

Fear and Anger in the Time of Covid-19

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Abstract

While Covid-19 is still shrouded in an aura of unknowability, unpredictability and epidemiological uncertainty, it is all the more true that the implications and consequences of the pandemic and the restrictive measures on the scale of basic emotions are equally unknown and incomprehensible. This systematic review aims precisely to explore this phenomenon in order to identify the possible consequences on the dynamics that bind people.

Keywords: Covid-19 – Emotion – Fear – Anger

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic seems to have given a sudden acceleration to that social change already theorized by Zygmunt Bauman in *Liquid Modernity* of 2000 based on the idea of perpetual change in which the only certainty is uncertainty. A change that moves in the direction of what Ulrich Beck in *Metamorphosis of the world* of 2016 has defined metamorphosis: an all-encompassing, unintentional, nor ideological change that imposes itself inexorably on everyday life, with a tremendous acceleration that burns over time the existing possibilities of thinking and acting. And whose outcome seems indefinable, like an unknown, unknown territory. As Alain Touraine wrote in *Unnouveau paradigme. Pour comprendre le monde d'aujourd'hui* of 2005, we live in a contemporaneity marked by the end of society, the rupture of social ties, loneliness, the crisis of identities, free from obligations of belonging and imposed rules. On the other hand, if Bauman's liquidity and the end of Touraine society tell of the bewilderment, unease and disintegration of consciences induced by the drift of modernity, perceived as a perpetual crisis, according to the sociologist Carlo Bordonì, part of this change was caused by the pandemic by Covid-19 which only accelerated its dynamics (Bordonì, 2020).

The main indicator of this change, to which the Sars-Cov-2 has impressed so much acceleration, is the rediscovered centrality of the State (as the producer of the rules and regulations necessary for social control and the prevention of risky behaviour in the name of the protection of public health), science (as the source of reliable, valid and verifiable knowledge and truths) and the Community (compared to a multitude of individuals animated by anger and aggression, greedy and prone to indiscriminate exploitation of possibilities). Along the lines of Max Weber, we could say that the pandemic from Covid-19 acting as a powerful and extraordinary accelerator element, has contributed to the ongoing change in the direction of “a nascent state”, of a new time, of an emerging condition that, however, as any change simultaneously produces disorientation and restlessness, fear and anger.

The appearance on the world scene of the pandemic has therefore determined effects, consequences and implication on the sphere of human relations and on the functioning of social systems, which have destabilized the balance, putting at risk its maintenance. The entire dramaturgical structure already described by Ervin Goffman in *The presentation of self in everyday life* of 1959 seems to have been deeply disturbed and subverted. It seems legitimate to maintain that the Covid-19 pandemic acted as a slanting factor, rather than a causal factor, of emotional phenomena such as anger, fear, anguish.

This confirms what Bauman argued in *Retrotopia* in 2017 that an ancient and deep process of social retreat in the tribal sense is underway, where stigma and aversion to the “unequal” and to the foreigner operate in the direction of a progressive social disintegration. The effects of this process seem to have momentarily shifted from the more properly political plane of globalization processes to the more specifically relational and social one.

The fear of immigrants has become the fear of contagion, anger against foreigners translates into anger against offenders of restrictions and containment measures; social condemnation of the different is transformed into stigma and relative marginalization of the plague-spreader. This according to psycho-social dynamics that identify the high

morbidity and mortality of the pandemic a powerful detonator of our uncertainties and vulnerabilities, widespread and indistinct, that Bauman in *Liquid fear* of 2006 has synthesized in the concept of “fear”.

2. The research: a systematic review

This work investigates the fear and anger triggered by psycho-social discomfort induced by Covid-19 pandemic and its social and economic consequences, through a systematic review of the most current scientific evidence on the subject.

