

# Taking on the “new normal”: emerging psychologists’ reflections on the COVID-19 pandemic

Sarah Gradidge

*Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, UK*

Wai Meng Yap

*HELP University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

Andrian Liem

*Monash University Malaysia, Subang Jaya, Malaysia, and*

Giselle Dass

*University of Bristol, Bristol, UK*

## Abstract

**Purpose** – Coronavirus (COVID-19) rapidly became the “new normal” with profound implications for everyone’s daily life. In this paper, emerging psychologists from diverse cultural backgrounds discuss four main ways in which COVID-19 impacted diverse psychological populations.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This paper was written as a reflection on how COVID-19 has impacted diverse psychological populations using authors’ academic and personal experiences.

**Findings** – First, the authors explore inaccessible populations with a focus on domestic violence victims living in rural areas. Second, the authors consider consequences of social isolation with a focus on remote workers. Third, the authors investigate the consequences of public (dis)trust in the pandemic with a focus on migrant worker communities. Finally, the authors discuss pandemic-relevant subcultures with a focus on “anti-vaxxers”.

**Social implications** – The paper concludes with a discussion of negative implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on diverse psychological populations, both for the present and the future, and ends with an action plan of possible interventions to overcome these limitations.

**Originality/value** – Overall, the current paper provides a broad overview of how the pandemic has shaped and will continue to shape diverse psychological populations.

**Keywords** Human behaviour, Cultural diversity, Applied sciences, Inequity, Well-being, Social intervention

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

## Introduction

Coronavirus (COVID-19) rapidly took over daily life, becoming the “new normal” (Tam, 2021). COVID-19 had, and likely will continue to have, profound impacts on all of our lives, from the more obvious (e.g. direct mortality or illness due to COVID-19) to the more subtle (e.g. reduced social interaction). For example, about 13% of clinically vulnerable people are still restricting their social interaction in the UK (ONS, 2022). The pandemic had multiple negative psychological consequences, including sharp increases in depression and anxiety



(e.g. Shah *et al.*, 2021; World Health Organisation, 2022), with implications still for today such as backlogs in mental and physical healthcare (e.g. APA, 2022; BMA, 2022). Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has informed new ways of living (e.g. remote working; Mutebi and Hobbs, 2022), whilst highlighting and exacerbating already existent issues (e.g. domestic violence, Havard, 2021; anti-vaccination beliefs, Durmaz and Hengirmen, 2022; inequality and poverty, Ndi *et al.*, 2021). As such, the pandemic has had an irreversible psychological and societal impact. Additionally, COVID-19 has provided a modern snapshot into the psychological consequences of a pandemic. As there has been estimated to be a 38% or higher risk of a person experiencing another pandemic within their lifetime (Marani *et al.*, 2021), lessons may be learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic in order to mitigate negative psychological effects of any future pandemic.

The aim of the current paper is therefore threefold: Inspired by a paper from our colleagues on the International Congress of Psychology's (ICP) Emerging Psychologists' Programme [1] (EPP; Simon *et al.*, 2021), we, as emerging psychologists from diverse sociocultural backgrounds, aim to reflect upon (1) past, current and future psychological impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic ("psychological impacts" aim), which may include exacerbation of already existent issues or the creation of new psychological issues, and (2) how the COVID-19 pandemic can either be applied to prepare for and mitigate negative psychological consequences of any future pandemic, or how the pandemic can inform better living in the post-pandemic world ("long-term implications" aim). To meet these two aims, we reflect on our own research experiences to focus on four main psychological populations as case studies: domestic violence victims, remote workers, migrant workers (MWs) and "anti-vaxxers". First, we discuss our methodological approach for this paper, which is as follows.

