

# Covid 19 Pandemic : A Curse or a Blessing ?

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## Introduction

The COVID 19 pandemic was a thunder happening in the middle of a sunny day. No one really expected that this new virus discovered in China would spread all over the world and change the fragile balance of human kind life.

Starting from China, a research conducted by Wang and his colleagues (2020) on COVID-19 and Anxiety supported that 53.8% out of 1220 participants experienced severe psychological impacts of the outbreak. Indeed, 16.5% suffered from severe levels of depression, 28.8% reported facing anxiety issues and 8.1% were dealing with continuous stress pressure.

The research of Abdulmajeed and his colleagues in Saudi Arabia (2020) on the psychological impact of COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that out of 1160 respondents 23.6% reported moderate or severe psychological impact. The authors also added that almost 28.3% reported moderate to severe depressive, anxiety, and stress symptoms.

Another research conducted by Dubeya and his colleagues (2020) on psychosocial impact of COVID 19 underlined that national wide lockdowns provoked acute panic, anxiety, obsessive behaviors, hoarding, paranoia, and depression. They also warned about the spread of racism outbursts among citizens that were less able to control their anger and frustration and started showing aggressivity against others.

Indeed, because of the imposed confinement and the increasing number of the contaminated cases, many people have been impacted negatively and started to manifest signs of psychological distress such as insomnia, eating disorders, hallucinations, mood disorders, phobias, addictive behaviors, family violence.

The quarantine period of three months imposed by the United Arab Emirates Government has triggered the unconscious repressed thoughts and has forced their return exposing the individuals to their deepest psychological conflicts and has weakened their defense mechanisms.

Even though this difficult situation disturbed the coping strategies of the students, it also offered them the opportunity to go through the different psychological phases of the confinement starting from the survival phase till the integration one and provided them with the possibility to reorganize their personality features confronting their inner psychological troubles.

The return of the repressed pushed the students out of their comfort zone and helped them with the guidance of the Office of Counseling and Disability to manage their psychological strain retrieving their darkest secrets that couldn't be maintained anymore in their unconscious.

## Conceptual framework

### Definition of the Trauma :

Laura Sokolowsky and Jean-Claude Maleval (2012) stated that the term traumatic neurosis came into being in 1919 by Sigmund

Freud following the First World War and the afflictions that soldiers manifested on the battlefield.

Trauma occurs, in fact, when the psyche is overwhelmed and exposed to a situation to which it has not been prepared. The time component is essential, the body must suddenly be exposed to a new event threatening its physical and / or mental balance. The extreme vulnerability of the person in the face of the terror of this stranger coming to break open the door of his fragile defenses. The war seemed at that moment to be the ideal manifestation of this physical and psychic trauma installing this insurmountable anguish assaulting the body as well as the mind.

At the moment of shock, the individual finds himself confronted with his own helplessness in the face of his inevitable death. The traumatic image is then found, according to François Lebigot (2006), denied for several hours, days, months or even years. Internal anxiety then appears and overwhelms the body with manifestations of anxiety that are often incomprehensible. The break-in of the ego, when the infantile defenses and foundations are already precarious enough, breaks the psychological peace of the person and subjects him to countless anxiety-inducing, depressive and psychosomatic symptoms.

According to François Lebigot (2006), the trauma arises following three different situations. The first situation is the lonely face to face with death. In this first case, the author mentions road accidents that lead to unconsciousness or a coma, being the victim of a threat with a weapon, explosive attacks or natural disasters. The second situation is when the person is exposed to the death of a loved one, and more particularly in a violent and unexpected way. The third situation is when death takes on a pageantry of horror, more precisely in times of a viral pandemic, of accidents causing alarming numbers of victims in a very short time and in a traumatic manner.

The trauma causes various pathologies including repetition syndrome, anxiety, depression, behavioral and personality disorders as well as psychosomatic pathologies and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The repetition syndrome manifests itself in the form of nightmares and daytime relapses revisiting the traumatic situation in various ways. Images recalled or relived in dreams may relate directly to the traumatic situation or may paint a picture of horror revolving around death. These different manifestations are intrapsychic. Nonetheless they succeed in breaking the apparent calm of the subject which leads towards exposing him to anxiety attacks going through a depressive experience as well.

The anxiety is crippling and is often accompanied by a feeling of imminent death or loss of sanity. Depression comes on gradually and can range from mild depression to delusional melancholy.

Behavioral disorders quickly surface giving way to addictions more and more necessary in order to cope with the anxieties assailing the subjects and the irritability, isolation as well as the aggressiveness expressed towards oneself and others causing exclusion of the traumatized person from the social sphere condemning him to an alienating solitude.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is defined by Bisson and his colleagues (2015) as a mental disorder that arises as a consequence to the exposure to horrifying situations. They added that PTSD can occur after a single traumatic event or a prolonged exposure to a traumatic situation. According to this study PTSD is frequent among adult population and covers about 3% of the adult population and this rate may double in case the population is affected by a disastrous situation. According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, extreme anxiety and fears related to traumatic situations are the two major components of PTSD. Vieweg and his colleagues (2006) added that the traumatic event should include real or threatened death, a real severe injury or a threat to the physical integrity of oneself or others. PTSD diagnostic is stated when the victim responds to the horrifying event by experiencing intense fear, clinical impairment in personal, professional and social life for at least one month.

