

## **EFFECTS OF ISOLATION AMONGST MARRIED INDIAN COUPLES DEVELOPING SADISTIC TENDENCIES**

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### **Abstract**

*On 24 March 2020, the Government of India ordered a nationwide lockdown for 21 days, limiting movement of the entire 1.3 billion population of India as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 pandemic in India. It was ordered after a 14-hour voluntary public curfew on 22 March, followed by enforcement of a series of regulations in the country's COVID-19 affected regions. The lockdown was placed when the number of confirmed positive coronavirus cases in India was approximately 500. The sudden prohibition on movement of the entire 1.3 billion population has caused disruption in the daily livelihood and social indulgence. After 2 months, the lockdown still is in motion and the population is stagnant. This stagnation has made them prone to many mental health issues which are to be identified. The focus of this study will be centered at understanding whether there has been any significant impact of COVID-19 pandemic and the prolonged lockdown that it has caused on the psychological well-being of married individuals who have lacked social contact from the outside world and have been working from home. Therefore, assessing the possibilities of married individuals showing the onset of sadistic tendencies against their spouses under the influence of anxiety based sadism, which could determine the prevalence of antagonistic social anxiety amidst Indian population. The results shown by both the scales (Zung Self-Rating Anxiety Scale and Variety of Sadistic Tendencies) in determining anxiety and sadism in married couples can be majorly said to be significant to the cognitively based predictions in determining the sadistic tendencies. The findings also contribute to the accumulation of knowledge in behavioral changes in couples during lockdown and may be useful in determining potential to establish links between strong aspects of direct sadism for both male and female partners early detected tendencies.*

**Keywords:** Isolation, Lockdown, Anxiety, Sadism, Violence, Work from home, Marriage

### **INTRODUCTION**

On 24 March 2020, the Government of India ordered a nationwide lockdown for 21 days, limiting movement of the entire 1.3 billion population of India as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 pandemic in India. It was ordered after a 14-hour voluntary public curfew on 22 March, followed by enforcement of a series of regulations in the country's COVID-19 affected regions. The lockdown was placed when the number of confirmed positive coronavirus cases in India was approximately 500 (WHO, 2020).

The sudden prohibition on movement of the entire 1.3 billion population has caused disruption in the daily livelihood and social indulgence. After 2 months, the lockdown is still in motion and the population is stagnant. This stagnation has made them prone to many mental health issues which are to be identified (CDDEP, 2020). The association between anxiety, social relationships, and cognitive health is complex, as although good social relationships may enhance wellbeing, individuals who have greater wellbeing may experience better social relationships (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Poor social connections may be associated with poor cognition in adults who are not experiencing mental health problems, and the trajectory of this association may be moderated by cognitive reserve. However, it is unclear whether this relationship is the same for married couples in isolation with symptoms of anxiety (Frederickson, 2016). Married couples in isolation face numerous challenges, including disassociation from persons in their social networks. Perceived social isolation or loneliness could impair the quality of life in couples, and lead to mental disorders. However, it is uncertain

whether perceived loneliness has an independent association with anxiety symptoms and comorbid conditions in Indian couples. Therefore, we aimed at examining the association between perceived loneliness and anxiety symptoms, among Indian married couples (Holwerda et al., 2012). All forms of violence against women, physical and mental, whether at domestic or societal levels, including those arising from customs, traditions or accepted practices shall be dealt with effectively with a view to eliminate its incidence. Institutions and mechanisms/schemes for assistance must be created and strengthened for prevention of such violence, including sexual harassment at work place and customs like dowry; for the rehabilitation of the victims of violence and for taking effective action against the perpetrators of such violence. A special emphasis should also be laid on programs and measures to deal with trafficking in women and girls (Sanger & Kacker, 2020).

Most of the research on sadism was conducted in forensic settings, particularly focusing on sex offences (Mokros et al., 2014). More recently, however, there has been a recognition that sadistic traits exist outside of this setting – a phenomenon termed “everyday sadism” in an attempt to distinguish it from sadism in the context of sex or crime (Buckels et al., 2013). Sadism is a personality trait characterized by the enjoyment of other people's pain or suffering. The current study starts with the issues surrounding the definition and measurement of sadism: there is debate regarding exactly what sadism is, which has led to a number of limitations with existing measures. It then discusses the relationship between sadism and antisocial behaviour: sadism is clearly associated with cruel behaviour towards others, but its exact role in such behaviour, and the precise distinction between sadistic and non-sadistic crimes, has proved hard to characterise. It then considers sadism in the context of other antagonistic personality traits – psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism. Finally, it considers future research directions: clearer definition, the development of sadism in social isolation, and the impact on married couples. Sadism often motivates antisocial behaviour, which takes a significant toll on its victims; understanding exactly what sadism is, and whether it can be treated, is of vital importance (e.g., O'Meara et al., 2011).

