

SOCIO-PATHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF COVID 19 PANDEMIC

Saše Gerasimoski, PhD¹

Faculty of Security, Skopje, University "Sv. Kliment Ohridski",
Bitola, Republic of North Macedonia

Abstract: The world is going through the worst crises since the World War Two. Covid 19 Pandemic has changed our societal life overnight. This paper tackles the socio-pathological consequences of the Covid 19 pandemic, notably with implications on several socio-pathological phenomena such as suicide, alcoholism and violence, especially domestic violence. Theoretically, the paper rests mainly on the structural and functional theory of societal anomie as well as the contemporary theory of risk society. Methodologically, the paper will use comparative theoretical analyses, as well an empirical analysis of secondary data concerning the state of these socio-pathological phenomena before and during the Covid 19 crises in Macedonia. The findings presented in this paper will serve as the basis for future research in this field, as well as to help better understand the socio-pathological implications of Covid 19 crises.

Keywords: *Covid 19 pandemic, societal pathology, suicide, alcoholism, domestic violence*

INTRODUCTION

We are living in a unique sequence of societal history marked by the explosion of risks. The risk society thesis elaborated by the seminal German sociologist Ulrich Beck has become our everyday (Bek, 2001). We are confronting with numerous security risks, which are constantly increasing, becoming worse and more and more unpredictable. The most evident proof of this thesis is the Covid 19 pandemic with which the world struggles for more than one and a half year. Most notable scientists believe that the world will never be the same as we knew it previously, meaning that the Covid 19 pandemic will cause lasting consequences on the world and society. We are talking about the tectonic changes with serious consequences, especially on the structure and functioning of society. We have become so preoccupied with our everyday fears for our physical existence that, in fact, COVID-19 has

¹ sasegerasimoski@gmail.com



reduced us to a 'society of survival', as stated by famous Korean intellectual Byung-Chul Han (Siguenza & Rebollo, 2020). Han's controversial thesis of the 'burnout society' has recognized the so called 'dialectic of negativity' with which we are faced every day in order to beat the Corona virus (Хан, 2016: 11). "An open society is a society exposed to the blows of fate", remarked Zygmunt Bauman, thus, in some way announcing what could turn wrong with globalized and postmodern society at its peak (Бауман, 2016: 11). And it proved right. The open world suddenly became a closed world, reminiscent of the closeness of medieval society, for instance. But it is man who actually provoked Covid 19 with their invasiveness as a species. After all, as Sari Hanafi rightly concludes, "COVID-19 is a disease not only of globalization, but also of Anthropocene" (Hanafi, 2020: 3). Could this be a water-shedding event that might denote the end of humankind, of homo sapiens as we know it? (Харапи, 2018: 442).

Among the most crucial implications of Covid 19 crises, we could surely mention the ones towards the societal relations and societal deviance. In fact, the sheer discussion of the so called 'new normality' is in its nature a debate about the normality or deviance of the social moment in which we live. It is even much deeper and more important considering the interest of sociology and social pathology than relation of Covid 19 with sociopathological phenomena only. Nevertheless, the object of interest in this paper will gravitate around the more direct relatedness between Covid 19 pandemic and sociopathological phenomena. Precisely, we could agree that the Covid 19 crisis causes evident and serious consequences in many sociopathological phenomena, amongst them especially visible are the consequences on suicide, alcoholism and violence, most notably on domestic violence. Even without some profound scientific research we can observe an increase of these sociopathological phenomena by just following the reports and news from the media in the given period. Of course, a more serious scientific approach is needed in order to prove and closely analyse the trends in this sphere and bring conclusions.

This paper actually elaborates all of the previously mentioned questions in the lines to follow. We put significant emphasis on analysing the state with suicide, alcoholism and domestic violence in the period of Covid 19 pandemic in Macedonia, with some parallels on global level, mainly using up to date official secondary data from Macedonia's statistical sources and statistical data from WHO (World Health Organization). Our intention is to give a glimpse on this relation and to compare the implications of Covid 19 pandemic on these socio-pathological phenomena on both levels. By doing so, we believe that we could provide some answers considering the correlation between Covid 19 and the abovementioned socio-pathological phenomena, as well as enabling better understanding of this nexus.