### Definition of Humor

The Larousse dictionary defines humor as a “form of wit which attempts to emphasize the comic, ridiculous, absurd or unusual character of some aspects of reality. “. This form of mind is hidden behind a serious air and consists of releasing with a certain detachment the pleasant and unusual aspect of reality. Simpson and Weiner (1989) argue that humor is the faculty of perceiving what is ridiculous or funny and the ability to express it in the form of a joke. « *The faculty of perceiving what is ludicrous or amusing, of expressing it in speech, writing, or other composition: jocose imagination or treatment of a subject* »<sup>1</sup>

Freud argued in 1905 that humor is a process which allows the person to avoid negative affects. According to him, humor allows individuals to achieve pleasure despite the painful affects that come to be considered as subjects of disturbance to them.

Verdeau-Paillès (2000) follows the same path and adds that humor is above all language. It's a medium that often conveys a different meaning from that which is stated. It plays on and with words to facilitate the communication of messages that may be marked with censorship or suffering if carried through “ordinary” language. It constitutes an element of relationship and a means of information, stimulation and initiation into action. It also represents a manner of looking at one's self, a way to laugh at one's crises, a way to show off and finally, a way to have fun.

The humor is certainly verbal, but it also relies on the non-verbal. It is present in all forms of verbal expression and in action comedy through facial expressions, ironic smiles, laughter, grimaces and body language.

Verdeau-Paillès (2000) states that humor is a conscious and intentional social construction, but also semi-conscious and involuntary. It is flexible and modular, adapting to all situations, ambiguous due to its association between seriousness and its opposite. Humor can be kind, aggressive, or playful.

It takes shape in several manifestations with a more or less important degree of kinship such as comedy, farce, self-mockery, irony, sarcasm, cynicism, jokes, black humor ...

Pranking involves playing a trick on an individual for the purpose of entertainment. It approaches the notions of burlesque and ridicule.

The parody consists of an imitation of burlesque, intentionally left in order to make the audience laugh.

The caricature, for its part, intentionally disfigures in words, gestures or mimicry of people, situations or acts in order to denounce something that would be perceived as outside the norm.

Irony is a paradoxical intervention of terms. It consists of saying the opposite of what you really want to say. It ignores pity, mourning, anger or suffering. It is often directed against others but can, sometimes, be directed towards oneself. Its intention is to ridicule and caricaturize the other's point of view.

Sarcasm differs from irony in the intentional aspect. Sarcasm aims to hurt others. There is nothing funny about it as it is rather considered as an aggressive humor intended to hurt the listener or a third party.

Self-mockery is the ability of one person to make fun of oneself by transforming humiliation into enjoyment and thus, by the means of disarming hostilities and adorning with sympathy.

Writing is a secondary process skill of playing with words and their meanings. It is according to Freud, “a rascal” with two faces; it summons meaning and nonsense, laughter and anguish, and at the same time mania and melancholy, ; a compromise between the preconscious and the unconscious. Freud described it as deep and superficial at the same time as well, provided that it causes an effect of astonishment, ; it skims the surface of things while stinging to the deepest. It creates a hole which allows a new meaning to be introduced through the transgression of linguistic codes: it opens a breach.

Black humor represents the tragic dimension of humor; it will bring out laughter from difficult situations such as death, poverty, illness ... (Black humor represents the tragic dimension of humor as it brings out laughter from difficult situations such as death, poverty, illness ...)

Cynicism, on the other hand, is the very opposite of the concept of humor. A cynical individual is someone who only focuses on life issues, systematically self-deprecating about their own accomplishments and positive qualities.

### Humor and Trauma :

Humor has over the years been bestowed with virtues hitherto unknown. It would, in fact, have a positive impact on the different spheres of daily life. Tatano-Beck (1997) attests that humor promotes a decrease in anxiety and helps to consolidate self-esteem, thereby improving the quality of interpersonal relationships. Long associated with laughter, humor seems to be responsible for muscle relaxation, a natural increase in the production of stress-fighting endorphins. Garrick (2008), explained the importance of humor after a disastrous situation coping with trauma experiences. She added that humor has a very important role mitigating the intensity of traumatic stress reactions among crisis survivors. Garrick insisted that it's actually a powerful and effective healing tool during therapeutic encounters.

Therefore, humor started to be the subject of various studies with numerous patients suffering from psychiatric pathologies (Pasquali, 1990), but also from Alzheimer's (Buckwalter, Gerdner, Stolley, Kudart and Ridgewayet, 1995) and from cancers (Morishima and coll, 2019), attesting to the positive role of humor on health and the de-dramatization of illness. More recent researches, such as that of Provine in 2003 and Bourque in 2004, make it possible to back up these remarks on neuropsychological manifestations. Indeed, humor has an important role in lowering hypertension and improving digestion. It promotes respiratory exchanges by amplifying the inspirations, and thus allowing better oxygenation of the blood. It has an important impact in increasing the amount of immunoglobulins and proteins that

attack viruses. It also appears to increase the level of activity of T cells responsible for recognizing and destroying cancer cells.

