

Press Release

A warning from psychologists and psychiatrists | May 2021

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Introduction

This Press Release is the outcome of observations, debates, experiences and studies made by psychologists, psychotherapists and psychiatrists concerned about the negative consequences of some of the measures adopted to address and contrast the spread of COVID-19, which may not be limited to the current period only.

Our goal, which is consistent with our work and our researches, is to **promote, protect and guard both individual and social psycho-physical well-being.**

The reports, the considerations and the requests contained in this document are intended to make our governors and the entire population aware of the **side effects** and the **dangers** that certain actions bring or may bring to the mental health and the well-being of the community as a whole.

This Press Release, which is based on scientific data and reasoning, aims at observing the current situation from a psychological point of view, and wishes to provide tools to avoid the triggering of dangerous pathological dynamics for both individuals and the whole society.

It covers 3 main areas:

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Finally, **proposals** and **requests** will be made (page 4).

This Press Release is non-partisan, therefore it shall not be exploited by any political party.

1. The psychological damage resulting from the lockdown and its management

This Press Release was primarily drafted to cover the serious psychological conditions that the nature and the management of the lockdown have entailed in the various sections of the population. The most evident ones are briefly reported hereunder:

• Isolation

The sudden changes in the lifestyle and in the limitation of personal freedom have brought to a series of dynamics that are well known by the medical and psychological literature. In particular, isolation has always been associated with **consequences at psychic and somatic level** that lead to a fall on the possibilities of resilience (up to functional disorders) and on the correct functioning of the immune system. We are living beings with an intrinsically relational nature, which is fundamental for a healthy life.

• Depressive symptoms

Numerous surveys and clinical observers have detected an increase in depressive symptoms in the population, which vary from a **depressed mood**, that is difficult to contain, to a **loss of motivation**, from a sense of **physical and cognitive fatigue** to a **low self-esteem**. Again, these symptoms have an impact on the immune system, since they lower its functionality and expose individuals to various forms of pathologies.

• Violence and aggressiveness

The limitation of freedom, the fear and the concern for the future triggered **dysphoric responses** with an increased **tendency to harm both the others and oneself**. Home violence has increased, as have verbal and physical attacks between family or non-family members. **Paranoid suspicion towards the**

others, considered as disease carriers and spreaders, is now the main reason of community break-up.

• Sense of inconsistency

The perception of increasingly marked **contradictions in official communications** on the one hand and a **certain form of censorship of authoritative points of view, but not recognized by the mainstream**, on the other (scientist debunking, public pillory, threats to freedom of expression), is a **predictive factor of health alteration**, which can be clearly detected by the principles and tests of salutogenesis.

• Individual and social control

The progressive realization of Orwellian scenarios, justified by a necessary urgency to protect physical health, is **proportional to an aggravation of the mental health and an impoverishment of culture**. This aspect appears inexplicably as a minor or even not-noteworthy concern. In other words, an obsessive attention to protecting the quantitative aspect of human existence emerges surprisingly, to the detriment of the qualitative aspect.

• Technological overdose

Even though technology can certainly offer comfort in various areas of our daily life, it is dangerous to further and indiscriminately use it in this contingent period. Technological evolution cannot be associated with the evolution of the individual and of society; in many cases, it can compromise normal cognitive abilities and emotional regulation. The current trend is to place humans at the **service of technology**, not vice versa. Not everything that *can* be done *must* be done.

- **Development and growth of compromised young people**

Setting aside the practices used to protect children's development in a dramatic and brutal way is alarming. The choices and the structures of courses, validated over the years by psycho-pedagogical researchers, have been abandoned and replaced by disheartening temporary solutions, under the aegis of "scientific" Press Releases such as that of the WHO, which suggests that video games can be used to spend time with children (the same WHO which, over the past twenty years, has invited care professionals to create and implement projects for a conscious use of the internet in order to prevent its addiction and abuse) or by unacceptable ideas, such as the use of electronic wristbands for distancing or, even worse, long-term remote teaching solutions.