SOCIO-PATHOLOGICAL PHENOMENA AND COVID 19 PANDEMIC

The sociopathological phenomena, generally speaking, have been in constant increase worldwide in the last couple of decades. This increase is mainly due to the disturbances of societal order in times of globalisation and postmodern neoliberal society. The contemporary society has in itself built-in flaws, distortions and unresolved structural strains that produce societal deviance. The postmodern and neoliberal quest for individualization and self-realization are often viewed as the driving forces for societal deviance, both on societal and cultural level (Тејлор, 2012: 51). The societal deviance was researched a decades ago by some eminent social thinkers, in the notions of "ill society" by Erich Fromm, or "culture of narcissism" of Christopher Lasch (From, 1980; Lasch, 1979). Obviously, our world has never been short of troubles. To make things worse, the Covid 19 pandemic appeared last year and is still here. For the first time since the Great Plague of 14th century, the world experienced



quarantines, a dramatic and sobering way of showing how fragile our world has become. The negative impact of Covid 19 towards societal relations is obvious. We only have to analyze deeper the scale of this correlation, causes and consequences.

The paradoxical ambivalence of Covid 19 crisis could be summarized in the strange dialectic of societal isolation and societal solidarity. They are present both and they all contribute to the societal pathology and its resolving at the same time. Think of this irony of separation and unification as two different sides of the same token (Жижек, 2020: 39). For instance, the Corona virus has made us more worried, shrouded in fear and suspense for our survival, which could lead to anxiety, depression and in some cases even to suicide if this lasts for a longer time. But, at the same time, this societal isolation has pulled the people together within their primary family ties, thus alleviating this negative effect and even providing prevention and protection against suicide.

Without referring directly to some conspiracy theories, it is more than evident that the Corona virus outbreak was not so sudden event after all. For decades, scientists have been constantly warning us of the disastrous consequences of the uncontrolled interference of man in nature. Anthony Giddens called this “the manufactured risk”, while Juval Noa Harari speaks more precisely of the so called “tick-ing bomb in the laboratory” (Гиденс, 2002: 24; Харари, 2019: 303). In other words, all the preconditions for some global mankind tragedy were set and it was just the matter of time when this would happen.

Covid 19 pandemic left serious, and one could argue, lasting consequences to societal relations. Owing to the pandemic, some of the previously known societal disorganizations worsened, such as societal anomie and alienation. People were forced to stay in lockdown, to limit their societal interactions and to replace them with virtual communication. This unnatural societal situation was a powerful blow to the world and way of living the people previously knew and lived, since the globalization was at full swing. Now, all of a sudden, people were forced to accept this new societal momentum as so called “new normality” and even to adapt to it as a state that could become our reality for certain indefinite time in the future. This caused additional pressure and increased fear, anxiety and uncertainty that were already present in times of risk society. All of these dramatic structural changes in societal relations could not stay without any consequences on societal relations. Most of them were manifested in the spheres of sociopathological phenomena, most notably as additional increase in the rates of suicide, alcoholism and violence, especially domestic violence.

IMPLICATIONS OF COVID 19 PANDEMIC ON SUICIDE, ALCOHOLISM AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Unfavourable influence of Covid 19 pandemic can be most visibly seen in the sphere of societal pathology. The disturbances in societal relations during Covid 19 are so great that they can be seen as separate factor that contributes significantly, if not entirely, to the rise of several sociopathological phenomena, in specific, suicide, alcoholism and domestic violence. Although the time distance is relatively short to give some stronger conclusions on these correlations, nevertheless, by using some statistical comparison from WHO and Macedonian statistical sources, as well as some recent scientific and professional studies in this field, we will attempt to highlight these correlations.

