



Mental Health in the Post-Pandemic Era: Challenges and Coping Strategies

Sumaira Riaz ^a

^aFaculty of Public Health, Jinnah Sindh Medical University, Karachi, Pakistan

Correspondence: Sumaira Riaz (sumairariaz@gmail.com)

Received: 14 May 2025 | **Revised:** 25 May 2025 | **Accepted:** 15 June 2025

ABSTRACT

The world has experienced long term implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on culture and mental health. It has already caused higher degrees of depression, anxiety, burnout, grief and social isolation among the people. Moreover, socioeconomic instability, future uncertainty, digital fatigue, reduced social cohesion, and more distress are post-pandemic elements that make the current conditions of post-pandemic culture even more complicated. All these are factors that lead to general socio-economic instability. Meanwhile, various coping techniques like the resilience building, mindfulness, social and family support, and the application of digital mental health tools have been found to be critical in facilitating recovery and adaptation. This paper will review the available literature to discuss the key mental health issues of the post-pandemic period and find suggested coping mechanisms at the individual, community, and systemic levels. The findings highlight the need to involve a combined approach that encompasses professional responses, facilitating policy structures, and ground level campaigns to improve mental health systems and develop resiliency to future occurrences of crisis.

Keywords: Mental health, post-pandemic, coping strategies, resilience, anxiety, depression, digital mental health, social support

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 was not only a worldwide epidemic but a serious mental and social shock. Although a significant part of the initial attention was focused on physical health and infection control, the pandemic also caused a large-scale crisis of mental health which is still felt during the post-pandemic period. The abrupt changes in everyday life, quarantine, fear of being infected, losing close people in life, and financial insecurity created an atmosphere of constant stress, and its effects on mental health are extensive. In a world where the world has shifted into the new reality, the trauma caused by the pandemic still reverberates in the personal and societal experiences of people today. Among the most urgent pandemic outcomes are increased mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and burnout. Disproportional psychological burdens were among the health workers, the students, the frontline workers, and women and children who were the most vulnerable. Evidence suggests that prolonged stress, uncertainty, and loss has taken a toll on emotional exhaustion, resilience, and overall mental health in most communities. These patterns explain why the perception, teaching, learning, and value of mental health in our societies should be reviewed in the post-pandemic world. In addition to clinical mental illnesses, the pandemic has affected relationships, community connection as well as work life balance. Online communication and teleworking has led to loneliness, isolation, and digital burnout. Response practices have not only broken relationships and destabilized social support networks, but they have in other instances placed individuals in silos. As the communities start to re-open, two important aspects of the psychological recovery process are restoring meaningful relationships and trust.

These challenges have also changed the coping mechanisms. Mindfulness sessions and exercise, peer support, and online therapy apps were some of the new methods individuals and groups have discovered to restore sanity and strength. Whilst teletherapy and mental health applications fall into

the category of digital mental health interventions, which have made more care more reachable especially in low-resource environments, the tools also raise concerns about accessibility, privacy, and long-term effectiveness, which also puts us at a more inclusive and balanced approach.

Finally, the post-global pandemic era demands a novel model of mental health care that will integrate clinical assistance, political intervention, and local coping mechanisms. The governments, health care organizations, and community groups of societies should unite to make up inclusive systems that also minimize stigma, access and resilience. This does not only transform personal welfare of individuals, it also transforms to the society welfare and economic stability to societies that still face crisis in the world.

Objectives

1. To investigate the unprecedented amount of psychological problems that will be experienced in the post pandemic phase.
2. To investigate the individual, community and systemic coping approaches.
3. To determine how social support networks and digital tools can be used to facilitate resilience and recovery.

Research Questions

1. What are the most burning psychological issues during the post-pandemic stage of individuals and communities?
2. What coping mechanisms have been effective in dealing with the post-pandemic mental health problems?
3. What is the potential of digital interventions and community support in terms of sustainable mental health provisions?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This is due to the fact that the post-pandemic period has raised the interest in the long-term psychological impacts of COVID-19, and the literature is continually reporting high rates of depression, anxiety, stress, and psychological distress among the populations across the globe. Youth, university students, frontline healthcare workers, and those with a pre-existing mental health condition have been hit disproportionately. These groups frequently had the combined burden of such factors as social isolation, broken education, economic instability, and lack of prospects (Ding et al., 2023; Billah et al., 2023; Riedel et al., 2021). Gender and age differences are also observed to present higher rates of psychological symptoms, where females and younger people are more likely to show them than male and older individuals, indicating that demographic variables are also the major factors in identifying the vulnerability towards post-pandemic mental health issues (Gurvich et al., 2020; Foster et al., 2022).