It promotes the secretion of endorphins, neuropeptides that inhibit the perception of pain. It also prepares the sleep cycle by tiring the adrenergic arousal system. All these physical changes provoked by humor are enhancing the quality of life of the individual and are promoting mental health rehabilitation. It helps reducing the negative effects of severe anxiety, depression and more specifically PTSD.

Humor has been the object of questioning in therapeutic processes. This is why, Reynes and Allen stated in 1987 that humor helps to break down patient resistance and establish a healthy identification with the therapist. It, thus, ensures a good therapeutic alliance.

Wolfen and Wolfen (1993) claim that the combination of humor and creativity helps to develop the capacities of resilience of the individual; Resilience that proved itself to be the best ally against psychological collapses. This is why Camilo Ortiz (2000) positions humor as an effective therapeutic tool in the face of mental disorders.

Humor seems to perform contradictory functions at times. It can strengthen group cohesion as well as serve to exclude others. It can reduce the differences between people, but can also accentuate them. Thus, humor seems to have a socializing function, done by encouraging cooperation but also by, sometimes, serving to attack the other arousing the strongest resistance.

Catherall (2013) demonstrated that in response to traumatic event, people will develop severe interruption in functioning stressing the affected person but also the whole family with slow recovery. Researches also discovered that simultaneous or numerous stressors impact the resistance of resilience, diminish the immunity system performance and expose to psychological and physical breakdowns. The traumatized victim is tied up; she can't speak out her suffering to expulse it to the outside and at the same time remaining silent is killing her from inside, troubling his whole physical and psychological balance. Schimmenti (2012) revealed that hidden trauma events can dramatically affect the person's life leading to develop disturbing feelings of shame and defective self. He added that it would also provoke withdrawal from social contacts, narcissistic rage, addiction and perversions.

Humor, here, serves as a language that conveys a message. According to Verdeau-Pailès (2000), it would be a message of tenderness for the Timid and a sharp message for the Aggressive. It is defined, as Philippe Avron (2005) noted, through this game of surprise messages, shaking reality, insidiously penetrating it and exposing it. He disguises the pain and the unspoken in order to allow him to expose himself to the light of day while diminishing the superego dictatorship. Avron, Ph (2005) points out that humor is a mind game that surprises and reveals the hidden side of the subject's ideas and feelings.

In its cathartic function, humor seems to fulfill the role of a liberating factor.

Humor is also a defense. Freud attests to this in his work "The Wit and Its Relationship with the Unconscious", which highlights that humor makes it possible to put into perspective the anxiety-provoking situations encountered by a person.

René Pandelon, Nathalie Lustig and Danielle Raoux (1997) state that this process constitutes a way of avoiding pain, more particularly that awakened by passion, an emotion combining both pain and pleasure. The humor enters into a fight against the anguish of death, aiming to reduce it and eliminate it imaginatively in order to preserve the relationship with the other.

## Methodology

In this research, we are interviewing students from the American University in the Emirates (AUE).

In this research we intend to identify the student's perception about the COVID 19 Pandemic and the confinement consequences on their personal and professional life.

We will also test the impact of humor usage on trauma management highlighting the classical four types of humor presented by Martin A.Rod (Self enhancing humor, affiliative humor, aggressive humor and self-defeating humor) and adding the last category "No Humor" described by Dr Jihene Mrabet (2017) during her thesis about "The role of Humor in adolescent process. Preconscious Functioning, Narcissism, Individualization and Socialization".

## Hypotheses:

- ♦ **Hypothesis 1:** AUE students will perceive the pandemic situation as a curse threatening their psychological balance
- ♦ **Hypothesis 2:** AUE students that resort to adaptive humor would manage the confinement situation in a better way than students that resort to non-adaptive humor or those that are not capable of humor (No Humor category)

## Method of investigation:

The method that we will adopt throughout this research will be a clinical, quantitative and qualitative method that aims to better understand this humorous process within the COVID 19 confinement circumstance.

a. COVID-19 Survey comprising the following questions:

- ♦ How do you perceive COVID 19: Curse or Blessing? Depending on the answer, the student will answer question a or b:
- a. Identify three negative consequences of the confinement
- b. Identify three positive consequences of the confinement
- ♦ We collected symptoms from DSM 5 regarding anxiety and depression symptoms and thus we asked the following questions:

Have you frequently experienced during confinement: sadness, anxiety, guilt, sleeping disorders, eating disorders, concentration problems, motivation problems, irritability, tiredness, agitation, worry, pessimistic thoughts, breathing problems, digestive problems, hypochondria manifestations, hopelessness, helplessness, overwhelmed by a load of academic work, isolation, different aches and any other symptoms...

The COVID 19 survey was supposed to be a face-to-face interview items where questions will be asked to students about COVID 19 situation and the different symptoms manifested during the confinement period. However, since we were all confined and the university decided to switch to online classes, we organized the different interview topics into COVID 19 survey.

The questions included in this survey were inspired from clinical observation of anxiety and depression as per DSM 5. After answering the survey questions about the manifested symptoms during confinement, we turned the answers into quantitative results. A total score out of 20 is calculated and was chunked in 4 parts showing progressive anxiety severity during confinement.

The survey was pre-tested among 10 students (five suffering from Anxiety and depression disorders and five not suffering from any anxiety disorder or depression).

