



COVID-19 and its Socio-Economic and Psychological Impacts on Italy

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Abstract

The global outbreak of Corona virus (COVID-19) spread rapidly in early 2020. In the initial stages, Italy became the second-hardest hit country in the world, only after the US, despite aggressive containment efforts by the its government. The fatality rate was mainly high among old-age patients. The underlined response by the Italian government amid COVID-19 was the desperate need of the hour; and so far, the best method known to contain the threat of transmission is by social distancing, self-isolation, and a nationwide lockdown. The ongoing global crisis has caused a great strain on the socio-economic position of the country and pushed it further into a recession like many other countries across the globe. COVID-19 has not only damaged the Italian economy but has severely crippled its public healthcare system as well. Apart from studying the outbreak of COVID-19 in Italy, the paper examines the response of the Italian government when there was a spike in the number of cases. The paper then outlines the precautionary measures and actions taken by the government to contain the outbreak as well as study the socio-economic and psychological impact of COVID-19 on Italian population, and how one of the most advanced healthcare systems in the world failed to cope with the situation. Italy being the hardest hit European country, in addition to some others, was indeed one of the top frontline countries in Europe to take prominent action in containing it.

Keywords: Pandemic; COVID-19; Italy; Socio-Economic Impact, Psychological Impact, pandemic

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Introduction

As a global community we need to learn how governments are processing information and distributing it back to the public on a regular basis not only during a crisis. It is the social responsibility of every citizen to stay informed, and it is also the responsibility of a government to share accurate and timely information with its citizens, be good or bad. The government officials responsible for decision-making must understand that good governance is more than just managing a country. It is not always about decision-making and formulating policies but it also about the timely prioritization and implementation of those very policies. Transparency and legitimacy of information are vital pillars of a healthy government.¹ However, only a handful of nations have practiced good governance since the outbreak of COVID-19 when it was declared a pandemic. The world is witnessing a crisis that has required governments to rapidly take precautionary measures to contain the threat. However, the rising number of new cases and deaths raised a question; did the governments share timely information about the severity of the outbreak of COVID-19 or did they hold it back to avoid mass panic? Moreover, were the measures taken by various governments proved too late?

COVID-19 is the paramount agenda of every government worldwide ever since it first broke out. It has since taken the world by storm forcing people to isolate themselves as a precautionary measure. Initially, on January 30, 2020, COVID-19 was termed as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) by the Emergency Committee, which was assembled by the WHO Director General. The following was published on February 14, 2020, that the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention on January 9, 2020, identified novel corona virus as a key element in the global outbreak of COVID-19. By January 30, 2020, more than 9,700 cases were reported in China and 106 cases in 19 other countries around the world. On February 11, 2020, the virus was labeled as COVID-19, short for Coronavirus Disease 2019.² It was categorized as a pandemic on March 11, 2020, by Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director General. Dr.

¹ S. H. Ahmed, "Crisis of Good Governance," *The Nation* (March 05, 2017), available at <https://nation.com.pk/05-Mar-2017/crisis-of-good-governance>.

² PAHO, "Novel Corona Virus (COVID-19) - Epidemiological Update," *The Pan American Health Organization* (February 14, 2020), available from [https://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_docman &view=list&slug=coronavirus-epidemiological-alerts-and-updates&Itemid=270&layout=default &lang=en](https://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_docman&view=list&slug=coronavirus-epidemiological-alerts-and-updates&Itemid=270&layout=default&lang=en).

Ghebreyesus stated in a media briefing, that WHO started studying the outbreak round the clock since it was first noticed by Chinese doctors in November 2019. He also mentioned that WHO is alarmed by the rate at which the virus was spreading. He urged all countries to prepare for the worst. He then summarized four ways to limit the spread which required governments to test excessively that would help them detect the disease in time which would in turn speed up protecting and treating its citizens. Testing will also result in reducing transmission of the virus. He reminded all countries to activate and build up their emergency response and healthcare systems, to educate their citizens about the risks, and how they can protect themselves and to take all necessary precautionary measures, which included nationwide lockdowns.³