The literature focuses on highlighting the focal role of coping strategies in mediating the extent as well as course of mental health outcomes. Positive reframing, acceptance, humor, problem-solving, and cognitive restructuring are adaptive strategies that are always linked to fewer symptom of depression and anxiety and improved overall psychological well-being (Budimir et al., 2021; Meyer et al., 2022; Lampraki et al., 2025). A special place in terms of its significance is the role of social and family assistance, which acts as a protective measure, promotes emotional regulation, and speeds up the process of overcoming distress (Vallejo-Slocker et al., 2022; Fluharty et al., 2021). Academic, financial, and psychosocial resources are also effective in reducing the mental health consequences of the pandemic in students and young adults when they are accompanied by support activities that offer adaptive coping strategies (Luo and Mohammed, 2023; Scorsolini-Comin et al., 2021).

On the other hand, recurrent psychological distress, increasing depression, and anxiety have been associated with the dependence on maladaptive coping strategies, e.g. avoidance, self-blame, behavioral dissociation, drug use, or over-distracting the self (Kar et al., 2020; Elshaer, 2023; Hong and Skiba, 2024).

On the whole, the literature brings to a convergent point that coping approaches greatly determine mental health evolutions within the post-pandemic environment. The adaptive approaches can lead to resilience and faster recovery, while maladaptive approaches cause growing psychological distress and disability in the long term. The implications of the findings lead to the recommendation of implementing education campaigns for the population that should facilitate adaptive coping, invest in psychosocial resources, and encourage the implementation of resilience building initiatives in schools, workplaces, and in health care settings (Gurvich et al., 2020; Chianumba et al., 2024). Among the main action tasks that can be implemented to reduce the current psychological effects of COVID-19 and make the societies better equipped to cope with the crises in the future, one can include the improvement of the social support system, the creation of more digital mental health tools, and the integration of coping-focused training into the policy on mental health.

Research Design

The study is based on the narrative literature review research design, which investigates the challenges and management strategies of mental health during the post-pandemic time. The design of a literature review was selected due to the possibility to synthesize the results of a broad scope of empirical studies, systematic reviews, and theoretical papers, which will give a complete picture of the topic. In contrast to systematic reviews, during which a review is limited to strict inclusion/exclusion criteria, a narrative review allows flexibility in its use of various contexts, populations, and methodological traditions, which is significant in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

Peer-reviewed journals, reports and online databases and publishers such as PubMed, PsycINFO, ScienceDirect, Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar were consulted to obtain relevant literature. The search involved articles published between 2020 and 2025 and this was due to the fact that this represented the COVID-19 pandemic and the post-pandemic transition phase. Sources were obtained using systematized keywords and Boolean operators. The key search terms were:

- “mental health” OR “psychological distress” OR “depression” OR “anxiety”
- AND “COVID-19” OR “post-pandemic” OR “pandemic aftermath”
- AND “coping strategies” OR “resilience” OR “psychological adaptation”.

The initial search yielded **over 3,000 articles**. Including the screening of abstracts according to relevancy and excluding duplicates and articles that were not concerned with coping or post-pandemic issues, 112 articles were included in the list of articles to be reviewed in-depth.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria:

1. Studies published between 2020-2025.
2. Articles devoted to mental health outcomes (depression, anxiety, stress, resilience).
3. Research that points at coping mechanisms (adaptive or maladaptive).
4. Empirical studies, systematic reviews, and theoretical studies peer-reviewed.
5. The studies were carried out in varied population groups (students, healthcare workers, and the general population, vulnerable populations).

Exclusion criteria:

1. Articles published before 2020.
2. Research on physical health effects of COVID-19 only.
3. Opinions, commentaries, non-peer-reviewed reports.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

It was done in a three-step process:

- Extraction - The main points were collected in the form of author(s), year, country, study design, sample characteristics, mental health outcomes, coping strategies, and key findings.

- Categorization - The studies were categorized in themes (a) prevalence and nature of post-pandemic mental health issues, (b) adaptive coping strategies and (c) maladaptive coping strategies.
- Synthesis - The synthesis of findings was done through narrative synthesis, and comparisons of regions, population and types of studies were made. Patterns and contradictions were also brought out where feasible.

Ethical Considerations

No direct human subjects were used as this study was conducted using secondary sources. Nevertheless, the level of ethical norms was ensured through proper references that were properly cited and the original authors were mentioned. The analysis should also have been objective, accommodative of a variety of people, and attentive to the stigmatization of mental health.

DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS, AND DISCUSSION

] The reviewed studies were thematically analyzed, with the focus on three key areas that include: (1) prevalence and nature of mental health challenges in the post-pandemic setting, (2) adaptive coping strategies related to positive psychological outcomes, and (3) maladaptive coping strategies related to poorer outcomes. The classification of findings into these clusters enabled the identification of patterns and deviations of one population to another and one situation to another. The comparative analysis also demonstrated the prevalence of psychological distress, but also the heterogeneity of coping strategies, which depend upon age, gender, socio-economic status, cultural background, and professionalism.