The results were satisfactory and allowed me to trust the questions inspired from the DSM 5 as a good diagnostic tool.

b. Questionnaire inspired by Martin's The Situational Humor Response Questionnaire (SHRQ). The questionnaire will allow us to highlight a preferential style of the students' humor.

### Sample:

Our sample is composed of students studying at the American University in the Emirates.

One of the most important factors of our research is to measure the level of anxiety provoked by the quarantine situation. For this reason, we had to control the baseline anxiety of the participants. In order to do that, we used the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) elaborated by Charles Spielberg to exclude the students that had already a highly anxious personality.

AUE* Students		
Number	48	
Gender	Male	Female
	16	29
Age	[20; 35]	[18; 32]
Nationalities	UAE, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia	UAE, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, Palestine, India, Tunisia
Majors	Educational Psychology and Counseling, Accounting, Public Relation, Animation, Risk Management, Business Management, International Relations, Interior Design, Digital Forensic	Educational Psychology and Counseling, Public Relation, Business Management, Fashion Design, Interior Design, Hospital and Healthcare Management, Computer Science, Graphic Design, Marketing

AUE\*: The American University in the Emirates

### Results Analyses

- Hypothesis 1: AUE students will perceive the pandemic situation as a curse threatening their psychological balance

Table 1: The students' perception of COVID 19

	Curse	Blessing	Fake
Students' perception of COVID 19	23	21	1

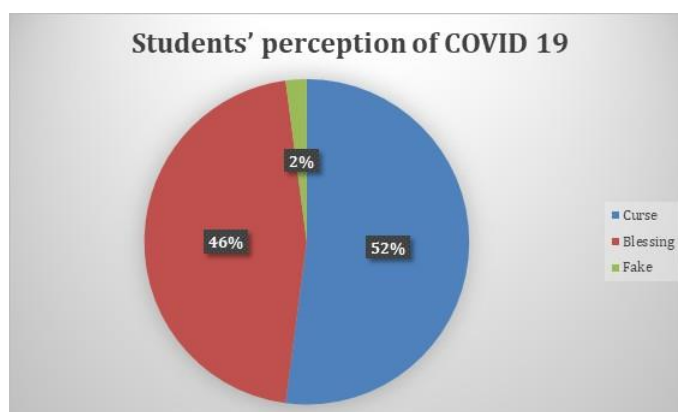


Figure 1: The students' perception of COVID 19

The results showed that the majority of the students perceived COVID 19 as a curse (23 out of 45) and almost half of the sample perceived COVID 19 as a blessing (21 out of 29). Only one student chose to add an extra answer qualifying COVID 19 as a fake event.

These results were surprising since we were expecting that the COVID 19, as a traumatic situation, would be majorly perceived negatively by individuals and more specifically, by teenagers because of the freedom restraint. While, we realized that students' perceptions are, actually, mixed.

Pushing further the investigation, we wanted to get a closure look on the reasons behind the students' perceptions.

### Positive consequences of COVID 19

Many students perceived COVID 19 pandemic as a blessing and that for the reasons displayed on the table below:

The results showed that the most frequent reasons behind students perceiving COVID 19 as a blessing are the ability to learn new skills (16%), the opportunity to dedicate time for self-reflection (16%), the possibility to dedicate more time to family, working on rebounding with parents, children and even extended family (14%), the fact that staying at home facilitates the organization of one's life (12%) and the installation of a hygienic life (11%).

### Negative consequences of COVID 19:

Many students perceived COVID 19 pandemic as a curse and that for the reasons displayed on the table below :

The results showed that the most frequent reasons behind students perceiving COVID 19 as a curse are the provoked emotional strain (18%), social distancing (15%), the fragilized physical health (10%) and the feeling of boredom (9%).

Results showed that the COVID-19 confinement situation provoked opposite reactions among AUE students splitting them in two groups. The ones who think that there is a lot to learn from this challenging situation and the ones who think that this challenging situation is bringing only horror, misery and psychological distress.

### COVID-19 Survey:

After answering the survey questions about the manifested symptoms during confinement, we turned the answers into quantitative results. Twenty questions are asked displaying symptoms of anxiety and depression as per DSM 5. A total score out of 20 is calculated and was chunked in 4 parts showing progressive anxiety severity during confinement. This leads us to identify 4 categories:

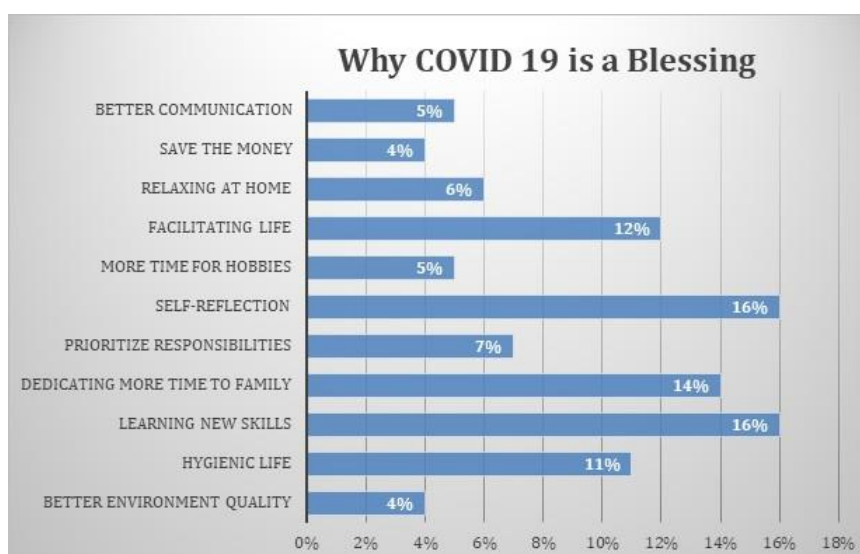
- From 0 to 4 symptoms: No specific anxiety problems due to the confinement situation
- From 5 to 10 symptoms: Mild anxiety problems due to the confinement situation
- From 11 to 15 symptoms: severe anxiety problems due to the confinement situation
- From 16 to 20 symptoms: Major anxiety problems due to the confinement situation (Probably disorder + depressive syndrome)

The results of the survey are displayed on the table below:



**Table 2:** Positive consequences of COVID 19 according to AUE students

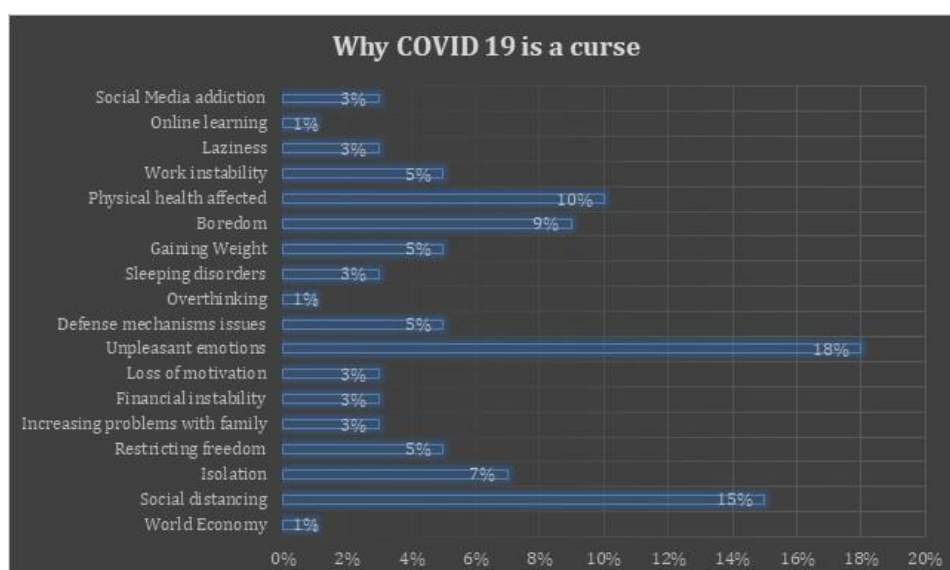
Rationale	Percentage	Example
Better environment quality	4%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Living a hygienic life</li> <li>- Better environment such as stopping factories</li> <li>- Safe environment/healthier</li> </ul>
Hygienic life	11%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Spending more time at home</li> <li>- Better hygiene</li> <li>- Spending more time at home</li> <li>- Total dependence on home food and avoidance of fast food that's harmful to our health</li> <li>- Better physical health</li> </ul>
Learning new skills	16%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learning new stuff and discovering new skills like reading books</li> <li>- Learning guitar</li> <li>- Innovation</li> <li>- Trying new hobbies</li> <li>- Improve your skill like starting to attend conferences online so easy</li> <li>- Could practice a new skill or discover a hidden talent</li> <li>- "learn to make use of internet and technology in a more efficient manner for many purposes all over the world, allowing the development of a new sector of growth in the world."</li> </ul>
Dedicating more time to family	14%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dedicating more time to family, bonding with family, spending time with family</li> <li>- Spending more time with children and strengthen family ties</li> <li>- Better family connection</li> <li>- Family are staying together</li> </ul>
Prioritize responsibilities	7%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tidying and reorganizing house &amp; life</li> <li>- Focus more on your work rather than going out</li> </ul>
Self-reflection	16%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reflection on myself and discovering myself more, more time to understand yourself</li> <li>- "Me time"</li> <li>- Discovering yourself</li> <li>- Self-reflection</li> <li>- More time to meditate</li> <li>- Got time to truly understand ourselves</li> <li>- Increased awareness</li> <li>- Knowing the value of the daily habits that we were doing without knowing their value</li> <li>- I am on a spiritual journey with the big G that has never happened before</li> </ul>
More time for hobbies	5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More free time for hobbies such as book reading</li> </ul>
Facilitating life	12%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work and study from home is easy for those with tight schedules and lack transportation methods</li> <li>- Finish tasks at home</li> <li>- Helps to finish things at home</li> <li>- Taking rest from hectic world</li> <li>- As a self-proclaimed introvert this time has truly made me mentally happier</li> <li>- First marriage is fixed</li> </ul>
Relaxing at home	6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Staying home and relaxing</li> <li>- Staying calm</li> <li>- Work and study from the comfort of your home</li> </ul>
Save money	4%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Save money, Less financial strain</li> </ul>
Better communication	5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social communication I start to call many friends even who even those whom I haven't spoken with for years</li> <li>- Avoiding unknown people is easy</li> <li>- Avoiding toxic persons</li> </ul>