### Methodological approach

This paper combines narrative review incorporating previously published literature with a collaborative autoethnography (CA) approach. CA entails researchers reflecting on and gaining a meaningful understanding of their sociocultural experiences (Roy and Uekusa, 2020), and has been utilised during the pandemic (e.g. to explore teaching and learning experiences; Singh and Chowdhury, 2021). Outside of the pandemic, this method has also been implemented to reflect on peoples' social and cross-cultural experiences, such as experiences of research across the Global North and the Global South (e.g. Tabb and Valdovinos, 2019). For this paper, we therefore collaborated as cross-cultural emerging psychologists using a combination of narrative review (informed by previous literature) and CA (informed by our personal experiences) to reflect upon our own research and/or sociocultural experiences and studied populations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Within this paper, informed by our own experiences in line with CA, we discuss four themes (inaccessibility, social isolation, trust and anti-scientific beliefs) utilising four diverse psychological populations as case studies (domestic violence victims, remote workers, MWs and "anti-vaxxers"). Each case study is linked back to the two psychological aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic that we aim to reflect upon: (1) past, current and future psychological impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic ("psychological impacts" aim), and (2) how the COVID-19 pandemic can either be applied to prepare for and mitigate negative psychological consequences of any future pandemic, or how the pandemic can inform better living in the post-pandemic world ("long-term implications" aim). Whilst our chosen psychological themes and studied populations are highly diverse, this paper is intentionally broad as a way to (1) incorporate our diverse cross-cultural research experiences in line with CA and (2) demonstrate the wide-ranging psychological impacts which the COVID-19 pandemic had and continues to have in line with our aims. Note that the populations discussed within this paper are utilised as case studies to exemplify the themes and in alignment with our own

research and/or sociocultural experiences, but the discussions can be extended to wider populations. We therefore state within each results subsection to which populations findings may generalise.

## Results and discussion

### *Inaccessible populations: a focus on domestic violence victims living in rural areas*

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Within this first section, we explore inaccessibility in relation to our two aims (“psychological impacts” and “long-term implications”). Specifically, the COVID-19 pandemic worsened inaccessibility by removing the ability to engage face-to-face with some populations (including negatively impacting psychological research with these groups of people; Lourenco and Tasimi, 2020), alongside making inaccessible populations more vulnerable (e.g. to domestic violence; Leigh *et al.*, 2022; ‘psychological impacts’ aim). Thinking beyond the COVID-19 pandemic and linking to long-term implications, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how non-internet-based methods such as phone, text messaging or post could be utilised to better enable equal inclusion of inaccessible populations within research (Rodda *et al.*, 2022). For this first case study, we focus on domestic violence victims living in rural areas, drawing upon one of the author’s research experiences in line with CA. Note that this reflection may extend to other inaccessible populations (e.g. people who are not domestic violence victims but who also live in rural areas without Internet access). We now explore the points mentioned in this paragraph in more depth below, beginning with a reflective background of the author’s research.

The current author’s studies were conducted in a rural post-conflict population who had little to no Internet access. The combination of the topic (domestic violence) and participants’ location (rural and remote) meant that participants were both vulnerable and largely inaccessible. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic and inaccessibility of the sample, this author experienced significant challenges in ethical internet-mediated participant recruitment and data collection. This experience highlighted the extreme inaccessibility of this population and not only made research on this population more challenging, but also made this population even more vulnerable than pre-pandemic.

In regards to psychological impacts, due to the nature of domestic violence, participants’ homes were often not safe environments for them to live in (Leigh *et al.*, 2022). This issue was exacerbated by the pandemic, whereby COVID-19 raised unique problems such as much-reduced social support compared to pre-COVID and abusers weaponising COVID-19 itself to enforce control (Leigh *et al.*, 2022). Thus, whilst domestic violence was a pre-existing issue before COVID-19, the pandemic also created new concerns for domestic violence victims. Additionally, for researchers, the pandemic significantly impeded access to participants (Lourenco and Tasimi, 2020). However, even if access to participants was attained (e.g. through the Internet), the pandemic raised novel issues with participant confidentiality and welfare (Madigan *et al.*, 2021).

