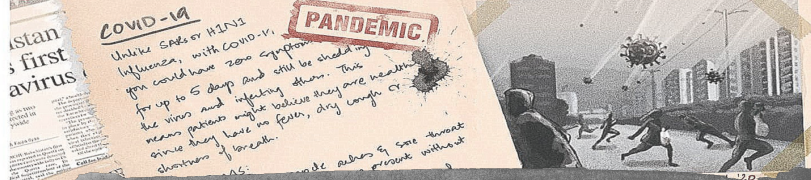


CORONAVIRUS CALYPSE



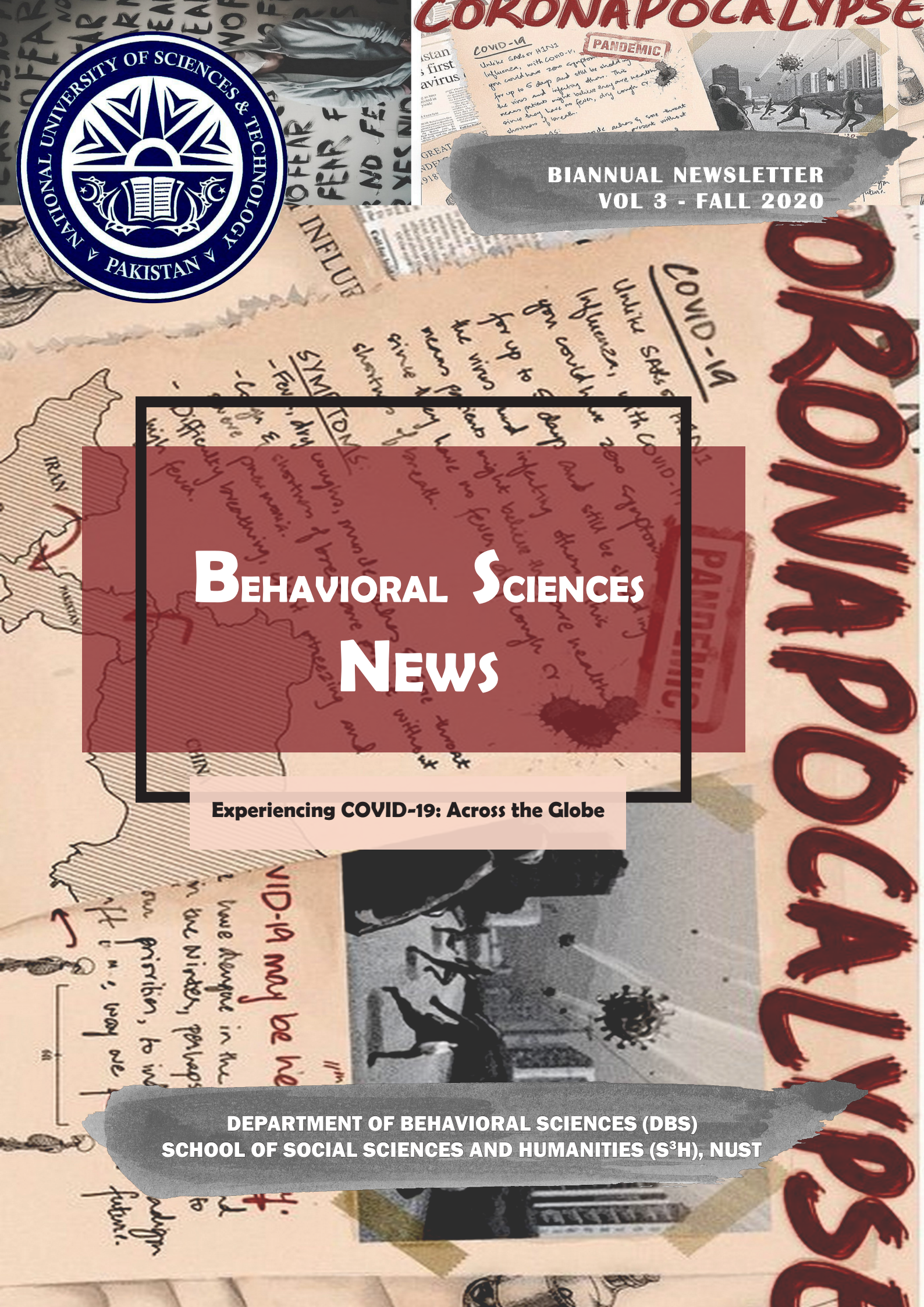
**BIANNUAL NEWSLETTER
VOL 3 - FALL 2020**

BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES News

Experiencing COVID-19: Across the Globe

**DEPARTMENT OF BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES (DBS)
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES (S³H), NUST**

CORONAVIRUS CALYPSE



MESSAGE FROM THE RECTOR

Life on Earth has embraced a paradigm shift since the outbreak of COVID-19. The pandemic has not only adversely affected national, regional and global economies but also exposed the flimsiness and limitations of public policy and governance in handling the novel global challenges posed by it. Originating from the Chinese city of Wuhan, the disease swept across the world like wildfire, engulfing over 210 countries in no time. The outbreak has been so sudden and unprecedented that it left the world too shocked to imminently brace for the gigantic challenge. Like many other countries around the world, Pakistan also had its own set of challenges as a large population across the country either themselves fell victim to the highly contagious disease or witnessed their kith and kin suffering from it. Nevertheless, the morale and resilience were proverbial both on the part of state institutions and general population, as a result of which the pandemic has been contained to a great extent.

In view of COVID-19, the Department of Behavioral Sciences at the NUST School of Social Sciences & Humanities (S³H) has brought out the latest edition of its Newsletter that mirrors real-life experiences of the people who faced the pandemic in different parts of the world – 24 countries to be precise. I commend the excellent efforts of the Editorial team for putting together experiences of people from China to Australia, Middle-East, Africa, U.S, etc., under one Issue. This is indeed a testament to the Department's commitment to understanding and reflecting on human complexities through scientific lens. I believe that this issue will be of great interest, particularly for those students who potentially base their research on the pandemic and its impact on the social fabric in different parts of the world.

Wish you a happy reading!

Lt Gen Naweed Zaman, HI(M), (Retd.)
Rector,
National University of Sciences & Technology



MESSAGE FROM PRINCIPAL S³H

While the sun of last day of the year 2019 was setting in Wuhan city of China, the world was told about the emergence of Coronavirus, which spread like wildfire, engulfing over 210 countries and territories around the world. The velocity and the speed at which the virus travelled around the world was unprecedented. No country – rich or poor was ready to face the challenges of COVID-19. The resultant pandemic (as declared by WHO on 11th March, 2020) exposed the health facilities around the world. We, in Pakistan, witnessed the spread of the virus from North to South and East to West, taking over 6400 lives. Globally, over 30 million were infected and close to million lives were lost. How people around experienced the onslaught of the virus? What are their experiences?

The Department of Behavioral Sciences of the School of Social Sciences & Humanities (S³H) at NUST, under the leadership of Dr. Salma Siddiqui devoted her newsletter, asking the same question from the respondents around the world. “Behavioral Sciences News”, flagship Newsletter of the department, has successfully gathered the real-time experiences of the people from 24 countries. From China to Europe, Middle-East to Africa, Australia to New Zealand and South Asia to Central Asia, people have shared their experiences of living with fear and dismay under the Covid-19 environment.

I commend the efforts of Dr. Salma Siddiqui and her colleagues in putting together the varied experiences of living with coronavirus in different parts of the world. This edition of the Newsletter devoted to the COVID-19 will be an excellent-resource information for the students of Social Sciences in general, and policy makers in particular.

Dr. Ashfaque Hassan Khan
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Principal & Dean,
School of Social Sciences and Humanities,
NUST



MESSAGE FROM THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

The year 2020 challenged us in many ways; but we tried our best to measure ourselves up to it. We successfully organized the first National Conference on Qualitative Psychology on March 5th, well in time before pandemic hit us. The next challenge was to customize our curriculum and use the online platforms for all academic activities. Since NUST already utilized Learning Management System (LMS) and Campus Management System (CMS), it was possible to adapt teaching on Distance Learning Mode. Those students who had connectivity issues due to living in remote areas of the country were sent recorded lectures and supportive learning material through post. The challenge still exists in Pakistan as many educational institutions and their faculty are not ready, both in terms of skills and technological readiness, to transition in to online teaching mode.

The psychosocial impact of lockdown and fear of catching the virus which has no cure yet, had impact on the wellbeing of both faculty, staff and students. The psychosocial support services assumed significance as a consequence and there is a rise in the need to seek such service. Another challenge that this pandemic has brought to surface is the absence of parameters to ensure quality and ethical practice of the psychologist who are providing counseling through various online platforms. It's about time that we have a council which ensures ethical practice and training resulting in the relevant competency in Psychology.

Let's pledge to keep our lives simple, less ostentatious, and spend time to nurture the core values which makes life meaningful. The biggest pandemic that plagues humanity are our own prejudices and disregard for the sense of justice and fairness; we will survive COVID-19, but we may not survive the bigotry and tyranny that we feed through our selective amnesia. It is up to us to reflect and pledge to commit to course correction to thrive as human race!

There is a chance we would rise and transform like a phoenix from our own ashes!

Dr. Salma Siddiqui
Ph.D Clinical Psychology
Fulbright Fellow
HoD Behavioral Sciences,
School of Social Sciences and Humanities,
NUST



EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to the 3rd edition of “Behavioral Sciences News”, a biannual newsletter produced and published from the platform of Department of Behavioral Sciences, NUST. This issues thematically focuses on the experience of COVID-19 pandemic, as it unfolded, around the globe.

The pandemic has affected each country and individual differently but the isolation, uncertainty, fear, angst, pain and suffering were shared. We were all forced to step back and away, from the daily hustle bustle of life and take stock of our inner world, and our surroundings. The pause that was expected to stay for few weeks, has now lasted for months. In the absence of a specific solution, we are trying to acclimatize ourselves to living with this uncertainty for a long time to come --- finding life and laughter around sanitizers, distance, and beneath masks.

They say that there is power and healing in connection. This is even more critical in the current atmosphere of distance and isolation. So for this issue, we have tried to virtually bridge the gap, by bringing together contributors from around the world. I invite you to sit with us as we journey with each of them for an insight into their individual experiences of a global pandemic. You might even see some of your own glimpses in them --- after all humans are just as similar as they are different.

Ms. Umbreen Akhtar
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School of Social Sciences and Humanities,
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COVID-19 ACROSS THE GLOBE

There is something unique about the Pandemic COVID-19, it connects us on a human level. It did not matter whether you lived in the “developed” world or struggled to make a life in a middle income country. It forced us to review our priorities, be more mindful and practice measures to protect ourselves and the dear ones from catching the virus. It made us alter ways of socializing and declutter our lives from all that stole our time and peace. Here in Pakistan, we kept listening to the stories of both loss and courage that put a human face to this pandemic. So, I thought why not ask the friends and colleagues around the globe to share their reflections about their life during the pandemic. We are so grateful to all the wonderful people who very generously sent us their reflections, giving us insight about how the pandemic impacted lives in different part of the world. So let’s connect with each other, through these reflections.