**Figure 2:** Positive consequences of COVID 19 according to AUE students

**Table 3:** Negative consequences of COVID 19 according to AUE students

Rationale	Percentage	Example
World Economy decrease	1%	- Huge effect on world economy
Social distancing	15%	- Social distancing - Not being able to see your friends - Not being able to see my family - No more family and friends gathering - Inability to socialize - Limitation of contact with the elderly
Isolation	7%	- Left alone with my thoughts - Isolation - Loneliness
Restricting freedom	5%	- Restricting freedom - No traveling, if people were outside the country, they can't come back to their families
Increasing problems with family	3%	- Spending too much time with family - Confinement with family - Divorce cases
Financial instability	3%	- Financial crisis - Financial loss - Financial issues
Loss of motivation	3%	- Loss of motivation
Unpleasant emotions	18%	- Rise of unpleasant emotions and thoughts - Depression - Anxiety - Negative emotions - Anger and frustration - Irritability - Psychological disturbance
Defense mechanisms issues	5%	- New experience - Distractions that kept vulnerable people busy are no longer there - The fear and uncertainty of now knowing when things will return to normal
Overthinking	1%	- Overthinking
Sleeping disorder	3%	- Oversleeping - Instable sleeping time - Insomnia
Gaining Weight	5%	- Gain weight
Boredom	9%	- Boredom
Physical health affected	10%	- Physical health affected by lack of sport and walking - Vitamin D deficiency - People's deaths
Work instability	5%	- Work affected, salary reduction - Fear of losing the job and no future perspectives
Laziness	3%	- Laziness
Online learning	1%	- Online learning is hard
Social Media addiction	3%	- Spending all the time on social media accounts



**Figure 3:** Negative consequences of COVID 19 according to AUE students

**Table 4:** The percentage of AUE students according to their anxiety intensity

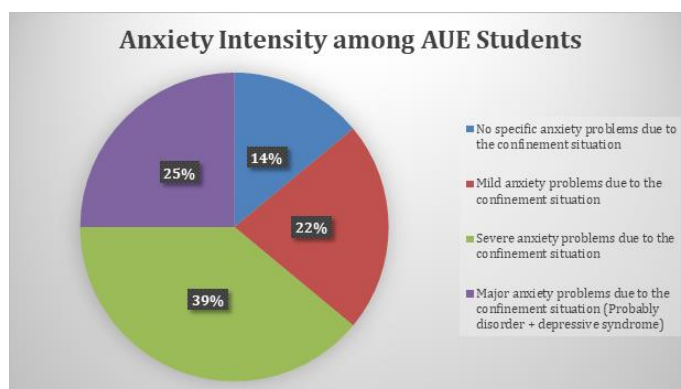
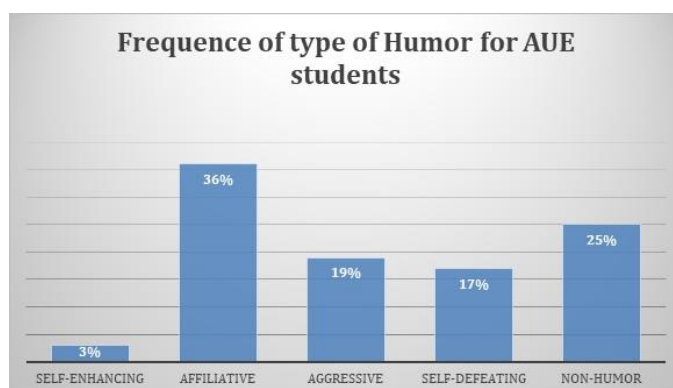
Anxiety Intensity	Percentage
No specific anxiety problems due to the confinement situation	14%
Mild anxiety problems due to the confinement situation	22%
Severe anxiety problems due to the confinement situation	39%
Major anxiety problems due to the confinement situation (Probably disorder + depressive syndrome)	25%

**Table 5:** The percentage of AUE students according to their type of humor

Type of Humor	Percentage
Self-enhancing	3%
Affiliative	36%
Aggressive	19%
Self-defeating	17%
Non-Humor	25%

**Table 6:** Pairing of anxiety level and type of humor among AUE students

Anxiety Level	Type of Humor
No specific anxiety problems due to the confinement situation	Affiliative
Mild anxiety problems due to the confinement situation	Self-enhancing and Affiliative
Severe anxiety problems due to the confinement situation	Aggressive, Self-defeating and Non-Humor
Major anxiety problems due to the confinement situation (Probably disorder + depressive syndrome)	Aggressive, self-defeating and Non-Humor

**Figure 4:** The percentage of AUE students according to their anxiety intensity**Figure 5:** The percentage of AUE students according to their type of humor

The results showed that 14% of the students were not suffering from specific anxiety problems due to the confinement and 25% of the sample are suffering from major anxiety problems that probably evolved in an anxiety disorder and/or a depressive syndrome.

The rest of the students were divided between those who are suffering from mild anxiety problems (22%) and those who were experiencing severe anxiety problems (39%).

