronavirus, known as SARS-CoV-2, affects the respiratory tract and causes a range of illnesses, from mild cold-like symptoms to severe pneumonia and even death [1]. The initial evidence indicates that the virus originated from the Huanan seafood wholesale market in Wuhan [1], where the likelihood of transmission from live animals to humans was high.

Indicators	Worldwide (as of 31 October 2023)
Confirmed cases	771,549,718 [2]
Deaths	6,974,473 [2]

b) In Uzbekistan: Across the Republic, 253,662 confirmed cases and 1,637 deaths have been recorded [2]. It should be noted that only laboratory-confirmed cases and deaths officially attributed to COVID-19 are

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The pandemic has had an unprecedented impact not only on physical health but also on social, economic, and, most importantly, mental well-being. One of the most severe consequences of the pandemic was the “infodemic.” This term refers to the lightning-fast spread of false information, conspiracy theories, and baseless rumours through social media platforms. The World Health Organization assessed this “infodemic” as a serious threat to the global health system because it led to confusion among the population, hazardous behaviours, and adherence to unverified recommendations [4]. This is evidenced by the following:

a) Extent of the infodemic: Between March and April 2020, Facebook detected nearly 90 million false posts regarding COVID-19. In China, 23–26% of YouTube videos contained misinformation about the virus [4].

b) Global statistics: Studies indicate that, in the early stages of the pandemic in Bangladesh, false information induced stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms [4]. Research conducted in the USA and the UK also showed that exposure to COVID-19-related misinformation increased feelings of depression and anxiety [5].

c) Situation in Uzbekistan: During the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous false reports and hypothesis-based theories circulated on social media in Uzbekistan.

The rapid spread and scale of this virus led to one of the greatest public health crises in human history [1]. The following statistics clearly demonstrate this:

a) Worldwide: COVID-19 has claimed the lives of millions [2] and infected hundreds of millions of people. As of 31 October 2023, approximately 771.5 million confirmed cases had been reported globally, with more than 6.9 million deaths. These figures vividly illustrate the devastating impact the pandemic has had on humanity.

included in Uzbekistan, which may result in lower reported numbers compared to other countries [3]. These figures confirm that every country and every household has borne the heavy burden of the pandemic.

For example, rumours suggested that the virus was “artificially transmitted” to the population, that vaccination was mandatory and harmful to health. Such misinformation provoked panic, distrust in vaccination, and negative attitudes toward healthcare professionals. In particular, there were instances where people attempted to treat the virus using disinfectants or various unproven “folk remedies,” posing serious health risks. Certain groups actively resisted pandemic restrictions and mask-wearing mandates, which was also linked to misinformation on social media. Modern problems, such as the proliferation of digital communication platforms, are global economic uncertainties brought new challenges to family dynamics. Digital communication, especially with the proliferation of virtual relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic, emotional and the importance of intelligence and affective regulation in ensuring family harmony increased. In this context, the influence of psychotypes on family relationships is cultural diversity and it needs to be reconsidered through the lens of modern social pressures. The widespread dissemination of false information (the infodemic) during the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated pre-existing mental health conditions and contributed to the emergence of new psychological disorders. The main negative effects included:

1. Panic and fear: False news and baseless rumours

heightened individuals' sense of loss of control, leading to panic attacks and persistent fear [4]. This was particularly evident in "panic buying" incidents caused by unfounded reports of food or medicine shortages. People attempted to purchase excessive amounts of unnecessary items.

2. Anxiety and Stress: Regular exposure to misinformation significantly increases chronic anxiety and stress levels [5]. Conflicting and false information about the spread of the disease, its severity, or treatment methods kept people in a constant state of worry. This also led to somatic symptoms such as sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, and chronic fatigue. Disruptions in family relationships, psychological strain, and emotional pressure exacerbated neurotic conditions [14,15,16].

3. Depression and Emotional Distress: Prolonged stress, social isolation, and false information about future uncertainty intensified depressive symptoms. In some cases, this even led to suicidal thoughts [5]. Emotionally vulnerable groups, particularly children and adolescents, were especially susceptible to psychological trauma, which manifested in heightened neurotic reactions [14,15,16].

4. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): Traumatic experiences related to the pandemic, such as the death of loved ones, severe illness, or witnessing distressing situations through the media, led to the development of PTSD in some individuals. False information could further aggravate these traumatic experiences. Additionally, the younger generation, especially children, experienced deeper psychological trauma during the pandemic, contributing to increased neurotic conditions [14].

5. Social Anxiety and Discrimination: The infodemic facilitated the rapid spread of false information, conspiracy theories, and racially charged content, increasing psychological strain and leading to social anxiety, discrimination (unfair treatment based on characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, or religion), and desocialisation (withdrawal from societal norms and values) [6,7,8]. For instance, misinformation claiming that the virus originated from a specific ethnic group triggered racial discrimination.

6. Obsessive-Compulsive Symptoms: Some individuals exhibited heightened obsessive-compulsive behaviours, including excessive cleaning, frequent handwashing, and over-adherence to hygiene rules, often driven by panic-inducing misinformation about the virus.

False information, conspiracy theories (e.g., claims about artificial origin of the virus or vaccines), and racially charged news propagated through the

infodemic further intensified psychological stress.

Meta-analyses conducted across the general population during COVID-19 revealed the following global prevalence of mental health conditions [9]:

a) Depression: 28.0% [9]

b) Anxiety: 26.9%

c) Post-traumatic stress symptoms: 24.1%

d) Stress: 36.5%

e) Psychological distress: 50.0%

f) Sleep disturbances: 27.6%

Some studies reported clinically significant psychological distress in nearly 50% of the population, with 20% experiencing severe effects [11]. In Australia, the prevalence of psychological distress during the early months of the pandemic rose from 20% to 45%, more than doubling [12]. Overall, levels of depression and anxiety were significantly higher than before the pandemic [13].

During the pandemic, the widespread dissemination of misinformation impacted people's mental state even more strongly than the disease itself. Incorrect information spread through mass media and social networks amplified fear, stress, anxiety, depression, and social isolation. The infodemic heightened feelings of uncertainty and loss of control, destabilising cognitive processes and leading individuals to act more on emotions than rational thinking. Stress also affects a person's intellectual potential. The state of strong and long stress reduces cognitive functions, such as attention, memory, decision-making, solving a problem. Parents' words generally have much more significance in a child's fate than parents would like. Therefore, they should be handled very carefully. It is very important for a child to distinguish between the attitude towards him and his behavior. The child's actions, deeds, words may not please, make him angry. But the child himself must be loved, this is important.

From a psychological perspective, the mechanism of accepting false information is closely linked to a person's emotional state. Under high-stress conditions, the brain more readily registers fear-inducing thoughts and information, activating a "safety" response. Consequently, during the infodemic, people were more likely to believe emotionally charged manipulative messages rather than evidence-based facts. This phenomenon is explained in psychology as "cognitive distortions," representing an increase in illogical thought patterns. Professional reflection is an important tool in the teacher's pedagogical activity improving the teacher's own skills and students' personal, social and emotional contributes to

development. Empirical research results of reflective approach confirmed the positive impact on students' social skills and academic success. Reflective teachers are highly effective in understanding students' individual needs, analyzing their own behavior, and improving instructional strategies showed. Gestalt is a form, configuration, a certain form of organization of separate parts that creates a whole. The subject of Gestalt psychology is the human mind, which should be studied according to the principle of integrity. The method of studying Gestalts is observation, monitoring one's own perception, reaction to events. The central mental process is visual perception. The process of solving a problem is thinking that is carried out not by selecting skills formed through errors and trials, but by systematizing the field, in other words, by understanding the insight of the present moment.

Statistical data indicate that during COVID-19, 25–50% of the population experienced increased psychological distress. In Uzbekistan, misinformation led to panic buying, distrust of vaccines, and negative attitudes towards healthcare workers. These behaviours contributed to declining social trust, disruption of social systems, and even social fragmentation.

Effective strategies to combat the infodemic include:

- a) **Providing verified information through trusted sources,**
- b) **Improving digital literacy,**
- c) **Strengthening psychological support services,**
- d) **Ensuring open communication and transparency within society.**

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the pandemic demonstrated that information hygiene is as crucial as physical hygiene. Misinformation poses a direct threat to mental health. In future global crises, medical interventions must be accompanied by strategies for mental and informational health. Proper management of information is essential for societal calm, rational decision-making, and psychological resilience.

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