-Dr. Salma Siddiqui

Shinghai, China

Ms. Maheen Sadiq



I happened to be inside China when the deadly virus started. Thankfully, I lived in Shanghai – quite far away from Wuhan. I heard about the virus spreading around China by the mid of January. Typically, I assumed it's nothing serious and will be cured shortly. Never did we imagine it to grow on such a large scale, spreading around the whole world like wildfire. It was the end of January, when the whole of China was put under quarantine - Complete lockdown. The trendy streets, bustling subways, busy parks and fancy markets once filled with millions of people were now empty. Everyone was ordered to stay at home. The apartment entrance and exits were heavily checked. We were provided with masks, hand sanitizers, and standard operating procedures to follow, for the university. Our temperatures were recorded twice every day by the apartment staff at first, and then via an application downloaded on our cell phones. We were given special entrance cards to enter our residence. There were only one or two grocery shops open until 6 pm.

If we had to go out, our temperatures were checked, a form was filled with our basic information (our name, phone number, passport number, apartment number, university name and the time we leave and get back) every time, and 'day-ticket' was handed over valid up until 10 pm. If by any chance, an individual got back after 10 pm, they couldn't enter until after 6 am the next day, and they were put under quarantine for 2 weeks in a separate apartment with complete ban on going outside. Our lives had become completely monitored. We had to scan QR codes anywhere we went, and it could track where we have been for the past two weeks. Moreover, everyone had their separate health QR codes on the AliPay application on their cell phones. If the health code was "Green", it meant the person has not traveled to high-risk areas; "Yellow" health code meant the person has traveled to moderate risk area; and the "Red" health code meant the person has traveled to high-risk areas. Chinese government controlled the virus very quickly, and only after a month shops started to open little by little. We had already started to go out in public and the streets started to slowly pick up. There were more people outside strictly following protocols. People were scared in the beginning, but humanity thrived, friends looked after each other, cheered each other up in bad times, and indoor games rocked the dark nights.

China defeated coronavirus in no time and it was only made possible through strict discipline, policymaking and commitment of the government. Artificial Intelligence helped a lot to monitor the largest population on the face of earth. Technology has surely been a blessing, from food deliveries to online shopping, everything was brought to doorsteps without being exposed to any outside risk. Most surprisingly, although it's been more than two months that China has been virus-free, but 90% of the Chinese citizens still wear masks and take precautions, our temperatures and health codes are still checked wherever we go, be it a bank, a mall, a school or even our own university or apartment.

Turkey

Gulhayat Yesildag

The first case was seen in Turkey on March 11th. After the first case was encountered, some new measures were also implemented. The developments and measures taken after this date are as follows; Health Minister, Fahrettin Koca announced on March 11th, that the test results of a patient coming from Europe were positive. On March 13th, a second person tested positive. The decisions taken at the meeting chaired by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on March 12th, and were announced by Presidential Spokesperson İbrahim Kalın. It was decided that primary, secondary and high schools will be vacated for two weeks as of March 16th, and students will continue their education from home on the internet and television channels for a week starting from March 23rd. Universities were vacated for 3 weeks starting from March 16th. It was also decided that the sports competitions will be played without spectators until the end of April. Going abroad of public officials was subject to permission. Ministries and public institutions announced their own measures.

Our Health Minister Fahrettin Koca addressed the nation everyday. The shared statistics of rising COVID-19 cases in Turkey, gave us all many with sleepless nights to think how we can stop spreading of this virus. Two dates were critical -- April 11th, with highest cases in a single day (5138) and eventually, June 1st, when the curve began to flatten with 827 cases.

First we had limited restrictions - it was forbidden to come on streets for 65+ people and then the number became 20. Eventually, it was a complete lockdown for everyone especially on weekends, when usually weather is nice and people would want to go out and spend time with each other. There were also restrictions for social distancing in public transport, and wearing masks were compulsory for everyone. Buses, coaches and all other public places were periodically disinfected. Public places such as shopping malls, cinema, saloons, beaches were sealed. Besides, travelling abroad as well as interurban through any means of transportation, was cancelled. Once the number of new reported cases began to decrease, these restrictions were eased out to ensure safe mobility and overall productivity. Nowadays, we have gotten used to of this controlled life style but it does not mean virus had gone or we found the cure. That's why I want to say that we need to remember that we still, especially doctors, have a long fight ahead of us. So, we should not forget about social distancing and taking care of ourselves as well as our loved ones, till we triumph.

Geelong, Australia

Muhammad Jamaluddin Thaheem

It was during the 2nd week of March, we had just started our academic year 2020, thinking that we've escaped the pandemic, that an email from the university authorities brought the dreadful news of lockdown and a full transition to online learning. Before that, the city of Geelong in Australia was still living a carefree life. News of the COVID-19 outbreak was everywhere but Australia was holding better till then despite the disruption of international travel generally and that of students from hotspot countries particularly.

I was still attending the office and was hopeful that life will be business as usual. But after mid-March, life was never the same. Coming to terms with the fact that save for four reasons (work, health, groceries, and exercise) going out of home is not permitted, that work from home will be a norm and that all the teaching, research and service activities will be done from home was never easy. Making matters even more interesting were my two little kids (Zaviyar, 5 years and Zayera, 2.5 years old) who are ever full of energy to go to parks, enjoy the rides, and basically, be a kid. Much of that, if not all, had to be stopped. Public parks in Victoria got closed and with that the rides. It took me some time to explain to my son what it meant from the notice that 'this equipment is temporarily closed due to COVID-19'. He would always enquire about the suitability of the word 'equipment' for his harmless swing!

But it gave us time to spend together because work from home meant so many things; it meant work 'of' home, work 'for' home, work 'at' home, and much more. Also, I realized how challenging it is to keep two kids engaged in the car parked outside Coles (supermarket) while my wife would be doing groceries. I admit that I learned *Rock, Paper, Scissors* from my son during one of those waits. And the ordeal of washing, wiping and sanitizing groceries continue to amuse us till today. We both giggle and whine about it, but that's the new "normal".

Other than physical, medical, financial, and economic, COVID-19 has surely exposed our emotional vulnerabilities. It'll be a long time before we can take a sigh of relief and live the pre-COVID-19 ways. But it has brought us closer, no matter how episodically and briefly. It has forced us to admit to the downside of our global connectivity and outreach, yet it has underlined the importance of working together. If the virus doesn't know the boundaries, so shouldn't the combined measures to curtail it. Lastweek was Zaviyar's birthday. Turning 5 is a major milestone in one's life and despite the second wave in Victoria, we did our small celebration so that we don't forget to smile and rejoice in the face of the most trying of times.

Bonn, Germany

Ms. Bushra Iqbal Malik

Self-isolation, Quarantine and Lockdown are new concepts for people to protect against the virus. The outbreak and its subsequent spread of COVID-19 have left a shock wave of disbelief and confusion in the entire world. But what disturbs me is a spike in racism in the west. The ugly racism and xenophobia are growing in Europe like anything. In France, a local newspaper has come under fire for its headline “Yellow Alert”, echoing a historic Western racist and derogatory term, “Yellow Peril.” The paper later apologized in a tweet. Although people have significantly altered their behaviour in response to the virus and prejudices, but they still need to think and learn what they are unconsciously doing.

Since the chancellor Angela Merkel’s first address to the nation, I observed a shift in the nation’s attitude towards everything. At the start of this infectious disease, public life was totally controlled through strict measures; restaurants were fully closed, total ban was imposed on hang out in bars and parks, everybody is bound to wear a facemask. The ban on groups of more than five outside home turned into a tussle among public and the authorities. Intervention of police became necessary at this point in order to protect public health. These circumstances have provided a comfortable niche to the detractor political parties to oppose the governments. Somehow these challenges for governments are blessing in disguise. At this point, revising and restructuring of social and health sector policies are must for each country. In addition, it’s the time to look at the politicians and selfish industrialists as they are real challenge for their government. The non-cooperation movements from civil society organisations are another challenge. Public is asking for good health professionals and program but there are many who just want their freedom to move and meet friends without masks.

The recent protest in Berlin was named “Corona dictatorship”. The speaker linked the current restrictions to the seizure of power by Adolf Hitler. More than half of the German population believes in the danger posed by the coronavirus. But many Europeans believe that authorities and health experts are exaggerating the dangers of the virus and to deceive public. German Sociologist and Risk Researcher Ortwin Renn says that the reason for taking part in protests against Corona are actually the way to deal with an acute danger for some and it is matter of the personality structure of deniers and there are some people who want to see something as an enemy in front of them.

According to an analysis by the Munich-based institute, many migrants and refugees are “grappling with existential fears” due to the tense labour market situation, especially those who work in the low-wage sector with temporary jobs. They are caught between COVID-19 and the resultant financial problems. A recent study by the University of Bielefeld concluded that the risk of infection in shared asylum facilities is at least as high as on cruise ships. Hence, putting several hundred people in one space making adhering to distance rules and hygiene regulations impossible. The racism in a common man and the racist speeches by politicians should be taken under observation.

Waterford, Ireland

Dr. Akhtar Ali Syed

After taking more than 600,000 lives, the COVID-19 phase has started to fade. Out of 150, two laboratories are in the final stages of having a vaccine to deal with the pandemic. A successful vaccine would answer a lot of what has been theorized, anticipated, and felt about the life on the planet. At this juncture there are two notable imprints, I have on my mind; one is relevant to our survival and the other is to our existence.

I remember the painters of a doom's day scenario, those who were sounding convincingly adamant that life won't be the same thereafter. The pandemic, for them, was going to change almost everything from work to home, holidays to shopping, and from socialization to leisure. Now, we can say that nothing of that scale is going to happen. The fright is lessened at least.

I remember the deniers, particularly those heads of state who rebuffed the lethality of the virus. No one could quieten their medical hogwash except the virus itself. Now, only the doctors are talking and being listened to. I feel in safe hands. One wishes if the flamboyance was circumvented initially to limit the life loss. Countries like Ireland, listened only to the medics, went for the lockdown on March 16th, followed the advice religiously and survived the chaos and pandemic, both. From schools to offices, restaurants to shops, every place was shut down with an immediate effect. People did resent, they anticipated the psychological impact and outbreak of financial crises. Nothing happened except financial problems for people, which were quite heavy for some. A majority preferred the option of working from home. Only essential workers like me had to go to their office base. As a clinical psychologist, my workload went even lesser than the pre-COVID-19 phase.

I remember the miracle mongers, who were seeing the treatment for virus affected people in anything and everything. The Facebook prescriptions could only get a steeped rise in death toll than anything else. After seeing the strategies adopted in Germany, Italy, Spain, and Ireland, I relearnt and persuaded again to rely only on the right person for the right reason. I realize that COVID-19 caused more deaths than the economic crises caused by it. I was forced to revise that economics is germane for those who are breathing not for the deceased. I strongly felt that avoidable agility and uncalled for acuteness won't get us anywhere except weariness. The majority of our activities are doable without us running from pillar to post. Children in Ireland liked attending online classes. Most of the office work was properly done from home. Though I was conducting online therapeutic sessions for the last many years, I went more digital and experienced the virtual linkages for therapy and management, both. Once again, I started following the advice I used to give to others, "introspection and reflection are as important as attending the task at hand". Meditating Buddhas perhaps have given wisdom to the world, which equals to the discoveries of genius Einsteins. A vaccine will ensure my survival but the answer to challenges to my existence lies somewhere else.

COVID-19 was a hiccup because we were gulping for quite some time; now it is time to slow down.

