



Depression, anxiety and stress in homemakers during COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact worldwide, affecting various aspects of life. One prominent group affected by these circumstances are homemakers—usually women—who bear substantial domestic responsibilities, including childcare, household chores, and family caregiving. The multitude of challenges they face can have implications for their mental well-being. This study aims to ascertain the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among homemakers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data collection employed the DASS-42 scale, a validated tool for measuring depression, anxiety, and stress. The study participants consisted of 88 homemakers with children. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive analysis. Results indicated that a percentage of homemakers experienced normal levels of depression (28.41%), anxiety (14.77%), and stress (37.5%). Additionally, varying degrees of depression, anxiety, and stress were present, ranging from mild to severe. These findings underscore the necessity of addressing mental health challenges specific to homemakers. Implementing support programs tailored to alleviate the mental well-being challenges faced by this demographic is crucial.

Keywords: *anxiety; COVID-19; depression; homemakers; stress*

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unparalleled challenges to individuals worldwide (Fegert et al., 2020; Maison et al., 2021). Among those significantly affected are homemakers, who have assumed substantial domestic responsibilities including childcare, household chores, and family caregiving (Kaplan, 2023; Yoosefi Lebni et al., 2021). The pandemic has magnified these responsibilities due to lockdowns, school closures, and heightened health concerns (Alsaeed et al., 2023; Aparicio Betancourt et al., 2022). Consequently, homemakers find themselves grappling with an augmented workload, encompassing not only their customary domestic duties but also the additional demands of remote schooling, constant meal preparation, and elevated cleaning and hygiene measures. This increased workload has the potential to result in feelings of being overwhelmed and experiencing burnout (Aguiar et al., 2021; Griffith et al., 2022).

The pandemic has blurred the conventional boundaries of roles for homemakers. With family members engaged in remote work and learning, there has been a heightened expectation for homemakers to be constantly available to fulfill multiple roles simultaneously—such as that of a teacher, caregiver, and homemaker. This overload of roles can lead to conflicts and heightened stress (Low et al., 2023). Homemakers often face a lack of recognition for their contributions, which can be exacerbated during the pandemic. While essential workers are in the spotlight, their efforts might go unnoticed, contributing to feelings of being undervalued (Lu et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the pandemic has triggered a sense of social isolation due to restrictions on social gatherings and interactions (Hwang et al., 2020; O’Sullivan et al., 2021). This isolation has been particularly pronounced for homemakers who were already primarily confined to their homes, exacerbating feelings of loneliness and a dearth of emotional support from peers (Lim et al., 2022; Loose et al., 2023).

The economic uncertainties brought about by the pandemic may have amplified financial stress for families (Ghassabian et al., 2022). Homemakers might feel compelled to manage household finances with limited resources, further contributing to their stress. The cumulative impact of these stressors can precipitate mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety and stress.

Depression entails feelings of sadness and a loss of interest in once-enjoyed activities. Anxiety involves a state of uneasiness and apprehension, often accompanied by physical symptoms like an increased heart rate and sweating. Stress is a psychological and physiological response to external pressures or demands (Lovibond, 1995).

A comprehensive examination of the impact of the pandemic on mental health, as evidenced by a meta-analysis of 194 studies, revealed a noteworthy prevalence of anxiety, affecting approximately 35.1% of the 851,000 participants involved (Delpino et al., 2022). This finding underscores the substantial global repercussions of the pandemic on mental well-being. Concurrently, a separate meta-analysis of 12 studies conducted by Bueno-Notivol et al. (2021) demonstrated a wide-ranging prevalence of depression, spanning from 7.45% to 48.30% during the pandemic. The considerable variance in these figures highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of the emotional toll experienced by individuals across different contexts.

Furthermore, the prevalence of stress during the pandemic was investigated through a meta-analysis involving 9,074 subjects, revealing a notable occurrence of 29.6% (Salari et al., 2020). These statistics underscore the pervasive nature of stress in the face of the pandemic's challenges. Although data pertaining to depression, anxiety, and stress are available on a global scale, a specific exploration of these mental health aspects among homemakers remains relatively uncharted.

