

## **Anxiety and depression levels in Malta: A year into Covid-19 pandemic**

Sarah Cuschieri

*S Cuschieri*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Medicine & Surgery, University of Malta, Msida, Malta  
Contact: sarah.cuschieri@gmail.com

### **Background:**

Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a number of lifestyle changes and restrictive measures. The aim was to assess for the impact of Covid-19 on anxiety- depression levels and associated behavioural attitudes among the adult population of Malta.

### **Methods:**

An anonymous survey using Google Forms was disseminated on social media (1st to 26th of February), targeting the adult residents of Malta. The survey's questions assessed for socio-demographic characteristics, changes in physical activity levels, and body weight. The Generalised Anxiety Disorder assessment tool was used to evaluate the level of anxiety and the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 assessment tool was used to evaluate the level of depression among the participants during the pandemic. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were performed.

### **Results:**

A total of 1,034 participants responded. Mild anxiety levels (41.20% CI95%:38.24 - 44.23) and minimal depression levels (54.23% CI95%:51.17-57.25) were generally reported. On stratification by employment status, students reported severe anxiety levels ( $p < 0.01$ ). Indeed, a participant reported, "COVID-19 made me very anxious. . .not knowing if I will be finishing my degree". Covid-19 also impacted on behavioural attitudes, "I am eating more, I put on weight. . .resulting in feeling a bit depressed and have nothing to look forward to". Indeed, a proportional increase in body weight was reported among those with mild to severe anxiety levels ( $p < 0.01$ ). An inverse trend with an increase in anxiety and depression scores and decrease physical activity levels was observed ( $p < 0.01$  respectively).

**Conclusions:**

The population's mental health has been impacted differently, with some societal groups more susceptible than others. An increase in body weight and a decrease in physical activity appears to be linked with both anxiety and depression levels.

**Key messages:**

- Increase in mental health burden and obesity prevalence is anticipated as a resultant effect of Covid-19.
- Enhanced psychological support and prevention strategies targeting mental health and obesity are recommended.