2.1 Method

The systematic review was carried out in January-August 2020. The inclusion criteria adopted are attributable to the principle of the sociological relevance of the problem under investigation and to the relevance of scientific evidence (Ruggeri, 2010, pp. 109-121; Giarelli, Venneri, 2009, pp. 148-152; Sala *et al.*, 2006). The research, using the terms “fear”, “angry”, “Covid-19” (combined through the boolean operators OR and AND), has been carried out in the following databases:

- EBSCOhost Research Databases and, specifically, SocINDEX with Full Text e Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection;
- Pubmed.gov della US National Library of Medicine del National Institut of Health;
- Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews of Cochrane Library.

The inclusion criteria adopted were:

- research focus: fear and anger at the time of Covid19;
- reference years of publications: 2020 (to assess scientific evidence specifically related to Covid-19);
- independent scientific literature at international level;
- work in English.

2.2 Results

This has allowed the selection of 125 international studies that have been subjected to preliminary analysis of abstracts which led to a total of 57 studies analyzed in full text. This subsequent phase of analysis led to a further selection of studies, resulting in a total of 20 studies (Table 2)¹. The research fosus has been further defined and refined through the use of the P&PICO method and the complementary Facet analysis (Table 1)².

Table 1 - Specification of the initial question and definition of the research scope: from the P&PICO method to the Facet analysis system

	Population	Problem	Comparison and approach	Outcome
P&PICO	General population	Covid-19, contagion, anger, fear, stigmatization, prejudice	Analysis and discussion of the main results of the evidence considered, with the approach of Grounded theory	Coping strategies, adequate information, management of emotions, compliance with behavioural norms of prevention, State intervention

¹Unexpectedly or perhaps predictably, exploratory research revealed a research focus relation to the phenomena of domestic violence and suicide. Therefore, the studies identified have become part of the analysis of the present review in order to enucleate further dimensions of understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation.

² For the definition of the initial question, reference was made to the P&PICO methodology (Problem & patient, intervention, control outcome) which allows to summarize the process of specification of the clinical question. The PICO method, which in this case has been adapted to the specific theme, requires the preliminary specification of two questions. The first, clinical: what interests me (negative emotions, anger, fear, consequences in terms of personal and public well-being, etc.)? The second, methodological: whit respect to the initial question, what is the most appropriate study design? (Sala *et al.*, 2006). Instead, the system of Facet Analysis, once identified and systematized the essential concepts of the research question, has allowed to widen and deepen further the scope of analysis (Hjorland, 2013).

<i>Facet Analysis</i>	<i>Vulnerability</i>	<i>Sars-Cov-2</i>	<i>Growing awareness of contagion risks</i>
	<i>Emotions</i>	<i>Pandemic</i>	<i>Safe behaviors</i>
	<i>Anger</i>	<i>Vaccine</i>	<i>Test</i>
	<i>Fear</i>	<i>Risk of contagion</i>	<i>Coping strategies</i>
	<i>Sadness</i>	<i>Perception of risk</i>	<i>Educational policies</i>
	<i>Disgust</i>	<i>Personal protective equipment</i>	<i>Multidisciplinary support teams</i>
	<i>Happiness</i>	<i>Social distancing</i>	<i>Information</i>
	<i>Reactions to distress from Covid19</i>	<i>Isolation</i>	<i>Media</i>
	<i>Social relations</i>	<i>Quarantine</i>	<i>Institutions</i>
	<i>Individual well-being</i>	<i>Solitude</i>	<i>Social media</i>
	<i>Collective well-being</i>	<i>Economic crisis</i>	<i>Police forces</i>
	<i>Public health</i>	<i>Job loss</i>	<i>Social services</i>
	<i>Domestic violence</i>	<i>Impoverishment</i>	<i>Health care</i>
	<i>Women</i>	<i>Addictions</i>	
<i>Children</i>	<i>Alcohol abuse</i>		
<i>Suicidal behaviour</i>			

In this way, the review of the studies, consistent with the Cochrane method, and in line with the principles of the Grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 1990; Glaser and Strauss, 2012), has allowed to:

- immediately restore the phenomenological complexity of the research focus;
- lay the foundations for a theoretical sensitivity analytical structure;
- maximize the logic of discovery.