It is important to note that despite the existence of data on the general population, there remains a notable dearth of information regarding the unique experiences of homemakers. As such, further research focusing on this specific demographic could yield valuable insights into the distinct challenges and psychological responses they encounter. This information could not only

enhance our understanding of the pandemic's complete impact on mental health but also guide the development of targeted interventions and support systems for this often overlooked group. Experiencing high levels of depression, anxiety, and stress can have detrimental consequences for homemakers, including cognitive impairments such as difficulties in concentration, memory, and decision-making (Kassem et al., 2017; Volel et al., 2018). Given the myriad responsibilities homemakers manage, heightened anxiety might hinder effective task management, further intensifying stress levels.

Physical symptoms often accompany anxiety and stress, including rapid heartbeat, sweating, muscle tension, and digestive issues (Chand & Marwaha, 2023), exacerbating distress and perpetuating the anxiety cycle. Sleep patterns have also been disrupted among many homemakers due to anxiety (Castro et al., 2021), leading to difficulties falling asleep or staying asleep, ultimately resulting in fatigue and emotional exhaustion (Oh et al., 2019).

The pressure of simultaneously being a caregiver and educator during the pandemic can exacerbate depression, anxiety and stress for homemakers. Concerns about their children's academic progress, emotional well-being, and overall development can impact mother-child interactions (Nichol-Harper et al., 2007). Maternal anxiety can be influenced by parenting styles adopted (Manoochehri & Mofisi, 2014).

Given the contextual backdrop provided, it becomes crucial to delve into the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress experienced by homemakers. This research endeavors to elucidate the extent of these psychological states specifically within the demographic of homemakers amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The significance of this research lies in its capacity to shed light on the intricate emotional landscape encountered by homemakers during these unprecedented times. Despite the existing broader data on the global population's mental health struggles, there exists a palpable gap in our comprehension of how these challenges manifest among homemakers, a group that plays a pivotal yet often underappreciated role within society.

Method

This cross-sectional study was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic from January to February 2022. The research employed the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS) as its instrument, a tool previously validated by Damanik (2011). The DASS-42, utilized for data collection, serves as an assessment of negative emotional symptoms. Consisting of 42 self-report items, this inventory is specifically designed to gauge the severity and presence of depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms among individuals.

The reliability of the DASS was demonstrated through robust scores, as indicated by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of $\alpha=0.948$. The scale incorporates 42 statements or items, with response options ranging from 0 to 3. A rating of 3 corresponds to a highly appropriate or very frequent response, 2 signifies a moderately frequent and fitting response, 1 represents an infrequent response, and 0 denotes an unsuitable or never occurring response.

The study's participant selection criteria were specific: they encompassed homemakers who were married, primarily responsible for household management, without formal employment outside their homes, and having school-age children. To gather data, a Google Form was employed and shared across various social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Line, Twitter, and Instagram. The gathered data were subsequently subjected to analysis using descriptive analysis to know levels of depression, stress, and anxiety experienced by the participating homemakers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Result and Discussion

Result

The result section consists of description of the result of analysis performed for the research. For quantitative research, this section should contain descriptive statistic, assumption test, and hypothesis test. For qualitative research, please provide detailed steps and processes of the analysis (e.g. content analysis, thematic analysis), quotations from the field data, or tabulation. Which are then critically analyzed sequentially or unified (no more than 30% of the overall manuscript pages). This section must contain a concrete evidence of the data analysis result. When possible, put a table/chart/figure that contains the interpretation of the data analysis to make it easier to understand. Table/chart/figure should not contain raw data that has not been analyzed.

A total of 103 data points were initially collected, but after applying specific criteria, the study focused on 88 participants who met these criteria. The age distribution within this subset exhibited a diverse representation. A significant proportion, encompassing 48.86%, fell within the age range of 31 to 40 years, while 38.63% were in the 20 to 30-year age bracket. A smaller subset, constituting 12.5%, were aged between 41 and 50 years. When considering the number of children, the participants were divided into two groups. The first group consisted of those with a single child, accounting for 43.18% of the participants. The second group included those with more than one child, making up the larger share at 56.81%. These insights are visually presented in Table 1 and contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the participant demographics.

