

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Attitude, Anxiety Level and Psychological Readiness of the Community Residents during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Ras Al Khaimah Emirate: A Cross-Sectional Study

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Positive attitudes and psychological preparedness of community to the prevention of COVID-19 are crucial.

Aim: to assess the public's attitudes, anxiety levels, and psychological readiness during the COVID-19 pandemic in Ras Al Khaimah, United Arab Emirates.

Methods: A Cross-sectional study conducted on a sample of the public of different age groups attending Primary Health Centres from September to December 2020. To recruit the study participants who fulfilled the inclusion criteria, convenience sampling technique was used. Self-made questionnaire was used to measure the level of anxiety, attitude and psychological readiness of the public.

Results: Social media was used as a main source of information about the pandemic by more than two-third of the participants. Over half of the study group had low anxiety level, and more than two third of them had a positive attitude. Concerning psychological readiness about the pandemic, more than two third of the participants were psychologically readied. A positive link was found with a statistically significant difference ($P < 0.05$) between the age of the study participants, their anxiety, attitude and psychological readiness.

Conclusion: A positive correlation was discovered between the study group attitude, anxiety and psychological readiness. Continuous raising the community's awareness and maintaining their attitude regarding COVID-19 prevention, to ensure healthy and positive attitude the introduction and strict implementation of sanctions and regulations are very important to be developed and sustained over time.

Keywords: COVID-19, Anxiety, Psychological readiness, Attitude, Pandemic

INTRODUCTION

A recently discovered corona virus causes an infectious disease COVID-19. (1). As reported to the WHO on December 31, 2019 that a novel corona virus causes respiratory illness in a cluster of people in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China and on January 12, 2020, The World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed. (2). COVID-19 as compared to SARS had a lower ratio of case fatality than in 2003, however the transmission rate it had is much higher and a much higher total death toll (3).

A serious public health disaster is the COVID-19 pandemic, with more than 207, 784, 504 cases confirmed (4). The United Arab Emirates' Ministry of Health and Prevention (MOHAP) (UAE) revealed 1,206 additional coronavirus infections on August 14, 2021, bringing the total number of cases to 700,587. (5).

One of the most serious global challenges in infectious disease management in 2019 is dealing with the new coronavirus (COVID-19). People all over the world are afraid, worried, and anxious because of the COVID-19 and its implications (6, 7). Fear is linked to the rate of transmission of the infectious diseases and medium as well as its morbidity and mortality. Other psychosocial concerns, such as stigmatisation, prejudice, and loss, occur as a result of the pandemic. When reacting to COVID-19 people may not be able to think clearly or rationally, due to high levels of dread and anxiety, (8).

In the society as seen from reported public behaviour anxiety is also reflected, such as hoarding of essential and non-essential items and panic buying (9). The abrupt

lifestyle change, which includes limited travel, self-isolation, social isolation, and working or studying at home, may also contribute to the mental health problems growth (10). Disease-related literacy and attitudes of people in society has shown by evidences, play crucial roles in determining their behaviours and regulating the spread of illness during an outbreak in terms of knowledge and behaviour (11).

However, currently most focus of the treatment of COVID-19 is on control of infection, a high treatment cure rate and an efficient vaccination around the world (12, 13). Assessment of the public attitude, anxiety and psychological readiness is critically important to have a society free of COVID-19 is the holistic goal. It would help in the containment and management of the present epidemic by providing improved insight into disease-related belief gaps.

Understanding the general public's behavioural and psychological effects in this situation could provide significant information to policymakers, allowing for the implementation of population-based educational measures to effectively combat the pandemic. As a result, this research has a purpose of analysing the public's views, psychological preparation, and anxiety levels in the pandemic of COVID-19 in the Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A Cross-sectional study conducted on a sample of the public of different age group attending Primary Health Centres from September to December 2020. RAK Medical & Health Sciences University Research Ethics Committee

approval number: RAKMHSU-REC-250–2020– F–N and Ministry of Health and Prevention Research Ethics Committee/ RAK subcommittee approval reference No: MOHAP/REC/2020/ 43-2020- F- N was obtained to conduct the study. Participants agreed to participate in the study having at least primary education, age eighteen years and above, both male & females and sign the consent form. Those who are working in the medical field with audio and visual problems that prevent communication and were excluded from the study. Participants based on the study criteria were enrolled in the study and after reading the participant information sheet required giving a written informed consent, designed for the study before enrolment.

Self-administered questionnaire developed by the researchers in Arabic and English after reviewing the literatures related to attitude, anxiety and psychological readiness; included the parts: Part I to part-V will be prepared. Data were collected via personal interview and distributing the questionnaire.