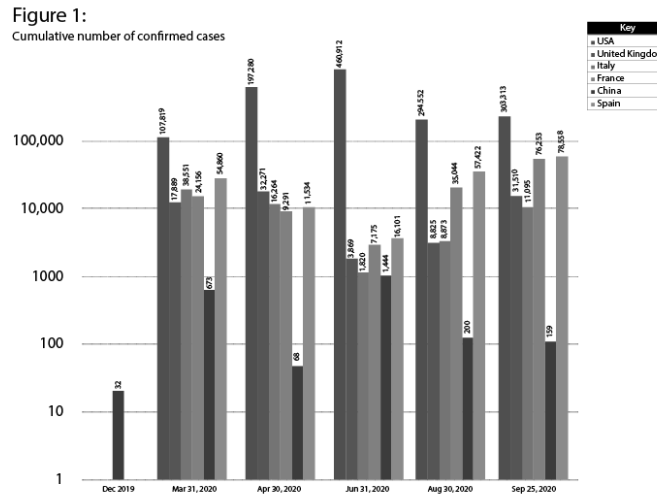
Since COVID-19 first took over the headlines, it has claimed the lives of 1,855,214 people as of January 5, 2021. China, USA, Spain, Italy, Germany, and France became the first and the worst-hit countries, which experienced a surge in new cases and rising death rates, illustrated in figure 1⁴. With a death toll of over 4000, strict and timely measures were taken by the Chinese authorities that helped in containing the virus first in Wuhan then in other cities of China. Outside Asia, Italy quickly became the epicenter for COVID-19; Lombardy, home to over 10.06 million Italians, became 'the Wuhan' of Italy. The COVID-19 spread like wildfire in the northern region, and, on March 8, 2020, the Italian government announced a nationwide lockdown to restrict the spread of the virus. No one could enter or leave Lombardy and other 14 provinces: Modena, Parma, Piacenza, Reggio Emilia, Rimini, Pesaro and Urbino, Alessandria, Asti, Novara, Verbano Cusio Ossola, Vercelli, Padua, Treviso, and Venice.⁵ Italy followed the Chinese example of a nationwide lockdown when it became

³ T. Ghebreyesus, "WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 11 March 2020," *World Health Organization*, (11 March 2020). Visit <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19-11-march-2020>.

⁴ ECDC, "The number of confirmed cases is lower than the number of actual cases; the main reason for that is limited testing." *European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control*, (Dec 31, 2019 – Sep 22, 2020), visit at <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus-data-explorer?yScale=log&minPopulationFilter=1000000&time=earliest..latest&country=GBR~USA~FRA~CHN~ITA~ESP®ion=World&casesMetric=true&interval=weekly&smoothing=0&pickerMetric=location&pickerSort=asc>.

⁵ "Coronavirus: Northern Italy Quarantines 16 Million People," *BBC*, (March 8, 2020), visit at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-51787238>.

clear that the virus had a higher chance of being contracted through human-to-human transmission.



COVID-19 Outbreak in Italy

According to European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), since 31 December 2019 and as of 22 September 2020, about 31,132,906 confirmed cases of COVID-19 (in accordance with the applied case definitions and testing strategies in the affected countries) have been reported. As the situation progressed in Europe, Italy experienced the highest number of deaths and many speculations have been drawn, which explains why Italy quickly became a global hotspot for COVID-19. Many argue that the percentage of population in Italy over 65 years is high, as Italy is known to have a high life expectancy rate due to an effective public healthcare system. The Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CCDC) warned the elderly citizens to be more likely to suffer with COVID-19.⁶ Researchers at the University of Oxford published a journal in *Demographic Science*, which stated, “Italy has the second-oldest population.” Apart from having ‘lots of old people’ Sara Belligoni, a Ph.D. Student from University of Central Florida, wrote, “close-proximity and a

⁶ “Situation Update Worldwide, as of 14 April 2020,” *European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control*, (April 2020), available at <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/geographical-distribution-+2019-ncov-cases>.

dense population are significant reasons, which can explain why Italy was hit so hard by COVID-19.⁷ The outbreak was traced back to February 21, 2020, when the first patient tested positive for COVID-19 in the Lombardy region.⁸ According to the BBC, Italy recorded its largest ever one-day increase in coronavirus deaths on March 18, 2020, as the total number of deaths increased by 475, including more than 300 deaths in the region of Lombardy.⁹ Hospitals and medical centers in Lombardy found it difficult to cope with the increasing number of infected dead bodies and officials requested military assistance to move the dead to other regions. The locals in Bergamo shared pictures on social media of military trucks driving through the streets of the city as they transported caskets from the town's funeral house to neighboring cities. An army spokesperson confirmed that 15 trucks and 50 soldiers were deployed to move the bodies of the dead to the neighboring cities and provinces.¹⁰ Italian media stated, "an estimated of 70 caskets were transported from the crematorium to the highway and out of Bergamo — one of the worst-hit by the COVID-19 outbreak."¹¹ Bergamo was the first warning 'in pictures' for the world to follow precautionary measures strictly. Since then, the numbers have experienced a constant and rapid rise. The region most hit by the virus is Lombardy, with approximately 100 thousand cases, as of September 22, 2020.¹²

⁷ S. Belligoni, "5 Reasons the Coronavirus Hit Italy so Hard," *The Conversation* (March 26, 2020), available at <https://theconversation.com/5-reasons-the-coronavirus-hit-italy-so-hard-134636>.