In terms of many sociopathological phenomena that are affected by Covid 19 crises, such as suicide for example, we can see confirm the Robert Merton's strain theory as being pretty useful in explaining the deviant adaptation. Namely, as the time passes and the strain between societal norms and values becom-



ing more and more accentuated, deviant behaviour becomes possible way of adaptation of individuals and societal groups to a new societal reality, or the so called “new normality” (Merton, 1938: 672-682; Ташева, 1999: 472; Герасимоски, Бачановиќ и Аслимоски, 2019: 86). Disparity between societal values and societal norms is a significant, if not crucial factor of societal deviance, and it was observed more than a century ago within the so called structural-functionalist sociological and sociopathological theories, such as in the theory of societal anomie and the strain theory, elaborated in the works of Emile Durkheim and Robert Merton, respectively (Durkheim, 1982; Merton, 1938). In the newest sociological thought, these ideas can be seen in the work of the renowned sociologist Zygmunt Bauman in liquid modernity theory and the idea of interregnum (Bauman, 2012: 49-56; Gerasimoski, 2020: 12).

Suicide is rightly considered as the worst sociopathological phenomenon simply because it takes human lives and causes serious trauma for families and wider societal community. Since Emil Durkheim’s anthological study on suicide, the modern world has been struggling with this deviance for more than a century, mostly with the so-called anomic form of suicide (Durkheim, 2005). The suicidal rates have been in constant rise since then and Covid 19 pandemic only worsened the unfavorable societal conditions which lead to increased suicide rates and suicide attempts.

There are a lot of recent significant studies, statistics and findings in terms of suicide and its relatedness with Covid 19 pandemic. WHO reports that there were around 700,000 deaths globally caused by suicide in 2019, i.e. before the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic (WHO, 2021: 33). Concerning the relation between Covid 19 pandemic and suicide rates, it is difficult to draw some single conclusion, but what is common in majority of them is the fact that in most of the countries the initial stage of the pandemic was even marked by the decrease of the suicidal rates, explained by the so called pulling-together effect, whereby individuals undergoing a shared experience might support one another, thus strengthening social connectedness (Reger, Stanley & Joiner, 2020: 1094). However, in the later stages of the pandemic the increase of suicidal rates was observed only in some countries (Pirkis et al., 2021: 584). This is especially evident in case of Japan, for instance (Sakamoto, Ishikane, Ghaznavi & Ueda, 2021: 8; Tanaka & Okamoto, 2021: 233). Stay-at-home orders and the push for physical distancing seen internationally during this pandemic have led to or worsened the sense of social isolation for a remarkable percentage of the world’s population. Social isolation and confinement are particularly harmful when imposed, since they are typically used for punishment and they can be experienced as traumatic. Consequently, loneliness, lack of belonging, and lack of connections to others are all risk factors for depression and suicide (Abi Zeid Daou, Rached & Geller, 2021: 312). There is a high probability that suicide rates will increase in many countries of the world as the Covid pandemic progresses. This problem may be especially difficult in the US (Sher, 2020: 710).

As far as Macedonia is concerned, the numbers show no significant rise of suicidal rates during Covid 19 pandemic. According to the Ministry of Interior, the pre-Covid and post-Covid suicide rate statistics is constant. But even in this case, the numbers do not say more than what should be determined by experts, for example, is this a consequence of disorders caused by quarantine conditions and other restrictions, or is it the result of reasons unrelated to the current situation. To determine this, it is necessary to inspect the profile of the person who reached or tried to reach for their own life and it requires much deeper investigation and research. Moreover, the time distance is essential, especially since many of these acts do not occur now/immediately, but after a certain period, when the latent dissatisfaction will accumulate to the extent that the person considers it unbearable for him or her (Блажевска, 2020). One curious fact about the suicide in Covid 19 times in Macedonia is related to the knowledge that there was an increase in suicide deaths caused by poisoning (Тумановска, 2020). If the Corona 19 pandemic continues, it is reasonable to suppose that the suicidal rates in Macedonia will also rise.



Considering the scale of its consequences and the huge stress-related burden, COVID-19 pandemic can be considered as a mass trauma, which can lead to psychological problems, health behaviour changes, and addictive issues, including alcohol consumption. Most of the research studies done in the period after the outbreak of Covid 19 pandemic, as well as comparison of statistical data, show an increase of alcohol use worldwide and worsening the situation with alcoholism as socio-pathological phenomenon. In US and United Kingdom the alcohol consumption increased to 17%, in Canada 20%, in Greece around 30%, while in Poland a staggering 146% (Calinaa et al., 2021: 529-530). We should mention that all of this numbers are not to be attributed solely to the usage of alcohol as response to the Covid 19 stress and societal deprivation, but also to the increased consumption of alcohol as disinfectant. In general, the main reason for increased usage of alcohol is to be found in perceiving and understanding of alcohol as alleviator of the stress caused by Covid 19. To make matters worse, the increased alcohol use further weakens the immune system of the organism, thus acting as risk factor to Corona virus (WHO, 2020: 1-2).