Sadism can be defined as a virtue of an individual's preference on enjoying the infliction of pain. Studies have classified sadism into 2 genres: Direct and Vicarious. While direct sadism has the common notion of individuals who prefer to inflict pain themselves, vicarious sadism addresses the individual's need to witness and enjoy pain inflicted on others. This classification has been an outcome of the well defined “dark triad” and is connected by all 3 vertices (Paulhus, 2013). The expertise of criminologists and forensic psychologists can help in devising mechanisms to periodically monitor and address the issue of bullying and sexual harassment at a workplace and suggest policies to put an end to any inappropriate practice. Similarly, understanding the effect of workplace environment on bullying and sexual harassment can open new gates for research (Srivastava & Kacker, 2019).

In a society, crime exists due to prevalence of different factors that are personal, economical, political and social. Complete eradication of crime is not the goal of prevention framework, but a step towards discussion and attempt in reduction of the crime. Since ages crime has existed and still will prevail, however the goal is to create a civilized society with minimum crime rates (Sadanandan & Kacker, 2020). In recent times, it has also been witnessed that sadistic tendencies turn towards domestic violence which victimizes the female and male partners alike, many cities across India have reported cases that are predominantly focusing on how unstable matrimonies have led to mental and physical violence against the husband and which has also turned out to be fatal in certain instances. Men do report and allege spousal violence in private, but they hardly report it in public. Violence against men by women is not a new phenomenon, and the author predicts that it will increase with changing power dynamics, economic independence, and control over economy and resources. This change in power dynamics has occurred due to an increase in a partner's sadistic tendencies throughout time. Much has been researched and reported on violence against women but not on violence against men (Sarkar, Dsouza, & Dasgupta, 2007).

This brings us to the hypothesis regarding the current study:

- H<sub>0</sub>: There won't be any significant correlation between the variables anxiety and sadistic tendencies in male and female participants.
- H<sub>01</sub>: There won't be any significant correlation between the variables anxiety and sadistic tendencies in male partner in a marriage
- H<sub>02</sub>: There won't be any significant correlation between the variables anxiety and sadistic tendencies in female partner in a marriage.

## RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The focus of this study will be centered at understanding whether there has been any significant impact of COVID-19 pandemic and the prolonged lockdown that it has caused on the psychological well-being of married

individuals who have lacked social contact from the outside world and have been working from home. This study will also create an opportunity to examine how isolation based anxiety might lead to sadistic tendencies amongst married couples, which can be an early sign of violent tendencies.

The objective thus framed for this study is:

- To study and determine the effect of isolation during a lockdown on an individual's anxiety levels and sadistic tendencies amongst Indian married couples by using appropriate standardized scales of assessment.

## METHODOLOGY

### a. Participants

Purposive sampling technique was used to collect a sample of 30 married couples(60 individuals), ranging between 23 to 60 years of age, participated from across India, by means of an online survey platform for the study.

### b. Instruments

1. **Zung Self-Rating Anxiety Scale:** Zung Self-Rating Anxiety Scale was conducted in the study. The Zung Self-Rating Anxiety Scale (SAS) was designed by William W. K. Zung M.D, a professor of Psychiatry from Duke University, to quantify a patient's level of anxiety. SAS is a 20-item self-report assessment device built to measure anxiety levels, based on scoring in 4 groups of manifestations: cognitive, autonomic, motor and central nervous system symptoms.
2. **Varieties of Sadistic Tendencies:** The Varieties of Sadistic Tendencies scale was conducted in this study. The Varieties of Sadistic Tendencies (VAST) was designed by Delroy L. Paulhus and Daniel N Jones, professors of Psychology from University of British Columbia in 2015, to assess a patient's desire to indulge into sadistic activities. VAST is a 16-item self-report assessment device built to measure sadistic tendencies, based on scoring in the different aspects of sadism; paraphilia, self-harm, harming others, inappropriate behavior and violence.

## PROCEDURE

The purpose of conducting the study with Zung SAS and VAST on the subjects was to facilitate the correlation of anxiety induced from the isolation and the sadistic tendencies developing from them, subsequently establishing a link between tendencies of indulging into domestic violence when stayed in isolation for prolonged periods. For this, a specific format of a questionnaire was established to be followed. The couples were sent the online questionnaire comprising of demographic details, Zung SAS and VAST; in the mentioned order, they were told the instructions by means of text messages or phone about the questionnaire and the study was briefly explained to them. Once they were instructed, both the spouses were made to fill the questionnaire separately. There was no time limit on the responses and the same was informed to the subjects. The collected data from the couples were then analyzed with respect to our stated hypotheses. The raw scores of Zung SAS was calculated and Anxiety scales were determined for every individual which was then used to analyze the correlation between the acquired results from the anxiety scale. The scores from the VAST were calculated and once again the scores were used to determine the correlation between them. The results obtained from the SAS and VAST were then correlated with each other to determine if there exists, a link between the two variables.

As an added measure, the results obtained from both the scales were introduced to t-test with respect to the results obtained from male and female subjects to determine if there is any significant difference between violent sadistic tendencies developing amongst a specific gender due to isolation.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A total of 60 samples were considered for the study among which it was 30 male and 30 female. Data analysis included comparison of mean, standard deviation, Independent t-test of variables and bi-variate correlation analysis of the dependent and independent variables.