Geneva, Switzerland

Dr. Seema Pervez



I moved to Geneva four years ago, to be with my son and his family, as after losing Pervez, it was emotionally very difficult for me to live alone in that house. I spent almost 40 years in Islamabad and felt settled even after retirement; therefore, it was a difficult decision to quit the place which gave me so much love, respect and enjoyment. Despite my grief, I tried to learn to enjoy the surroundings, to take interest in kids, to develop some hobbies like handicraft, reading, watching plays, writing etc. beside staying in touch with friends and family. Life came back almost on the track but then we started hearing about a new type of virus COVID-19. Geneva being included in Schengen countries has very loose border controls. It is a landlocked country and has multiple entry points. Despite the fact that Swiss as nation are very law-abiding, careful and disciplined people yet could not control the inflow of the people who proved to be the carriers of the Covid-19. It has been more than five months that the life in Geneva is no more as before.

It was the second Saturday of March when I last went for a leisure shopping in a normal style. In the beginning, we thought that the virus is a seasonal virus which could be prevented by a high dose of Vitamin-C and Paracetamol. But when WHO declared it as "Pandemic" then the lifestyle was "entirely changed. Being "oldest person" around, everyone was more careful about me; therefore, I had to face more restrictions and care also ... "Did you wash your hands, where is your sanitizer, drink more water, have fruits, take extra vitamins, don't go close the family members coming from outside, don't hug the kids, keep social distancing etc.". These phrases and instructions became a part of daily conversation. This behavior created a mixed feelings. On one hand, I was happy for their concern and care for me, but at the same time it kept reminding me that I am old and fragile. Though it is a reality but now it was all the time on my face. To be very honest, though I feel guilty acknowledging it; that COVID-19 did not bring any drastic negative change in my life. Due to my deep inner faith in the eventuality of death, I was not worried for myself. I have strong confidence in the health care system of the country and the conscientiousness of my family member. They all were extremely strict in following the SOPs and watching the daily live broadcast by WHO representative. I started taking extra care of my physical and emotional health as I believed that it would help in increasing the immune system. Being in the bracket of the age group, which is more prone to the illness; I wanted to remain safe to keep my family safe in return. Not only that the Pandemic did not affect my life negatively, rather subconsciously I started enjoying the scenario in which all the family members were home. Though they were busy working online but I could feel that they are around. It became a new normal that they will remain in their work areas most of the time, would be having short breaks for snacks and lunch. I started taking more interest in cooking initially as a routine and later as a creative expression. The appreciation by the family was an extra bonus for me.

But at the same time, it generated a strange type of confused emotional state too. I started calling to my daughters daily, sometimes twice a day, for long conversation to feel assured that they are safe and following SOPs etc. I realized that in order to show myself strong I was trying to suppress my anxietysince long. Being a very empathetic person, I started worrying a lot about the loved ones. Smallest bad news was enough to disturb me. I also started having a guilt feeling that I am not helping people. I did not have the opportunity to do any volunteer work. Due to my age and language limitations, I was not suitable to do any volunteer work in hospitals etc. Such concerns started creating anxiety, erratic thinking and mood swings. So, I had to start working on my own emotional state. As a first and easiest step, I started sending some financial help to some people in Pakistan, whom I knew are needy but would not ask for. That helped. I also started stress management exercise and taking interest in nature. Luckily my house and neighborhood provide me opportunity to enjoy pets and water, have nature walks, bird watching, to have a clear sky and quickly changing weather. All these motivated me to be able to revisit and count the blessings of God. I believe that if God has had made us capable of conquering and preserving the nature, then we will be able to eradicate this notorious virus. We will do soon InshAllah.

Dr. Seema Parvez is a senior psychologist, currently based in Switzerland

New Zealand

Mr. Mohid Rehman



Situated just under 2000km from its closest neighbour (the Pacific island of New Caledonia) and 13,000km from Pakistan, it is safe to say New Zealand is relatively isolated. I came to the land of the longwhite cloud, Aotearoa (the native Māori name for the island nation) in 2018, along with my mother, a lecturer at NUST now completing her Ph.D here in New Zealand. In search of a life away from the hustle and bustle of this chaotic world. We found New Zealand with its small team of five million residents a calm and prospering outpost at the bottom of the world. From all the way down here, few of the world's worries make it onto our shores... or at least that is the way it used to be.

2020 has been a year of change and upheaval, one which has invaded every portion of our lives. New Zealand has been no exception. On the 28th of February, New Zealand confirmed its first case of COVID-19. By then, we had already closed our border with China, and we quickly expanded the blacklist to include Iran — the source of our first case. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 cases kept on increasing. On the 14th of March this year, border restrictions came into place, which effectively isolated us from the outside world. At the time our Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, described them as being among the “widest-ranging and toughest border restrictions of any country in the world”. With 8.4% of the workforce employed in tourism, this was no easy measure to consider. By the 26th of March, New Zealand went under a total and complete nationwide lockdown. As such, we all had to self isolate, and wait out the storm.

But in that isolation, we were also brought closer to things that we previously were distant to. Exposed to near-constant news coverage of floundering COVID-19 responses and the various bizarre conspiracy theories that fester on the internet, our resolve to wait it out only strengthened. We did not want to become the next Italy or fall further into absurdity like America. Although we were cut off from our immediate communities, the daily press briefings served to anchor our feelings of national pride and brotherhood. The leaders in charge never sugar-coated or suppressed information; instead, they treated us as grown adults who could see the situation at hand and recognise the tough road ahead. And for the most part, we all complied. There was a feeling of genuine sympathy and comradeship among the public; no doubt trickled down from Aunt Cindy's (Jacinda Ardern - the Prime Minister) Facebook live-streams. We were a single team of five million.

Compromises to our way of life needed to be made, no matter how highly we valued them. ANZAC Day (equivalent to Pakistan's Defence Day) is the yearly remembrance of the failed Gallipoli landings by Australian and New Zealand troops in WW-I (World War I), which became a formative event for both countries' national histories. Despite its observance being an essential New Zealand tradition, national health security took precedence, and the nationwide events were cancelled. Instead, we were encouraged to stand at dawn as one, maintaining the distance between our bubbles. Still commemorating the event by standing two meters apart from our neighbours; modifying the tradition to accommodate these dangerous times.

Daily life obviously also had to adapt, although maintaining a sense of normalcy was always stressed. Everything that could go online went online, including schools, businesses, and anything else that could make the transition. The makeshift offices in our homes grew, and the work carried on. Those industries which could not move online and were essential still called in their employees. However, social distancing practices were maintained throughout, and wage subsidies were offered as compensation to the workers putting themselves at risk. Whether or not this was harder than adapting to an online environment varied from person to person, depending on how integrated their work already was to the internet. Some schools, for example, were already using a combination of books and laptops, so all that was needed was to ensure every child had access to the internet.

All in all, great efforts were made to make this work for as long as possible. We did not know for how long we would be in lockdown, so tried our best to collectively make do until the COVID-19 threat was over. As a result of our unity and resolve, life is now back to normal. People once again worry about work and late assignments and where to take the kids on the next weekend. The mind spinning insanity of the rest of the world is once again a distant noise filtered through our TVs as we march on with our ever-busy lives. We are once again isolated from the world. We would rather not be, considering our economy depends on tourism. But until other countries hunker down and win their fight against COVID-19, we will keep on waiting at the bottom of the world.

Glasgow, Scotland

Ms. Mahnoor Campbell



In Scotland, all schools closed on March 20th. With the cancellation of exams, my husband went from working fulltime as a private tutor of English to no work and no income at his busiest and highest earning time of year. He had no savings and no means of paying his bills over the coming months. Me, I am a social animal. I thrive on meeting people and being mobile. I teach children who speak a language other than English at home, from age of 3 to 18. I covered 11 schools in a week. I love the variety and interaction. Suddenly I was going to be sat at my desk in my home with just my computer. It made me anxious as I hate being confined and stuck in one place. I also have fibromyalgia and immobility makes me stiff and increases my pain. I gathered a number of materials planning on working from home on developing resources needed for the future. However, my bosses had other plans. At the start we were all told to meet daily over zoom and it felt like a class attendance or lack of trust on the part of management. We were instructed to keep record of how much time we spent on any task/activity during the day. I did not like the atmosphere of control as we were professionals and used a certain level of autonomy. We set tasks with unrealistic deadlines and reminded every day that we should be grateful that we had a job and were getting our salary.

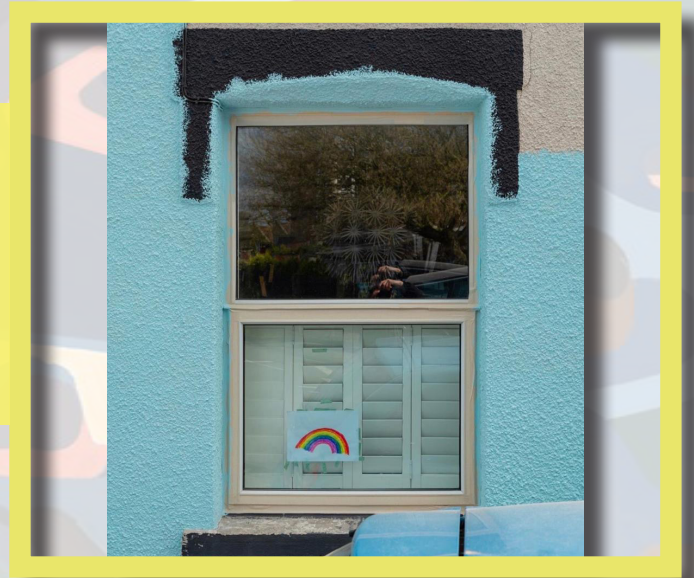
I was aware from friends who were teachers how flexibly they were working and how little they were being expected to deliver, when I was being told I had to be at my desk/computer 9am to 4pm and deliver a 35hr working week. The disparity made me angry and raised my stress levels hugely. This was of course compounded by the worry of how I was to make both ends meet over the indefinite future. My husband had taken it into his head that he would never work again. This was the end of his business forever! It felt like the walls of the house seem to be caving in on me. My retirement, my future was being snatched away from me. I had to do something for my mental wellbeing and so I decided to streamline household chores and gave my husband certain responsibilities. Only one person from a household was allowed into the supermarkets and my husband was higher risk than I. So, I took to doing the groceries but only once a fortnight, to reduce exposure. I limited cooking to twice a week, in bulk and we ate from the fridge, the rest of the week. That also gave us time to go out for physical activities.

My husband took to listening to everything about the pandemic, not just on the media but also on the 'alternative' media, thus the conspiracy theories. Suddenly everything was a lie, every politician was lying and everyone had a hidden agenda and that was all he would talk about. My solution was to start taking him out cycling after I finished work. I was a woman possessed, 9-4 work, a quick change and set off on the bikes. Avoiding crowds meant we started cycling on roads that hardly had any traffic. It did not lend itself to conversation but it built a different kind of companionship. I took him places and showed him routes he had never been before. On three different occasions, I had to give duty in school hubs. These were running to provide child care for children of frontline workers.

These came as a relief from desk work and an opportunity to interact with people. Currently on summer holidays, I am concentrating on my mental and emotional wellbeing so I am able to handle what might get thrown at me in August with the start of the new term.