Table 2 - Synopsis of the studies analysed

Authors	Objectives	Type of study	Participants	Dimensions investigated	Conclusions
Torales <i>et al.</i> , 2020	Analysis of the effects of the Covid19 pandemic on people's relational well-being	Systematic review	24 scientific studies	Effects of the pandemic on people's psychological and social well-being	The study suggests that the attention of government authorities around the world, focusing on the most closely epidemiological and clinical data, is neglecting the effects of the disease on psycho-well-beingsocial of people with the risk that the pandemic may evolve into emerging problems of health isolation, conflict and long-term stigma
Trnka, Lorenc, 2020	Analysis of the psycho-social reactions of the pandemic from Covid-19	Survey	1000 participants	Relationship between pandemic, anger and fea	The study shows a significant positive correlation between the consequences of the pandemic and emotional reactions related to anger and fear
Lwinet <i>al.</i> , 2020	Exploring trends of fear, anger, sadness and joy in social media narratives during the Covid-19 pandemic	Analysis of tweets through Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions	Over 20 million tweets	Relationship between protective measures and emotions such as anger and fear	According to the study, the most widespread public emotions during the pandemic were fear and anger. Fear seems to be linked to the unavailability of protective equipment, tests and targeted therapies while anger has shifted from the field of xenophobia to that of isolation provisions
Cerbaraet <i>al.</i> , 2020	Analysis of the correlation between social distancing and	Web-survey	140.656 participants	Relationship between negative emotions and primary needs	The study shows the existence of links between negative emotions and primary needs as a result of the Covid-19

	isolation and negative emotions				pandemic worldwide
Del Carmen Pérez-Fuentes <i>et al.</i> , 2020	Analysis of the effects of exceptionally stressful situations, such as the current health risk, on the cognitive and emotional state of the individual	Cross-sectional study	1014 participants	Relationships between perceived threat and negative emotions	The study shows a circular relationship between perceived threat and negative mood and, in turn, between negative mood increased feeling of threat
Taleviet <i>al.</i> , 2020	Analysis of the effects of the pandemic from Covid-19 on people's mental well-being	Systematic review	15 scientific studies	Relationship between risk perception and maladaptive behavior, emotional distress and defensive responses	The results confirm the existence of a relationship between anger and fear and the perception of a state of vulnerability
Vinkers <i>et al.</i> , 2020	Analysis of the psycho-social disorientation induced by the pandemic and the role of resilience	Narrative reviews	13 scientific studies	Relation between Covid-19 and social resilience	According to the study, the pandemic, which has generated individual and collective disturbance in the social system, requires a collective effort to restore social control dynamics in the direction of a new general socialization
Brooks <i>et al.</i> , 2020	Analysis of anger and post-traumatic stress symptoms	Systematic review	24 scientific studies	Relationship between restrictive measures and anger	Most negative emotions seem to be correlated with restrictions of freedoms to control contagion
Shanahan <i>et al.</i> , 2020	Analysis of the emotional discomfort caused by Covid-19	Cohort study	768 participants	Relationship between anger, perceived stress and pandemic	Pre-Covid-19 emotional discomfort emerges as the strongest predictor of emotional discomfort during the pandemic, followed by economic and psychosocial pandemic stress (e.g. lifestyle and economic disturbances) and pre-pandemic social despair and stress
Bezerra <i>et al.</i> , 2020	Analysis of the consequences of the pandemic from Covid-19 on the social well-being of people	Web-survey	16.440 participants	Relationship between restrictive measures and anger	According to the study there is a positive correlation between restrictive measures and social isolation and anxiety and anger, frustration and family conflicts
Roeschet <i>al.</i> , 2020	Analysis of domestic violence following the pandemic from Covid-19	Systematic review	14 scientific studies and report	Relationship between domestic violence and psycho-social stress	The psycho-physical stress, fear and anger induced by economic and social crises following events such as epidemics, conflicts and humanitarian disasters leads to an exponential increase in family violence in the world
Marques	Analysis of	Systematic	40	Relationship	The psycho-physical stress,