2. The dangers of a contradictory and fear-based communication

With regard to the official communication on the most widespread media, such as television, newspapers, radio and social networking sites, we are highlighting the macroscopic elements that have led the population to develop a state of generalized anxiety and terror, with the consequences – combined with the concern for one's own work and other distress factors – described above.

- Emphasis on **absolute values and increased numbers in newspapers**, without contextualization and without demonstrating their truthfulness, especially with regard to the number of infections and deaths due to the virus, but not proven as such.
- Doctors and virologists communicated **in an alarming way and with pilot data that were not always reliable**, without any sensitivity on the psychological side, and without specifying the hypothetical value of their statements, given the scientific uncertainties

in this regard.

- **Communication was neither plain nor clear**, often similar to that of a TV show or, on the opposite side, conveying an idea of dogmatic and reductionist science, far from the complexity of the elements involved.
- The scientific research method presented is a **decadent scientism**, through which the mythological idea of science is imposed to the public opinion, thus offering mathematical solutions and answers to everything, rather than recognizing the real limits and uncertainties using intellectual honesty.
- Official communication did not empower the citizens, but used **fear as a means of behavioural control** (contagions, sanctions, threats to extend the emergency period).

Damages spread as a pandemic and will be further **reflected in the short and long term**. Generalized anxiety, in fact, produces long-term effects that can evolve into post-traumatic stress disorder or depressive symptoms, burn out, obsessive compulsive disorders, antisocial disorders, as described above, together with eating disorders, sleep disturbances and psychiatric problems. All this, added to the concern for the future, may develop further unpredictable effects.

3. The concern about the consequences of a non-systemically reasoned recovery

Human nature is intrinsically relational, and our brain develops only thanks to the relationships of a certain nature. In order to be able to build up and evolve, family and social relationships need to continuously rely on a physical presence and to be lived with confidence, and not with suspicion or fear. Any technological surrogate in this sense will always be lacking.

Instilling in people, and even more in children, the fear of an "invisible enemy" of which the person next to me might be the carrier, means to impoverish or annihilate any possibility of growth, exchange and enrichment; it basically means to cancel every possibility of living an intense and happy life.

Financial solutions for families and workers, that are then disregarded or implemented in a way that does not comply with the promises made, generate **fear, discomfort and anxiety connected to their survival**, a gripping anxiety that is already dramatically present and pervasive in many people's life. The sense of powerlessness in this regard aggravates the already precarious psychological situation. The suicide rate is likely to increase dramatically, generating public health issues that are certainly not inferior to those produced by a virus.

Proposals and requests

1. Restoring a truly democratic, pluralistic, free and confrontational communication.

The psychic discomfort produced by the radical change in people's lifestyles is varied and takes on different psychopathological characteristics, though always combining a distressing onset and a clinical severity.

The *primum movens* of all the psychopathological situations that have arisen is the **match between loss of hope and fear**: if communication incessantly and monocratically reiterates terrifying contents, stigmatizing real or phantasmal points of no return, then specific experiences are automatically produced and they act as triggers for **very serious pathological and psychosocial developments**.

Restoring a truly pluralistic communication, where to think outside what appears to be an authorized box (often also very different from the authorized boxes that are typical of other countries), **would give the possibility**

to compare different hypotheses of reality, different future visions, and different developments of possible lifestyles to face scenarios prophesied as apocalyptic and inevitable.

At present, expressing an opinion that is not accepted by the mainstream does not appear to be viable without retaliation, threats or public **media pillory**: a dissonant idea is inevitably marked as fake news or conspiracy, immediately attacked and taken to trial not by means of serious and legitimate debates, but by means of radical ostracism in principle from the media system, denying any form of doubt or alternative thought, at the cost of lying or personal delegitimization. It is a proper **communicative deviance** that is reaching extremely dangerous levels.