London, UK

Ms. Zainab Riaz



It started back in January, with a few people here and there wearing masks in the tube. Soon after pharmacy stores were running out of face masks and hand sanitizers. That was my first experience of Coronavirus in London. At that time, there was just speculation and what ifs. What if the virus spread everywhere? How would the already overloaded NHS (National Health Service) cope? Would there be a lockdown with empty streets like in Wuhan? Should people think of stockpiling groceries in the event of a lockdown? It seemed like too scary a scenario to happen in real life, so we dismissed it for the most part and moved on with everyday life.

Then everyday life changed during the lockdown in March, when the official lockdown began. All offices, restaurants, theatres, malls and museums closed down. When the Prime Minister got admitted to the hospital and the Queen left London to go into quarantine, it really hit home that no person is immune from this virus. With empty streets now a reality, the fear settled in. Since UK had the highest numbers of deaths in Europe, for most of March stepping outside the house was done with a lot of hesitation. We were working from home, cleaning and disinfecting groceries every week and interacting with people only on video calls. Admittedly, working from home has its perks, particularly being able to wake up at 8:59 am for a 9:00 am work call. But it's a struggle to focus just on work at home when you can see a messy room in front of you!

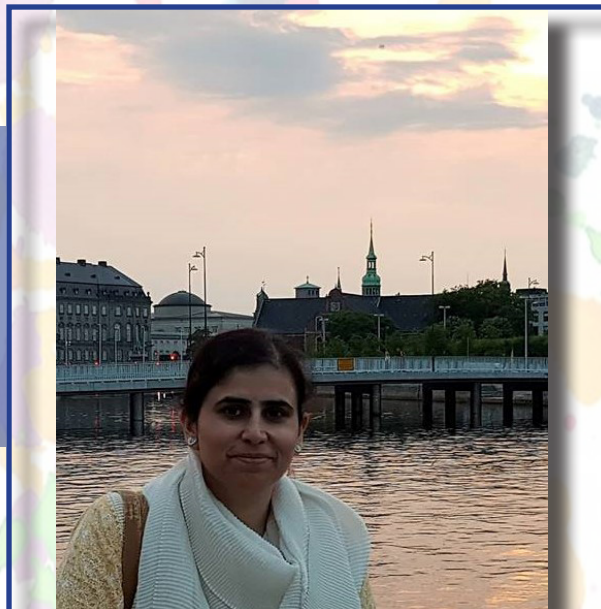
Since the only reason we were allowed outside was for exercise or groceries, our regular walk became more important than ever. Our neighborhood became alive. Children put up painted rainbows in their streets, a symbol for thanking the NHS. Rainbow spotting became a national activity on walks. One of our neighbors started to play the violin from his balcony for all the walkers to enjoy. We walked further than we had before, spent more time in silence in the parks. We discovered quiet sitting corners in previously ignored Church gardens, noticed more flowers and relished more in the natural beauty around us.

The most significant change for me however was to be away from family, and to know that airports and flights are closed. There was this constant feeling of uncertainty and it was hard to know that going home is just not an option. As numbers began to rise in Pakistan, so did our worry. Not getting the regular video call from home meant checking in constantly on text to make sure everything was okay. Often while living abroad you appease yourself by looking forward to the next time, you'll see your family. With no close meeting in sight and not knowing when exactly we'll meet our family next, homesickness is at an all-time high. Daily post-Maghrib chai and gupshup time with my family, mango sessions and my bookshelf in my old room are the three things I'm missing the most (in that order).

It's been a challenging year, and when I look back to 2020 there will be many moments of the pandemic I'll want to forget. But there's one moment I'll always hold onto. It was the first 'Clap for Carers' that happened back in March, where people across London came outside on their porches to cheer for the doctors and nurses on the front line. When I ducked my head out the window, and saw all the neighborhood windows lit up I was surprised my how deafening the noise was. Everyone cheered and hooted. Some banged their pots and pans together, and cars honked their horns from the streets. It was a moment of pure collective joy. And in a time when there was a void of human interaction, it was so fulfilling in a way only a human interaction can be.

Marburg, Germany

Dr. Rubina Kausar



COVID-19 has changed lives around the world. I am living in Germany for the last seven years. I have completed my Ph.D. and Post-doctorate. I am living here with my family including two children. Before the pandemic, life was different here. Due to the current pandemic, lockdown brought visible changes in our lives. My elder child is a school-going, 10 years old. In the mid of March, schools were closed and children were limited to home. My younger child is just one year old and he already stayed at home, otherwise I could send him Kita. Now, I had to take care of two children along with other household chores. My elder was quite disturbed and irritated due to the closure of school because she could not go outside even for other activities. Everything was banned due to lockdown. No parks and play areas, no visits to friends etc. We were travel lovers, therefore, but now it has also become a dream under several restrictions. Traveling was a big source of relaxation for us because we do not have other family and relatives here. Shopping was another important aspect of life, which is no easier task because only one person in a family is allowed to go to the supermarket. No get-together, no birthday parties.

Despite all of these problems, one positive thing I have learned from the current pandemic is the strengthening of the health system in Germany. At least there was no fear of lacking ventilators or other medical facilities. Due to a strong health system, fear of pandemic was not as high as I have observed in other parts of the world. Another important thing to mention here is the attitude of the German nation. They have behaved very nicely during the period of lockdown and peak of the pandemic. Both the German government and German people have given a message to invest money in people's education and health that make people more responsive to such crises and enable institutions to fulfil their responsibilities to respond to such natural disasters. The current pandemic and nation's response show that such nations can better survive in the world without having billions of investments in defense.

Copenhagen, Denmark

Ms. Aina Masood



You never know the value of something until it is gone. This was true for many of us when countries started shutting down in March 2020. In the beginning of the year, we were aware of the coronavirus but we, as humans, felt unaffected by it. The number of cases drastically increased in Denmark in March and as a response the government announced a two-week lockdown that took effect immediately. It was with that announcement, that our beliefs of being indestructible were challenged. It was a roller coaster ride from there on as the lockdown persisted for 3 months.

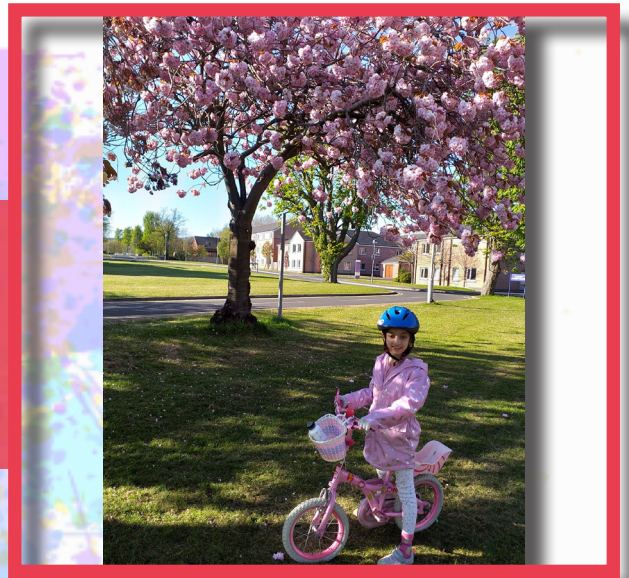
We had to re-adjust to the demands of the lockdown. We squeezed in a home-office by converting our dining table into an office table. We set up a reading corner (mainly for me). Work from home for my husband meant that we had to come up with new house rules to maintain our personal space. Fortunately, Denmark never went into a lockdown where we could not step outside at all. It was this opportunity that helped us maintain a healthy routine with nature walks, photography and biking. I learned to ride a bike in now-empty parking lots and less crowded roads. We spent our time baking, coloring, checking up on our families and giving each-other haircuts as the salons were closed.

It was in the lockdown period that I felt more connected to my siblings, parents and friends all over the world. I learned how to use social media platforms to connect with the locals, with Pakistani community in Denmark and with people in Pakistan as well and how to strengthen that virtual bond. It was through this networking that I got my first paid job in Denmark where I conducted a webinar on mental well-being during a pandemic. While the days felt longer because of limited activities, we learned how much we were saving financially. We were cooking at home and enjoying the simplicity of meals.

There were two most important realizations for me. Firstly, I noticed how we had switched on minimizing the 'wants' that presented themselves as 'needs'. We became more adept at differentiating between these and secondly, I realized how people are honest, responsible and considerate in following the guidelines and accepting responsibility for their well-being and, also the well-being of people around them. As we were in lockdown for around 3 months and even after that, the country opened gradually with caution. Even today, there are strict guidelines to be followed, sanitizers available everywhere and try-rooms in malls are mostly closed. People are advised to maintain distance and we long to hug our friends or shake hands. We can now meet up for a coffee or a meal but I notice the tension that surrounds being physically close. We are adjusting to the new normal and thankful that we are not on red alert anymore.

Northern Ireland

Dr. Fatima Ali Haider



When I came to Northern Ireland, last year, to study, a single parent with a seven-year-old, little did I know about the challenges ahead of me except the usual ones of moving to a different country. I was often warned about the loneliness as a student but to be honest I never felt it, thanks to the blissful presence of my little one. We were almost beginning to feel at home in this new place when COVID-19 started, a test of all my strength and energies, that I thought I had gathered in these last seven years after losing my husband and son. My loss, which I thought I had come to terms with, came back to me in bursts of panic attacks and nightmares, worrying about our own safety in this foreign land and the safety of my son who was thousands of miles away.

All around me, I saw people becoming angry and bitter, criticizing their respective states and the public for a situation that was perhaps beyond individual and state capacities. In Northern Ireland, the Land of Troubles, people re-experienced their decades old post-traumatic stress symptoms, because the virus reminded them of their fear of the unseen enemy. I heard people saying that we were together in this crisis and I was constantly reminded of George Orwell's famous lines from *The Animal Farm*: All animals are equal but some are more equal than the others. I felt we were forgetting that the vulnerable and the traumatized became even more vulnerable in the pandemic; that those who had families under one roof, food on the table and stable sources of income had a lot more to be grateful for.

As things began to settle down after the initial shock and chaos, a new lifestyle emerged with new challenges, new discussions. As I began reflecting on my experiences of the pandemic, I realized that it had reiterated some valuable life lessons, things we know but often choose to ignore or postpone for a later time. It reminded me how even the strongest of the relationships were the most fragile ones and vice versa; that for some of us, it took a pandemic to realize who were our true friends; how important it was to count your blessings in your most difficult moments; how to rise above your own struggles and notice the ones who were suffering more than we were, even though we were fighting the same battle; the importance of spending time together with our loved ones, the realization that one can manage without quite a few of the so called necessities of life; the value in the ordinariness of life, the true worth of a hug or a hand shake and most importantly, the value of self-care. COVID-19 has taken precious lives, stories unfinished, words unsaid but for those who have survived, there is an important lesson that life is to be valued at all times, good and bad because:

Today is a gift, that's why we call it present ! (Kung Fu Panda)

London, UK

Ms. Sadia Iftikhar

London, the city of dreams and aspiration, is equally affected by the pandemic. In human history this is the first time such a huge calamity has targeted the world brutally. We went through a state of 'helplessness' in front of this tiny microscopic creature which has claimed the lives of half a million people in few months and still counting... When this virus first appeared in China, we thought it has nothing to do with us but soon it turned into pandemic and affected us directly. We were asked to stay at home. Work from home was introduced. Only key workers were allowed to leave their homes, as my husband was a key worker he was going to work with full protocol before leaving and coming home. My son's admission got delayed because of the pandemic. Our everyday routine was ruined. I was not going to Library and Social groups I used to go with my child. I had to prepare activities for my little one to keep him busy and focused at home.