⁸ M. Assunção, "First Coronavirus Cases in Italy Happened 'Much Earlier' than Previously Thought, According to New Study," *New York Daily News* (April 24, 2020). Visit <https://www.nydailynews.com/coronavirus/ny-coronavirus-first-cases-italy-january-much-earlier-according-study-20200424-plmph6zq4rckzckqsvbpoqiyli-story.html>.

⁹ "Italy Corona Virus Deaths Rise by Record 475 in a Day," *BBC News*, 18 March 2020, visit at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-51952712>.

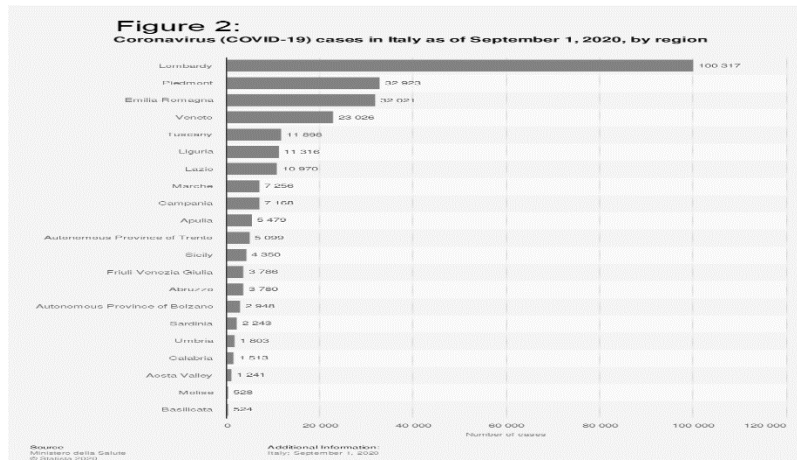
¹⁰ J. Roberts, "Army Trucks Filled with Bodies from Overflowing Cemetery Drive through Streets of Italy," *Metro News*, (March 19, 2020). Visit at <https://metro.co.uk/2020/03/19/army-trucks-filled-bodies-overflowing-morgues-drive-streets-italy-12423685/>.

¹¹ J. Horowitz and E. Bubola, "Italy's Coronavirus Victims Face Death Alone, With Funerals Postponed," *The New York Times*, (March 16, 2020): <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/16/world/europe/italy-coronavirus-funerals.html>.

¹² "Cumulative Number of Coronavirus (COVID-19) Cases in Italy since February 2020," *Statista Research Department* (May 2020). See <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1101680/coronavirus-cases-development-italy/>.

Cases by regions

With the lockdown in place to contain COVID-19 and cities turned into quarantined enclaves, the northern region of Lombardy was the most affected. The overwhelming situation has taken a toll on everyone, and Italy has started to show signs of struggle.¹³ Regions including Piedmont, Emilia-Romagna, Veneto, Tuscany, Liguria and Lazio were all marked as hot red zones due to the highest number of registered COVID-19 cases, as shown in Figure 2.¹⁴ The ‘business capital’ of the nation, Lombardy, experienced a surge in reported cases because it does the most trade with China — the region consists of many businesses, mutational companies and manufacturing industries, and with so many people interacting with one another and the transmission of the virus was quick and easy. Milan, in the north, is Italy’s financial capital and conducts close trade with China. The whole Northern region is home to multiple multinational offices, corporations, and factories. The workers are known to travel from all over the world to attend conventions, meetings, and business trips in northern Italy. One infected person not only could infect others in office spaces but he or she could potentially transmit the virus out across the entire region in a few hours.¹⁵



¹³ “Coronavirus (COVID-19) cases in Italy as of September 1, 2020, by region”, *Statista Research Department*, (September 1, 2020): <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1099375/coronavirus-cases-by-region-in-italy/>

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ S. Belligoni, “Analysis: Five Reasons why the Coronavirus Hit Italy so Hard,” *The Local It* (March 30, 2020), available from <https://www.thelocal.it/20200330/five-reasons-the-coronavirus-hit-italy-so-hard>.