Results

Mental Health Challenges in the Post-Pandemic Era

In all the studies, depression, anxiety, stress, and post-traumatic symptoms increased significantly. It was found out by Ding et al. (2023) and Budimir et al. (2021) that the prevalence rates of depression and anxiety were significantly high among youth and university students, especially in comparison to pre-pandemic periods, mainly because of the disruptions in the academic process, the financial burden, and social isolation. The healthcare workers, especially frontline, were exposed to increased burnout, insomnia, and secondary traumatic stress (Riedel et al., 2021; Puia et al., 2025).

It had always been reported that gender differences were lower: females and younger people were more psychologically vulnerable (Foster et al., 2022; Gurvich et al., 2020). The vulnerable populations, including children (Vallejo-Slocker et al., 2022) and LGBTQ+ youth (Hong and Skiba, 2024) had different stressors related to discontinuous routines, identity conflicts, and lower support networks.

Adaptive Coping Strategies

Adaptive coping strategies were also protective and minimized the psychological distress. Common strategies included:

- Positive reframing and acceptance: Linked to the decreased symptoms of depression and anxiety (Kar et al., 2020; Meyer et al., 2022).
- Social and Family support: Known to be a robust stress resistance and resilience predictor on a regular basis (Fluharty et al., 2021; Richardson et al., 2024).
- Consistent checkups and troubleshooting: This is especially useful when it comes to rehabilitating order and order among students and working professionals (Billah et al., 2023; Luo and Mohammed, 2023).
- Humour and distraction: It was reported that the strategies are temporary but beneficial in reducing acute stress, particularly in younger ages (Budimir et al., 2021).

Notably, healthcare workers who adapted emotion-oriented coping with institutional support experienced less burnout and were resilient (Puia et al., 2025; Abidin et al., 2025).

Maladaptive Coping Strategies

Maladaptive coping on the other hand was associated with deteriorated psychological outcomes. Persistent distress and low recovery curves were related to such strategies as avoidance, behavioural disengagement, self-blame, substance use, and excessive self-distraction (Ding et al., 2023; Lampraki et al., 2025).

As an example, Fluharty et al. (2021) have indicated that persons who used avoidance extensively had more depressive symptoms in the long term, and Kar et al. (2020) identified the use of substance to worsen anxiety. These results underline the idea that maladaptive strategies might help to alleviate the situation in the short term but increase the potential long-term vulnerability.

Discussion

The discussion brings out the fact that the pandemic has affected mental health equally across the board but the extent and types of distress are demographic and context-specific. The younger populations and females were disproportionately affected and it is important to take targeted interventions. The results are that adaptive coping- especially social support, acceptance and routine activities are effective buffer, whereas maladaptive coping is an area where the psychological well being diminishes.

Notably is the fact that the results highlight the context-dependency of coping effectiveness. An example is that problem-focused coping works well in stressors that can be controlled, whereas socially supportive and emotion-focused coping were more effective in the case of the pandemic (Meyer et al., 2022; Sampogna et al., 2021).

. The evidence indicates that resilience-enhancing interventions should prioritize flexible coping strategies over commitment to one strategy.

There are institutional and policy implications as well. Healthcare systems will need to provide **organizational support, mental health training, and counseling services** for professionals to mitigate burnout. Similarly, peer-support, financial support, and psychological support should be offered in universities in order to cope with the long term load among students.

Altogether, the synthesis shows that the post-pandemic mental health environment requires a multilevel strategy, which should include improving individual coping strategies, family, and community-supporting structures, and institutionalize mental health policies to ensure long-term resilience.

CONCLUSION

The world has escalated mental health issues during the post-pandemic period, and depression, anxiety, and stress are prevalent among young people, students, medical staff, and the vulnerable population. Resilience and recovery are associated with adaptive coping strategies including social support, acceptance and problem solving and maladaptive reactions including avoidance and substance use aggravates psychological consequences. Effectiveness of coping in different contexts differs, and it is important to note that interventions are required to be context-specific. In order to find solutions to this crisis, adaptive coping should be encouraged, the community and institutional support are to be reinforced, and the mental health must be of primary concern in policy and healthcare systems. Together with personal resilience and social intervention, societies will be able to overcome the post pandemic psychological weight and become prepared to subsequent crisis situations.