Table 1: Showing mean and standard deviation of the independent and dependent variables.(Anxiety and Sadistic Tendencies)

Independent & Dependent Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Anxiety	53.0667	7.96362
Direct Sadistic Tendencies	2.9577	0.51867
Vicarious Sadistic Tendencies	2.8882	0.60324
<b>N= 60</b>		

The above table 1 shows the means of the independent and dependent variables, i.e., Anxiety and Sadistic Tendencies (Direct & Vicarious) as 53.0667, 2.9577, and 2.8882 respectively. The standard deviations for the same variables (Anxiety and Sadistic Tendencies (Direct & Vicarious)) were found to be 7.96362, 0.51867, and 0.60324 respectively.

Table 2: Showing bi-variate correlation of the combined scores of Anxiety and Sadistic Tendencies of male and female partners in the marriage together.

Variables	Direct Sadistic Tendencies	Vicarious Sadistic Tendencies
<b>Anxiety</b>	0.254*	0.015
<b>N= 60</b>		

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The above table 2 shows the bi-variate correlation of the total scores of Anxiety and its effect on the dimensions of Sadistic tendencies which are studied in terms of Direct Sadism and Vicarious Sadism. The dimension direct sadism from sadistic tendencies shows a significant positive correlation to the Anxiety variable at ( $p < 0.05$ ) level of significance with the value of 0.254\*, which indicates that anxiety has a role to play in driving the sadistic tendencies of both male and female partners in a direct order. The positive correlation and its significance at the  $p < 0.05$  level shows that the suggested hypothesis,  $H_0$  which says that there won't be any significant correlation between the variables anxiety and sadistic tendencies in male and female can be rejected and the alternate hypothesis proving the relation in variables can be accepted.

Table 3: Showing bi-variate correlation of the combined scores of Anxiety and Sadistic Tendencies of male partner in the marriage.

Variables	Direct Sadistic Tendencies	Vicarious Sadistic Tendencies
<b>Anxiety</b>	0.514**	0.071
<b>N= 30</b>		

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The above table 3 shows the bi-variate correlation of the total scores of male partner's Anxiety and its effect on the dimensions of Sadistic tendencies in the forms of Direct Sadism and Vicarious Sadism. The dimension direct sadism from sadistic tendencies shows a highly positive correlation to the Anxiety variable at ( $p < 0.01$ ) level of significance with the value of 0.514\*\*, which indicates that anxiety of male partner in a marriage has a strong role to play in developing the sadistic tendencies. The positive correlation and its significance at the  $p < 0.01$  level shows that the suggested hypothesis,  $H_{01}$  which says that there won't be any significant correlation between the variables anxiety and sadistic tendencies in male partner in a marriage can be rejected and the alternate hypothesis proving the relation in variables can be accepted.

Table 4: Showing bi-variate correlation of the combined scores of Anxiety and Sadistic Tendencies of female partner in the marriage.

Variables	Direct Sadistic Tendencies	Vicarious Sadistic Tendencies
Anxiety	0.083	0.034
N= 30		

The above table 4 shows the bi-variate correlation of the total scores of female partner's Anxiety and its effect on the dimensions of Sadistic tendencies in the forms of Direct Sadism and Vicarious Sadism. Though the dimensions of sadistic tendencies showcased positive correlation to anxiety, there is no significance neither at a  $p < 0.05$ , nor  $p < 0.01$  levels of significance. This indicates that the suggested hypothesis,  $H_{02}$  which says that there won't be any significant correlation between the variables anxiety and sadistic tendencies in female partner in a marriage can be accepted.

The further step was to explore the possibility of determining the links between anxiety developed during isolation and the 2 types of sadism. In order to achieve that, married couples were assessed for both anxiety and sadistic tendencies and the results were received in a positive aspect. This indicated that couples in isolation due to lockdown show signs of anxiety which were coupled with sadistic tendencies which could be seen in correlation to preferences that an individual makes that are leading to direct sadism. Anxiety may directly affect the individual influences towards sadistic behaviour which signified from the study as the implication in an individual has resulted to lack of empathic cognition which makes the person to feel an inclination to indulge in cruel activities. Also, people scoring more on the items depicting direct sadism in the individual strongly consists themselves to indulge in cruelty and take up the sadistic tendencies.

## CONCLUSION

Results from the current study showed that signs of antagonistic anxiety can be significant determinants of the sadistic tendencies, where the sadistic behaviour was assessed by the combination of direct and vicarious sadism. The results shown by both the scales (Zung Self-Rating Anxiety Scale and Variety of Sadistic Tendencies) in determining anxiety and sadism in married couples can be majorly said to be significant to the cognitively based predictions in determining the sadistic tendencies. The findings also contribute to the accumulation of knowledge in behavioral changes in couples during lockdown and may be useful in determining potential to establish links between strong aspects of direct sadism for both male and female partners early detected tendencies.

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We would like to thank Mr. Nikhil Chopra Galimotu for assistance in the analysis of the data, making the manuscript what it is today.