This lack of access causes significant concerns, as unique and highly-valued insight into this research population was unobtainable due to COVID-19. This population was thus left more vulnerable and isolated than pre-pandemic, and reduced the ability of researchers to help this population, raise awareness of their situation or to identify issues created or worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, while the Internet has provided enormous benefits in enabling easier access to international and cross-cultural samples, it continues to be limited in accessing populations with little to no Internet access, such as those living in remote, rural settings, and/or populations with lack of a safe environment, such as domestic violence victims. Research samples may subsequently reflect this bias in accessibility by being themselves biased in research sample selection (Lourenco and Tasimi, 2020). That is, samples may disproportionately or only represent populations with Internet access and/or a safe environment and neglect

those without. This bias may therefore lead to privileges in who is represented in research and therefore helped, and who is not represented and therefore not helped.

Relating to long-term implications, inaccessibility continues to be a concern at the present time and in the future. Firstly, if any future pandemic occurs, inaccessible populations may again become almost entirely unreachable, thereby increasing their vulnerability and restricting important research on these populations. Secondly, Internet-mediated research in psychology continues to become increasingly common (Gosling and Mason, 2015). Whilst this move to online research increases accessibility in some ways by providing an efficient way to investigate vulnerable people in a non-intrusive manner (Dodds and Hess, 2020), and has increased access to some vulnerable populations (Bybee *et al.*, 2022), these benefits still crucially depend upon safety of the participant's home, participant's location and access to the Internet. Both for now and in case of any future pandemic, we therefore suggest that researchers overcome limitations in accessibility of samples by identifying both the biases of their collected samples and the assumptions that their participant recruitment strategies rely on (e.g. access to the Internet). For participants who do have Internet access but who reside in an unsafe environment, researchers may utilise more indirect routes instead of participant interviews or surveys, such as analysing Internet searches (Anderberg *et al.*, 2021; Berniell and Facchini, 2021). For participants who do not have Internet access, researchers may employ a multi-method approach utilising phone, text messaging or post instead (Rodda *et al.*, 2022). Beyond research, we also advocate for access to the Internet as a human right in our increasingly Internet-driven society (Reglitz, 2020), and of course to advocate for safe living environments free from domestic violence.

### **Implications of pandemic-induced social isolation: a focus on the workplace**

Within this second section, we explore social isolation in relation to our two aims (“psychological impacts” and “long-term implications”). Specifically, regarding psychological impacts, the COVID-19 pandemic caused social isolation through lockdowns, which significantly reduced opportunities for social interaction (McKenna-Plumley *et al.*, 2021). Psychological effects were especially pronounced for people who work from home (WFH) (George *et al.*, 2021). Linking to long-term implications and beyond COVID-19, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown how negative effects of social isolation (e.g. caused by WFH) can be mitigated (Esposito *et al.*, 2021), which is especially relevant in light of continuing trends towards WFH. For this second case study, we therefore focus on remote workers. However, this reflection likely extends to other populations who are at risk of social isolation, such as those who are clinically vulnerable and shielding. We now explore the points mentioned in this paragraph in more depth below.

Regarding psychological impacts, the pandemic changed the way humans interact through nationwide requirements for social distancing and self-quarantining (Bliss *et al.*, 2021), with most countries having entered multiple lockdowns. Whilst necessary for public safety from COVID-19, these lockdown measures had significant negative impacts on social, educational and psychological outcomes (Bliss *et al.*, 2021). For example, pandemic-induced social isolation negatively affected multiple aspects of life such as socialising (McKenna-Plumley *et al.*, 2021). However, novel effects of this social isolation were particularly pronounced for people who switched to WFH. Remote workers reported feeling more isolated (van Zoonen and Sivunen, 2022), and had significant changes in their wellbeing: They experienced greater productivity but less feelings of meaning, and less stress but more reported health issues (George *et al.*, 2021). WFH during COVID-19 therefore seems to have had profound and widespread effects on feelings of social isolation and wellbeing.

