

# **The COVID-19 Crisis**

Key Social and Psychological Issues

**Eric D. Miller**

*Kent State University*

Series in Sociology



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*This book is dedicated to my mother with much love and gratitude*



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# Foreword

John Harvey

*University of Iowa*

Eric Miller has a history of being one of the most insightful and timely researchers and theorists about topics relevant to loss and trauma. As a 27-year member of the editorial board for the *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, he has helped shape the field of loss and trauma and has been a leader in developing ideas and theories pertaining to significant loss events such as the Pittsburgh Synagogue Shooting. In this same vein, in the present book, he has addressed the Covid-19 Pandemic with new ideas and a broad moral understanding of how this great loss event has affected and will affect generations of people world-wide.

The present book is one of the first on this topic. It is written in such a way that scholars, practitioners, and the general public will find it to be highly readable and insightful. Millions of people have died as a direct or indirect effect of the Covid virus. Scholars such as Miller help us understand how individuals, families, communities, and countries have attempted to deal with the Covid crisis. This pandemic will likely not be the last. Hopefully, it will not be the “new normal,” in reference to the term mentioned in Miller’s introduction. This pandemic deserves the type of analysis and scholarship so richly displayed in this book. Miller’s voice must be heard and appreciated if we are to successfully deal with the long-term impact of this deadly disease.

John Harvey, Professor Emeritus, University of Iowa, Founding Editor of *Journal of Loss and Trauma*.





# Preface

One of the leading scientific voices during the Covid pandemic, Anthony Fauci, delivered his first public address on the virus in late January 2020, titled “Coronavirus Infections: More Than Just the Common Cold” (American Society for Microbiology, 2020). Most anyone who lived through the Covid pandemic would very likely say that was an understatement—though perhaps, as discussed in this book, a better way to have phrased this point may have been that most everyone *should* have come to that conclusion (and, alas, may have held views anathema to such renderings).

When I first considered this book project, it was after the completion of a journal article written in March/April 2020 in which I termed the then-early-stage pandemic as “the loss and trauma of our time” (Miller, 2020). I will leave it to others to entertain whether that description was appropriate or even prescient. This book largely picks up where my 2020 journal article left off. But, at the time of this writing in February 2022, I would still suggest that this phraseology was indeed appropriate. Why so? In brief, as considered in this book, the pandemic itself produced many direct effects on individuals and society-at-large that have been (at the very least) challenging if not traumatic and even disturbing. As I also explore in this book, the pandemic has arguably been connected to other secondary effects and consequences--some of which may ultimately prove to be beneficial to many individuals, while others may have quite disruptive or nefarious impacts. As an example of the latter, this preface was written days after the Russian invasion of Ukraine--which is largely viewed as the most significant war event in Europe since World War II (e.g., Hirsch, 2022). At first blush, while it might seem questionable to link that event with the pandemic, a major theme considered in this book is that the pandemic has produced much instability and has showcased American vulnerabilities (in particular). (And, a secondary and unknown question is whether this warlike incursion will have any impacts on the development of the virus itself (Park, 2022).) But of course, as I caution in this book, it is difficult to try to pinpoint clear cause-and-effect conclusions linked with the pandemic. However, in reflecting on terming the pandemic as the “loss and trauma of our time,” the potential circumstances of any sort of nuclear exchange as a result of this conflict—however unlikely, though plausible (Giovannini, 2022)—makes this aforesaid description almost pale by comparison.

It is my hope that readers will agree that I have mindfully attempted to document a critically important ongoing historical event from a psychological perspective. This point helps to make this book a fairly unique and major

contribution that distinguishes it from other works regarding the Covid pandemic. As such, this book might also serve as a sort of historical document that future scholars, teachers, and students of history may want to refer to as a source when considering psychological responses to this crisis from its earliest phases. In discussing some of the major psychosocial effects and consequences of the pandemic, readers will also find that this book draws from a large variety of both media and academic sources; in doing so, it aims to be accessible to a more general public while still maintaining appeal and interest to scholars and teachers alike—which is a fairly daunting task in and of itself. This book has timely social relevance of a continuously evolving and socially stigmatized experience in its focus on highlighting the chief developments (predominantly) from the first two years of the Covid pandemic with a psychological lens. In sum, academics, clinicians, policy makers, students, and laypersons who seek to have a critical yet concise overview of some of the most compelling psychological issues related to the pandemic from its earliest stages should find this work a helpful reference.