We could not visit family and friends even neighbours. Few of our neighbours were in quarantine and we were helping them by delivering basic necessities at their doors. Cities were lock-downed to stop the spread of the deadly virus. My mother came to visit us for the first time and she has to stay with us at home. Her flights to Pakistan were cancelled four times and this period was really frustrating. We could not show her the hustle and bustle of London for which it is known for. Streets were empty, roads were quiet, places of worship were even close. Our daily life our plans were put on stand still. No parks, no entertainment no access to any facility that we enjoyed few days back. It seemed the world was going to end. At the start frustration was at its peak because our routine was upside down. Now, we are adjusting to this changing world. Life is going back to normal but the marks this pandemic has left on our economy, psychology and other aspects of life will last long.

Sant'Anna, Italy

Ms. Aniqah Ibnat Lim

“The show must go on”, this one phrase was something that I have always heard. Another phrase ingrained in me through my belief system was that “Death is inevitable”. However, never have I found these to be true, at the same time, as they have been, during COVID-19 pandemic in Italy. Italy was the one of the worst hit countries during the first wave. Some called it the wrath of God while to others, it appeared to be a massive political conspiracy. Meanwhile, in early January, in a small town of Italy, called Pisa, my two roommates and I, would have conversations, filled with intrigue and speculation over the new virus, never realizing that all hell was about to break loose in Italy. By the end of January, the news was spreading like wildfire that there is an outbreak and it is spreading fast, yet it did not catch attention. February brought term-break vacation for us all. People went away to enjoy vacations back home or abroad. A virus that emerged 7562 km away was not going to reach us -- but it did. It reached Italy, not only easily but also awefully. By the end of February, it was a havoc of rising numbers and death toll.

Italy turned into a red zone. Life came to a stand-still --- everything closed down, classes were shifted to online mode and borders were sealed. We were all confined to our homes. For me, that meant spending more time with my flatmates. We tried to keep our spirits up by trying to explore new activities to occupy ourselves while we watched the death-toll rise. We could not do anything to actively bring the numbers down but stay inside. So, all we could do was keep each other going and we did, while also praying for our family's safety that were a world apart. I had a lot to be thankful for. I did not have any financial crisis, loss of business, starvation, health of a loved one and most importantly, I was not alone. I had my friends that I talked to and saw everyday. This also brought gratitude. I had a lot to be thankful for.

The pandemic also brought with itself, the realization of what's truly important -- it isn't the material wealth, buildings and places --- it's humanity. As a believer, it also made me realize that Almighty, Lord of the Throne, is in absolute control, with the power to restore the balance. The purpose of our lives is working for humanity and towards humanity.

JAPAN

Dr. Saeeda Batool

I had set an entirely different plan for 2020; of renewing and refreshing my attitude to work, acquire of new skills, try learning a new language and all this required me to take a break. I got a chance to do so, and join my family in Japan. I was happy and excited to see my dream coming true and was looking forward to enjoying the Tokyo Olympics 2020 which unfortunately fell victim to the COVID-19, later. I could not have preempted that the entire world would take a break. However, my experience of the pandemic was different. I am enjoying a perfectly normal life in Japan, firstly because I had planned my 2020 as a “work from home” year and secondly, I did not observe any panic in Japan. There was no “lock down” announcement, public transport was available as per usual schedule even though all schools were closed and work from home was in practice. At the government level it was requested to avoid unnecessary outings, and observe social distancing, self-restricting if experience any symptom, avoid closed spaces with poor ventilation and this message was being played repeatedly at all malls, trains, local busses, grocery shops, and all public places to keep the public well-informed. “Out of stock” word was coming from every corner of the world, so we also rushed to stores expecting empty shelves but to our surprise everything was available and bulk purchase was discouraged. To my amazement, every family member received a reusable mask dispatched to every household by the government and every resident in Japan including the foreigners received 100,000 yen as uncertainty allowance. Japanese government was dealing COVID-19 with every possible way without making anything a news and staying focused on finding clusters of cases and the routes of transfer and making hand sanitizer available everywhere.

Being a struggling Pakistani, I was surprised to see that Japanese people are enjoying the blessings of normal life with no social or financial, job security threats. I discovered that Japanese cultural practices were behind the relatively slow pace of the epidemic and low corona numbers despite the fact that Japan was the second country after China, to report the case of Corona and has one of the biggest elderly populations in the world. People naturally practice social distancing, not wearing shoes in the house, complete silence on public transports, lack of aspirated consonants in the Japanese language, cleanliness of public toilets and restaurants, low obesity rates, fitness craze, few foods eaten with bare hands and Japan's high standards of hygiene and cleanliness are the factors that made Japan an outlier among all the developed country, especially in the first phase of COVID-19.

Here is the glimpse of things that I learned about their cultural value and emotional intelligence. The Japanese people have fiercely deep appreciation for nature, they are taught to learn harmony, order, and self-development; three most important values that underlie Japanese social interaction. Since childhood, the Japanese are taught that they belong to an interdependent society and they are made to recognize that they are beginning from the family but later extending to larger groups such as neighborhood, school, community, and workplace. Dependence on others is a natural part of the human condition and that is why, most Japanese tend to avoid open competition and confrontation. The education focuses on building character, learning etiquette and qualities of being kind and self-disciplined. All the students in their initial 10 years are trained to clean their classrooms, cafeterias, toilets to ensure that no one would ever dream of touching doors, the metro rail and ticket booths after wiping their snotty nose. This explains how they overcame the challenge of pandemic.

Sydney, Australia

**Ms. Samina Whales
(Senior Clinical Psychologist)**

No one in the world has been spared from the impact of COVID-19. Australia remains one of the countries that have taken strict measures to curb the incidence and prevalence of COVID-19, despite its current fears around a second wave, or just a Victorian wave, whatever name you may give. Looking back when COVID-19 was first identified and the NSW Premier announced restrictions to public gathering, maintaining 1.5 meters distance from others on public transport, be working from an office, the community's first response was to hoard as much as they can. Supermarkets got flocked by public with toilet paper, pasta, rice, disappearing off the shelves within days. Being a resourceful country, it was albeit somewhat amusing to see, that under the threat of limited supply which this country has never seen, humans demonstrated similar at times worse panic, than what you generally see in resource-poor countries. Thankfully, this eased over time, but it did require that a customer would not be able to buy more than two of the high demand items, even at self-serve counters. In case of any violation, the system would alert the store management and security.

The restrictions were strict and the measures were somewhat punitive to start with, but it proved to be critical in containing the virus. There were some extreme stories like a man fined \$1000 for eating a burger in a park, or for being in a car with three people and not maintaining 1.5-meter distance. At the same time, there were some gatherings such as 'black lives matter' protest which did take place and reportedly whilst observing social distancing rules. Religious places could not have mass gathering and this is the first time that Ramadan for Muslims was an at-home affair, as were the Eid celebrations. There remains strict border-control not just for international travel, but from regional travel across all states. Studies indicate that the most severely affected group of people were from 17 to 25 years old; a group that's socially most active. However, the strict restriction meant that while they remained in touch via social media, it did little to relieve them from feeling lonely and isolated.

COVID-19 news dominated the morning television shows, and public saw the government officials almost daily making some announcement. Whilst government has supported the community with several measures; the most important one being given social security benefits to everyone, who was at risk of losing job, and giving money for business to keep them alive, people are still in need for more and continue to ask for more handouts. Medical services, and in terms of mental health, special new Medicare items, designated as "COVID-19 additional items" were introduced for public to access counseling and therapy if they were feeling isolated, lonely and beginning to become anxious/depressed. These are available for face-to-face counseling as well as telehealth, video-link etc. Clients coming to services are asked a series of questions, they are offered masks to wear, and their temperature is taken. If there is even a slight high temperature, clients are refused entry or face-to-face session, are asked to get COVID-19 test and call back after they have the results. Despite so many sectors continue to work very well, the public is starting to get sick of the measures and some rule breaking behaviour with serious consequence is seen, at least on once a week basis.

KSA

Dr. Seher-un-Nisa Hassan

(S³H Faculty, currently residing in KSA)

The COVID-19 pandemic! Sometimes I am unable to figure out whether it is a buzzword, a feeling or a lived experience. I guess this confusion arises from limited or incomplete information about virus itself which most of the time, in early days of pandemic was even not authenticated. Then comes the statistics, daily infected, died, recovered, which ultimately became just numbers, but left lasting impact on everyday life of people including mine. I relate my experience of this pandemic with traveling through a desert. In the past three years, during my stay in Saudi Arabia, I frequently got the chance to travel through vast deserts. Nature expresses its supremacy in desert and despite all the resources, that we imagine would suffice, a sense of powerlessness is often experienced in the wilderness of barren landscape. The road through expanded range of mountains in deserts sometimes arouse feelings of uncertainty with questions where and when it is going to end! The stagnant life and isolation in deserts is appealing for shorter duration but becomes unbearable if we have to tolerate it for days or months.

COVID-19 pandemic has undeniably influenced each aspect of my life whether it is social relationship, work, travel or religious activities. In the beginning of this year, I was very clear and quite ambitious about my plans to spend quality time with my family members in home country during the upcoming summer vacations, which clearly ruined due to international travel bans. The Saudi government strict lock-down measures were implemented in their true sense, which were helpful to control the spread of coronavirus infection but restricted my life to the extended screen time. The social media apps are still the only way to experience joy of interactions with my parents in Pakistan. Apprehensions about safety of loved ones in home country are persistent having a toll on energy levels, mood, and ability to function during the day.

The major attraction as a Muslim expatriate in Saudi Arabia is opportunity of frequent visits to *Haramain Shareef*. The closing of Holy Mosques and curfew during the month of Ramadan took away the spiritual routine of fasting and later even the festivity of Eid. In middle of these unpleasant experiences, the heart was also grateful to have enough time during lockdown to dig deeper into life itself to get better insights and appreciation for the freedom I had in pre-COVID-19 world.

Durban, South Africa

Ms. Ayesha Siddika

When we first heard of COVID-19 virus, we didn't think for a single second that it was going to take over our lives within weeks. It spread faster than anticipated and soon we were in complete lockdown in South Africa just like many countries the world. Being a housewife, it didn't change much in my daily routine except for the weekly meetings with a group of friends and our gym sessions. After long the whole family (three sons and daughter-in-law) was at home. The best time was Ramadhan. We were already reading Salah together and even Jumma as congregational prayers were not allowed. This was the First ever Ramadhan we all sat together for. Otherwise the men used to go to mosque. Second best thing was that I read Taraweeh Salaah behind my youngest son who is Hafiz ul Quran, what more can a mother wish for? Alhamdulillah.

On the social level, the pandemic has had positive and negative effects. We are now on Stage-3 lockdown which means businesses have reopened with very strict measures. Wearing a mask and hand sanitizers are compulsory in all public places and minimum of 1.5m distance between individuals in queues. Officially the government has asked for reopening of schools for grade 7 and 12 which are the defining classes in the educational system. Grade 7 students have to prepare to move to secondary schools whilst Grade 12 learner's move from secondary to tertiary level. But still now there is debate among teachers, parents and governing bodies arguing on the safety versus education importance.