In a democratic system protected by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, **no one should impose how and where to draw information**, also treating the recipient as a naive child who is unable to understand and discern. The outcome is one-colour information, which pushes towards uniformity of thought through fear, though defrauding the richness and the evolution of culture, and atrophying free research and self-expression.

We therefore claim the right that every citizen has to be able to listen to the different opinions at stake and analyse them in detail, where possible, according to the ways and the sources they believe to be more reliable, so that they can draw their reasoned conclusions. We also claim their legitimate right to peacefully spread their views.

2. Promoting a culture of health

According to the data from several medical sources, the disease brought by Covid-19 is mild, that is, it gives mild symptoms. The deceased people had other pathologies in place. Healthy people

in fact are that large percentage of people who contracted the virus, but who experienced mild symptoms or who did not even notice they had the disease, quickly building up the necessary antibodies.

Science has widely demonstrated that **leading a healthier lifestyle strengthens and forges the immune system**. Eating healthy food, exercising, knowing and managing stress, not smoking or not taking toxic substances should be a commitment for each of us, and the media should continuously pass information about it. Therefore, it is really rather distressing and somehow medieval to observe the beacon of public attention almost exclusively oriented towards pathogenesis rather than salutogenesis.

A healthy lifestyle that systemically encompasses the factors that make the body resilient and strengthen the immune system should become part of a **society ready to face complex challenges from different points of view, including health**. A media communication in this sense would also solve several critical issues:

- it would urge people to take back **responsibility** for their own health, rather than feeling threatened by the behaviour of others;
- it would increase the **sense of trust and hope** in people's possibilities, rather than delegating any vital choice to others;
- it would **decrease the fear** and the vulnerability relating to pathogenic events, also reducing the consequences of the nocebo effect;
- it would **give back dignity to human being** by providing significant information for their well-being;
- it would **relieve the burden of the national health system** and care professionals, and it would improve the feeling of respect and trust between citizens and public organizations.

3. Avoiding the trigger and the growth of further forms of discrimination

Media communication on COVID-19 has fuelled exaggerated and irrational fears. People not wearing a mask and walking in deserted streets, health workers, small businessmen and desperate self-employed people who peacefully demonstrated, yet respecting the social distancing, were discriminated against or attacked.

Again, such conduct should be discouraged by **fostering a constructive cooperation and disseminating good practices**, case histories and tangible examples, where the value of individual and non-harmful freedom, mutual help and synergy between governors and the population can emerge.

4. Publicly acknowledging the mistakes made

Provided that no political and medical authorities were ready for such an emergency, mistakes were made. This has generated distrust and despair at people's sentiment level. However, **authority** is not achieved by never making mistakes, but by **admitting and correcting one's own mistakes**, and then starting again in a more conscious and reasoned way.

Some events that have produced a general turmoil – such as the case of a young man undergoing involuntary treatment simply because he expressed his dissent peacefully, or public figures laughing at the proposals made by specialists that differed from the official opinion – are very serious facts and visible to everybody, and an admission of a mistake in this sense is not only morally correct, but it is **necessary for the restoration of the credibility of those who have allowed all this**.

5. Stimulating the exchange of points of view between scholars and official specialists and scholars and independent specialists

What became really rather obvious was the **huge gap** between official and one-way communications emphasized in the mainstream, as well as those of other professionals operating in the same areas, but coming from independent sources. The role of social networking sites, when it did not despicably alter or shadow certain contributions, has clearly highlighted these discrepancies, **fomenting bitterness and – again – mistrust and fear.**

A more conscious vision of reality is observed when reality tends to unite rather than divide, or in any case to encourage the constructive dialogue among everybody. This is perhaps one of the greatest challenges we have to face.

6. Restoring civil rights

Civil law does not concern jurisdiction only, but it is a full indissoluble prerequisite for maintaining mental and behavioural balance. During the lockdown, several obligations and impositions became object of fear:

- those jeopardizing the **freedom of choosing medical treatments and solutions** (primarily vaccinations) as a condition / threat for the restoration of normality;
- those of **enhanced technologies as an alternative solution** to the usual social interactions;
- those concerning **the adoption of health devices** for all (masks and gloves) which, in addition to not being clearly effective in avoiding virus infections and cause psychological problems;
- those of **isolation, control** (through police forces or technological tools) and **uniformity of thought**, as already outlined above.