Validity: Before using the questionnaire, to assess the validity of its content a preliminary phase was undertaken. Five specialists in the fields of community health and mental nursing were initially requested to analyse how relevant the questionnaires items are and may accurately reflect the public's attitude and anxiety level regarding COVID-19.

Pilot study & reliability: The questionnaire was given to the participants to fill and using Cronbach's alpha test data used to assess internal consistency reliability and the value was 0.601.

Statistical Analysis: The data was analysed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0 that were presented into mean and standard deviation number and percentage. To assess the correlation between the demographic data and attitude, anxiety level and psychological preparedness of the public Pearson's correlation test was used. $P \leq 0.05$ is considered statistically significant.

RESULTS

Table 1: Socio-demographic data of the study group (n= 204)

Variable	Characteristics	n	%
Gender	Male	50	24.5
	Female	154	75.5
Age (years)	18 - < 33	101	49.5
	33 - < 48	85	41.7
	≥ 48	18	8.8
	Mean ± std.	31.13 ± 11.42	
Marital status	Single	93	45.6
	Married	111	54.4
Education	Middle school and below	27	13.2
	Associate's degree	46	22.5
	Bachelor's degree	107	52.5
	Post graduates	24	11.8
Occupation	Governmental	53	26.0
	Private	26	12.7
	Retired	3	1.5
	Unemployed	122	59.8
Nationality	Local	65	31.9
	Non-local	139	68.1

The data of socio-demographic of the study group as shown in table 1, most (75.5%) of the study group were females. Mean age of them 31 with standard deviation 11. More than half (54.4%) married. In addition to level of education, more than half (52.5) had bachelor's degree. For nationality, Non-local (68.1%) while local (31.9%).

The highest sources of information reported by the participant social media (71.1%), internet (63.7%), official websites (56.9%) followed by TV (46.6%), health care workers (38.7%), family and friends (38.2%) while newspaper (35.8%) (Figure 1).

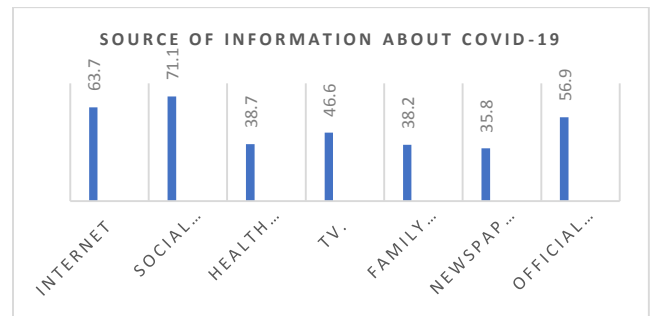


Figure 1: the study group source of information about Covid-19

*More than one answer

The attitude level categorized into two levels, most (70%) of the study group had positive level while (30%) had negative level (Figure 2)

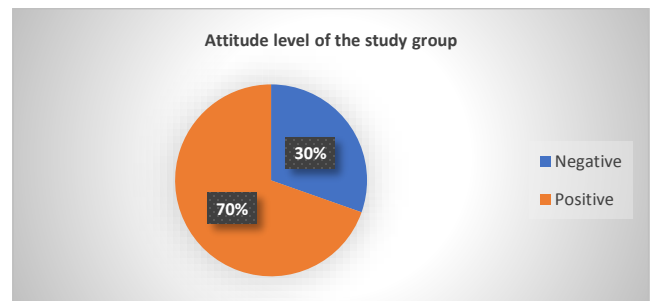


Figure 2: The study group distribution according to their attitude level about Covid-19

Anxiety level categorized into three levels, more than half (56.9%) of the study group had low level, (25.5%) had moderate level while (17.6%) had high level of anxiety (Figure 3).

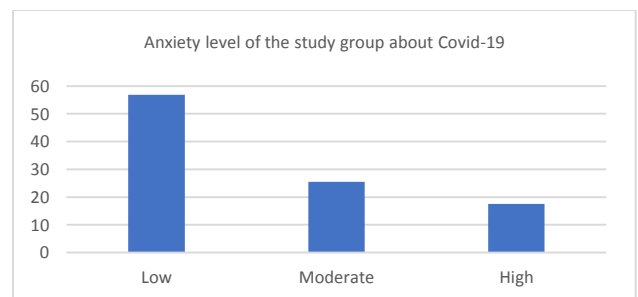


Figure 3: the study group distribution according to their anxiety level about Covid-19

In relation to psychological readiness, most (70.1%) of the study group agreed that it would be helpful to chat to someone about your concerns about the COVID 19 viral

pandemic, and 56.8% agree that getting mental health care is required if one is panicked about the Pandemic situation. (Table 2).

