

# COVID-19 Pandemic Related Mental Health Outcomes in a Southern US State

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## COMMENTARY

The COVID-19 epidemic has had a significant impact on the way people and institutions around the world work. The burdens of the pandemic, the prevalence of mental health issues, and risk factors for psychosocial morbidity among community residents in Arkansas were investigated in this cross-sectional registry-based study. The research looked at a time when the hospital was gradually reopening but infection rates were growing. Validated screening measures of depressive symptoms (PHQ-9), generalised anxiety (GAD-7), trauma-related symptoms (PCL-5), and alcohol consumption were used in the study (AUDIT-C). On each of these outcomes, a significant number of participants reported higher symptoms.

Individuals, who reported more pandemic-related disruption in daily life, as well as those with a prior history of mental health concerns, were more likely to screen positive for depressive, anxiety, and trauma-related symptoms in separate multivariable analyses that accounted for a number of demographic and pandemic-related covariates. The findings shed light on the challenges faced by community members during a phased reopening, and lay the groundwork for future screening and intervention efforts. Since the World Health Organization and the US Department of Health and Human Services declared the coronavirus illness (COVID-19) a public health emergency in January 2020, the pandemic has had a significant impact on people's daily lives all around the world.

The virus's high transmissibility, along with a dearth of licenced vaccinations and limited therapy options, has resulted in a widespread public health disaster. Communities have had to deal with a lack of viral testing resources, a reduction in access to normal medical care, and frequently inconsistent preventative health advice. Access to work and enjoyment has been limited due to physical distance regulations. Many people have been laid off or have had their earnings decreased as a result of the jarring economic repercussions, and practically everyone has had their daily routines disrupted. These extensive changes may play a role in a variety of psychosocial issues, such as social isolation, anxiety, uncertainty, and grief. There have been urgent calls for investigation into the COVID-19 pandemic's possible mental health impacts. Although research in this field is fast progressing, little is known regarding

reactions among the general public in the United States.

An initial wave of research, primarily conducted in the immediate aftermath of the outbreak, found increased levels of self-reported anxiety, depressive symptoms, and distress among community inhabitants in China, followed by Italy, Germany, Egypt, Hong Kong, and the United States. Earlier studies found similar mental health consequences during the SARS coronavirus epidemic, though the data came mostly from recovered individuals rather than the general public. A larger, well-developed literature has focused on psychosocial responses to other types of community-level disasters, with findings pointing to persistent issues with depression and trauma-related symptoms, sometimes in conjunction with other issues like anxiety, substance use, and general distress.

The extent to which these challenges are linked to the emerging COVID-19 epidemic in the United States is unknown, and more research is obviously needed. Furthermore, there have been few studies that have focused especially on the public's experience during periods of phased reopening of companies and organisations. Such research is especially essential in places where infection rates are rising, and citizens are grappling with the conundrum of increasing access and social engagement but also increased risk. SARS-CoV2 virus infection rates and local government mitigation efforts have varied significantly over time in different geographic regions. The current research was a registry-based cross sectional assessment into community residents' mental health responses to the COVID19 epidemic in Arkansas. Rural areas have been identified as having inhabitants of special interest, albeit they have not yet been examined in the United States.

Using validated self-report screening measures, we looked at a range of clinically relevant psychosocial outcomes that might be harmed by a global traumatic event (e.g., heightened symptoms of depression, generalised anxiety, posttraumatic stress, and alcohol misuse). We also looked at a number of demographic and situational risk factors that could increase the likelihood of psychological morbidity. We expected that specific situational factors such as perceived viral exposure or infection, food and financial insecurity, diminished access to regular medical people caring, greater disturbance in daily life, more stringent social distancing, and diminished daily structure would be linked to higher levels of anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress.

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