As the world increasingly turns towards remote working (Wigert and Agrawal, 2022) even beyond COVID-19, measures to combat social isolation caused by WFH must be implemented. For instance, WFH individuals with high levels of perceived autonomy (vs. those with less

perceived autonomy) report less loneliness, whilst perceived social support correlates with decreased perceived challenges of remote working (Wang *et al.*, 2021). Indeed, the lack of physical interactions from WFH practices has been proposed to create a less than conducive climate for creativity and organisational innovation (Rapio, 2020). However, in the absence of a physical working environment, online communication is advantageous in facilitating connections and decreasing psychological distress and isolation (Esposito *et al.*, 2021). Hence, technology functions as a positive communication tool to allow for feelings of connectedness and increased social support (Esposito *et al.*, 2021). Thus, to buffer against the negative influence of WFH on employee communication and motivation beyond COVID-19, employees may need to communicate proactively to create a “positive social climate” (Rapio, 2020). Specifically, organisations are advised to create conditions for employees to experience co-worker support (George *et al.*, 2021). For example, existing work relationships can be positively boosted through (1) investments in technology which facilitates co-worker communication and (2) creating informal (online) events to allow deeper relationships with supportive co-workers to develop (George *et al.*, 2021). Scholars have also advocated for organisations to develop networks of social support amongst employees, colleagues and supervisors who work remotely (Marino and Capone, 2021), especially if there are tasks which require interdependence (Marino and Capone, 2021), as well as emphasising hope for WFH individuals who are experiencing high or moderate levels of loneliness (Bareket-Bojmel *et al.*, 2023). Such measures are relevant in case of any future pandemic and associated lockdowns to combat pandemic-induced social isolation, as well as being applicable to a non-pandemic future, whereby WFH becomes increasingly common (“long-term implications” aim).

To summarise, WFH during COVID-19 has brought benefits and disadvantages (George *et al.*, 2021). As we continue to live in an increasingly accelerating digital world where WFH workers are projected to make up four times the level of the pre-pandemic workforce (Barrero *et al.*, 2021), employers must implement measures to ensure positive WFH environments. As perceived autonomy and social support are essential in supporting employees’ wellbeing (Wang *et al.*, 2021; Yap and Badri, 2021a, 2021b), encouraging these positive job constructs in particular may buffer against negative effects of WFH.

#### *The consequences of public (Dis)trust in the pandemic: a focus on migrant workers*

Within this third section, we explore (dis)trust in relation to our two aims (“psychological impacts” and ‘long-term implications’). Specifically, the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that trust in one’s government is significantly lower in some countries than others (see primary data below), with implications for public adherence to government guidelines (Jovančević and Miličević, 2020). Beyond the COVID-19 pandemic and linking to long-term implications, such findings demonstrate the importance of trust in one’s government for adherence to governmental guidelines, whether these guidelines are about public health (relevant for any future pandemic) or any other matter. For this third case study, we focus on Indonesian MWs. This reflection likely extends more broadly to the population at large, whereby trust in government is an important factor for public adherence to government regulations across countries (e.g. Fridman *et al.*, 2020; Grežo and Adamus, 2022; Wright *et al.*, 2021). For this section, we first present some primary data analyses, before exploring the points mentioned in this paragraph in more depth. Specifically, to demonstrate differences in public trust, we briefly discuss one of the current author’s preliminary results from February and March 2020 which compared the public trust of MWs across territories (Macau vs Hong Kong vs Taiwan) towards four groups: (1) local government, (2) local people, (3) fellow MWs, and (4) a representative of the government. Details regarding the data collection can be found elsewhere (Liem *et al.*, 2021). Importantly, all MWs within the sample were from Indonesia. Thus, all participants belonged to the same community, but resided in vastly different

socio-political places. Therefore, the (dis)trust that Indonesian MWs had towards a stakeholder (e.g. government) might differ across nations due to national socio-political differences. Specifically, due to the unstable political situation in Hong Kong (e.g. [Lee et al., 2019](#); [Shek, 2020](#)), which may subsequently impact the way in which MWs perceive authority figures (i.e. police) in Hong Kong, trust is likely lower in Hong Kong compared to Macau or Taiwan.

