

Pandemic Fatigue: A Challenge in Combatting against COVID-19

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The COVID -19 pandemic has hit the world for a period of a year and a half; it has been a triple crisis, with medical, economic, and psychological consequences (Hoof, E.V., 2020). After 18 months of going through a pandemic, this includes not only facing the transmission of SARS CoV-2 virus but also restricted movements. Communities are now facing pandemic fatigue starting as early as the third wave of increased cases in September 2020 (Gerada, C., 2020). Pandemic fatigue is the stage when the initial enthusiasm and eagerness to tackle the crisis is replaced by feelings of exhaustion (Murphy, J.F.A., 2020). In a simple definition, pandemic fatigue is understood as demotivation to follow recommended protective behaviours (Morrison, M., 2011 & Masten, A.S., 2020). It is a natural and expected reaction to sustained and unresolved adversity in people's lives, evolving gradually over time and affected by several emotions, experiences, and perceptions as well as the cultural, social, structural, and legislative environment (WHO, 2020).

There are several factors and signs of pandemic fatigue. Among the signs of pandemic fatigue is when there is an increase in cases of violation of standard operating procedures (SOPs) implemented by the government (Luqman A.A.K, 2020). Life-career imbalances, limited interactions, and limited social movements in addition to the need to adhere to SOPs in going about daily life have contributed to pandemic fatigue. The long period of movement control order (MCO) has also led to the occurrence of stress, loss of motivation, and emotional disturbances (Siti, M.Z., 2020). In a recent study which analysed the pandemic fatigue level in the community, adherence to SOPs and government directives, emotional stress, career-family conflict, and physical risks experienced by the public during the pandemic period, it was shown that 62.5% of respondents experienced pandemic fatigue at an alarming rate (Zakaria, S.M., 2021). The symptoms of pandemic fatigue involve emotional stress leading to sleep disturbances, labile mood, and burnout. Imbalance between family life and career commitments was very much affected too during the pandemic. Working from home (WFH) sometimes lead to long hours of working without limit. Children need to continue on with hybrid or online teaching. These create an environment transforming home into workplaces and schools, which to a certain extent reduced the quality of life and family time.

We are now still in the pandemic mitigation phase. The government has set two main strategies in combatting the pandemic; namely through public health interventions and achieving community immunity through vaccination. Public health interventions and COVID-19 vaccine will help curb the spread of the epidemic. But at the same time, pandemic fatigue also needs to be curbed so that society can survive in the crisis facing the country. Public health interventions with new norms practices such as movement control, physical distancing practices including avoiding crowded and crowded gatherings, and the wearing of face masks are still essential. New hope came with the availability of vaccines and vaccination programs that are expanding (Zakaria, S.M., 2021). However, while waiting for the full impact of vaccines and vaccination programs to providing community immunity, the public still need to deal with new norms and public health interventions. This long journey will impose the public towards pandemic fatigue; adherence to protective behaviour still needs to be observed to avoid flouters (Bador, A.H., 2021). Therefore, the government needs to take certain steps and strategies in ensuring that the public will not be affected too much by pandemic fatigue. The government must take the lead to assist public health authorities to conduct interventions in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. We cannot afford having too many violators and flouters to the programs and SOPs.

World Health Organization suggested few strategies to maintain and reinvigorate public support and to overcome the pandemic fatigue. These must be informed by public health, societal, cultural, and economic considerations, and must ensure that no one is left behind (WHO, 2020). First, is to understand the people by collecting and using evidence for targeted, tailored, and effective policies, interventions, and communication. Second is by engaging people as part of the solution, finding ways to involve individuals and communities at every level. Third, by allowing people to live their lives but reduce risk; considering the wide-ranging restrictions may not be feasible for everyone in the long run. And finally, acknowledging the hardship people experience and the profound impact the pandemic has had on their lives.

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