COMET- COVID-19 Mental Health Survey
"Mental health effects of the COVID-19 outbreak – a longitudinal international comparison"

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Abstract

Background: For a peacetime society, a virus epidemic is considered to be one of the most difficult and stressful events to manage in terms of public health. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has been forcing millions of people to change their usual life, to work from home, and to practice physical and social distancing. Many people face uncertainty regarding their financial situation, and the risk of being contaminated. It is yet unknown what the mental health effects of the COVID-19 outbreak are. As reported in several studies conducted during the most recent past virus epidemic (SARS and Ebola), the obligation to keep a safe distance between people and the state of emergency could generate psychosocial consequence as depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), insomnia, and distress in affected individuals. However, it is yet unclear which variables predict negative mental health outcomes. To the authors knowledge, no studies have yet been conducted examining predictors for adverse mental health responses during a more protracted crisis such as the current COVID-19 crisis in the absence of war or terrorist attacks.

Objectives: The project called COMET - COVID MEnTal Health Survey has the main objective to evaluate whether the course of mental health symptoms during the current COVID-19 outbreak is predicted by demographic variables (age, gender, education level, profession, degree of economic losses) social isolation, level of exposure to COVID-19 outbreak, pre-existing mental health problems, contamination fear, cultural value orientations and coping strategies. We will examine mental health symptoms at four waves: Wave 1 (April/May 2020), Wave 2 (3 months), Wave 3 (6months), Wave 4 (9 months

Methods: We will perform a longitudinal cross-sectional online survey across fourteen countries affected by the COVID-19 virus outbreak. It will not be possible to draw a random population sample. Instead we will perform an internet survey and aim for a large sample size. The population will be contacted online through universities mailing lists and/or different social network (as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.). They will then ask online informed consent through a secure web link on Survalyzer (https://vrijeuniversiteit.survalyzer.nl/). Participants will then be invited to take a series of self-report questionnaires available in different languages (Dutch, English, German, Italian, French, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish, Mandarin, or Bahasa Indonesia). The outcome of our study will be to evaluate whether the course of mental health symptoms during the current COVID-19 outbreak is predicted by demographic characteristics, degree of loss, contamination fear, cultural values and coping strategies.

We have developed a survey tool that assesses demographic questions, questions about living situation and housing, COVID-19 exposure of participants, relatives and friends, economic situation, and common mental symptoms (depression, anxiety, PTSD, substance abuse). A lot of partners from different countries and universities are participating (Italy, Switzerland, Australia, Sweden, Indonesia, Turkey, USA, China, Germany, Spain).

The study is already approved by the Scientific and Ethical Review Board (VCWE) of the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam – The Netherlands (VCWE-2020-077).