In the new "normal", learners are left in a difficult situation. Private schools have reopened and parents have been given the choice of either continuing with on-line classes or sending their children to school. From an economic point of view COVID-19 has had some major negative effects. Just like other countries, many people lost their jobs as businesses can't afford to pay for their services. In South Africa, no work means no pay. The Government put up some schemes whereby workers can obtain money from the Unemployment Fund and this procedure had to be facilitated by the employers. Social grants of Rands 350 are being provided to the unemployed and nowadays it is normal to see long queues of people waiting at Post Offices. Another reality of South Africa is the presence of many unregistered and illegal workers mostly from other African countries. They live on a day to day job and don't have access to the grant. Durban has seen a wide movement of solidarity towards the most vulnerable ones. Many people have come together such as Road patrol groups and various religious organizations and went out to distribute groceries and basic food items to the less fortunate communities. Many people did the same on a personal level. From the time when lockdown moved to stage 3, the government still holds on the ban of alcoholic drinks and cigarettes. Many argue the logic behind such measures but the reality in South Africa is testified by doctors and other medical workers. The admissions in hospitals of cases related to domestic violence against women especially have decreased by more than 75%. This fact is further proved by the police force across the country as they witness a drastic decrease in domestic violence. Alcohol consumption among poorer communities have proven to be very devastating and the ban is certainly a positive sign of COVID-19.

Overall, people have become more conscious of hygiene especially in public places. From another perspective altogether, many people realize that we are not in control of what happens in life. We do our best to live a decent life and leave the rest in Almighty's power. For too long we have taken things for granted and been arrogant about it. COVID-19 is like a warning. How we take it depends on the individual. On a very positive note, stay safe everyone. Have patience and make shukr.

Malaysia

Dr. Zainab Chaudhary

Life was going fine with new experiences and interesting turns. I had settled already with the new job, new city, new role, new people and was really enjoying being a working-mom. Although it was tiring but I got to explore new things that unleashed amazing new side of my personality for me- I started driving, began living independently without husband's uninterrupted support for the whole week, learned to juggle between managing kids, households, job and social liabilities. In the middle of the week at times, it would all get too much to take and I would long for a break. I was looking forward to my vacation this year as we were going to go back home to Pakistan. But then Covid-19 happened, and the entire scenario changed from office to home, meetings to isolation, and gatherings to social distancing! 18th of March marked the day lock down started in Malaysia, and the public responded well. All precautionary measures were ensured, and the situation got under control.

In the beginning, it was all so swift that it was hard to make sense of what was happening. Work-from-Home (WFH) became the new normal. Online classes and e-learning became the norm. Trying to comprehend the situation, it was the much-needed break for me, a blessing in disguise. What I have learned - the only thing that is certain is change, and nature has the absolute power; humans are adaptable beings; and all the things that we have made ourselves dependent on are meaningless in the larger picture. Having realized the lack of gratitude in our attitudes, one thing is certain - the struggle, the frustration, the feeling of helplessness is real, but it will pass eventually. My resilience and optimism assure that.

Dubai, UAE

Dr. Sameera Naureen

At present, I am a general surgeon at Dubai Hospital and a mother of four girls. I would say, I am decently satisfied with the quality of my life, regardless of its busy nature. Around March 2020, an unexpected change made its way into my life. In a blink of an eye, I bore witness to the mass destruction and loss induced by the virulent pandemic. From work place to a countrywide lockdown, my perception of the world's unpredictability has changed forever. With a step into the hospital, an unforgettable surge of insecurity makes its way to you; a part of the pandemic that even a mask would not manage to riddle. Hallways reeked of sorrow as groups of civilians hauled into the ER with complaints of similar symptoms whilst some battled for life in normal wards, revamped into intensive care units. Making my way through the devastating hours had me pondering deeply about the future of our time; the 'new normal'. At a point in which our staff stood at the front line as an army in hazmat suits my head failed to accept the receding hope while I worried for my daughters and relatives. Phone calls from family friends were bustling with worried mothers struggling to contact their loved ones on hospital ventilation.

A lack of Personal Protective Equipment, led to search for alternative distribution methods in aid to myself and my team. "The world is ending", a statement that ran through my head like a song's catchy rhythm as I completed rounds battling hypoxemia under layers and layers of surgical masks. My feelings were no different outside my workplace, as even day-to-day groceries had proven themselves to be a great challenge. Another thought that had occurred to me, regarded how major world issues were silenced in a time of our prospering society, as my mind opened up to just how great of an impact the size of a virus can create upon ourselves. A wise soul once said, "The only source of knowledge is experience." I can conclude that despite the difficult times a surge of wisdom was bestowed upon me, keeping me up on my feet despite all that dragged me into despair. A lesson I hope to share with you all, tackles the necessity of hope and faith, as only in the darkness may we see the stars.

Ontario, Canada

Ms. Shamyle Rizwan Khan
(Clinical Psychologist)

"A flower that blooms in adversity, is the most rare and beautiful of all"
– Fa Zhou, Mulan.

Life and the world as we knew has been redefined for us in the past few months. Human behavior though, as a rule, has kept up its intrigue for me in its display of resilience. The COVID-19 pandemic reduced distractions for many of us here in Canada. The individual came under focus, as the crowds dissolved. Our life, personal resources, struggles, traumas, health, finances, immediate support in family and friends – essentials to living were prioritized; celebrated or mourned, and the luxuries suffered. As a natural consequence of a drastic shift in lifestyle which this pandemic, it was anticipated that people will not only suffer in their physical health but also in their mental and social wellbeing. To address and normalize this challenge, the media here in Canada actively highlighted the psychological burden on this virus, and as a regular, news channels would interview mental health professionals on the matter, on the changing trends in client complaints they were coming across, what are the tips they could give the public and people were encouraged to utilize the free mental health helpline made available to them during this global crisis. Financial aid plans were issued by the government here to safeguard the rights of employees and to support those who couldn't support themselves.

Where the material world suffered, societies were forced to look within to find and build personal resources. Taking a look in the mirror, and facing our personal and collective demons, was no longer a choice. A trend that I observed in the individual journey of my clients was mirrored in the social sphere as well. Where initially in the first few weeks of the pandemic, people were anxious and triggered as they could no longer escape the internal or external crisis, staying the course nonetheless brought much clarity and insight into the solutions to their concerns, and hope and resilience started to surface.

Community volunteer organizations in particular have since started projects with a focus on assisting families affected by COVID-19 in any way. People started to step out of the house for exercise and personal care more than usual, all the while maintaining and encouraging safe distance from each other when passing along the path – with a nod and a smile of course ^_^ . The spirit of support was conveyed with bright messages in colored chalk outside houses saying "choose kindness", "have an amazing day", and, "you've got this". The time is certainly unprecedented in its challenge, but it has also helped people to create resources for themselves that they did not see otherwise possible. Even though we're under a large gray cloud, we do get peeks of sunshine – and what's more, we are learning to be grateful for it.

Los Angeles, USA

Ms. Manal Farrukh Khan, M.D.



“Unprecedented”, “public health crisis”, “brought the world to its knees” - These are some of the adjectives and phrases that have been used to describe COVID-19. It is all of these and it is also a pause. A long heavy pause! I am a psychiatry trainee and in my line of work, pauses are not uncommon. A pause typically occurs during a therapy session and it is often accompanied by a pregnant silence that hangs in the air as the patient and I grapple with our discomfort. In these moments of pause, there is trepidation about what will follow. My patient might wrestle with their vulnerability. Should they share? Will I judge? Are they safe? I sit with my own anxiety as I try to predict where they will land. If they choose not to go deeper with me, is that a reflection of my limitation in making them feel safe? I briefly feel disconnected and “other-ized”. I analyze my counter transference, resist the enmeshment, and attempt to contain this pause. Our eyes meet! Who will speak first? Are they testing my ability to tolerate their silence or are they urging me to take the lead? Do I use this as an opportunity to prove my companionship by partnering with them in their moment of distressing silence? Should I stay here, in this moment, with them? I can also “optimally frustrate” by denying their plea (if there is one) for me to take the lead. We can tolerate this pause together! It might be distressing, and we have it in us, to overcome distress.

The pause is not passive, the pause requires deep reflective work, and the pause takes us to uncomfortable places. Similarly, I have experienced COVID-19 as a pause. A pause that challenged how I conceptualize myself. When faced with a real threat, do I march on as a sacrificial lamb or do I selfishly stop and question? What is heroic and who gets to decide that? I am a replaceable resource for the administration, but can I be replaced as a mother? What is important – preserving lives or livelihood? At what point do the lines blur? How did we end up with such exploitative economies? The class and race-based injustices are not a chapter from a history textbook. They are real, rampant, and deadly. Our prejudices do not die even when we are faced with death. Or do they become especially potent when we are faced with death? The pause is fraught with anxiety driven narratives. Why is this happening? Who did this? There must be someone responsible. It is “the other”! The other who is callous! The other who is controlling!

There is trepidation, vulnerability, otherization, a yearning for connection, and an opportunity to overcome. However, as with all pauses, this pause also needs to be contained with compassion first. Compassion that is active, reflective, and creative, compassion that lends resilience through connections, and compassion that will take us forward as we shed the norms of our past.

The pause is pregnant!

Alabama, USA

Dr. Caroline Boxmeyer



In late February 2020, it became clear that COVID-19 was spreading in the United States. I recall being surprised when the first universities announced that their students would not return after Spring Break. A short time later, the university where I work made the same decision. Other leaders and I had to move quickly to address a host of issues. What resources were needed to identify and treat individuals with COVID-19 at our medical center? Could we continue with our normal health care operations? Should medical students and other trainees stay part of the health care team, or shift to remote learning? How could we quickly move all of our courses online? What did our faculty and staff need in order to continue providing health care during a pandemic, while protecting their own health and safety? How would the pandemic affect the university's finances and our financial security? With much hard work, creativity, and flexibility, we worked through each of these issues. Many of us found ourselves working remotely, myself included. I began conducting psychotherapy sessions and participating in meetings via Zoom. My husband started teaching university math courses via Zoom. His talented youth swimmers had to stop training and competing. After their school system worked hard to address equity and access issues, my daughters began participating in school online. Many times, all four of us were on our own video conference at the same time. My husband and I began going on long walks every morning.

The new stay-at-home schedule became a welcome relief. It was nice to not rush or drive as much as usual. It was a gift to have more time to spend with my loved ones and in nature, where I always feel most at home. At the same time, I felt guilty that I was safe at home while many of my colleagues were risking exposure every day. I also worried for those who were socially isolated. Although my family's daily sphere of operations narrowed in so many ways, it also felt much more expansive. I became more intimately aware of the interconnection of all beings and had more time and space to practice deep gratitude. At the same time, I knew that I had this opportunity because of my privilege. I worried about those who were already experiencing the health and financial impacts of the pandemic. As the pandemic continued into the summer months, we faced difficult decisions, such as whether to travel to visit grandparents as planned. Our daughters grieved the cancellation of sports seasons, summer camps, church activities and seemingly everything they had to look forward to. Despite these losses, our daughters were incredibly resilient. They undertook many creative projects and found new ways to entertain themselves. There has been a lot of screen time too. More time at home consuming social media led to a greater understanding of the racial and health inequities in this country.

