

Psychology and Covid-19 in the Americas

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Editors

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Preface

The chapters included in Volume I and II of *Psychology and Covid-19 in the Americas* were conceived and prepared during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, when all three of us were part of the board of the Sociedad Interamericana de Psicología or SIP (Interamerican Society of Psychology). All chapters were presented in the very first virtual international meeting organized by SIP in its history, a titanic effort that brought together professionals from psychology and other allied fields from the Americas and beyond.

The content of both volumes includes many of the first issues addressed by researchers, scholars, and practitioners at the start of the pandemic; before vaccines, before knowledge of treatment and impact, before our worlds and daily lives were forever changed. Their content covers a wide variety of topics such as the psychosocial and physical impacts of COVID-19 and the sanitary measures imposed to flatten the curve of contagion, as well as differences in perceptions, remote learning and teaching, virtual communities of knowledge and practice, policies, infrastructures, treatment, and interventions in different countries throughout the Americas. What is captured in both volumes goes beyond what we could consider as the proceedings of one of the first virtual international meetings on psychology and COVID-19 in the world. The content marks a baseline for the collective work initiated by professionals who came together to answer the call to combat the pandemic. In that sense, both volumes are truly a “snapshot in time” that could help us assess in the future how much progress we have made to apply psychology to the pressing demands of our time.

As we prepared these words, we find ourselves three years past the beginning of the pandemic. Like with many historic events that left indelible memories, we will remember how our daily routines were disrupted by the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic in March of 2020: schools and universities moved their classes online, and many people were forced to work from home. Families were separated or together 24/7 and their resilience was tested. Health workers were hailed as heroes, while health systems across the world collapsed under the heavy burden of unimaginable death and disease.

Across the world, we witnessed how the virus exacerbated and brought to the surface deep inequities that greatly contributed to increasing the number of people who succumbed to the illness in this period. Through the incessant news cycle, we learned about the disparate impacts of the virus on people of different races and of lower socioeconomic status in many countries, particularly essential workers, and vulnerable groups. The fear of a catastrophic recession across the world became real and unemployment hit rock bottom seemingly everywhere.

Weeks seemed like months and months like years as the world waited for a cure.

In the race to find one, China and Russia developed the first vaccines against the SARS-CoV-2 virus in mid and late 2020, but it wasn't until 2021 that mass vaccinations started taking place in several countries. In February 2021, many Central and South American countries were still vying for COVID vaccines for their populations, with Argentina receiving some from Russia, Brazil from China, and some countries, like Peru, still not acquiring doses. People were instructed to wear masks, avoid crowds, wash their hands, and keep social distance. With some trepidation, people started gathering in small groups indoors and outdoors, but much of what seemed like a new normality was threatened by several new variants of the virus. Even though WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus declared the end of the COVID global public health emergency on May 5, 2023, we are still dealing with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, and we will do so for a long time to come.

We are grateful to all of the contributing authors for helping to provide this glimpse into a moment in the past, and from a psychological perspective, as this will forever be a record of a time that will ultimately be obscured by fading memories. It is valuable to the field of psychology as we have learned a lot since those early pandemic days. We know much more about systems that should be in place for mental health care, how to talk to our children and elders about it, and even how to deal with vaccine resistance. Thus, these volumes serve as a reminder of all we have learned since then. Additionally, we have learned that such a thing can happen. This existential realization has impacted many individuals quite significantly, including our children and youth, who now have higher rates of mental health issues than before COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdowns and isolations. We have learned a lot about remote work, and how this impacts human beings who need social connections. We have learned about public health and messaging, and how some react versus others. The numerous and invaluable lessons learned can be carried into the future to serve us in another situation like this one.

In short, everything in the world has been affected by this virus. Even the process of publishing this book suffered from the impacts on editors and authors who were, as humans, dealing with the illness. We feel it is worth the wait, however, for the reasons mentioned above, and for the perspective of information from across the Americas in this historical period.

We have been told that this will happen again; it is just a matter of time. Perhaps we will be better prepared next time. Thus, research on the various aspects of COVID-19 must continue. While a plethora of studies have been published on this

topic in psychology since 2020, many more are needed, plus it is a dynamic and ever-changing situation. To get prevention programs in place now, rather than in a moment of crisis, to spread public information now, rather than in desperate moments, and to understand how humans are affected in today's world by such restrictions are very important. The future of the world may depend on it.

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