Indeed, the author observed that trust levels of MWs in Hong Kong towards all groups were commonly lower than the trust levels of MWs in Macau and Taiwan. In contrast, MWs in Taiwan had the highest levels of trust and lowest fear of COVID-19. In all three MW communities, trust was consistently correlated in a negative direction with fear of being exposed to COVID-19. These preliminary findings demonstrate that trust and fear of COVID-19 within the same community (MWs) may differ when living in socio-politically different areas (Hong Kong vs Macau vs Taiwan), yet with similar Chinese cultures. These findings, therefore, highlight how differences in governmental pandemic response can develop or erode public trust, with possible implications for public fear of becoming infected with COVID-19 and thus consequences for psychological wellbeing ([Tang et al., 2020](#)). Additionally, this (dis)trust applies not only to the government itself, but also to trust in local people and in fellow members of one's community, suggesting that distrust could be directed towards *ingroup*, as well as *outgroup*, members. Overall, these findings therefore suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic had differential psychological impacts on identical community members depending upon the nation (and its associated socio-politics) that they resided in.

Whilst not directly investigated within this research, the cross-community differences discussed here may also have implications for pandemic-relevant behaviour ([Jovančević and Miličević, 2020](#)), such as health-related behaviour compliance and endorsement of conspiracy theories. That is, more trust may hypothetically increase compliance with COVID-19 safety regulations and reduce belief in conspiracy theories, thereby improving public safety. Considering long-term implications, current and future crisis and disaster management and interventions should strongly consider public trust in stakeholders, as distrust may undermine stakeholders' message and damage public safety through non-compliance with public health regulations. Public trust may be encouraged through actions such as information substantiality, whereby authorities ensure information is accurate, reliable, relevant and complete ([Lee and Li, 2021](#)).

#### *Anti-scientific beliefs: a focus on “anti-vaxxers”*

Within this final section, we explore anti-scientific beliefs in relation to our two aims (“psychological impacts” and “long-term implications”). Specifically, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated already existent trends towards anti-scientific beliefs ([Durmaz and Hengirmen, 2022](#)). Referring to long-term implications, the COVID-19 pandemic has provided some insight on how to reduce anti-scientific beliefs from taking hold in any future pandemic or more generally outside of a pandemic (e.g. through psychological inoculation; [van der Linden et al., 2020](#)). For this final case study, we focus on “anti-vaxxers”. This reflection likely extends to people who hold alternative anti-scientific beliefs or believe misinformation, such as climate change deniers and flat-earthers. We now explore the points mentioned in this paragraph in more depth below.

The pandemic put “anti-vax” (anti-vaccination) beliefs within countries such as the US into the spotlight. There are concerns that these anti-vax beliefs drove low COVID-19 vaccination rates ([Oxford Analytica, 2020](#)), with the US only fully vaccinating 63.99% of their population by early February 2022 when this paper was originally prepared ([Our World in Data, 2022](#)) despite extensive availability of COVID-19 vaccines for many months. To try to resolve this crisis, some US states even resorted to financial incentives to drive up vaccination

rates (Ducharme, 2021; Walkey *et al.*, 2021). Whilst anti-vax subcultures are not new, the *scope* of their effects is new in our globally and technologically connected world (Armitage, 2021). Anti-vax is thus becoming less of a fringe and geographically localised phenomenon: Whilst still a minority in most countries (Roozenbeek *et al.*, 2020), COVID-19 anti-vax movements arose globally in countries such as the UK, Spain, Mexico and Ireland (Roozenbeek *et al.*, 2020) and Germany (“corona-truthers”; Hotez, 2020). In fact, approximately one in five people were unwilling to receive a COVID-19 vaccine as at January 2022 in the UK and Germany (Our World in Data, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic thus highlighted already existent anti-vax attitudes, whilst having a unique psychological impact by exacerbating anti-vax attitudes even more (Durmaz and Hengirmen, 2022). Additionally, COVID-19 forced people to flock online to meet their psychological and social needs (Gioia *et al.*, 2021), and this online interaction subsequently brings its own challenges: It more easily removes dissent and allows confirmation bias to propagate in so-called “echo chambers” (e.g. Baines *et al.*, 2021), and social media has enabled a proliferation of misinformation (e.g. YouTube; Li *et al.*, 2020). Thus, COVID-19 has provided a “perfect storm” for cultivating anti-vax beliefs, a trend which is continuing today.