Now, we are facing the unfortunate reality that the pandemic has not been well-managed in the United States. Over 140,000 Americans have died and 3.8 million have been infected with COVID-19. We grieve each of these losses, as well as the businesses that have closed or are on life support. Hope for returning to in-person school and work this Fall is receding, as COVID-19 cases continue to rise. Whenever "normal" does return, my hope is that it is a "new normal," with increased appreciation for slowness, creativity, connection, our earthly home, and all of the beings who share it.

Boston, USA

Dr. Saeeda Khanum



I moved to Boston, Massachusetts in December 2019, along with my husband and children to pursue postdoctoral fellowship at the Psychology Department, Harvard University. Initially we got adjusted pretty well as it was my third trip to Boston and nothing was new. At the end of February, we started getting messages from the Harvard administration to start working from home due to COVID-19. Being abroad with children, doing scientific work, while being a house-maker responsibility had complicated scenarios to deal with. COVID-19 has impacted my life at various levels, including personal self, as a mother of younger kids, as a house maker, as a scientist and as a professional.

As a scientist we usually bring kids in the lab and conduct experiments with them but I had to restructure the whole process starting from the thought of planning and designing experiments until conducting experiments online. I had to learn various skills and methods to plan, design experiments online so that experiments could be conducted online following all Ethical procedures with children which would be enjoyable as well. It was daunting in every way to conduct studies online with children following all the given guidelines. I am still working on it but overall, for scientist progress in research became very slow due to change of scenario, methodologies which even in some cases end up in failed experiments.

Being a mother, I had to re-visit all activities (nurturing, educational, play, socialization, outdoor) for my children in such a way that children would be least impacted from the indirect effects and stress of COVID-19. Parks in Boston are locked, classes are online for kids which are not enjoyable at all for the. They can no longer engage in their preferred outdoor activities. So inevitably, they have been complaining of boredom. The extreme Boston weather takes further toll on everything. Questions from kids like "When am I going to school and meet friends? When will the coronavirus end and we will go into parks?" with no certain answers make you mindful of responding in such a way that it wouldn't stress them further. Another aspect of COVID-19 is that kids started learning online about the science of viruses and safety measures which is a huge natural experiment in itself.

Children will never forget these experiences as life in a different culture challenged them in all respects. Professionally, many activities like seminars, talks, conferences were open online but definitely way different and less social than they used to be in real life. Moreover, scheduling the tasks in such a way that each role does not clash with other, was immensely difficult. As a house maker, I have gone through a time when I used to go into grocery stores and everything was gone already, early in the morning and it seemed that life needed to be adapted as minimalist. Boston is a very expensive city in all aspects and even funding seems scarce given the hype in all kinds of prices. In addition, my aspiration of doing few things for development of discipline of Psychology in Pakistan and some educational reform for children education desperately needed in Pakistan, got compromised. Overall, trying to keep balance in all of your roles being a woman and mother put you in a very stressful scenario where you are responsible for many things at the same time and each day brought new challenges for which you were not prepared yet.

Alabama, USA

Ms. Amna Salman

I have been living in the United States for the last 13 years. I live in a small university town called Auburn near Atlanta. My husband and I both teach at the university and have three kids together. Dealing with the unforeseen challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a significant toll on people all across the world. The situation was very similar here in Auburn, AL. My husband had many travel plans during the spring 2020 semester so I had asked my mom to come and stay with us and help me out with the kids. Little did we know that all of us would be at home for indefinite time. Initially, all non-essential jobs were directed to be done remotely. Therefore, I moved to online teaching through Zoom, which was interesting. The actual challenge for me was keeping up with kids' online schooling. The first few days were very frustrating with every grade using different management system; however, we got through it!

If I look back at my normal day in the pre-COVID-19 era, I realize how extremely busy our lives were. With kids' school and work, we had kids swimming as after school activity every day. Most mothers in the US have a similar routine serving several roles: a mom, wife, partner, housecleaner, chauffeur, referee, nurse, psychologist, chefs etc. It is hard to find a balance between kids' extracurricular activities and finding time for yourself. COVID-19 has really slowed down our lives and I like it. I especially enjoyed Ramadan with no after parties and nowhere to go to. We made a small masjid in the house and prayed together. My sons took turns in giving the Azaan. We are continuing this tradition since my kids wanted to pray together even after the Ramadan. I had never imagined parenting under these circumstances but it is allowing us to connect with our family members and make some precious memories. Therefore there is still hope, all is not yet lost in 2020.

The schools are preparing to open again after summer. They have given us two options: in-person and remote learning. With the number of COVID-19 cases rising rapidly in the United States, we are opting for remote learning since this is an uncharted territory and there is no blue print for correct answers. As parents, we are all trying to navigate the line between providing support, structure, and stability for our kids while remaining calm and flexible given our changing circumstances. Despite the many challenges caused by COVID-19, I wish and pray that families come out of the pandemic even stronger and more connected than before.

COVID-19 and the Department of Behavioral Sciences

-Muhammad Ali Ilyas

The spread of the pandemic has significantly impacted the world in almost every sphere of life. Economies are struggling and societies are attempting to find ways to connect without compromising safety. The world of psychotherapy has also been significantly impacted by COVID-19. Teletherapy, which was not as widespread pre-pandemic as it is now, has really taken off and various organizations have been created worldwide to aid teletherapy. In Pakistan, teletherapy has become popular, with organizations and private practitioners now shifting their focus towards connecting with people through online platforms and entrepreneurs are getting in on the action by trying to come up with marketing innovations that help make teletherapy more accessible. The Department of Behavioral Sciences, NUST has been introducing professionals into the field of therapy since 2015, when the first batch graduated. As an alumnus myself, I have been working for almost a year and I have been running an online platform where I attempt to connect potential clients seeking therapy with therapists, provide psycho-education and advocate for mental health causes.

I started practicing under supervision right before the pandemic and I viewed a significant shift in my client's and the way I was working. Since the country went into lockdown, I started receiving more and more requests from individuals who were looking for psychotherapy services. To me, it seemed as though it was a large burden on a virtually disorganized mental health system. I also noticed that people had a lot of similar questions that needed to be addressed. Based on themes of the questions I was being asked, I started using my online platform to answer those questions by putting up detailed posts and some video content as well. The audience I was engaging with provided positive feedback on the bits of psychoeducation that I was sharing. There are many individuals who are doing the same thing online and I would imagine they have collectively helped educate many people out there. My only concern about psychoeducation online is that it can be very hard to understand the nuance of a statement someone may make online; I believe over time, we will start learning how to be even more effective communicators to our audience. I asked some other alumni from DBS about what their thoughts were on the nature of psychological struggles have the people that you've been working with faced in the wake of COVID-19, their views on psycho-education through social media and what would they say to someone whose life has been significantly impacted by the pandemic? Here's what they had to say:

Reflecting on her experiences, so far, Ms. Shamyle Rizwan Khan shared:

"In my practice, the three larger themes that emerged as client concerns during this current pandemic are, relationship with self, boundaries with others, and general grief as a consequence of change. In the face of these unexpected challenges and triggers, a majority of clients were able to develop insight and experience breakthroughs in their personal narratives during counseling. Even though these weren't always pleasant realizations to acknowledge that their existing patterns of behaviors are not healthy, they led to developing a more resilient perspective for clients - that if they were to turn inward in introspection, they were able to arrive at workable solutions to the problems in their life. I also experienced a noticeable increase in the number of people reaching out for mental health support during this time, with reasons ranging from goals of symptom treatment to improving quality of life.

As a collective, we share a complex power dynamic with social media. The influence any social trend or personality carries is amplified in our lives because of the intimate use of social media in an average individual's life. To use this power for the purpose of education only, would be a utopian dream. To use this power for the purpose of education as well, however, is fairly achievable.

As a consumer of educational content on social media, and now an active psycho-educational content developer, I have experienced an incremental increase in the ease with which people now approach psychological, mental health and wellbeing topics. This has started to make cracks in the stigma which encapsulates the subject of mental health in our community. By educating and influencing at least the individual minds, if not masses; this has started to give way to a ripple effect furthering the cause of psychological wellbeing.

With awareness, comes autonomy. Choose to pause amidst disruption. Look around you and within yourself, and observe the change that is happening in your life. Identify and name what you see and what you feel. Once you know what qualities and resources you have inside yourself and, on the outside, you will have identified not only what unique challenges you are faced with, but also what tools you possess to build your life forward.”

Based on her interactions, Ms. Sumbal Gilani added:

“One of the major area of struggle that was actively reported in people, who I have worked with, during this difficult time was the sudden change in concept of normalcy as they knew it which resulted in a profound sense of lack of control and vulnerability. This state triggered/renewed/uncovered a lot of deeply rooted psychological traumas & conflicts for them. These people found themselves in midst of intense emotional reactions and irate thought spirals of which they were unable to make sense. Their existing coping skills and modes of distraction did not work with their confinement during lockdowns, rather they felt oddly exposed and face to face with the difficult stuff that they had been dodging efficiently up till now. Thus resulting in relational issues leading to domestic violence & existential crisis in some cases.

While, I believe mental health has definitely found visibility thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic, people have started acknowledging their internal struggles openly and with the large amount of informational material available online it has become easier for them to understand their struggles better. But I do have reservations on how and by whom this information is being imparted. Because of the sensitive nature of information of psychological concepts and its profound impact all professionals have to be mindful of the information they are giving and how the audience may perceive it. Thus there is a strong need for mindful content creation and consistent disclaimers to educate people on the entire phenomena that mental health is & not just the fact that they have to seek help. Furthermore, the ‘whom’ part may also have repercussions for certain clinicians as the content out there may be contradictory and further mislead people.

If this person comes to me for therapy I may follow this road. Keeping all things in mind (the intensity of their loss or distress during the pandemic) I will validate what they are experiencing as their feelings and thoughts have a significant meaning in how they manifest themselves. I will encourage them to talk (if they are at that point) about their experience. And I would tell them that no matter how difficult it seems but this distress is an opportunity to look within and to address the discomfort by enhancing your coping skills. I will guide them on the emotional reactions and how they manifest during trying times so that they are able to gain the feeling of control over themselves and then help them explore the deeper parts of their personality.”

Summarizing his experience, Mr. Syed Ali Abbas Qasim Shah shared his observation:

“It a tough experience. It may be a mix of financial problems and emotional concerns. It gets worse when we find ourselves alone in the process. The experience can’t be put into words and there may not be one strategy that might release you/us from this. There is however, conviction to go forward, as you, who is reading this article is already showing - by reading; and there is hope which is a state of mind whereby you may have some plans, expectations and/ or goals of the future, though there may be more uncertainty now than before. This, in itself, has carved a path of recovery and growth for people in the past.

Please practice patience, look within yourself for your capacities and your abilities; extend compassion, help and support towards yourself and towards others; and if it is getting very challenging, please seek help. Taking help is a sign of courage and persistence, and you have that spark inside you. We are together hoping it gets better, some of us are invested in preventing things from going worse (wearing masks or on the front-line helping people); if you can may be look in this direction as well.”