COVID-19: Lockdown and its impact on Italy

Different reports have already suggested that no country or its government is equipped or fully prepared to fight the pandemic on its own. We can see that the precautionary measures adopted by the world governments have already impacted the global economy and the lives of millions of people; nevertheless, these precautionary measures for all countries is the need of the hour as there is no vaccine available to treat the COVID-19. The health group experts developed the Global Health Security (GHS) Index – a joint project of the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security (CHS), the Nuclear Threat Initiative, and The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). It initially stated in a detailed report that no country, irrespective of how economically stable it may be, was fully prepared to handle a major pandemic like the one we were experiencing now.¹⁶

Impact on Economy and Trade

COVID-19 has severely affected Italy, the third largest economy in Europe. An article published on March 16, 2020, on CNBC stated that the money being injected in the economy to tackle the financial strain is pushing Italy's total budget in deficit. In the beginning of the year, the country had already been experiencing economic strain, which limited the growth of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to only 3% compared to 2.2% in 2019. Italy's economy was already struggling to keep its head above water even before the coronavirus outbreak. Economists forecasted a fall in the GDP and said the Italian economy would shrink in 2020.¹⁷ Several reports suggested that the Italian economy was already slipping into a recession, before the pandemic however, COVID-19 added to the strain. Researcher Luca Paolozzi from Research Excellence Framework (REF) institute said, "the pandemic is effecting the service sector, since the service sector was allowing the Italian economy to keep afloat, it is predicted that the GDP will shrink in the first quarter of 2020." Milan's stock exchange experienced a drop of 3.3% in early March. Many experts already feared the worst – that the Italian economy reached the brink of recession and that it will struggle to cope with the escalating crisis. According to FTSE MIB (Milano Italia

¹⁶ L. Schnirring, "Inaugural Global Health Security Index notes wide readiness gaps," *CIDRAP News*, (October 24, 2019): <https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2019/10/inaugural-global-health-security-index-notes-wide-readiness-gaps>.

¹⁷ "Italy Supports Coronavirus-Hit Economy, PM Hails 'Italian Model'," *CNBC* (16 March 2020), visit at <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/16/italy-supports-coronavirus-hit-economy-pm-hails-italian-model.html>.

Borsa), stock markets' Index, the two markets traded lowest for the first time due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte said, "He will soon announce plans for the gradual reopening of the economy that will be applied starting from May 4, 2020."¹⁸

The sudden and continued rise of COVID-19 further placed Italian economy under great plight as neighboring nations Austria, Malta, and Portugal denied entry and placed travel bans for those coming in from Italy. As the situation progresses, it is evident that Italy will have to bear great economic, social, and political cost in 2020. According to estimations in 2020 the GDP would neither increase nor decrease until the lockdown is lifted.¹⁹ On March 11, the Italian government announced that it would release a budget of \$28.3bn aimed to fight the economic crisis, to help closed businesses, offices, and restaurants, citizens who had mortgage or house payments, and those who were unemployed. Economy Minister Roberto Gualtieri said, the budget would be divided into two halves. The first half would be used immediately, and the other would be saved in case the situation worsened.²⁰

The difficult decision made by the Italian government to impose a travel ban on flights going to and coming from China – a major trading partner – came with a heavy cost to the already stressed-out economy. As China buys an estimate of \$16 billion worth of Italian exports per year, the export industry was left paying the price as Italian goods could not be exported resulting in the closure of many businesses and manufacturing industries. The entry bans-imposed on Italians by the neighboring countries and EU to contain the pandemic has added great burden on Italy's economy. Northern Italy generated €35,000 (\$38,000) with an employment rate of

¹⁸ L. Paolozzi, "How the Coronavirus Outbreak is Affecting Italy's Economy," *The Local* (24 February 2020). See <https://www.thelocal.it/20200224/how-coronavirus-is-affecting-italy-economy>.

¹⁹ K. Warren, H. Second and S. Al-Arshani, "A Third of the Global Population is on Coronavirus Lockdown — Here's Our Constantly Updated List of Countries and Restrictions," *Business Insider Italia* (11 July 2020), <https://www.businessinsider.in/international/news/a-third-of-the-global-population-is-on-coronavirus-lockdown-x2014-hereaposs-our-constantly-updated-list-of-countries-and-restrictions/slidelist/75208623.cms>.

²⁰ "\$28bn Virus Rescue Plan after Italian Lockdown," *Gulf Times*, (March 12, 2020): <https://www.gulf-times.com/story/658244/28bn-virus-rescue-plan-after-italian-lockdown>.

67% is concerned after the cancelation of many trade events. Tourism, trade, and economy are all experiencing deficits.²¹ Italian economy is barely hanging by a thread as the government has allocated all its resources to focus on containing COVID-19. Recent forecasts state that the economy will experience a fall of 3%. Experts say that the signs of economic recession in Italy were already evident before the outbreak, the pandemic has further pushed the Italian economy into a spiral, which has resulted in growing fear that Italy will experience a hefty blow in the future.