To understand how to combat anti-vax beliefs in the here-and-now (to encourage more people to get fully vaccinated against COVID-19 or other viruses like measles) and the long-term (e.g. any future pandemics or new viruses in general), we must first understand why such beliefs arise. Anti-vax beliefs seem to be underpinned by mistrust and disbelief in scientific and political authority (Jennings *et al.*, 2021; Newhagen and Bucy, 2020) and are presumed to be intellectually correct (“overconfidence”; e.g. Motta *et al.*, 2018). Whilst anti-vax beliefs may be irrational, the *motivations* for holding these beliefs may themselves be rational, such as fear and anxiety including death anxiety (Bodner *et al.*, 2021) or disgust towards blood and needles (Hornsey *et al.*, 2018). Anti-vax beliefs may also legitimately arise from historical breaches of trust against one’s subgroup (e.g. Gamble, 1997; also see “The Consequences of Public (Dis)Trust in the Pandemic” section above), explaining proportionately higher vaccine hesitancy amongst, for example, ethnic minorities (Office for National Statistics, 2021). Therefore, anti-vax beliefs are perpetuated by a myriad of complex factors (online interaction; confirmation bias; social media misinformation), yet are fundamentally driven by mistrust of authority and underlying rational motivations.

Thinking long-term, science advocates may therefore need to do the following in order to reduce support for anti-vax beliefs: (1) build trust in scientific and political authority and/or (2) address anti-vaxxers’ rational motivations (Hornsey and Fielding, 2017), though these possible interventions are yet to be tested within a COVID-19 context. Factually-based interventions, such as psychological inoculation (exposing people to persuasively weak anti-scientific arguments to “inoculate” them against persuasively stronger arguments; e.g. van der Linden *et al.*, 2020), may also be effective. These interventions are relevant for enhancing compliance with public health orders both for COVID-19 (e.g. vaccine uptake) and future viruses or pandemics. Such interventions are increasingly important as we live in a “new normal” full of misinformation (i.e., an “infodemic”; e.g. Patel *et al.*, 2020), which may be contributing to, for example, greater vaccination hesitancy and associated lower vaccination rates (Elflein, 2020, 2022a), subsequently leading to a greater number of cases of viral diseases (Elflein, 2022b; Stewart, 2022) in places like the US and Europe.

### Conclusion and implications

Here, we have provided a broad overview of how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted diverse psychological populations, using four samples as case studies to highlight (1) past, current and future psychological consequences of the pandemic and (2) important lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic to mitigate negative psychological effects in any future

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pandemic/s or to encourage better living. We conclude that, whilst the COVID-19 pandemic has not been solely responsible, the pandemic has contributed to and hastened multiple “new normals”, such as internet-mediated research (Fatanti *et al.*, 2022), remote working (e.g. Amankwah-Amoah *et al.*, 2021), distrust in government within some countries (Statista Research Department, 2022a, 2022b) and anti-vax beliefs (Durmaz and Hengirmen, 2022). Whilst living conditions linked to COVID-19 like lockdowns are now mostly no longer in place globally, the pandemic continues to have consequences for the here-and-now and for the future. For instance, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our daily lives have become even more dominated by socially distanced technology (i.e. the Internet), which has contributed to the dissemination of misinformation (e.g. Jennings *et al.*, 2021) and enabled remote working (Davies, 2021), may impact levels of (dis)trust in government and science (e.g. van Dijk and Alinejad, 2020) and has pushed research even further towards utilising the Internet as a medium (e.g. Fatanti *et al.*, 2022).

Whilst psychological research on effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is extensive (e.g. see Aknin *et al.*, 2022 or Rodrigues *et al.*, 2022 for reviews), our paper is unique in combining narrative review (informed by previous literature) with CA (informed by our personal research and sociocultural experiences). As discussed throughout the paper, our conclusions may generalise to wider populations of people (e.g. inaccessible populations in general or people who hold alternative anti-scientific beliefs). Additionally, some conclusions are culture-dependent. For instance, whilst institutional trust seems to be important for people across the world (e.g. Fridman *et al.*, 2020; Grežo and Adamus, 2022; Wright *et al.*, 2021), levels of (dis)trust in institutional bodies like government or science can differ across nations due to socio-political differences (see primary data in “The Consequences of Public (Dis)Trust in the Pandemic” section above).

