



# Effects of the Pandemic on Mental Health of General Population and Healthcare Professionals

## Pandeminin Toplumun ve Sağlık Çalışanlarının Ruh Sağlığına Etkileri

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Dear editor

We read the article titled "Effect of COVID-19 Pandemic on Anxiety and Treatment Adherence in Orthodontic and Dental Patients" prepared by Elhalık and Trakyalı and published in the third issue of your magazine in 2023 with great interest (1). We thank the author and the editorial board for the article discussing the impact of the pandemic on the health behavior of orthodontic and dental patients in the light of current literature. We would like to mention a few points to contribute to the discussion of the study.

The fear of getting sick in the pandemic, the changes brought about by social distance and isolation affect people spiritually. These changes can cause anxiety and depression. Especially the increase in loneliness and decrease in social interactions are important risk factors for mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and major depression (2). In a study conducted in Iran, it was emphasized that stress increases mental morbidity and causes uncertainty and unpredictability. It has been reported that this uncertainty can cause or exacerbate fear, depression and anxiety. Situations that cause stress in a person's life can cause mental disorders such as panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and trauma-related disorders (3). Many studies in the literature have studied the effects of the pandemic on anxiety, depression and stress. In addition, some studies have shown that the pandemic has negative psychological consequences such as sleep disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and hopelessness (3-5).

A systematic review evaluated the general population during the pandemic in China, Spain, Italy, Iran, USA, Turkey, Nepal and Denmark. The frequency of anxiety symptoms was 6.33%-50.9%, the frequency of de-

pression symptoms was 14.6%-48.3%, the frequency of PTSD symptoms was 7%-53.8%, and the frequency of stress was 8.1%-81.9%. Risk factors associated with increased mental symptoms include female gender, age 40 or younger, presence of chronic physical or psychiatric illness, unemployment, being a student, and frequent exposure to social media or news about COVID-19 (4).

In a study conducted in Poland, one out of five participants had anxiety and depressive symptoms, while two out of three participants complained of loneliness. A state of panic occurs due to the misunderstanding of information on the pandemic, the stigmatization of various groups, and the lack of information on the issue (5). In the study conducted by Wang et al. in 1210 people, moderate-severe depressive symptoms were observed in 16.5%, moderate-severe anxiety symptoms in 28.8%, and moderate-severe stress symptoms in 8.1%. It has also been shown that having the right information reduces these mental symptoms (6).

In the current literature, it has been determined that the long duration of the pandemic and intense working hours increase burnout and fatigue. It is stated that during the pandemic period, some health workers are at risk of being dismissed from their jobs, which is one of the important reasons that increase the workload and stress. Moreover; it has been reported that during the pandemic period, healthcare professionals may lose their relatives, and this situation may be psychologically effective (7, 8). In Canada, 95% of healthcare professionals stated that their workplace was affected by the pandemic, and 86.5% stated that they felt more stressed at work (9). It is stated that the lack of personal protective equipment is one of the main psychological stressors and it is important to provide adequate

equipment. The fact that patients do not cooperate adequately on medical measures can also increase their stress levels. In this respect, it is important to provide psychological support to both healthcare professionals and patients. Anxiety and feelings of social rejection caused by working in environments with a high probability of contracting the disease during the pandemic process are also important stress factors for healthcare professionals (10). In addition to these, there are additional risks such as the difficulty of isolation and quarantine conditions. The uncertainty of the pandemic also puts pressure on the mental state of individuals. Activities that provide mental relaxation were also restricted during the pandemic period. Decreased sociability can also increase stress levels and trigger depression.

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