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Emiliano Antonio Gutiérrez Fierros
Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City, México

<http://orcid.org/https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7132-422X>

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The current COVID-19 pandemic has raised several questions regarding the ability and capacity of governments, economies, and health care services and workers to deal with such a widespread infection. Furthermore, the appearance of several pandemics in the 1900s and 2000s, expanded such questions to include the ability and even willingness to diagnose and treat the psychological consequences of these events.

In October 2019, Professor Steven Taylor published a book, entitled “*The Psychology of Pandemics: Preparing For the Next Global Outbreak of Infectious Disease*”, which offers the first comprehensive analysis of the psychology of pandemics. Interestingly, the publication of the book in October 2019 by Cambridge Scholars Publishing predates the coronavirus pandemic by only a couple of months. In the book, Professor Taylor highlights the threats that worldwide pandemics pose to governments, health care institutions, but also people who deal with the everyday consequences of such pandemics. With this inclusion, Professor Taylor presents a wider, more comprehensive image of what pandemics have represented in the past, and sheds light on the relevance of the psychological factors that play a role in understanding adaptive and disruptive behaviours during pandemics. The book is concise and only 179 pages, making it an accessible read for many mental health professionals and academics.

Professor Steven Taylor has an MSc from the University of Melbourne and a PhD from the University of British Columbia. He is currently a professor and clinical psychologist in the department of psychiatry at the University of British Columbia and has a private practice in Vancouver that specialises in mood and anxiety disorders. His research has focused on anxiety disorders and related clinical conditions, including

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fears and phobias, health anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. He has published more than 300 peer-reviewed articles and more than 20 books. His new book, *The Psychology of Pandemics*, draws from accounts from multiple disciplines such as medicine, epidemiology, virology, sociology, and psychological subdisciplines such as clinical psychology and health psychology, to outline the characteristics of living through a pandemic, the implications and responsibilities for health systems and governments, and the psychological implications that could arise in such an event.

In his book, Professor Taylor starts by mentioning that the cause of pandemics is manifold, however, the essential elements are a host, an infectious agent to which most people do not have pre-existing immunity, and the environment. The interplay between these elements at a large scale, which may afflict millions across the globe can cause pandemics. While the book focuses on influenza pandemics, which is considered to be a common source of pandemics, other causes are also covered, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). It is important to mention that, from the beginning, the author explains that this book focuses on analysing the data of previous pandemics to try and explain the implications for public health systems and the psychological reactions and behavioural problems that may arise in future pandemics. It is not a coincidence that most expected responses from the onset on to the persistence of the COVID-19 pandemic can be found throughout the first five chapters of the book, seeing how to this day, we are no better equipped to prevent, deal, and resolve a pandemic than we were in previous decades and even centuries.

The writing style and historic revision make this book easy to understand. The book opens by detailing the basic facts of pandemics and available methods used to deal with them. The author emphasises that previous reactions to pandemics have focused on immediate concerns, neglecting to anticipate the potential future dangers. At the same time, the author makes it clear that health authorities and governments have focused on previous pandemics limiting the spread of infection, neglecting once again other important elements, such as the psychological consequences people may experience. This oversight might hinder positive behaviours to contain or even fight spread while failing to treat psychological consequences such as emotional distress, maladaptive behaviours, and even socially disruptive behaviours.

The focus, thereafter, is the psychological consequences of pandemics, including personality traits that may signal vulnerability, critical consequences such as generalised anxiety, fear, social-psychological factors, and possible cognitive-behavioural therapies to treat these emotional reactions. Personality traits are, in a way, indicators of the propensity of some people to show acute psychological issues in situations related to pandemics. The author points out how people differ in the way they react to psychosocial stressors such as a pandemic, and while some people can minimise or control their reactions, others may experience negative emotions, the most common being anxiety and fear. Anxiety

as a trait could be linked to another trait known as the overestimation of threats; in return, the overestimation of threats has predicted anxiety in response to outbreaks of SARS, swine flu, among others. Another important trait is negative emotionality, otherwise known as neuroticism, which is the tendency to become distressed by aversive stimuli and is linked to different mood and anxiety disorders.

Mental disorders may even be triggered by pandemic related stressors, including mood disorders, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorders, and depression. These reactions might also be linked to the emergence of socially disruptive behaviours such as riots, or even conspiracy theories regarding the source of infection or ways to treat it. These two factors emerge because of the threats of uncertainty during a pandemic, where people become more susceptible to unfounded claims if these can reach mainstream exposition. People tend to conform to a group's behaviour or even believe in conspiracy theories when they try to understand the new environment they are living in, to assert some control over the said environment, or maintain the security and positive image provided by their group.

Consequently, risk communication becomes inherently relevant to reduce the negative reactions or defences against a pandemic. Proper risk communication by government, health, and credible sources aim to inform people about the best actions to take to protect their health and safety. Risk communication should, therefore, include information about coping methods, the guidance of managing stress and emotional reactions such as anxiety, depression, or anger. Direct communication with the public can lead to positive behaviours such as hygiene, social distancing, or even vaccination if health authorities are perceived as trustworthy. In such a culturally diverse country as Mexico, risk communication is best advised to be promoted with cultural sensitivity in mind. Communication in this sense would require different messages targeting different groups of people with different strategies.

Analysing the information included in this book, there are several important actions that we can take away for the near future of the current COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly, the possibility of a second or further waves of infection increases the need to provide psychological support for people with behaviours and personality traits linked to maladaptive reactions during the pandemic. Providing a sense of stability even during the pandemic, alternative behaviours and cognitive-behavioural therapy in higher-risk cases will be necessary as a response to the psychological needs of people around the world. At the same time, when a vaccine is available, it will be important to improve health-promoting behaviours such as vaccine adherence, especially for people such as health care workers. This can be achieved by using incentives such as public education campaigns.

Overall, *The Psychology of Pandemics* is a book that provides an outline of the course of previous pandemics, while at the same time highlighting behavioural and psychological factors that require attention from psychologists and health care workers. Even further, this book

highlights the need to be prepared not just for the current pandemic, but other pandemics that may occur in the future. Professor Steven Taylor's book, which addresses the psychological impact of pandemics can be considered ground-breaking and represents a catalyst for further critical discussions on the psychological impact of pandemics, which are especially relevant now during the coronavirus pandemic.