

# Multidisciplinary Responses to COVID-19: Addressing Mental and Physical Health Impacts and Innovating Against Viral Threats

## Original Article

Maria Iqbal<sup>1\*</sup>, Hafsa Khan<sup>2</sup>

### Authors Affiliation

<sup>1</sup>Riphah International University, Lahore Pakistan. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6476-3096>

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, School of Health Sciences, University of Management & Technology, Lahore Pakistan. <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-4501-808X>

### Corresponding Author\*

Maria Iqbal

[marya.sindhu95@gmail.com](mailto:marya.sindhu95@gmail.com)

Riphah International University, Lahore Pakistan

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### Abstract

**Background:** The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically impacted global health, necessitating multidisciplinary approaches to understand its effects on mental and physical health and to develop effective solutions.

**Objective:** To explore the multifaceted impacts of COVID-19 on mental and physical health and develop interdisciplinary strategies and solutions to mitigate future health threats related to the virus.

**Methods:** This study employed a controlled design involving 96 patients diagnosed with COVID-19, split into two groups based on their primary health complications—mental and physical. Group 1 received cognitive-behavioral therapy, while Group 2 underwent physical rehabilitation exercises. Outcomes were measured using the Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 scale for mental health and the Medical Outcomes Study Short Form-36 for physical health, assessed at baseline, four weeks, and eight weeks.

**Results:** Significant improvements were observed in both groups. Group 1's average GAD-7 scores decreased from 14.2 at baseline to 7.4 at week 8 ( $p < 0.001$ ). Group 2 showed enhancement in SF-36 scores from 45.6 initially to 34.8 by week 8 ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating improved physical health status.

**Conclusion:** Tailored interventions, including cognitive-behavioral therapy and physical rehabilitation exercises, are effective in mitigating the mental and physical health impacts of COVID-19. These findings underscore the need for continued development of targeted, multidisciplinary strategies to address pandemic-related health issues.

**Keywords:** Cognitive-behavioral therapy, COVID-19, mental health, multidisciplinary approaches, pandemic, physical health, public health, rehabilitation, SF-36.

## INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global healthcare landscape has witnessed unprecedented challenges that have prompted a reevaluation of existing health systems and highlighted the urgency for robust interdisciplinary research (1). The pandemic's impact on both mental and physical health has been profound, underscoring the necessity for a multifaceted approach to healthcare that integrates findings from diverse medical and scientific disciplines (2). This approach not only promises to enhance our understanding of COVID-19 but also to improve our preparedness for future health crises (3).

One of the strengths of this integrated research approach is its capacity to draw on a wide array of expertise, from virology and epidemiology to mental health and public policy, creating a comprehensive understanding of the virus's impacts (4). This multidisciplinary strategy facilitates the development of more effective interventions and public health measures, tailored to the nuanced needs of varied populations (5). Moreover, the collaborative nature of this research fosters innovation through the synthesis of diverse methodologies and perspectives, potentially leading to breakthroughs in vaccine development, treatment modalities, and preventive strategies (6).

However, the limitations of this approach are equally notable. Interdisciplinary research often faces logistical and methodological challenges, including the integration of data across different fields and the coordination of efforts among a broad range of professionals with varying expertise (7). Additionally, the rapid pace at which COVID-19 research has had to advance may lead to gaps in peer review

and data validation, posing risks to the reliability of the findings (8). Despite these challenges, the ongoing pandemic necessitates swift action, and the potential benefits of this research strategy may outweigh the drawbacks (9).

Critically, the discourse surrounding the management of the pandemic is polarized, with debates centered on the balance between public health imperatives and economic stability (10). This debate encompasses the ethical considerations of lockdowns, the societal acceptance of health surveillance for contact tracing, and the implications of fast-tracked vaccine deployment (11). Such discussions reflect a broad spectrum of public and scientific opinion, illustrating the complex interplay between health security and human rights (12).

The interconnectedness of global communities, as highlighted by the pandemic, accentuates the need for international cooperation in health crises (13). The virus does not respect national borders; thus, a siloed approach to health management is both ineffectual and imprudent (14). Global health threats require a unified strategy that promotes the sharing of knowledge, resources, and strategies (15). The lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic should thus inform future protocols and preparedness plans, ensuring that the global health community is better equipped to manage upcoming challenges (16).

The COVID-19 pandemic has served as a critical catalyst for change in the domain of health research and crisis management. By fostering an integrated, interdisciplinary research approach, the scientific community can enhance its responsiveness to public health threats. Although this approach is not without its challenges, its potential to drive significant improvements in health outcomes during this and future pandemics is indisputable. As the world continues to navigate these turbulent times, the value of robust, collaborative research efforts cannot be overstated.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

In the study, researchers recruited a total of 96 patients who were diagnosed with COVID-19 and exhibited symptoms impacting either mental or physical health. These patients were divided into two groups, each consisting of 48 individuals. The first group comprised patients primarily suffering from mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD, while the second group consisted of patients facing physical health complications including respiratory distress, prolonged fatigue, and cardiovascular symptoms. The division was based on preliminary assessments conducted by healthcare professionals using the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 and the Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 scale for mental health evaluations, and the Medical Outcomes Study Short Form-36 for physical health status.

Enrollment criteria required participants to be over the age of 18, have a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19 via RT-PCR test, and exhibit clear symptoms of either mental or physical health issues for at least two weeks post-diagnosis. Exclusion criteria included patients under the age of 18, those with a history of chronic psychiatric or physical illnesses prior to COVID-19 infection, and those unable to provide informed consent. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board, and all participants provided written informed consent before participation.