Impact on Tourism

Tourism is a labor-intensive sector; travel bans across the world have caused a major decline in international tourism. Italy's emergency extension has not only strained its economy and trade but has also brought about a complete halt to tourism nationwide. The fifth most popular travel destination – Italy's tourism is what keeps the nations' economic engines running apart from its exports. "An approximate of 65 million tourists were to arrive in 2020 but the impact of an extreme pandemic on inbound arrivals could lead to a decline of only eight million arrivals to Italy."²² The tourism sector is affecting approximately 1.17 million employees. According to research, Italy would be expecting an estimated drop of 28.5 million tourists nationwide due to COVID-19. According to ANSA, the number of night stays at registered accommodations in Italy was 148.5 million from June to August, which was 65 million fewer than the number recorded in 2019. Almost 70% of hotels and accommodations remained closed in Rome and Milan since the lockdown was imposed.²³ The region of Veneto will experience the highest drop in the country with an estimated decrease of 4.61 million arrivals. Likewise, Lombardy is predicted to experience an estimated drop of 3.87 million tourist arrivals.²⁴ For now,

²¹ P. Subacchi, "Italy's New Affliction," *Project Syndicate*, (28 February 2020), visit at <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/italy-coronavirus-economic-impact-by-paola-subacchi-2020-02>.

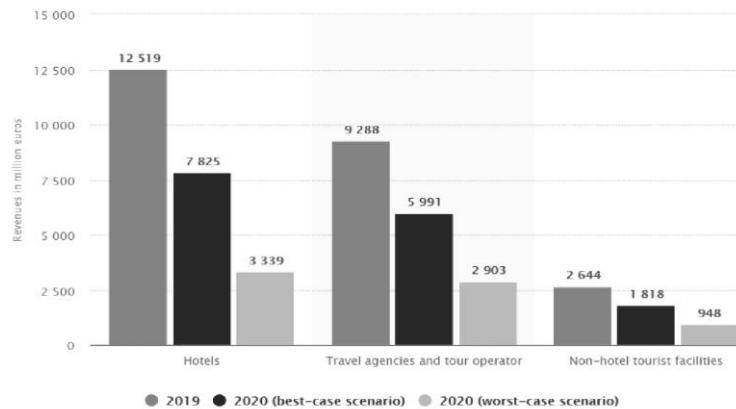
²² C. Bremner, "Italy in Crisis as Tourism Demand Collapses amid Coronavirus Pandemic," *Euromonitor International* (18 March 2020), available at <https://blog.euromonitor.com/italy-in-crisis-as-tourism-demand-collapses-amid-coronavirus-pandemic/>.

²³ O. Petcu, "Italy's Luxury Market and Tourism to be Worst Affected than Anticipated by the Covid-19 Pandemic," *CPP Luxury* (15 August 2020), see <https://cpp-luxury.com/italys-luxury-market-and-tourism-to-be-worst-affected-than-anticipated-by-the-covid-19-pandemic/>.

²⁴ "Forecasted Impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on Tourist Arrivals in Italy in 2020, by Region of Destination," *Statista Research Department*, (March 2020). Visit at

there is no solution but to follow the policies set by the Italian government, which includes travel restrictions in and out of Italy. If the threat is not contained now then it will without a doubt aggravate the already deteriorating situation in Italy. Euromonitor International's Travel Forecast Model suggests, incoming tourist arrivals will experience drop by 11.2% due to closing borders, flight cancellations and travel bans, which will cause further stress to the whole economy.²⁵ The unknown duration of the lockdown in Italy has compelled the tourism industry to lose an estimate of \$24 to \$66 billion in 2020. WTTC President and CEO, Gloria Guevara, recommended that an action plan be implemented with proper measures and SOPs outlined so that tourism in Italy could open as soon as possible and further loss be avoided. The SOPs included rapid testing of tourists and building tracing software on both arrival and departure gates so that they could trace COVID positive travelers. Two potential forecasts have been predicted for Italy's tourism department as the country looks to lift travel ban and ease the lockdown measures.²⁶

Figure 3:
Estimated impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) on revenues of the tourism industry in Italy in 2020, by sector (in million euros)



<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1101025/impact-of-coronavirus-covid-19-on-tourist-arrivals-in-italy-by-region/>.

²⁵ "Italy in Crisis as Tourism Demand Collapses Amid Coronavirus Pandemic," *Euromonitor International*.

²⁶ "Impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) on Tourism Revenues in Italy 2020, by Sector," *Statista Research Department* (2 Jun 2020). Visit at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1111074/impact-of-the-coronavirus-on-tourism-revenues-in-italy-by-sector/>.

