

# Touch-Banned Solidarity

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**Abstract:** Mankind has been brought to its heels under the burden of not being able to find a cure about the recent corona virus pandemic and the most feasible option rather that was only available to be implemented was social distancing, lockdown and complete closure of schools, colleges, offices and areas of public congregation. That might have been a combating strategy to minimize infection but something remained neglected, as it has always been – mental health concerns. While disengagement and distancing become the new normal way of life, what about the loss that we are encountering in this process- as we lose human touch, intimacy of relationships and worst still; a distancing of minds from one another. Through the paper, the researcher attempts to analyze how Covid 19 has changed the physical situation, but the psychological wellbeing is a greater challenge within.

**Keywords:** Pandemic, Disengagement, Congregation, New normal, Corona virus, Human touch.

## 1. Introduction

Research Question: Lockdown and social distancing has deprived people of the solidarity they share.

## 2. Methodology

Doctrinal research has been conducted on the topic whereby a range of data has been thoroughly referred and utilized for drawing out inferences. Secondary data has been collected from books and articles available online. Primary data included case study references and interviews of psychologists during this lockdown phase.

## 3. Introduction - Gregarious Solidarity

Gregariousness is a defining trait of human beings that binds them into the fabric of solidarity, and lays the foundation of a society – precisely the propelling force of a civilization. While people chose to stay in company, stay connected and in a close association, they hate to be left out or worse still be isolated in chambers or self-captivated quarters. Association not just builds up solidarity in one's primary and secondary groups but also enables a person to have a set of shared commonality with a group of persons and connecting with them on a regular basis at the same time helps in upliftment of emotional distress, if any. Imagining a school or college environment – a bunch of same age group people with shared interests find emotional support in one another, while at the same time they find the confidence of sharing interpersonal feelings, a daily dose to coming in contact and leading the day together – all of this

signifies a greater phenomenon of companionship that is intrinsically important for a proper psychological well-being. Distress, lowered self-esteem, depression trends, self-doubt, confusions about life decisions, stress from familial or household matters and most importantly dealing with the usual frustrations and mood swings of the formative adolescence and post adolescence years all can be dealt with some social support – a peer group solidarity and the stimulation of touch; that connects and shares the burden with the emotion of gregariousness or the feeling of being connected. With the enforcement of lockdown in India, and in the whole world as well, schools and colleges have been shut down, physical gatherings and meet ups have ceased under the fear of contracting the virus and people had no option but to sop going out of their houses. The home isolation which began since the lockdown has not only disrupted the usual routine of people but at the same time disables their spheres of entertainment – their interpersonal intermixing, gregarious functioning, solidarity functioning and worse still fuelled distress among people. Negativity coupled with restrictions on movement, together with the feeling of being trapped inside the house and the slight or no change in everyday life has resulted in a suffocating environment for many. All of these are triggers for stress and with these precipitating factors being active in the environment; it becomes imperative to throw a special focus on mental health.

## 4. Social Support Mechanism – The Disruption

According to a survey, it has been observed that the psychological well-being and functioning of human behavior has a connection with their primary groups, and often the size of native hometowns have also had a role to play in it, also several other factors such as the socio economic background have a better effect on it .The survey also suggested that men high on gregariousness had exhibited better psychological well-being and with better social integration showed greater adaptability with rigorous environmental settings.

This points out that while the feeling of solidarity is intangible, it is nevertheless substantiated in the interactive group and peer mixing process, and rests heavily upon personal interaction quotient – the level of which has gone down and almost ceased during the lockdown. While feelings of isolation give boost to negativity, the fear of losing out on people and diminishing intimacy provokes anxiety. At the same time, a disruption of normal routine and increased captivity in homes

has resulted in social introversion and inflection of personality – this has affected externals more than the internals.

Defining social support has been diverse and varied, at the same time it is inclusive of different peer, same age groups and people of compatibility- among them the most generally accepted are friends and family. When we speak about peer group social support, it excludes family as in certain cases where the comfort, confidence and intimacy functions due to a shared interest of similar age. Peer group solidarity has its foundation laid upon a common pursuit that is often either some sports or educational institution that ensures a regular connectivity by physical means.