### Humor questionnaire:

Among the 45 participating students, only 36 finished the second part of the research answering the humor questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to students by email and unfortunately six students didn't send their responses and three were excluded because they didn't follow the instructions of the Situational Humor Response Questionnaire.

The results showed that the majority of our students' sample are using affiliative humor (36%) which is described as an increase use of funny jokes and sometimes self-deprecating tendency that is not harmful to the transmitter. Rather, it is used to appease others. It's a tolerant and not hostile humor. This type of humor is defined as an interpsychic movement aiming at strengthening group cohesion and creating new relationships. According to Mrabet (2017), this type of humor characterizes stable individuals that have good introspection skills, a well-functioning barrier between conscious and unconscious preventing the emergence of the primary defense mechanisms, a pleasure of thinking, a positive internalized parental imago and a good social investment. Even though they have the capacity to link emotions to representations, sometimes emotions are overcontrolling the scene and that is probably due to the emphasis on the social aspect that could exacerbate the emotion.

Students reluctant to use humor represents 25% of our sample and came in the second position in terms of frequency. The students unable to enjoy or to produce humor are described, according to Mrabet (2017), as having a failing internal dynamic that do not allow proper management of one's defense mechanisms and reduced capacities to link representations to emotions and emphasis on the affective component at the expense of the representational one. The barrier between conscious and unconscious is dysfunctional allowing the infiltration of primary defense mechanisms that impede the pleasure of thinking. Identity and identification are unstable with absence of positive internalized parental representations and a minimal social investment.

The results showed that 19% of our students' sample used aggressive humor which is described as sexist and/or racist jokes. It is offensive and socially unacceptable and is illustrated by irony, sarcasm and dark humor. It is positively correlated, according to Venon (2007), with aggressivity and hostility toward others. According to Mrabet (2017), this type of humor characterizes moderately good internal dynamic, sometimes, parasitized by the acting out or the emergence of primary defense mechanisms and a highlight on aggression where the most important is the affect and not the representation (the means is not important, what is more important, rather, is to disparage or make fun of the other). The barrier between conscious and unconscious is dysfunctional allowing the infiltration of primary defense mechanisms that impedes the pleasure of thinking by disorganizing it; Identity and identification are unstable with absence of positive internalized parental representations and a hesitation between self-focus and social sphere investment.

Self-enhancing and self-defeating humor are poorly represented within our sample (3%).

Self-enhancing humor is described as an accepted and not detrimental humor to others with a comic view of the world. It

represents a major element of adaptation to stress and according to Venon (2007), it is negatively correlated with neuroticism and negative emotions and positively correlated with emotional stability, optimism, high self-esteem and agreeableness toward others. According to Mrabet (2017), this type of humor characterizes stable individuals that have good introspection skills, a well-functioning barrier between conscious and unconscious preventing the emergence of the primary defense mechanisms, a pleasure of thinking and daydreaming, a positive internalized parental imago and a good social investment.

Self-defeating humor is described as Self-depreciation in order to please others and to be able to gain their sympathy (17%). This type of humor often indicates a narcissistic flaw and an increased dependence on the gaze of others. According to Vernon (2007), it's positively correlated with depression and neuroticism. According to Mrabet (2017), this type of humor characterizes Failing internal dynamic that do not allow proper management of one's defense mechanisms and a reduced link capacity between representations and emotions. The barrier between conscious and unconscious is dysfunctional allowing the infiltration of primary defense mechanisms that impede the pleasure of thinking disorganizing the pleasure of thinking, Identity and identification are unstable with absence of positive internalized parental representations and a minimal social investment likely reflecting a social phobia.

Because of these previous results, we expect students resorting to adapted humor (Self-enhancing and Affiliative) to be psychologically more balanced and to express low level of anxiety during the confinement than students who resorted to non-adaptive humor (Aggressive and self-defeating) or Non-Humor.

The 36 AUE students' responses to humor questionnaire were coupled with their anxiety level. As every student has to answer the COVID 19 survey and the Situational Humor Response Questionnaire, we draw a table where each student had displayed his anxiety level and the type of humor used. Then we grouped the answers of all the students in the table below:

As shown on the table, the results showcased that students using self-enhancing and affiliative humor didn't show high anxiety or depressive levels due to the confinement situation. However, students resorting to aggressive, self-defeating and non-humor displayed severe to major anxiety and depressive disorders.

According to the research's results, we can consider humor as a sign of a relatively stable mental state. The preferable type of the humor used by the person could inform us about his/her psychological mental health. Indeed, adapted forms of humor such as self-enhancing and affiliative humor are more likely to be associated with mental health stability and a good ability to manage stressful and traumatic situations. Whereas non-adapted humor (aggressive and self-defeating) or the reluctance to enjoy or produce humor are associated to psychological fragility and the incapacity to create or use efficient coping strategies in time of crises.

The results of our study also confirm that the humor type used by the adolescent can inform us about his/her psychological dynamic and his/her inner fragilities and strengths.