Table 1. Demographic data

Demographic variable	N	%
Age		
20 - 30	34	38.63
31 - 40	43	48.86
51 - 50	11	12.5
Number of child		
1	38	43.18
> 1	50	56.81

The recorded values for depression range from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 39, with an average (mean) level of 13.90. This indicates that, on average, participants reported a moderate level of depressive symptoms. The standard deviation of 7.174 reveals the extent of variability around this mean, suggesting that individual responses exhibited notable differences in relation to the overall average.

Similarly, participants' anxiety levels ranged from 0 to 32, with a mean anxiety score of 14.07. This figure signifies a relatively moderate level of anxiety symptoms experienced by the participants. The standard deviation of 6.565 underscores the diversity in anxiety responses, implying that some participants reported significantly higher or lower anxiety levels compared to the mean.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Depression	88	0	39	13.90	7.17
Anxiety	88	0	32	14.07	6.56
Stress	88	0	36	16.92	6.64

In terms of stress, the data reflects a wider range of responses, ranging from 0 to 36, with an average stress level of 16.92. This average points to a moderate level of perceived stress among the participants. The standard deviation of 6.641 highlights the considerable dispersion of stress scores around this mean, showcasing the varying degrees of stress experienced by individuals within the sample. Descriptive analysis of the data is presented in Table 2.

Table 3. Categorical data of depression, anxiety and stress

Category	N	%
Depression		
Normal	25	28.41
Mild	14	15.91
Moderate	35	39.77
Severe	12	13.64
Very Severe	2	2.27
Anxiety		
Normal	13	14.77
Mild	9	10.22
Moderate	19	21.59
Severe	33	37.5
Very Severe	14	15.9
Stress		
Normal	33	37.50
Mild	13	14.77
Severe	3	3.41
Very Severe	1	1.14

The data presented in the categories provide a detailed understanding of the distribution of depression, anxiety, and stress levels among the participants, categorized according to severity. Within the domain of depression, participants exhibit a range of emotional experiences. The largest proportion, accounting for 39.77%, reported a moderate level of depression, indicating a significant impact on their emotional well-being. Additionally, 28.41% fell under the category of "Normal," indicating a relatively healthy emotional state, while 15.91% experienced mild depression. A smaller subset of 13.64% faced severe depression, and a mere 2.27% encountered depression of a very severe nature.

Moving to the domain of anxiety, the participants also exhibited a spectrum of responses. The most prevalent category was "Severe," representing 37.5% of the sample, signifying a substantial experience of anxiety-related symptoms. A significant 21.59% experienced moderate anxiety, while 14.77% faced mild anxiety. Notably, 15.9% experienced anxiety of a very severe nature. A comparatively smaller 14.77% fell into the category of "Normal," suggesting a state of relatively lower anxiety levels.

Regarding stress levels, participants' experiences were similarly diverse. A considerable proportion, constituting 43.18%, reported a moderate level of stress, which points to a significant impact on their perceived stressors. Additionally, 37.5% experienced "Normal" stress levels, indicating a relatively balanced emotional state. A smaller portion of 14.77% faced mild stress, while only 3.41% dealt with severe stress. A mere 1.14% encountered stress of a very severe nature.

Discussion

The current study aimed to investigate the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among a specific demographic – homemakers – during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings reveal

significant insights into the emotional well-being of this group and provide context for understanding their psychological experiences in the face of unprecedented challenges.

The results pertaining to depression levels among the participating homemakers offer a multifaceted view of their emotional states. The majority of participants fell within the categories of "Moderate" and "Severe" depression. This suggests that a substantial proportion of homemakers experienced noteworthy depressive symptoms during the pandemic.

The moderate depression levels imply that many homemakers faced significant emotional distress, which might not be fully debilitating but still substantially affected their daily lives. This level of depression can lead to a decrease in overall functioning, affecting their ability to manage household responsibilities and caregiving tasks effectively. The severe depression levels indicate even more profound impairment, possibly interfering with basic daily activities and requiring more intensive mental health interventions (Rask et al., 2015).