Impact on public healthcare infrastructure

Pandemics have seen a shorter life since ground breaking medical 'breakthroughs' in modern medicine with the help of technological advancements. Although managing the public healthcare infrastructure of a country during a pandemic is a whole other challenge, which includes risk management and the ability to make timely decisions. COVID-19 has not only claimed the lives of hundreds and thousands around the world but has also caused healthcare systems in many countries to collapse. It is a recurring reminder that the global economy is ill-equipped, whether it is economically or medically, to handle a situation of this magnitude. The public healthcare system of Italy is known to be the best in the West, but reports suggest that the alarming transmission of COVID-19 across the nation has pushed it to the breaking point. Italy's healthcare professionals are struggling to keep up mainly because they run out of medical equipment, space, and working hands, especially in the northern region. Many nurses and doctors are working day and night on the front fearing for their own lives as they put themselves at risk of contracting the virus. More than 2,629 healthcare workers have been infected since the outbreak in February 2020, according to a report published by Gruppo Italiano per la Medicina Basata Sulle Evidenze or GIMBE - Italy's Group for Evidence-based Medicine.²⁷ The patients who test positive for COVID-19 have a high risk of dying in extreme cases within 1 to 2 weeks after contracting the disease. Neither Italy nor any other country is prepared to deal with such a contagious disease. Italy may have the best medical facilities in place but the doctors and nurses are not trained to deal with a pandemic of this scale. The only way forward is prevention because there is no specific cure. The limited medical resources are also forcing doctors to pick and choose whom to treat. The travel ban has further caused complications, as southern regions can only deploy few of their medical supplies to the north, which has seen the most deaths. Many healthcare professionals blame the government for not enforcing a strict lockdown at an earlier stage, which in their opinion would have helped them in not only containing the virus at a much faster rate but it also would have helped in reducing the number of cases. The challenges, however, will continue to grow not only for Italy but every country till the virus is completely contained.

²⁷ E. Oddone, "Thousands of Medical Staff Infected with Coronavirus in Italy," *Aljazeera* (18 March 2020). Visit at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/rising-number-medical-staff-infected-coronavirus-italy-200318183939314.html>

The immediate threat to physical health is quite evident but the pandemic is also creating social stresses for all, most importantly healthcare professionals. It has highlighted gaps in mental health services and the rise in psychological issues. Problems such as anxiety, depression and stress have taken a toll on individuals, public healthcare professionals, and government officials.²⁸ Coronavirus has not only left people terrified for their health and finances but is also causing psychological troubles as recognized by Li Duan Gang Zhu, researchers from the Lancet Psychiatry. The Chinese developed strategies to develop and enhance mental health interventions for the professionals on the frontline and the public amid COVID-19.²⁹

Psychological challenges of COVID-19

Studies have underlined the fact that people living under quarantine have a high risk of being psychologically distressed and they showcase symptoms of PTSD, depression, stress, and anxiety. In reports published as a result of previous pandemics, major health crisis in the world have led to long-lasting psychosocial problems in people largely due to fear, anxiety, and social isolation.³⁰ Pandemics like, the one today, have left the population with a wide range of psychiatric issues, however, the exact impact of COVID-19 and the nationwide lockdown in Italy is still unknown or yet to be measured. Many surveys have been conducted in order to assess the real damage of COVID-19 on the mental health of the Italian population. One such survey, conducted from March 27 till April 6, 2020, published the following results: eighteen thousand one hundred forty-seven Italians answered the survey and the outcomes showed that 17.3% suffered from depression, 20.8% were dealing with high levels of anxiety, 7.3% were suffering from insomnia, 21.8% were stressed out, and 22.9% were battling with adjustment syndrome. The results of the survey clearly indicated that mental health issues grew exponentially in the Italian population as a direct result of the lockdown. The lockdown caused an increase in Post-traumatic Stress Symptoms (PTSS), Anxiety and Alcohol and Drug Services (ADS), work

²⁸ B. Williams, "Mental Health Concerns Arise Amid COVID-19 Epidemic," *Psychiatry Advisor* (26 February 2020), Visit at <https://www.psychiatryadvisor.com/home/topics/general-psychiatry/mental-health-concerns-arise-amid-covid-19-epidemic/>.

²⁹ L. Duan, G. Zhu, "Psychological Interventions for People Affected by the COVID-19 Epidemic," *Lancet* (18 February 2020). See [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366\(20\)30073-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366(20)30073-0/fulltext).