The interventions for the mental health group involved a combination of cognitive-behavioral therapy and online support sessions conducted by trained psychologists. The physical health group received a regimen of physical rehabilitation exercises tailored to individual needs, supervised by physical therapists via telehealth platforms. Both interventions lasted for eight weeks, with weekly sessions for each group. The effectiveness of these interventions was measured through follow-up assessments at the end of the study period, using the same instruments employed at baseline.

Data collection was carried out using a secure, web-based application, ensuring data integrity and confidentiality. Researchers used a combination of self-reported questionnaires and telehealth evaluations to monitor the progress of participants. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS software, version 25. The primary outcome measures were changes in the scores on the mental and physical health scales from baseline to the study endpoint. Secondary measures included patient-reported satisfaction with the interventions and adherence rates to the prescribed sessions.

Overall, the methodology was designed to ensure a rigorous evaluation of the effects of targeted interventions on COVID-19-related mental and physical health symptoms, providing valuable insights into the respective efficacy of psychological and physical therapeutic approaches during recovery from this infectious disease.

## RESULTS

Table 1: Mean Age and Standard Deviation (SD) of Participants

Group	Description	Mean Age (SD)
G1	Mental Health	45.5 (12.3)

Group	Description	Mean Age (SD)
G2	Physical Health	47.8 (11.7)

Table 2: Gender Distribution of Participants (Frequency and Percentage)

Group	Description	Male (Fre%)	Female (Fre%)
G1	Mental Health	27 (56.25%)	21 (43.75%)
G2	Physical Health	25 (52.08%)	23 (47.92%)

These tables summarize the age and gender distribution for the two groups involved in the study.

Table 3: Baseline Characteristics of COVID-19 Patients

Group	Description	Assessment Tool	Mean Score (SD)
G1	Mental Health	Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7	14.2 (3.5)
G2	Physical Health	Medical Outcomes Study SF-36	45.6 (8.1)

Table 3 outlines the baseline characteristics of COVID-19 patients using specific assessment tools for each group. The Mental Health group (G1) had an average Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 score of 14.2 (SD = 3.5), indicating moderate anxiety. The Physical Health group (G2) recorded an average SF-36 score of 45.6 (SD = 8.1), reflecting moderate impairment in physical functioning.

Table 4: Treatment Outcomes at 4th and 8th Weeks

Group	Description	Treatment Type	Week 4 Score (SD)	Week 8 Score (SD)	P-value
G1	Mental Health	Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy	10.6 (2.8)	7.4 (2.3)	<0.001
G2	Physical Health	Physical Rehabilitation Exercises	39.4 (7.2)	34.8 (6.5)	<0.001

Table 4 provides a comparison of treatment outcomes for two distinct patient groups undergoing different interventions over an 8-week period. For Group 1, undergoing Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, there was a noticeable decrease in the Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 scores from 10.6 (SD = 2.8) at week 4 to 7.4 (SD = 2.3) at week 8, indicating significant improvement in mental health symptoms. Similarly, Group 2, which engaged in Physical Rehabilitation Exercises, showed a progressive improvement in the Medical Outcomes Study SF-36 scores, from 39.4 (SD = 7.2) at week 4 to 34.8 (SD = 6.5) at week 8. Both changes were statistically significant with p-values less than 0.001, highlighting the efficacy of the respective treatments in reducing symptoms associated with COVID-19.

## DISCUSSION

The outcomes of this study demonstrated significant improvements in both the mental and physical health groups over an 8-week treatment period, underscoring the efficacy of targeted interventions for COVID-19-related health complications (17). For patients experiencing psychological distress, cognitive-behavioral therapy proved to be a robust tool in reducing anxiety symptoms, as evidenced by the consistent decrease in GAD-7 scores from baseline to the 8th week (18). Similarly, physical rehabilitation exercises facilitated a notable improvement in the physical functioning of participants, which was quantified by enhancements in SF-36 scores (19).

These findings suggest that tailored interventions can play a crucial role in the management of COVID-19's health impacts. However, the study's strength also hinges on its rigorous methodological framework, which utilized validated scales to measure outcomes objectively. Despite these strengths, the research was not without limitations (20). The relatively small sample size and the short duration of the study might limit the generalizability of the results (21). Additionally, the reliance on self-reported measures, which are susceptible to respondent bias, could have influenced the outcomes (22).

The debate surrounding the optimal approaches for managing COVID-19-related health issues continues, with some advocating for a more pronounced focus on physical rehabilitation, considering the long-term physical sequelae observed in patients. Others argue for prioritizing mental health interventions, given the profound and pervasive psychological impacts of the pandemic. This study contributes to this ongoing discussion by providing empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of both approaches, yet also highlights the need for a balanced strategy that addresses both facets of health, which are often interrelated (23).

Furthermore, while the interventions were successful, the dynamics of recovery observed could vary in broader, more heterogeneous populations. Future research should, therefore, aim to replicate these findings in larger cohorts and diverse settings to enhance the robustness and applicability of the conclusions drawn. The inclusion of longer follow-up periods could also provide insights into the long-term benefits of these interventions and help in understanding the chronic aspects of post-COVID-19 recovery (24).

To address health threats posed by the COVID-19, it is recommended to invest in robust digital health infrastructures, enhance interdisciplinary research collaborations, and prioritize adaptive public health policies that are responsive to evolving epidemiological data and healthcare needs (25).

## CONCLUSION

This study reaffirmed the value of specialized interventions tailored to the specific needs of patients affected by COVID-19. Cognitive-behavioral therapy and physical rehabilitation exercises both demonstrated significant efficacy in mitigating the respective mental and physical health declines associated with the virus. As the global health community continues to combat COVID-19 and its aftermath, these findings offer valuable guidance for developing effective treatment strategies to support comprehensive patient recovery.

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