The increased use of alcohol during Covid 19 pandemic is also associated as risk factor for heightening domestic violence. Emergency calls about domestic violence, for which harmful alcohol consumption is a risk factor, rose by 60% in EU countries (OECD, 2021: 1-2). We can compare similar findings in Macedonia. A psychic disorder is cited as the main cause of domestic violence, followed by the abuse of alcohol in second, and only a small percentage is attributed to the abuse of drugs in third place (Здравковска, 2021). One interesting research paper by professor Jan Konvalinka from the University of Prague, found certain correlation between high rates of deaths from Covid 19 and abuse of alcohol. Namely, he concludes that the Czech Republic records highest rate of deaths from Covid 19 in the world, correlating it with the unhealthy lifestyle of many Czechs which also contributes to the high mortality rate. This EU member is the first in the world in terms of consumption of beer with 200 litres per capita per year. In his research, he also mentions other countries for which he believes he found similar correlations, such as Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Belgium and Macedonia (Палата, 2021). In the case of Macedonia, we cannot generalize this conclusion since we do not have the exact numbers of the alcohol consumption from last year. It is considered that in Macedonia the consumption of alcohol is 5-7.4 litres per capita on an annual level (Институт за јавно здравје на Република Македонија, 2020: 9). According to the estimations from the commercial entities, there was a noticeable increase in alcohol consumption last year.

Domestic violence is a very complex sociopathological phenomenon. Covid 19 pandemic has only worsened the situation with domestic violence since it created favourable conditions for it to happen and intensify. The forced cohabitation of many families around the world has shown signs of a real 'emergency in an emergency' (Sacco et al., 2020: 72). Women, children and elderly are mostly affected by domestic violence. According to the UNDP data, 243 million women and girls have been subjected to sexual and/or physical violence perpetrated by an intimate partner in the previous 12 months since the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic. Even if we know that all of this domestic violence could not be attributed to Covid 19 pandemic solely, it is in fact a valuable datum. Domestic violence has risen from 25% up to 33% in different parts of the world compared to the pre Covid 19 period (UNDP, 2020: 1, 4). For instance, in Asia and Pacific region the domestic violence against women in the last 12 months ranged between 4.9 to 47.6% depending on the country (ESCAP, 2020: 7). In India alone, there has been a 47.2% increase in domestic violence complaints (Maji, Bansod & Singh, 2021: 4). Globally, in some countries there was an increase from 10% up to 50% to domestic violence helplines (C3O, 2020: 1).

In Macedonia, the number of reported cases of domestic violence during Covid 19 pandemic is relatively smaller compared to worldwide data, but, nevertheless, there was an increase in domestic vio-



lence from 8% to 10%. However, it is assumed that the number is much higher, since a lot of victims do not report the domestic violence, mainly due to the gender stereotypes, stigmatization and family tradition that are still present and because it is also deemed that domestic violence as something acceptable to certain individuals (Здравковска, 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

With all of its peculiarities, Covid 19 Pandemic is a phenomenon one of its kind in the humankind history. It has brought changes to societal sphere so immense and probably lasting that we have only started to feel its implications. Probably this is just the beginning of the series of implications that will be much more negative and severe in its nature as the pandemic progresses. Considering the topic of our paper, we could draw several conclusions related with the implications of Covid 19 pandemic on the sociopathological phenomena analysed in this paper (alcoholism, suicide and domestic violence). The conclusions could be summarized in the following:

- the sheer discussion of the so called 'new normality' is in its nature a debate about the normality or deviance of the social moment in which we live;
- there's a correlation between Covid 19 pandemic and sociopathological phenomena, such as suicide, alcoholism and domestic violence;
- it is difficult to analyse global patterns of correlation between Covid 19 pandemic and sociopathological phenomena, especially in terms of phenomenological aspects;
- worldwide, in most of countries, the first several months of Covid 19 pandemic were not followed by the rise of suicide rates, even a contrary, in many countries there was a decrease; in some countries such as Japan, an increase of suicidal rates was recorded in the later period of Covid 19 pandemic, while in North Macedonia, we cannot claim significant difference between suicidal rates before and after the outbreak of Covid 19 pandemic, although there are present factors that could correlate Covid 19 pandemic with suicide in the time to follow;
- most of the countries in the world, including North Macedonia, reported an increase of the use of alcohol and rise of alcoholism due to Covid 19 pandemic; similar as with the suicidal rates, the reasons for this can be found in the lockdown, heightened sense of societal deprivation, anxiety and fear;
- almost all the countries in the world, as well as North Macedonia, found the clear correlation between Covid 19 pandemic and rise of the domestic violence, especially violence towards women, children and elderly; the aetiology of domestic violence during Covid 19 pandemic is very similar to that of the other socio-pathological phenomena analysed in this paper.

REFERENCES

1. Abi Zeid Daou M., Rached G. & Geller J. (2021). COVID-19 and Suicide: A Deadly Association. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 209(5), 311-319.
2. Bauman, Z. (2012). Times of Interregnum. *Ethics & Global Politics*, 5(1), 49-56.
3. Bek, U. (2001). *Rizično društvo*. Beograd: Filip Višnjić.



4. Calina D., Hartung T., Mardare I., Mitroi M., Poulas K., Tsatsakis A., Rogoveanu I., Oana Doceaj A. (2021). COVID-19 Pandemic and Alcohol Consumption: Impacts and Interconnections. *Toxicology Reports*, 8, 529–535.
5. Durkheim, E. (1982). *The Rules of Sociological Method*. New York: The Free Press.
6. Durkheim, É. (2005). *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. London & New York: Routledge.
7. ESCAP (2020). *The Covid-19 Pandemic and Violence Against Women in Asia and the Pacific*. Policy Paper. No. 2020/12. Bangkok: ESCAP.
8. From, E. (1980). *Zdravo društvo*. Beograd: Rad.
9. Gerasimoski, S. (2020). Societal Deviance in the Era of Distorted Values and Norms: European and Macedonian Paralels. Proceedings of International Scientific Conference The Euro-Atlantic Values in the Balkan Countries. Security Horizons. (11-22). Skopje: Faculty of Security.
10. Hanafi, S. (2020). *Global Sociology and the Coronavirus*. Madrid: ISA Digital Platform.
11. Lasch, C. (1979). *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*. New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company.
12. Maji S., Bansod S. & Singh T. (2021). Domestic Violence During COVID-19 Pandemic: The Case for Indian Women. *Journal of Community Applied Social Psychoogy*. pp: 1–8.
13. Merton, R. K. (1938). Social Structure and Anomie. *American Sociological Review*, 3(5), 672-682.
14. OECD (2021). *The Effect of COVID-19 on Alcohol Consumption, and Policy Responses to Prevent Harmful Alcohol Consumption*. Paris: OECD.
15. Pirkis J., Ann J., Sangsoo S., Marcos DelPozo-B., Vikas A., Pablo Analuisa-A., Louis A., (2021). Suicide Trends in the Early Months of the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Interrupted Time-series Analysis of Preliminary Data From 21 Countries. *Lancet Psychiatry*, 8, 579–588.
16. Reger M. A., Stanley I. H. & Joiner T. E. (2020). Suicide Mortality and Coronavirus Disease 2019: A Perfect Storm?. *JAMA Psychiatry*, 77(11), 1093-1094.
17. Sacco M. A., Caputo F., Ricci P., Sicilia F., De Aloe L., Bonetta C. F., Cordasco F., Scalise C., Cacciatore G., Zibetti A., Gratteri S., Aquila, I. (2020). The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Domestic Violence: The Dark Side of Home Isolation During Quarantine. *Medico-Legal Journal*, 88(2), 71–73.
18. Sakamoto H., Ishikane M., Ghaznavi C. & Ueda P. (2021). Assessment of Suicide in Japan During the COVID-19 Pandemic vs Previous Years. *JAMA Network Open*, 4(2), 1-10.
19. Sher, L. (2020). The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Suicide Rates. *QJM: An International Journal of Medicine*, 707–712.
20. Siguenza, C. & Rebollo, E. (2020, May 24). Byung-Chul Han: COVID-19 Has Reduced us to A 'Society of Survival'. *EURACTIV*. Accessed on May 19, 2021. http://Byung-Chul%20Han_%20COVID19%20has%20reduced%20us%20to%20a%20'society%20of%20survival'%20-%20EURACTIV.com.html
21. Tanaka, T. & Okamoto, S. (2021), Increase in Suicide Following an Initial Decline During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Japan. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 5, 229–238.
22. UNDP (2020). *Gender-Based Violence and COVID 19*. New York: UNDP.
23. WHO (2020). *Alcohol and Covid 19: What you need to know*. Geneva: WHO.