## Discussion

The study of Ruch and Heintz (2013) confirms the results of our research. Indeed, the researchers were able to demonstrate that there is indeed a relationship between humor and personality. Using the

Humor Styles Questionnaire, they highlighted that the affiliative and self-enhancing humor styles are correlated positively with extraversion, positive affect, self-esteem and optimism. However, it's negatively correlated with neuroticism. They also added that Self-enhancing humor is positively correlated with life satisfaction. Aggressive humor style is positively correlated with extraversion but negatively with agreeableness. In the other hand, self-defeating humor seems to be positively linked to neuroticism, negative affect, negative self-esteem, pessimism and low life satisfaction. The results of this study concur with our findings since it shows clear evidence that a person that would use Self-enhancing and Affiliative humor would be in a better psychological state than a person that is using Aggressive and Self-depreciating humor.

Another study of Ostrower (2013) showcased the role of the humor as a defense mechanism against Holocaust trauma. Indeed, the researcher could demonstrate the role of humor in alleviating the pain of survivors during their detention in Nazi's camps. Sigmund Freud explained very well how this process will take place in such unpredictable situations. According to him, humor serves the establishment of an emotional economy. Indeed, it allows the person to enjoy certain prohibitions and to derive an amount of pleasure unattainable otherwise. Laughing at the stupidity or suffering of others would instantly cause a feeling of guilt, preventing the emergence of a feeling of pleasure. This is why humor is used; in order to bypass the ban. This is how Sigmund Freud elevates humor to the rank of a defense mechanism because it makes it possible to face the reality of a painful situation while avoiding the emotional suffering associated with it. Humor seems to be a precious and liberating gift, according to this psychoanalyst. He signs the triumph of narcissism over his own vulnerability by putting at bay the negative affects that can hurt the image that the person has forged of himself.

However, we can still wonder why some persons are not yet able to access humor as a defense mechanism. Ostrower (2013) adds in this sense that this type of defense mechanism depends on the psychological functioning of a person. The more the person is getting into pathology the less she will be able to resort to humor as a defense mechanism to protect her from psychic collapse.

We shouldn't forget to mention the contribution of Cheryl Tatano Beck (1997) who attests that humor promotes a decrease in anxiety and helps to consolidate self-esteem, thereby improving the quality of interpersonal relationships. Kuiper and Borowicz-Sibenik (2005) added that using humor is very effective to reduce negative emotions of depression, anxiety and stress.

In our study we could demonstrate that people that don't use humor at all have severe to major levels of anxiety comparable to non-adapted humor types (Aggressive and Self-deceiving). In the other hand, no case of reluctance to humor was linked to mild level of anxiety or absence of anxiety.

Even among humorous responses, there are some differences that indicate that there are two types of humor answers: adapted and non-adapted. The adapted humor (Self-enhancing and Affiliative) reveals a better flexibility, tendency to experience good emotions, good self-esteem and extraversion. This characteristic is confirmed by our study through the low anxiety level displayed among Self-enhancing and Affiliative groups of humor.

In the other hand, the non-adapted humor (Aggressive and Self-depreciating) reveals rigidity, a higher tendency to experience negative



emotions and low self-esteem, frequently correlated by studies to high level of anxiety and depression. This characteristic is confirmed also by our study through the high anxiety levels displayed among Aggressive and Self-depreciating groups of humor.

Humor would guarantee, according to Bergson, the symbolic resolution of all what is "incongruous", of any inappropriate behavior. The adolescent laughs at the other, excludes the other, probably swelling his damaged narcissism. But this movement of exclusion would also be accompanied by a movement of inclusion. We laugh at others but often also with others. The humorous behavior rarely occurs alone.

Laugh at "others" who do not seem to share our norms and interests, would consolidate group cohesion and promote the act of socialization.

As Éric Bidaud and Anne Bourgain (2008) said, laughter is a cry in front of the impossible. (to understand, to live, to fight...)

## Conclusion

The actual research proved that students' perception of COVID 19 confinement is mixed. Half of our sample, composed of students studying at the American University in the Emirates, perceived the pandemic as a curse insisting on the negative emotions it has provoked such as fear, uncertainty, anxiety, irritability, boredom and depression. They added that the distancing rule deprived them from seeing their beloved ones (family members and friends). Moreover, this crisis caused work instability and hence financial issues that sometimes obliged some people to go back to their countries or to relocate somewhere else. Many students were suffering from sleeping disorders, eating unbalance, overthinking and were unable to cope with this disastrous situation using their usual defense mechanisms. They also noticed that their physical health got affected because of the freedom restriction and their inability to practice exercises. Some of them even thought that the increased isolation has locked them into social media addiction.

Even though this pandemic provoked feelings of horror and uncertainty, almost half of our sample perceived this crisis as blessing. They highlighted how it improved their family cohesion, gave them the possibility to practice self-reflection and to reorganize their life revising their priorities. They also added that it offered them the possibility to learn new skills, to relax a little bit more at home and to go back to healthy hygienic life.

This research gave us, also, the possibility to uncover the role played by humor alleviating anxiety during the quarantine. Indeed, students who are performing adapted humor (self-enhancing and affiliative) are less impacted by anxiety and depressive syndrome than the ones, who perform non-adapted humor (Aggressive and Self-defeating) and non-humor. Through this explorative research, we could link the type of humor used by the student to his ability to cope with anxious and traumatic situations. Therefore, it leads to a new perspective that consider humor as a diagnostic tool allowing instructors, Medical health professionals and Mental health professionals to identify the adolescent's fragilities and strengths.

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