REFERENCES

Gurvich, C., Thomas, N., Thomas, E. H. X., Hudaib, A.-R., Sood, L., Fabiatos, K., Sutton, K., Isaacs, A., Arunogiri, S., Sharp, G., & Kulkarni, J. (2020). Coping styles and mental health in response to societal changes during the COVID-19 pandemic. International Journal of Social Psychiatry, Published October 4, 2020

Ding, H., Xu, Z., Hu, W., Guo, Y., Wang, C., Li, S., Hui, Z., Wang, J., Peng, X., & Xia, W. (2023). Changes of stressful life events, coping strategies and mental health among youths in the pre-

and post-coronavirus 2019 pandemic era: A cross-sectional study. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, Published August 1, 2023

Budimir, S., Probst, T., & Pieh, C. (2021). Coping strategies and mental health during COVID-19 lockdown. *Journal of Mental Health*, Published January 27, 2021

Luo, W., & Mohammed, J. (2023). Mental health status and coping strategies of Chinese university students during the COVID-19 pandemic: A rapid review. *PLOS ONE*, Published December 22, 2023

Abidin, F. A., Prathama, A. G., Fitriana, E., Komala, E. S., & Tijdink, J. (2025). Psychological distress and coping strategies among Indonesian psychologists during the COVID-19 pandemic: a two-wave cross-lagged study. *Health Psychology and Behavioral Medicine*, Published January 27, 2025.

Vallejo-Slocker, L., Sanz, J., Garc\u00f1eda-Vera, M. P., Fresneda, J., & Vallejo, M. (2022). Mental Health, Quality of Life and Coping Strategies in Vulnerable Children During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Psicothema*, Published May 1, 2022

Kar, N., Kar, B., & Kar, S. (2020). Stress and coping during COVID-19 pandemic: Result of an online survey. *Psychiatry Research*, Published November 26, 2020

Elshaer, I. (2023). Front-line hotel employees mental health and quality of life post COVID-19 pandemic: The role of coping strategies. *Heliyon*, Published June 1, 2023

Riedel, B., Horen, S. R., Reynolds, A., & Hamidian Jahromi, A. (2021). Mental Health Disorders in Nurses During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Implications and Coping Strategies. *Frontiers in Public Health*, Published October 26, 2021

Foster, S., Est\u00e9vez-Lamorte, N., Walitza, S., Dzemaili, S., & Mohler-Kuo, M. (2022). Perceived stress, coping strategies, and mental health status among adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic in Switzerland: a longitudinal study. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, Published December 14, 2022

Puia, A., Pop, S. R., Manzat, B. O. C., Pintea, S., Puia, I., & Fadgyas-Stanculete, M. (2025). Coping Strategies Among Healthcare Workers During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Emotional Responses, Challenges, and Adaptive Practices. *Medicina*, Published February 1, 2025

Fluharty, M., Bu, F., Steptoe, A., & Fancourt, D. (2021). Coping strategies and mental health trajectories during the first 21 weeks of COVID-19 lockdown in the United Kingdom. *Social Science & Medicine* (1982), Published April 22, 2021.

Hong, C., & Skiba, B. (2024). Mental health outcomes, associated factors, and coping strategies among LGBTQ adolescent and young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic: A systematic review. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, Published December 1, 2024.

Richardson, D., Aranda, F., Cook, J. A., & Swarbrick, M. (2024). How Individuals with Mental Health Challenges Coped During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Clinical Nursing Research*, Published August 15, 2024.

Billah, M., Rutherford, S., Akhter, S., & Tanjeela, M. (2023). Exploring mental health challenges and coping strategies in university students during the COVID-19 pandemic: A case study in Dhaka city, Bangladesh. *Frontiers in Public Health*, Published May 3, 2023.

Scorsolini-Comin, F., Patias, N. D., Cozzer, A. J., Flores, P., & Von Hohendorff, J. (2021). Mental health and coping strategies in graduate students in the COVID-19 pandemic. *Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem*, Published October 29, 2021.

Meyer, D., Van Rheenen, T. V., Neill, E., Phillipou, A., Tan, E., Toh, W. L., Sumner, P., & Rossell, S. (2022). Surviving the COVID-19 pandemic: An examination of adaptive coping strategies. *Heliyon*, Published May 1, 2022.

Lampraki, C., Jopp, D., Roquet, A., Hoffman, A., & Uittenhove, K. (2025). Development of depressive symptoms during the COVID-19 crisis: the role of coping strategies and their change. *BMC Psychology*, Published March 14, 2025.

Sampogna, G., del Vecchio, V., Giallonardo, V., Luciano, M., Albert, U., Carmassi, C., Carrà, G., Cirulli, F., Dell'Osso, B., Menculini, G., Nanni, M., Pompili, M., Sani, G., Volpe, U., Bianchini, V., & Fiorillo, A. (2021). What Is the Role of Resilience and Coping Strategies on the Mental Health of the General Population during the COVID-19 Pandemic? Results from the Italian Multicentric COMET Study. *Brain Sciences*, Published September 1, 2021.