Table 2: Psychological readiness for COVID-19 among the study group

Items	agree		disagree		Not sure	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
It would be nice to talk to someone about your worries for the COVID 19 viral epidemic	143	70.1	41	20.1	20	9.8
It is necessary to get mental health help if one panics of the Pandemic situation	116	56.8	55	27.0	33	16.2

There was a statistically significant difference (P0.001) between the age of the study participants and their anxiety, attitude, and psychological preparation. There was a positive link between the research group's attitude level and their anxiety and psychological preparation with a statistically significant difference (P0.001). While, there was no significant difference statistically between psychological preparedness and anxiety with a positive correlation (Table 3).

Table 3: Correlations between the age, attitude, anxiety and psychological preparedness of the study group

		Anxiety	attitude	Psychological readiness
Age	Pearson Correlation	0.20**	0.20**	0.22**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.004	.001
	Mean \pm std.	51.55 \pm 14.15	26.23 \pm 2.90	3 \pm 1
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	0.18**	0.03
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.008	.660
attitude	Pearson Correlation	0.18**	1	0.17*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008		0.011

**Correlation is significant at \leq 0.001 level. *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

DISCUSSION

The majority were male participants in this research, with a mean age of 31.13 \pm 11.42 years and married were more than half of them. The participants who had a degree of bachelors were more than half. In terms of nationality, around two-thirds of the participants were non-locals. This discovery is consistent with (16), who conducted the study on Pakistani society in different regions revealed that female respondents were more than two-thirds (63 percent) and more than half of them were between the ages of 21 and 30, as well as more than half, had a bachelor's degree (51.5 percent).

Concerning to COVID-19 information sources, the research findings shown that the majority of respondents (71.1%) acquired their information via social media, followed by the internet (63.7%). This finding is similar to (17), who recruited the participant population online through Facebook social media in Taiwan stated that the

social media and internet were the primary sources of COVID-19 information for most of the participants (80%), and due to the pandemic the internet makes more accessible of COVID-19 information, especially for people who are staying indoors. This result also agrees with (18), who conducted a study in Jordan among and private university students and government reported that more than two-thirds (77.1%) of university students got knowledge on COVID-19 through the internet, which includes social media and electronic news websites such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, WhatsApp and YouTube.

The findings are consistent with (19), in an online population survey in China, 97.1 percent of Chinese residents expressed optimism about the Chinese government's ability to limit the pandemic. This was most likely due to the global severity of the COVID-19 epidemic, which may have increased people's concerns. Furthermore, the government's stringent attempts to manage the pandemic have impacted people's life by forcing them to understand the disease and to take mandatory preventive measures. This contradicts the findings of (20), who presented that over half of the participants in an Ethiopian community knowledge and attitude survey had a negative approach to COVID-19 and a positive approach to COVID-19 preventive measures. Also reported, that the degree of education and the size of the family continued to have a major impact on the communities' attitudes toward COVID-19.

According to the current study, more than half of the respondents (56.9%) had a low level of anxiety. This is in agreement with (21), This is also in agreement with (22) who studied anxiety level among multiple sclerosis patients during pandemic times, shown mean anxiety level between them were 5.24 \pm 3.79 indicating that there was no anxiety related to availability of health care especially psychological support, despite the pandemic situation. More than two-thirds (70.1%) of the study group agreed that talking to someone about the covid-19 pandemic concerns is important, and more than half (56.8%) agreed to seek psychiatric help if they are panicked about the pandemic situation. This is in accordance with the findings of (14) who investigated the Indian population's attitude, perceived mental healthcare needs, anxiety, and knowledge, during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that 75% agreed that mental healthcare is vital for individuals. The need for professional aid from mental health specialists to deal with emotional and other psychological concerns was also

emphasised during the pandemic, which was expressed by the majority of the participants (80%). This is in the same line with (23) who conducted a comparative research in Serbia, Lebanon, Italy, and Portugal, and to assess the reactions of the public to the COVID-19 disaster and reported that, there was a positive correlation between age and stress. Emotional behaviour's, depression and stress related to pandemic outbreak (COVID-19) increase with age.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A positive link was found between the anxiety and age, psychological preparedness and attitude with a statistically significant difference among the study group. This study recommended that, continuous raising the community's awareness, and maintaining their attitude regard COVID-19 prevention as well as strict application of punishments and rules, are critical for developing and maintaining a healthy and positive attitude over time.

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