<i>et al.</i> , 2020	domestic violence following the pandemic from Covid-19	review	scientific studies	between domestic violence and fear and aggression	fear and anger induced by the pandemic and its consequences leads to an increase in aggression and abuse against women and children
Voraet <i>al.</i> , 2020	Study of the consequences of the pandemic from Covid-19 on the phenomenon of domestic violence	Systematic review	10 scientific studies and report	Relationship between domestic violence and fear and aggression	Psycho-physical stress, pandemic-induced fear and anger, along with alcohol abuse and addiction, increases the incidence of domestic violence
Moreira, da Costa, 2020	Analysis of domestic violence during crises	Narrative review	35 scientific studies	Relationship between domestic violence and pandemic	According to the conflict dynamics within families and aggressive attitudes pre-existing to the pandemic are significant predictive factors of an escalation of domestic violence exacerbated by fear of disease, loss of job and risk of impoverishment
Mohase, 2020	Complaint of the perspectives of increase of the phenomenon	Editorial		Relationship between restrictive measures and the incidence of domestic violence in the world	According to the WHO and the United Nations, the increase in cases of domestic violence is reaching levels that force governments to take targeted measures to tackle the phenomenon
Vieira, Garcia, Maciel, 2020	Study of the stressful effects of the pandemic on the phenomenon of domestic violence	Systematic review	11 scientific studies and report	Relations between social isolation during the pandemic and the increase in violence against women	The analysis reveals that, at a global level, the increase in cases reported to law enforcement and justice, corresponds to a reduction in social assistance and health services caused by restrictive measures
Humphreys, Myint, Zeanah, 2020	Analysis of domestic violence in the context of the pandemic from Covid-19	Systematic review	7 scientific studies and report	Relations between social isolation during the pandemic and the increase in domestic violence	According to researchers, the pandemic has triggered violent dynamics within families due to the negative emotions generated by the pandemic
Bouillon-Minois., Clinchamps, Dutheil, 2020	Analysis of domestic violence following the pandemic from Covid-19	Editorial	10 scientific studies and report	Relations between social isolation during the pandemic and the increase in domestic violence	According to the analysis, the risk of aggression and violence triggered by the stress induced by the pandemic is greater than the pandemic itself
Conejero <i>et al.</i> , 2020	Assessment of the impact of the pandemic on suicide risks	Narrative review	90 scientific studies	Relationship between psycho-social stress determined by Covid-19 and suicidal behavior	The study emphasizes that the pandemic from Covid-19, real pandemic of the solitude, has determined an increase of the suicidal behaviors in the world
Killgore <i>et al.</i> , 2020	Assessment of the impact of the pandemic	Survey	1013 participants	Relationship between fear and insomnia and the	Researchers conclude that the fear generated by the pandemic reveals a greater

 on suicidal
ideation

 manifestation of
suicidal behavior

 empirical association than
insomnia, with the
manifestation of suicidal
behavior

2.3 Discussion

The review of the selected studies and scientific evidence reveals an empirical frame of reference which allows a broad definition of the phenomenon. Indeed, although the impact, implications and consequences of this epidemic on global mental health have not yet been fully investigated, review of scientific literature reveals that there is a correlation between ($p > \alpha$) the spread of the disease and the increase in the prevalence of psycho-emotional and social distress, from fear to distress to anger in the general population, with values ranging from 57% to 73% of cases observed. Specifically, these are emotional states linked to fear of contagion and the risk of impoverishment (Brooks *et al.*, 2020). Among the elements of greatest interest it is frequently revealed that anger, fear and psycho-social discomfort have roots prior to the pandemic which, in this sense, seems to have acted as a slatentizing factor or as an amplifier of a condition of pre-existing fragility (Shanahan *et al.*, 2020).