³⁰ Dong L, et al., "Public Mental Health Crisis during COVID-19 Pandemic, China," (July 2020): <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32202993/>

from home, no social life, and discontinued employment due to the lockdown resulted in high levels of stress, anxiety, insomnia, and depression.³¹

The intensifying efforts to contain the pandemic through strict precautionary measures nationwide was the need of the hour, which has left not just Italians but the world's population feeling the brunt of psychological issues. According to another report, self-isolation has become the root cause of emotional, psychological, behavioral, and other mental health problems in the Italian population because they greatly depend on socialization as a mean of support and connection. The lockdown has also added Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among Italians during the lockdown.³² Another survey conducted to examine the emotional impact of the lockdown on Italy and Spain – two of the most affected countries in Europe; the results of the survey indicate that the most frequent symptoms included difficulty in concentrating (76.6%), boredom (52%), irritability (39%), restlessness (38.8%), nervousness (38%), loneliness (31.3%), uneasiness (30.4%), and worries (30.1%).³³

Roberta Brivio, psychologist and President of the Italian Society for Emergency Psychology in Lombardy, together with four colleagues arranged a free hotline for residents dealing with mental health problems and struggling to cope with isolation. She pointed out that many people call the hotline complaining about anxiety, loneliness, or fear. She also reported an increase in panic attacks in people. During this uncertain and difficult time Italians are resorting to different ways to support one another.³⁴

³¹ R. Rodolfo, et al., "COVID-19 Pandemic and Lockdown Measures Impact on Mental Health among the General Population in Italy," *Brief Research Report Article*, (August 2020), available at <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsy.2020.00790/full>.

³² S. K. Brooks, "The Psychological Impact of Quarantine and how to Reduce It: Rapid Review of the Evidence," *The Lancet Journal* (December 2019). Visit at [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30460-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30460-8/fulltext).

³³ M. Orgilés, A. Morales, et al, "Immediate Psychological Effects of the COVID-19 Quarantine in Youth from Italy and Spain," *Research Gate* (April 2020), visit at <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340763347> Immediate psychological effects of the COVID-19 quarantine in youth from Italy and Spain.

³⁴ A. Perrone, "The Strength of Ordinary People. The Creative Ways Italians Are Supporting Each Other During their Coronavirus Lockdown," *Time* (April 7, 2020). See <https://time.com/5816650/italy-solidarity-coronavirus/>.

Coping mechanisms

The pandemic is affecting everyone everywhere, and as the situation in Italy deteriorates people found unusual methods to cope with the stress and anxiety. Italians have started 'online socializing' to fill the void of not being able to interact with people. Being online allows for virtual social encounters. The ritual of meeting people has moved online, with a new twist introduced in Milan and other cities — a "smart aperitivo" is a ritual, which is enjoyed by friends and family in the living rooms. Online invitations are circulated among groups of friends and family to join the aperitivo. People gather online with a glass of beverage — wine or beer — and spend the evening talking, this helps them cope with the feeling of being lonely.³⁵ Many Italians have also mentioned cooking or baking as a great coping strategy. According to studies cooking is a mindfulness-based exercise as it engages all five senses and plays a vital role in the treating of anxiety and stress. To encourage everyone to 'culinary coping' an initiative was taken by a local who made Facebook group "Quarantine Cuisine" that provided a platform for its members post pictures and videos of their homemade dishes and share them with the rest of the group. The manager of the group said, "It keeps us inspired, connected... and hungry."³⁶ In Milan, people have moved from the streets to balconies and windows to fulfill their need of socializing. They come to the balconies, rooftops, and windows once a day to sing, clap and play music, which has helped in boosting the spirits of many elderly people living in isolation.

WHO has warned the world that COVID-19 "may never go away," and we might have to live with the virus? The news has further forecasted that a global mental health crisis is the next thing governments need to investigate. An estimated 37 people have committed suicide in Italy and another 25 have attempted suicide, since the beginning of March 2020. The suicides have been directly linked with increased stress and depression, feeling of loneliness, which has been triggered by the

³⁵ R. Tamborrino, "Here's how locking down Italy's urban spaces has changed daily life," *World Economic Forum*, (March 27, 2020): <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/coronavirus-locked-down-italy-urban-space/>.

³⁶ "Food helps: The coping strategies getting people through quarantine in Italy," *The Local It* (March 2020), <https://www.thelocal.it/20200328/food-helps-the-coping-strategies-getting-people-through-quarantine-in-milan>.

lockdown.³⁷ Psychologists around the world are offering free consultations to people dealing with mental health issues. A stronger and more reliable system needs to be implemented and set up where people can easily access therapy anytime of the day.

Recommendations

We reside in a global community, which is interdependent on each other for survival. Nations rely on one another to fight against everything that threatens their sovereignty may it be the lack of food and water, climate change, natural disaster, terrorism, or a pandemic. Amid COVID-19 entire nations are pooling their resources to collaborate with one another in order to fight the pandemic. For the first time in modern history, we are witnessing how the entire world has joined hands to solve a single problem, as world leaders seek to resolve a threat whose nature is neither fully understood nor entirely known by the global community. Scientists are working day and night to find answers to the many questions the pandemic has raised and experts are working together to find the solutions.³⁸ The critical need for international cooperation might be the only thing that can help in dealing with the crisis. It is vital for all nations to understand that ‘everyone is in this together’, and that the pandemic will hit every economy in the same way. There is need for strong support without which nations will not be able to survive. All sink or sail together.

