

## Chapter 21

# Anxiety During the Pandemic: The Perceptions of Health Importance, Health Knowledge, and Health Consciousness

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter intends to analyse the moderate effect of individual anxiety and gender derived by the pandemic crisis regarding health importance, health knowledge, and health consciousness of the individuals. A quantitative methodology was adopted with data collected from a questionnaire survey. The conceptual models and associated hypotheses were tested with a sample of 243 respondents. Data were analysed through a mediate-moderate model using a Hayes PROCESS macro. Findings show that health consciousness and knowledge affect health importance, health knowledge mediates the relation between health consciousness and health importance, for women health is more important than for men, and anxiety moderates and increases the relation between health consciousness, health knowledge, and health importance.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The coronavirus pandemic changed the world, and affected people and lifestyles (Rahmani and Mirmahaleh, 2021). No occurrence in recent history has influenced the individuals as deep and pervasive as this one. As a public health situation, the coronavirus pandemic is alarming. Everyone can be infected and no one is immune.

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In view of the evolution of the pandemic, governments have adopted a variety of measures to block the effect and the spread of the virus that has severe negative consequences around the world (Forman, Atun, McKee, & Mossialos, 2020). Restrictions imposed can lead to income reduction and greater feeling of insecurity in the future. These measures have had psychological and economic outcomes. Social distancing increase the risks of social isolation and retirement. Furthermore, the social retirement of the COVID-19 lockdown and the high levels of uncertainty raised stress, physical and mental disorders, thus increasing the feelings of depression, anxiety, behavioral disorders, and posttraumatic stress syndrome (Pakpour & Griffiths, 2020; Satıcı et al., 2020; Tull et al., 2020; Cherikh et al., 2020; Cullen, Gulati, & Kelly, 2020).

In this sense, during the pandemic, the health started to be the centre of attention (Arora & Grey, 2020). The importance that individuals attach to health changed. This shift is largely attributable to the levels of anxiety that people are going through (Riguzzi & Gashi, 2021). In this vein, some studies were carried out to analyze the effect of the coronavirus pandemic in individuals' health status. Shah et al. (2020) review similar studies of outbreaks with negative impacts on mental health, and argue that like other pandemics, COVID-19 causes fear, anxiety and emotional distress. Jungmann and Witthöft (2020) examined the role of the trait health anxiety and cyberchondria in the context of COVID-19 pandemic and state that trait health anxiety serves as a risk factor during this context. Faisal, et al. (2021) studied the impact of COVID-19 on university students' mental health status in Bangladesh and concluded that 40% of the participants had moderate to severe anxiety.

In this chapter we intend to analyze the effect of individual anxiety (Duplaga & Grysztar, 2021) derived from the pandemic on individuals' perceived health importance, health knowledge (Pian, Song, & Zhang, 2020; Seng, Yeap, Huang, Tan, & Low, 2020; Song, Yao, & Wen, 2021) and health consciousness (Pu, Zhang, Tang, & Qiu, 2020). The American Psychological Association defines anxiety as an emotion which is considered as a feeling of worried thoughts, tension, and physical changes. The need for health information, which leads to health knowledge (Belitzky, Bach, & Belitzky) from a cognitive perspective, is characterized by the degree to which individuals recognize and define the information (Pian et al., 2020). Health consciousness is the degree to which people care about their health and wellbeing (Chen & Lin, 2018). These constructs are related, and tested for the first time in the literature.

A number of studies examine the general effect of individual anxiety in the scope of the coronavirus pandemic, and more specifically in terms of mental health. The existing studies are mostly in the disciplines of psychiatry and medicine (Faisal et al., 2021; Jungmann & Witthöft, 2020; Özdin & Bayrak Özdin, 2020; Roy et al., 2020). The chapter aims to to explain how anxiety affects t individuals by incorporating three constructs not explored in the existing literature - health consciousness, health knowledge and health importance -

This chapter consists of five sections. Firstly, recent literature is reviewed on the effects of COVID-19 on mental health and more specifically on individuals' anxiety. Then the constructs of health consciousness, health knowledge and health importance are examined. The methodology is followed by a discussion of the findings. The chapter ends with a conclusion and future research directions.

## **BACKGROUND**

The COVID-19 pandemic made individuals feel the fragility of life and the importance of health. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) health is the state of complete physical, social and mental

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