We claim the need to refocus on the concept that a citizen is a living being with physical, psychological and spiritual characteristics, and not merely a consumer, as has become customary. We also claim their right of freedom of thought, expression and choice of

care.

Such freedoms are guaranteed by the foundations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and they are not only citizens' inalienable rights, but they are also the necessary ground for the maintenance of individual and social psycho-physical health.

Conclusion: focusing on mental health is indispensable for the individual

Taking into consideration the dramatic upheaval in the ways of relating socially, emotionally and at work, there is a significant amount of superficiality in the level of attention that has been paid – by the authorities and the various teams of experts recruited for this occasion – to the dramatic consequences in terms of global mental distress.

Under a logical point of view, it seems difficult to understand why the principle of health precaution was applied, in an exasperated way, to prevent the possible effects of a virus, but not to the other aspects of health, as if the **damage caused by a virus was more relevant than that concerning psychic balance** and the other aspects mentioned in the Press Release.

When they prophesy recoveries and new beginnings, even though they can hardly be predicted considering the medical and epidemiological points of view, it is bizarre to find out that **no serious and valid projects have been planned to protect mental health and to foster the correct personological development of young people.**

Reality has been distorted, and dramatic increases in the main psychopathogenetic indicators, as explained above, are already emerging from clinics.

We doubt that there is the need to make use of phenomenology to understand what critical events may generate from the sense of deprivation of space, which is perceived as

inaccessible and hopelessly lost, and from the sense of deprivation of time, experienced in a fixed and crystallized present, where **future seems to be locked by an impenetrable curtain** made up of anguish and sense of loss.

Paternalistically relying on the sense of responsibility of the individuals seems really rather astonishing, since they are actually pushed – isolating them socially and emotionally, abandoning them also financially, depriving them of the possibility to support their loved ones and without a vision of the future – towards serious psychopathological disorders.

The **psychopathological consequences** (with a precise and scientific origin, though not easily predictable or somehow prophetic) are dramatic and they are accompanied by tragic events under a socio-family point of view: in fact, we are in the presence of all the main triggers that can easily lead to dramatic events, such as suicides and homicides.

In addition to that, **interference on the personological development** of children is brutally affected by the inability to relate to peers, to experience reality freely, having to deal in many cases with parents who are desperate, bewildered and unable to support them emotionally, nor to explain to them the flow of a reality that they also do not understand.

In this period, during the daily reporting of facts and figures by the Italian Civil Protection Department and the team of experts, we had the opportunity to listen to the words of ‘experts’, who explained that children will not have problems: if parents are serene, children will be too. We believe that this statement perfectly sums up the level of superficiality and negligence that has affected the protection of mental health.

It is once again fundamental that the attention be concentrated on something that has been unexplainably forgotten: **human beings, with their basic needs, their strengths, but also with their pain and vulnerability**. Such living beings are considered as ghosts every time we forget to consider them as humans as such, and not as mere financial and political pawns to manipulate.

In fact, at the present moment, there are all the preconditions to identify the current elements involved in a strong psychological manipulation of the masses by means of a vision, a thought and an approach to the dominant life, which is trying to impose itself as something unique and indisputable, typically sectarian.

We, the mental health specialists, in **association** and constant connection with all the professionals who work on a daily basis for the well-being of people and society, will strive to support all those **virtuous behaviours that foster a higher level of psychophysical well-being**, and we will strive to promote the **beauty and richness of free thought**.

* We are pleased to issue this Press Release in agreement and synergy with the AMPAS Press Release of the Signal Doctors (21/04/2020), with the meeting motion on public health of the Rodotà Committee (05/2020) and with the Bill of the Freedom of Expression Covenant promoted by Byoblu (04/2020).

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