As anticipated, the review revealed a focus research report on domestic violence, against women and children, and suicides. Again, the evidence reveals a correlation ($p > \alpha$) between the phenomena, most likely due to restrictive measures to limit the contagion. Indeed, the progressive spread of the pandemic has been accompanied by a worrying increase in domestic violence in the world. Despite the meagre data available, the reconstructed empirical picture appears worrying, revealing almost three times as many cases globally as in the previous year (Graham-Harrison *et al.*, 2020; Gupta, Stahl, 2020; Allen-Ebrahimian, 2020). Only in Italy, according to data from the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) the victims who asked for help from the beginning of the year to 31 July more than doubled compared to the same period of 2019, by recording a +59% and with a preponderance of violence that is consumed in 93,4% of cases within the home (Istat, 2020).

A further indication linked to restrictive measures to contain contagion stems from worries of the various international organisations – from World Health Organization (WHO) to associations of psychology and psychiatry – for the spread of suicidal behaviors related to a real “pandemic” of loneliness, fear, anguish. To this condition must be added the effects produced by the processes of social labeling and discrimination through the so-called “stigma of the plague-spreader” that affects subjects and communities at risk of contagion, as well as positive subjects and their families also in relation to the countries of origin; in particular, these are dynamics observed in almost 50% of cases, of which are victims especially those of the age group 55-85 years. These phenomena associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, in addition to generating a strong sensitivity to dangers and social threats, are positively associated ($p > \alpha$) with the risk of suicide (Conejero *et al.*, 2020; Killgore *et al.*, 2020). In Italy, according to data from the Covid Suicide Observatory, of the Brain Research Foundation, from the beginning of March to the date of 31 July 2020, 62 suicides and 37 attempted suicides related to the pandemic were recorded by Covid-19; 44 other suicides and 25 other suicides from unknown causes³, confirming a phenomenon related to the psycho-social discomfort induced by the pandemic and its consequences.

3. Conclusions

On 30 January 2020, the WHO declared the new Coronavirus epidemic as a public health emergency of international interest. It is a decision linked to the global dynamics of a disease whose epidemiological characteristics, still surrounded by an aura of unpredictability and unknowability, define a picture of risks and dangers to the physical health and psycho-social balance of people. Specifically, these are dynamics and circumstances which, although they have already manifested themselves in the past, in this case they seem to reveal a severity such as to disorientate the institutions of the whole world and destabilize the systemic balances of the different areas of life in a lethal way, with emotional and psycho-social consequences so worrying as to require targeted interventions for the different categories for the different categories of people affected (Taleviet *et al.*, 2020).

In this regard, the European College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ECNP) stressed the need to reconsider the concept of “resilience”, judged as fundamental to address the destabilization produced by the pandemic and manage individual and systemic balances. In view of the organisational and financial efforts that the pandemic has imposed on governments around the world, the international financial organisations are predicting an unprecedented economic crisis that threatens to undermine the future of entire societies, as well as of individuals. The Covid-19 upset the consistency, quality and rhythms of our daily life. Hence the need for scientific communities and life sciences to establish a research programme for the development of evidence-based resilience recommendations and policies for both the general population and the different cohorts of people, on the basis of different sociographics variables.

³ <https://www.fondazionebrf.org/osservatorio-suicidi-covid-19/>

In the specific case, the concept of resilience refers to policies that states, both individually and through collaboration, should implement: from the strengthening of welfare to the reduction of inequalities, from maximum accessibility to health to increased funding for research and education, from modernisation of infrastructure to promotion of employment opportunities, to which should be added a rapid and reliable institutional communication for the full understanding of potential risks and strategies to address them (Vinkers et al., 2020).

Moreover, in the face of the anthropological explosion of fear, accompanied by widespread anger, collective psychological hallmark of recent months, of which spoke the Italian sociologist Giuseppe De Rita (De Rita, 2020), there seem to emerge timidly dynamics of social solidarity that see communities gather around an idea of social belonging and collaboration. And, above all, there seems to emerge a new demand for a welfare state, which years of uncontrolled neoliberalism and celebration of the market have irretrievably compromised, and new paradigms of assistance and social protection capable of leaving no one behind.

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