Cohen and Wills, 1995 have stated, Social support has tremendous significance in helping adolescent children deal with emotional distress, psycho-somatic disorders, psychological well-being and other issues. Apart from this, personality traits and dimensions have also been linked with social support.

This shows that while losing out on physical connectivity has triggered a reaction in people, the loss of social support and increasing dependence on social media to compensate for it has cumulatively resulted in distress causing thought patterns, an escape from which is not possible due to the continuous home isolation that people are faced with. This assumes concern as negative thoughts and negative orientation of cognition, leads to increased susceptibility to stress, cognitive appraisal of stress, impact on normal psychological well-being and that is often symptomised with withdrawal, losing interest in persons and things.

### **5. Banned Touch – Social Distancing**

The new phase post lockdown is social distancing, to prevent the viral contagion that spreads primarily through touch, social distancing has emerged as the New Normal – whereby people tend to avoid touch and hence grow even more paranoid about touching or coming close. It is difficult to gauge what impact it has been causing but the fact remains true nonetheless.

Touch is a powerful tool of intimacy in any kind of relationship – touch that is appropriate and non-sexual and at the same time non harassing has miraculous hidden potential. It is almost as good as a non-verbal means of communication and has a multiplicity of benefits that mainly impacts mental health in a direct correlation. The most positive and visually certain impact of a touch – by means of a hug or cuddle is that it has a soothing sensation that lowers blood pressure and cortisol – the infamous stress hormone in the body. With a gentle hug, not only is a solidarity and unity established but it also acts as an instigator of faith, a sense of calmness and relief that is soothing. Our day to day normal lives include many close ones who share this hug as a mark of interpersonal intimacy and this consequential feeling with us, which unfortunately gets banned in the new normal. While people grow protective and preventive, and socially distant, casual normal hugs cease to be an option of non-verbal communication, and the effect that used

to be associated with hugs ceases at the same time. This void manifests emotionally where people not only tend to become cynical and skeptic, they also lose the warmth in any form of relationship.

### **6. Captivating Self Exposure**

The biggest menace of being stuck up in isolation is the loss of ability to express and exposure – the inability to indulge in physical communication and inflection of personality as manifested by an increasing dependence and comfort seeking from virtual company has also excessive social media parading has led to depression among people. The constant void and fear of missing out, easy connectivity with friends over an online media and availability of time for lack of travel has resulted in increasing dependence on social media. This compensates for the loss of day to day communication, but can never work as a positive substitute for the same. The warmth of a walk down the street, catching up with someone for a coffee in a restaurant, going for a day out with friends and hanging out late, after school or college are such instances of exposure that now falls under the category of Banned Solidarity.

With exposure getting restricted in this New Normal, it is a catastrophe for patients suffering from depression, as they feel isolated as a function of behavioral symptom of depression. It is not simply about teenagers or young adults; it is universal in its phenomenon as it grasps people of all ages who are unable to find a way out for social mixing. Psychologists have identified this change as strange and novel as it refutes the age old social support therapy techniques, and at the same time bars interaction in its physical sense, all culminating in a unit of self-captivity, isolation and complete shutting down of physical exposure. This acts as a precipitating factor for depression, and other depressive disorders. Reaching out to people also has changed its nature from physical to virtual and the empathy and sharing of trust has also been severely affected.

### **7. The Way Ahead – Conclusion**

While strategies to keep ourselves physically safe from contracting the virus come in abundance, what stays neglected as usual is mental health. A product of social stigma and an effect of poor conscious recognition and awareness about psychological well-being, this neglect is precarious enough and costly in time. If not recognized, alarmed and prevented would take up a serious trail forthcoming with respect to mental fitness. Adaptability and resilience being the medicine to propel us through tough times, this situation calls for a similar approach whereby we need to appreciate the New Normal, associate with people, reach out when and where necessary, seek professional help if need be and most importantly exercise positivism,

Firstly, reading only positive and confirmed news updates,

Limited social networking, for the sake of communication,

Occasional going out of the house or exercising to stay fit and emotionally happy,

Engaging with people with whom we share intimacy, virtually.

Above all keeping faith with the slogan that – “WE ARE IN IT TOGETHER.”

### References

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