Reflecting on her experience, Ms. Sabaenah Salim shared:

“This situation warranted a drastic lifestyle change where people struggled with being stuck inside with blurred lines between personal, familial, and professional aspects of life. I observed the highlight for the individuals was to adjust to the Work from home (WFH) situation whereby they were required to manage work routines while also attending to familial responsibilities. Children and adolescents reported experiencing major difficulties while adjusting to online academic setup. The political policies along with socioeconomic factors also generated a sense of uncertainty, fear, and frustration amongst the masses. Together, these factors led most people to experience strong pervasive emotions of loneliness, sadness, hopelessness, helplessness, and anxiousness. Similarly, in the clinical setting, my clients reported experiencing intensified emotions of loneliness, hopelessness, anxiety, and panic in addition to what they were already experiencing; some even ended up relapsing to a previous mental state. Overall, coping was more difficult for the ones already suffering from chronic mental health issues.

I am a staunch supporter of psycho-education and promotion of mental health awareness through any medium as long as it is being provided by responsible and qualified individuals. Social media has an excellent outreach in modern times, hence, its impact is widespread and profound. I have come across multiple webinars being conducted globally by professionals for free, which I consider is an excellent trend. Some forums have also put in hard work to bridge the gap in the system by providing direct access to mental health professionals through arranging Q&A sessions. However, I am concerned about the authenticity of some written material provided in the form of quotes and models which lack a scientific basis and are a product of pop-psychology. Some content I have come across is binary, directive, and generalized; it can potentially misinform the readers. I have also witnessed multiple unqualified individuals representing the field of mental health which worries me greatly. I strongly believe that with this trend on the rise, as mental health practitioners, we need a regulatory system that can at least screen for these factors in the materials before its release on social media forums.

I feel the audience of this question is wide and even includes all of us professionals. Something that greatly helps in uncertain times like these is focusing on the factors we can control instead of those which we cannot. It is understandable if we end up feeling helpless, confused, frustrated, or insecure in these are unprecedented times. However, the key here is to accept our limitations and focus on all the things we still can do. Practicing gratitude, focusing on yourself, and making the best of this time would not only help us in sustaining our lives but also greatly impact our wellbeing. It is important to remember that this state is temporary and it will be over in due time. Lastly, doing all the above-mentioned points becomes easier if we introduce discipline in our lives and follow routines, which act as a backbone to our day. All in all, we are in this together, as a global community and staying positive and hopeful is essential.”

Quarantined-at-Home Teaching Experience: My E-Learning Plan and Implementation

-Dr. Azher Hameed Qamar

A worldwide outbreak of Covid-19 has brought radical changes in social, educational, economic, and healthcare systems across the globe. Amid the Covid-19 outbreak, on 13 March 2020, the Pakistan government ordered to close all public/private schools, colleges and universities. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan, urged and supported universities to go online to continue the academic year as planned. HEC emphasized using digital platforms and developing (or maintaining) the Learning Management System (LMS) to support online education. LMS, as a learning tool, is a mobile-friendly platform to manage, regulate, and operate educational activities including content, assignments, quizzes and recorded lectures. In this regard, the Virtual University of Pakistan (a recognized higher education body, providing e-learning since 2002) is supporting universities. The decision made HEC to shift to online classes received mixed feedback, however, only the top universities with the required infrastructure (such as existing and operationalized LMS) could launch a quality online education. In this context, in line with university guidelines and available support, I initiated my e-learning plan based on blended learning and led by the core objectives to maintain accessibility and quality. I used common and easily available options to enhance two-way teacher-student communication. The situation I was facing, to maintain a reasonable connection between formal (regular) and online learning, I opted to use synchronous online format and asynchronous format simultaneously. I considered Active engagement, Cognitive satisfaction, Time management and Shared understanding (ACTS) as the core objectives that led my blended learning format and ensure active learning (figure 1). I started working with two basic thoughts in my mind. First, the lecture format and teaching method should be familiar to all students that they have already experienced during regular classes. Second, I should provide them multiple options to watch, download, and attend the course content at their ease. To meet the core objectives of blending learning, I formulated the following e-learning plan (Table 1)

Table 1. E-learning plan of blended learning during quarantined-at-home teaching

	Synchronous online format	Asynchronous format
Interactivity	MS Team (Live) *, Chat Box	MS Team, LMS, Email
Instructions	MS Team (Live), Chat Box	Email, LMS
Language	Bilingual (English-Urdu)	English
Lecture/Discussion	MS Team (Live), Chat Box	LMS, YouTube, Blog, MS-Team
Questions	MS Team (Live), Chat Box	MS-Team, Email, Blog
Feedback	MS Team (Live), Chat Box	MS-Team, Email, LMS
Assessment	MS Team (Live) participation, On-line quizzes during the class	On-line assignments

*Microsoft Team (Live Audio Talk)

My e-learning implementation plan (figure 2) worked well and I received positive feedback. All my video lectures uploaded on YouTube were in the English language. I taught them how to use YouTube 'open transcript' option to read and copy the lecture transcript. To facilitate more, I uploaded PowerPoint slides on LMS and MS-Team. ACTS, which I focused as my core objectives to lead my blended learning format, helped me to plan and implement e-learning for undergraduate students in line with university and HEC instructions.

Departmental Highlights

National Conference on Qualitative Psychology was first of its kind in Pakistan to showcase qualitative research geared towards integrated solutions considering Sustainable Development Goals. The event provided opportunity to 150 researchers, scholars and academicians across the country to promote interdisciplinary qualitative research to find evidence-based and contextualized solutions of the social issues (such as health, hygiene, quality of education, social harmony etc). Eminent professionals in the field of social sciences attended the conference, and appreciated the platform provided by Department of Behavioral Sciences (NUST) in finding real time solutions to psychosocial and societal problems.

Addressing the occasion, the keynote speaker Dr. Zulfiqar Gillani (Consultant HEC) emphasized the significance of the scholarly qualitative research for understanding behaviors in the given context. This helps to provide “meaning” to behaviors which remains narrow by taking quantitative approaches to research. He was appreciative of NCQP 2020 as a brave step towards bringing much needed interdisciplinary qualitative research in focus and showcasing the researches conducted in Pakistani sociocultural context.





Pro-rector NUST, Dr. Asif Raza highlighted the importance of in-depth evidence-based research and urged academia to take qualitative research for providing human-centered solution-oriented approach. He appreciated that the Department of Behavioral Sciences (S³H) has made a significant contribution in promoting quality research at NUST.

Dr. Ashfaque Hasan Khan (Principal S³H) mentioned the need of qualitative research for effective evidence-based policy making. He expressed his pride and appreciation for DBS for organizing a conference that pioneered the promotion of interdisciplinary qualitative research in Pakistan.



Dr. Salma Siddiqui, Head of Department Behavioral Sciences and the chief organizer of the conference stressed upon the scholarly value of qualitative research. She narrated the significance of qualitative research to understand human behaviors and underlying psychosocial issues in its contextual and structural depth.



After the inaugural session, the conference formally moved towards scientific sessions for scholarly discourse on qualitative research inquiry for indigenous problems. Forty (40) research papers (selected after blind review of 100 submitted papers) were presented in three parallel scientific sessions that were segregated based on research methods used in these papers (that is, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Thematic Analysis, and Focus Group Discussion and Systematic Reviews). The esteemed researchers shared indigenous, contextualized, interdisciplinary and research-based perspectives on myriad of social issues and behavioral problems. Presenters uplifted the importance of qualitative research methods for solution to socio-cultural issues and challenges. Six eminent professionals (Dr. Syeda Shahida Batool, Dr. Urusa Fahim, Ms. Saima Qamar, Dr. Nighat Gilani, Dr. Farah Khalid, and Dr. Najma Sadiq) chaired the morning and afternoon sessions.



After the successful completion of scientific sessions, a panel discussion on Interdisciplinary Qualitative Research in Pakistani Social Context was carried out. Panelists included Dr. Azher Hameed Qamar (Moderator), Dr. Urusa Fahim, Dr. Syeda Shahida Batool, and Dr. Adnan Khan. Panelist had a constructive discussion on researchers' need to bracket their presumptions, true sense of process of analysis, and human-centered research grounded in social and cultural context.

The concluding session was presided by Ms. Ghazala Saifi (MNA, Federal Parliamentary Secretary), who in her address appreciated the researchers for presenting their qualitative studies and stressed the need for cultural research. Moreover, she suggested that researchers should come forward with original research to help find indigenous solutions rather than being influenced by foreign research that is mainly dominated by issues concerning their society. She lauded the efforts of Department of Behavioral Sciences in organizing the conference and providing a platform for much-needed qualitative discourse.





NARDBAN is a talk-series that was initiated by the Department of Behavioral Sciences, earlier this year. The intention was to provide a safe space to all those willing to talk about their struggles and challenges. So that together we can create the intelligence and resource which helps us thrive despite adversity. We believe that we are the beacon of change and when the conditions do not change, we can shift ourselves to overcome and rise above. These sessions are led by Ms. Annum Tanweer and Mr. Muhammad Ali Ilyas . They are both practicing clinical psychologists and esteemed DBS Alumni.



Earlier this year, Prior to the lockdown, NARDBAN conducted sessions on:

1. Relationship management
2. Stress management
3. Active listening
4. What makes a happy life?

These sessions were very well-received, with high participation from students across campus. Now, that students have returned to campus, NARDBAN plans on returning with topics, relevant to current situation, to help engage students all across NUST , while upholding the SoPs.



NUST is committed to creating Inclusive Spaces in Academia. In this spirit, NUST has initiated a series of sensitization trainings for the administrative staff and faculty. The trainings broadly focused on interpersonal communication, the use of language and expression to communicate respect, perspective on gender, why gender-based violence and harassment occurs, what laws exist in Pakistan to prevent it, and how to deal with issues of harassment. Following areas were covered:

1. Academia and administration: promoting equity and inclusiveness in campus
2. Overcoming barriers to effective and respectful communication
3. Gender at Workplace - stereotypes and discrimination
4. Understanding harassment at HEIs (Higher Education Institutes)
5. The Legal Framework on Harassment in Pakistan

These sessions were planned and conducted under the leadership of Dr. Salma Siddiqui, HoD Behavioral Sciences. Other facilitators included Ms. Rehma Hyder (Lecturer Dept. of Govt. & Public Policy), Ms. Maheen (Lecturer Dept. of Devt. Studies), Ms. Khushbakht Sohail (Lecturer Dept. of Govt. & Public Policy), Mr. Imran Nabi (GM PDC) and Mr. Waleed Malik (Program Manager PDC).

FACULTY HIGHLIGHTS

NEW ADDITION TO THE FACULTY

Dr. Siddrah Irfan **Ph.D Psychological Medicine**

Dr. Siddrah Irfan has done her Ph.D in Psychological Medicine from Universiti Putra Malaysia. Her research interest are quantitative research, attachment relationships, cognitive vulnerability and psychological problems among youngsters. She has received trainings in quantitative research methods, mixed method research design, systematic reviews and meta-analysis, advanced statistical analysis, and various quantitative analysis softwares/tools (e.g SPSS, AMOS, Smart PLS, MPLUS and R). In addition to this, she has also done a six months Certificate course in Cognitive Behavior Therapy with hypnosis from London College of Clinical Hypnosis Asia. She has been actively involved in activities related to mental health and research such as delivering lectures on mental health, counselling, organizing workshops on psychological first aid and analysis techniques, and participated in organizing international conference.



FACULTY ACHIEVEMENT

To the utmost pride of the Department of Behavioral Sciences, one of its faculty members, Dr. Saeeda Khanum was accepted at Harvard University on Fulbright Fellowship. She is currently there for her post-doctoral fellowship.