24. WHO (2021). *World Health Statistics*. New York: WHO.
25. Бауман, З. (2016). *Флуидни времиња: живот во доба на несигурност*. Скопје: Слово.
26. Блажевска, К. (2020, 30-ти април). Какви приказни се кријат зад бројките на МБР?. *Deutsche Welle*. Accessed on May 15, 2021. http://2021/Влијание%20на%20Ковид%2019%20пандемија%20врз%20социопатолошките%20појави/Какви%20приказни%20се%20кријат%20зад%20бројките%20на%20МБР_%20_%20Македонија%20_%20DW%20_%2030.04.2020.html
27. Герасимоски С., Бачановиќ О. и Аслимоски П. (2019). *Социјална патологија*. Скопје: Факултет за безбедност.
28. Гиденс, Е. (2002). *Забеган свет: како глобализацијата ги преобликува нашите животи*. Скопје: Филозофски факултет.
29. Жижек, С. (2020). *Пандемија! Ковид 19 го тресе светот*. Скопје: Арс Ламина.
30. Здравковска, Ж. (2021, 2-ри февруари). Пандемијата го зголеми семејното насилство. *Радио Слободна Европа*. Accessed on May 17, 2021. <http://2021/Влијание%20на%20Ковид%2019%20пандемија%20врз%20социопатолошките%20појави/Пандемијата%20го%20зголеми%20семејното%20насилство.html>
31. Институт за јавно здравје на Република Македонија (2020). *Информација за сотојбата со болестите на зависност во Република Македонија: 2017-2019*. Скопје: Институт за јавно здравје на Република Македонија.
32. Палата, Л. (2021, 19-ти април). Во борбата против корона вирусот се брои секој килограм. *Deutsche Welle*. Accessed on May 17, 2021. http://2021/Влијание%20на%20Ковид%2019%20пандемија%20врз%20социопатолошките%20појави/Во%20борбата%20против%20корона вирусот%20се%20брои%20секој%20килограм%20_%20Свет%20_%20DW%20_%2019.04.2021.html
33. СЗО (2020). *Спречување на насилството врз децата, жените и постарите лица за време на пандемијата со Covid 19: клучни активности*. Скопје: СЗО.
34. Ташева, М. (1999). *Социолошки теории*. Скопје: Универзитет “Св. Кирил и Методиј”.
35. Тејлор, Ч. (2012). *Болестите на модерното време*. Скопје: Или-Или.
36. Тумановска, М. (2020, 9-ти декември). Пандемијата ги зголеми обидите за самоубиства со труење. *Радио Слободна Европа*. Accessed on May 15, 2021. <http://2021/Влијание%20на%20Ковид%2019%20пандемија%20врз%20социопатолошките%20појави/Пандемијата%20ги%20зголеми%20обидите%20за%20самоубиства%20со%20труење.html>
37. Хан, Б. Ч. (2016). *Папсано општество*. Скопје: Табахон.
38. Харари, Ј. Н. (2018). *Сапиенс: кратка историја на човечкиот род*. Скопје: Три.
39. Харари, Ј. Н. (2019). *Хомо деус: кратка историја на иднината*. Скопје: Три.