These findings align with existing literature indicating that the pandemic's disruption to daily routines, coupled with potential increases in caregiving responsibilities and limited social support, may contribute to heightened depressive symptoms (Bai et al., 2023; Ju et al., 2023). The increase in responsibilities without adequate support structures likely exacerbated stress levels, leading to the observed depressive symptoms. Moreover, the limited social interactions due to lockdowns and social distancing measures may have reduced opportunities for emotional support, further intensifying feelings of isolation and depression.

The analysis of anxiety levels reveals a parallel pattern to the depression findings. A considerable percentage of participants, 37.5%, reported "Severe" anxiety, pointing towards a profound impact on their emotional well-being. Notably, a significant proportion (15.9%) experienced "Very Severe" anxiety. These findings align with the global concerns over the pandemic's uncertainties, health risks, and socio-economic changes (Whaley et al., 2023), which may have contributed to heightened anxiety among homemakers.

With schools closed and children at home, many homemakers faced the dual challenge of managing household duties while also providing educational support to their children. This added pressure contributed to feelings of being overwhelmed and increased anxiety levels, as the responsibilities of caregiving and home management intensified during the pandemic (Hacimusalar et al., 2020).

The implementation of quarantine and social distancing measures led to decreased social interactions, which heightened feelings of loneliness. Many homemakers, who typically manage household responsibilities and may rely on social networks for support, found themselves isolated. This lack of social support is closely associated with increased anxiety and depression, as individuals struggled to cope with emotional exhaustion and the inability to express their feelings (Windarwati et al., 2023).

Turning to stress levels, a substantial proportion of participants reported "Moderate" stress (43.18%). This indicates that a considerable number of homemakers grappled with significant stressors during the pandemic, potentially linked to managing household responsibilities, caring for children, and adapting to new routines. The finding of 37.5% falling under the category of "Normal" stress levels might reflect a certain level of resilience or effective coping mechanisms among some homemakers in managing these stressors (Gayatri & Irawaty, 2022).

Comparatively, the prevalence of "Moderate" levels was noticeable across all three emotional states – depression, anxiety, and stress. This parallel might indicate a nuanced interplay between these emotions, suggesting that individuals who experienced one emotional state were more likely to experience the others as well. This interconnectedness underscores the complex psychological responses to the pandemic's challenges (Lawrance et al., 2022; Troisi, 2023).

Despite the valuable insights gained from this study, certain limitations warrant consideration. The cross-sectional design limits our ability to infer causal relationships (Gad, 2023),

and the reliance on self-report measures might introduce response bias. Future research could incorporate longitudinal designs and objective measures to strengthen the validity of the findings.

This study contributes to the understanding of homemakers' mental health experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. By delving into the specific emotional states of depression, anxiety, and stress, it provides a nuanced portrait of the challenges faced by this demographic. Such insights are crucial for recognizing the unique stressors that homemakers encounter, ranging from managing household affairs to caregiving responsibilities, and highlight the need for tailored interventions to support their mental well-being.

The prevalence of moderate to severe levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among homemakers during the pandemic underscores the urgency of addressing their mental health needs. Policymakers and mental health professionals can utilize these findings to design targeted support programs that cater to the specific challenges faced by homemakers. This could involve providing access to online counseling services, support groups, or workshops that focus on building coping strategies and resilience in the face of pandemic-related stressors.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the emotional landscape experienced by homemakers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The prevalence of moderate to severe levels of depression, anxiety, and stress underscores the significant need for tailored support within this demographic.

Suggestion

Future research avenues should prioritize evaluating the effectiveness of targeted interventions designed specifically to alleviate the mentioned emotional challenges. Implementing and assessing the impact of online mental health programs, support groups, or workshops tailored to homemakers' needs could prove beneficial. Furthermore, the value of conducting longitudinal studies is highlighted, as they could offer valuable insights into the trajectory of emotional well-being over time. Such studies could identify patterns of change and potential influencing factors. For psychologists and mental health practitioners, a key recommendation is the development and provision of intervention programs aimed at addressing the distinctive stressors faced by homemakers. These programs should encompass strategies for managing caregiver stress, effective time management, and building emotional resilience. Additionally, the provision of resources focused on effective parenting techniques and personalized self-care practices is essential. Maintaining a balance between caregiving responsibilities and personal well-being is pivotal for sustaining positive mental health outcomes.

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