As previously noted and as I discuss in the first chapter, this brief book is meant to provide a sampling of many key issues and themes largely emanating from the first two years of the pandemic that should have much relevance to psychological and social scientific perspectives. Most of this analysis is particularly (though not necessarily exclusively) focused on events and happenings as they developed in America for two basic reasons: (1) the pandemic has had particularly insidious effects on America and (2) trying to bridge the knowledge and understanding of some of the more unique realities and contours regarding the pandemic response from different countries requires a more sensitive and extensive approach beyond the scope of this book. At the time of this initial writing in late February 2022 and following the Omicron surge, it was unclear if the health threats associated with the pandemic have truly subsided—or whether, (as has often been shown during the pandemic) most individuals are just desperately clamouring to return to “normalcy” while refusing to appreciate the continued possible future health risks and threats (Browne, 2022). It is indeed possible that, as we learn more about the pandemic’s (direct and indirect) effects over time, readers may have somewhat different interpretations of these events depending on whether this book is being reviewed years—or decades—following its release. Even so, it is my fervent hope that this fairly concise book offers scholars, students, and laypersons alike a sense of these initial issues and topics as they arose from the first two years of the pandemic.

As a reader, at this point, you may be wondering a bit about my background as I begin to discuss some of the key social and psychological issues emanating from the Covid pandemic. It is true that my perspective is just that. All of us who have lived through the pandemic will likely hold their own personal views

about its effects for both ourselves and society. Certainly, I do not claim to possess an all-knowing insight about the pandemic's psychological effects, nor would I claim any absolute resolution about its future trajectories. Nevertheless, this book was written with my informed scholarly and research background and training in the field of personality and social psychology. As a scholar who has published several books and academic papers largely focused on how adults adjust to loss and adverse events, I might add that I have many broad interests across and beyond the field of psychology that also helps to inform my scholarly perspective. Given the far-reaching scope of the Covid pandemic, this approach should also be welcomed and displayed throughout much of this book as well.

When I reflect on some of the effects that the pandemic has had on my life, I am reminded of the brief essay by communications scholar Peter Joseph Glociczki who shared some of his initial reactions to the start of the pandemic in the same published journal volume as my aforementioned paper (Glociczki, 2020). Among his comments were as follows:

Today is March 18, 2020. I woke up this morning to an actual fog outside. Fitting, amidst the COVID-19 virus, how it is pressing us to reconsider what we know to be clear...With the daily development of the virus, I wonder where we will be in one week. I had been looking forward to traveling today. Postponed for now, in the way the best place for anyone to be amidst our transnational moment is inside...I continue my daily routines. Treadmill, pushups, texting. I stay mostly indoors. I take reasonable steps to try and follow the guidance. I wait for my work to reopen, to reunite with students so that we might continue our lessons. Is COVID 19 our new normal? I hope not. I am longing for clarity, for what was normal: a familiar way of going forward (Glociczki, 2020, p. 558).

To me, in many respects, Glociczki's comments take me back to my own initial shock that we were facing a global pandemic (coupled with dubious political leadership and guidance)—and the angst over what the future may bring. Like Glociczki, I recall the early days—and weeks—of remaining solely indoors (including to do exercise) until there was a bit more guidance and understanding of what we were potentially dealing with in regard to the virus. As his comments also hinted, most of us found a way to go on living after this initial shock subsided. That is a testament to the resiliency showcased by many during times of crisis. While much of this book highlights this theme, this analysis does not shy away from some of the darker behaviors depicted during early phases of the pandemic.

There are many individuals I would like to thank and express acknowledgment for in regard to the preparation of this book. Let me first thank the excellent

guidance and support offered by Vernon Press, with particular appreciation to Victoria Echegaray and Argiris Legatos for their initial interest in my proposal as well as to Julien Verdeaux for much guidance throughout the review process. I am also very thankful for the reviewers of this book who have offered much helpful and thoughtful input that, in turn, has strengthened its contents and organization. On a personal note, as expressed in my dedication, I am forever grateful to all of the love and support provided to me by my mother, Ruth. The pandemic, in particular, brought many challenges—big and small—and she indeed is a great model of resilience herself. I thank my entire family as well with a particular acknowledgment of the many challenges that the pandemic created for my two sons—and their great ability and resilience to stay true to the phrase made popular by the British government in the early phases of World War II to “Keep Calm and Carry On.” I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge my beloved dog, Pepper, as our regular long walks were of tremendous personal value to me in coping with the many challenges during the pandemic.

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