Our paper is, however, necessarily limited by the time period in which this paper was originally written (February 2022) and edited (November–December 2022). Full psychological consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic may be realised only over years and perhaps even decades. For example, remote working is expected to continue to increase in the US (Wigert and Agrawal, 2022), thus potentially permanently changing how people work.

The paper is also limited in extension to future pandemics, if such pandemics are unlike COVID-19 and are either not caused by a respiratory virus or caused by a virus with highly visible symptoms. A particular psychological problem with COVID-19 is that COVID-19 may be viewed as “invisible” (Shaw, 2020), which may therefore make it easier to deny its existence. If a pandemic was instead caused by a virus which creates highly visible symptoms, perhaps people would not resort to anti-vax beliefs as strongly as they did with COVID-19.

Finally, whilst this paper has highlighted cross-cultural differences in psychological responses to the pandemic (e.g. Indonesian MWs), the extent to which our reflections are restricted to certain cultures or generalisable across cultures cannot be fully determined within the current paper. Additionally, the paper is limited in determining how the themes may intersect. Future research should therefore compare the discussed themes across cultures such as by seeing if anti-vax beliefs are higher in cultures with greater institutional mistrust. Such research may also directly measure historical cultural differences such as political instability and governmental mismanagement, to see if these factors can explain any cross-cultural differences in (dis)trust and anti-vax beliefs.

Despite these limitations, the current paper has wide-ranging practical implications for psychology both now and in the future. Specifically, we propose an initial action plan to begin addressing negative psychological consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic as follows: (1) recognise and acknowledge biased samples and inequality in access to research participation, advocate for Internet access as a human right and implement alternative research methods (e.g. phone, text messaging or post); (2) encourage positive experiences with WFH and enhance employees’ feelings of perceived autonomy, hope and social support, such as through technology which allows for online events and co-worker support, (3) always



account for public trust in authority when planning crisis and disaster management and increase trust through actions like ensuring information substantiality and (4) integrate communication science when engaging with anti-science believers such as through psychological inoculation, recognising motivations and/or increasing trust (see point three). We hope that future research will add to this action plan by identifying further effective interventions to combat the psychological issues raised within the current paper. Whilst the trends discussed within this paper were exacerbated and spotlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, they existed before the pandemic and will continue to inform the world that we live in. As emerging psychologists, we strongly believe it is our responsibility to recognise and adjust to these changes, and implement positive actions now for the betterment of people and society.

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*Conflict of interest:* The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### Note

1. The Emerging Psychologists' Programme, as a part of The 32nd International Congress of Psychology, is "intended to enhance communication between Emerging Psychologists from different countries and diverse cultural backgrounds, to promote exchange of knowledge between established and younger scientists, and to help younger scientists acquire new insights into specific fields of psychology and psychology in general." (ICP2020, 2019).

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### About the authors

Sarah Gradidge is a doctoral candidate in psychology specialising in human-animal interaction and social psychology. She is dedicated to protecting and improving human and animal wellbeing. Sarah Gradidge is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: [sarah.gradidge@aru.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.gradidge@aru.ac.uk)

Wai Meng Yap is a management psychologist and his areas of interest are in work, management and organisational psychology. He is passionate in improving well-being and happiness of employees in the workplace, by integrating and assimilating organisational research with practice.

Andrian Liem is a research fellow with research interests in clinical and health psychology, indigenous and cultural psychology, migrants and refugees, global mental health, gender and sexuality, interfaith dialogue and mixed-methods. He earned his PhD from the School of Psychology, the University of Queensland, Australia.

Giselle Dass is a doctoral candidate and experienced Psychologist with a demonstrated history of working in the mental health care industry, has experience in providing mental health care for children, adolescents, adults and their families; skilled in Non-profit Organisations, Research, Analytical Skills, Programme Evaluation and Volunteer Management.

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