

COVID-19 Pandemic as a Transitional Event: From the Perspective of the Transition Theory

Subjects: Others

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The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every aspect of people's lives across the globe. It is also unique in the way it changed their lives. In this entry, a framework, the Transition Theory, is outlined, which is used to interpret the transitional properties of this pandemic, the ways it differs from other transitional events, and how it impacts the lives and well-being of the individuals. The prediction is that people might consider the pandemic as an important life transition event only if there is a little similarity between their pre-pandemic and post-pandemic lives. Individual differences also need to be considered as those whose lives have been directly affected by the pandemic experience a greater COVID-related change (e.g., job loss vs. no job loss). Lastly, the transitional impact of the pandemic might have a strong link with people's mental outcomes. These notions call for a longitudinal approach to get an accurate understanding of the pandemic experience while this world-changing event unfolds rather than in retrospect.

Keywords: COVID-19 ; pandemic ; transition theory ; life elements ; transitional impact ; well-being

In December 2019, the world saw the emergence of a novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) which the World Health Organization (WHO) officially labeled a pandemic on 11 March 2020 ^[1]. As of May 2022, over 500 million positive cases and over 6 million deaths were recorded ^[2]. To curb the spread of the virus, isolation, social distancing, and other restrictions were put in place ^{[3][4]}. As a result, people had to reconfigure aspects of their environments and their routines to adapt to the pandemic-related changes they were experiencing (e.g., online classes, work from home). Furthermore, people's economic stability had a hard hit as financial markets fell and unemployment rates rose. Thus, the pandemic affected life across the globe to some extent in terms of their financial, social, and day-to-day activities. In addition, the pandemic came to dominate the news cycle and social interaction ^{[5][6]}.

Given the breadth and scope of the pandemic, it is intuitively clear that the pandemic has created a "new normal", or a pandemic period ^[7]. Considering life events that require an adjustment in a person's accustomed way of life, the COVID-19 pandemic could undoubtedly be counted as one of the most important life events or, in other words, an event of transition that has significantly impacted the lives of people from around the world. How the pandemic has changed people's lives, the nature and extent of these changes, and the effect these changes have had on people's well-being are less clear. It is relatively early to provide a complete empirical explanation of these issues, but given what we know about life transitions, their aspects of it, and their impact on the well-being status ^{[8][9][10][11][12][13][14][15][16][17][18]}, it is possible to speculate about them in an informed manner. This entry, speaking in broader terms, aims to explain whether the COVID-19 pandemic could be considered a distinctive (life) transition, and its qualitative impact. This is discussed in a few different steps: first, a theoretical framework, the Transition Theory, is outlined, which provides means for understanding the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic as a transitional event; second, discussed how the pandemic appears to be different from other transitional life events; finally, to take into account how the pandemic has been likely to affect people's lives, memories, and well-being.

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