International cooperation against COVID-19

The European Union and the US abandoned Italy in the middle of COVID-19 pandemic after the Italian government requested for immediate medical reinforcements because they worried that they would not have ample medical supplies for their own citizens mainly due to the travel ban as medical supplies from other countries could not be imported. When Italy’s permanent representative to the EU, Maurizio Massari, appealed for assistance and the EU did not respond. Fortunately, China, Venezuela and Cuba stepped up. He said that Italy was in touch with these three countries who have agreed to send doctors to help. Havana’s embassy declared,

³⁷ A. Giuffrida, “Italy’s Lockdown has Taken Heavy Toll on Mental Health, Say Psychologists,” *The Guardian*, (21 May 2020). Visit at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/21/italy-lockdown-mental-health-psychologists-coronavirus>.

³⁸ M. Mesfin, “It Takes a World to End a Pandemic Scientific Cooperation Knows No Boundaries—Fortunately,” *Foreign Affairs*, (March 21, 2020): <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2020-03-21/it-takes-world-end-pandemic>.

“Cuban solidarity with Italy.”³⁹ On March 12, China sent 9 medical experts and 31 tons of medical equipment to Italy.⁴⁰ The Chinese community living in Italy found support from their own community members residing in China. According to the Global Times, Wenzhou-based volunteer group Blazing Youth (BY) organized donations for Italy’s Piedmont region, received 6,000 disposable gloves, 1,900 masks, 660 pairs of protective goggles and 30 protective outfits.⁴¹ On April 9, the EU finance ministers agreed to a budget of more than half a trillion euros to fight against the economic recession due to COVID-19.⁴² Without global interference and aid countries will not be able to cope with the increasing number of deaths and new cases. Italy is an example that we as a global community depend on one another for assistance and survival.

War against COVID-19 has only just begun in different parts of the world. Italy is a lesson for all governments to take strict measures against the pandemic for the safety of their people. The pandemic has claimed the lives of thousands of people and during this difficult time people are looking up to their governments for help and information. Right information at the right time is key. Economies around the world are bound to experience deficit, limited expenditure, crashing markets, closure of industries and businesses downsizing, which are adding challenges to an already disastrous crisis. At an international level, it is important to acknowledge the global footprint of the disease, potential pathways of the spread of the virus and noting the tipping point beyond which it is declared a global health emergency. As positive development unfolds, Italy is gradually easing the lockdown. Civil Protection Agency Chief Angelo Borrelli stated that for the first time since March 2020, the country has

³⁹ B. Norton, “Italy and UK rely on help from Cuba, China, Venezuela to fight coronavirus – as US steps up brutal sanctions,” *The Gray Zone*, (March 17, 2020): <https://thegrayzone.com/2020/03/17/italy-uk-help-cuba-china-venezuela-coronavirus-us-sanctions/>

⁴⁰ M. Cherkaoui, “The Shifting Geopolitics of Coronavirus and the Demise of Neoliberalism – (Part 1),” *Aljazeera*, (March 19, 2020): <https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/shifting-geopolitics-coronavirus-and-demise-neoliberalism-%E2%80%93-part-1>

⁴¹ H. Lanlan, “Wenzhou people donate for Italy amid COVID-19 outbreak, boost understanding,” *Global Times*, (March 2, 2020): <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1181354.shtml>

⁴² “E.U. Officials Agree to Deal to Soften Coronavirus’s Economic Blow,” *The New York Times*, (April 15, 2020): <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/09/world/coronavirus-news-international.html>

experienced positive development. The numbers of cases are declining day-by-day, which shows that the transmission is slowing down.⁴³

The precautionary measures are set in place to keep everyone safe. At a time like this, communities need to unite and world leaders need to come forth more responsibly and with clarity, to stabilize the economic, social and health crisis. They need to work towards building a better socio-economic model, one that will not cripple during a pandemic. Today, even the strongest economies are unable to cope with the increasing number of deaths. It is imperative to learn to slow down the outbreak but, most importantly, it is needed to be prepared ourselves. We as a people and a nation should develop stronger contingency plans in order to limit the impact of future pandemics on not only our physical and mental health but every part of the economy.

⁴³ "Italy Says Current Virus Cases Fall for the First Time," *The News* (April 2020), available at <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/647397-italy-says-current-virus-cases-fall-for-the-first-time>.