

Did it really happen?

The Pandemic, The Denial, Resilience, Trauma, And Putting The Pieces Together Again

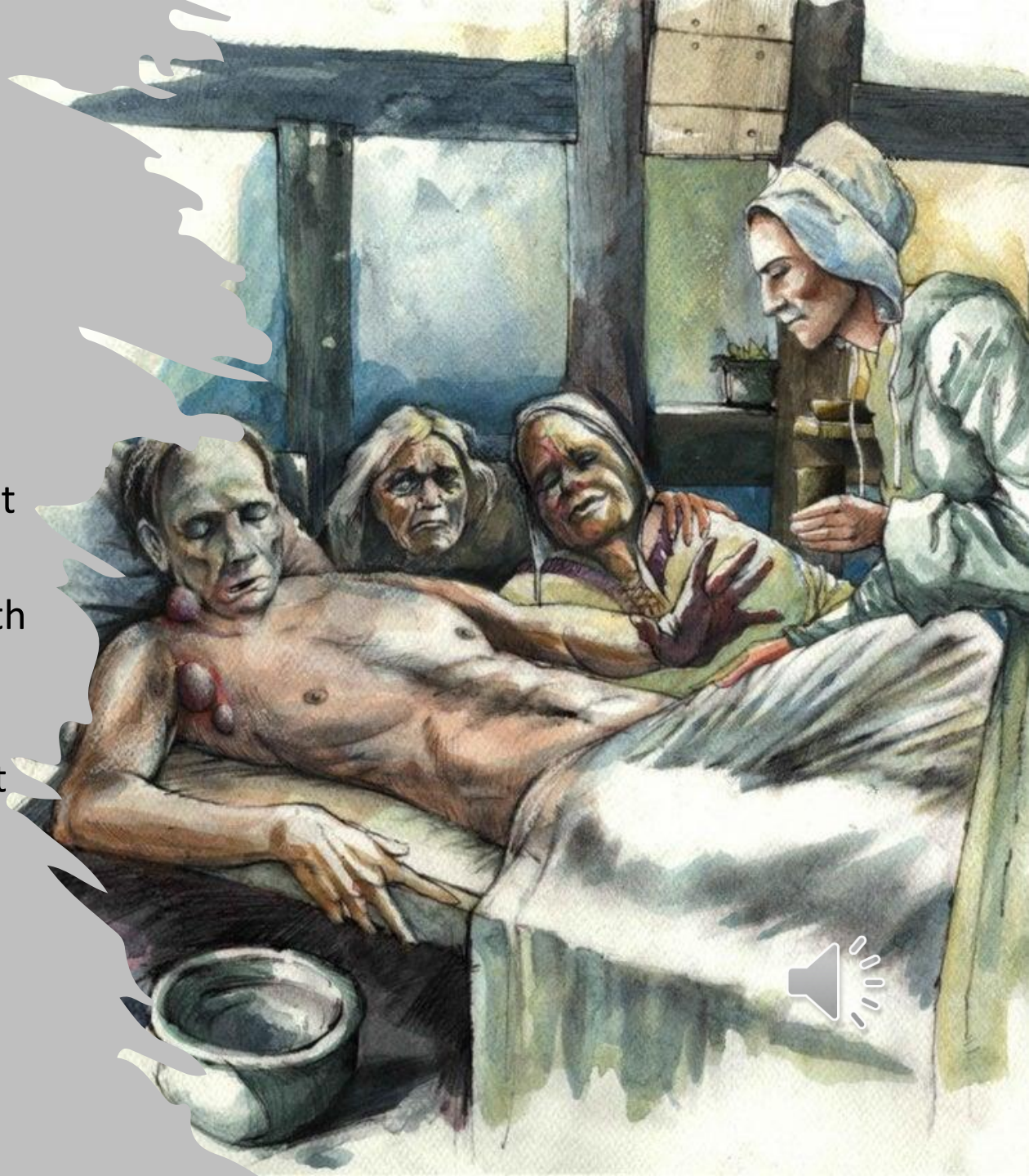
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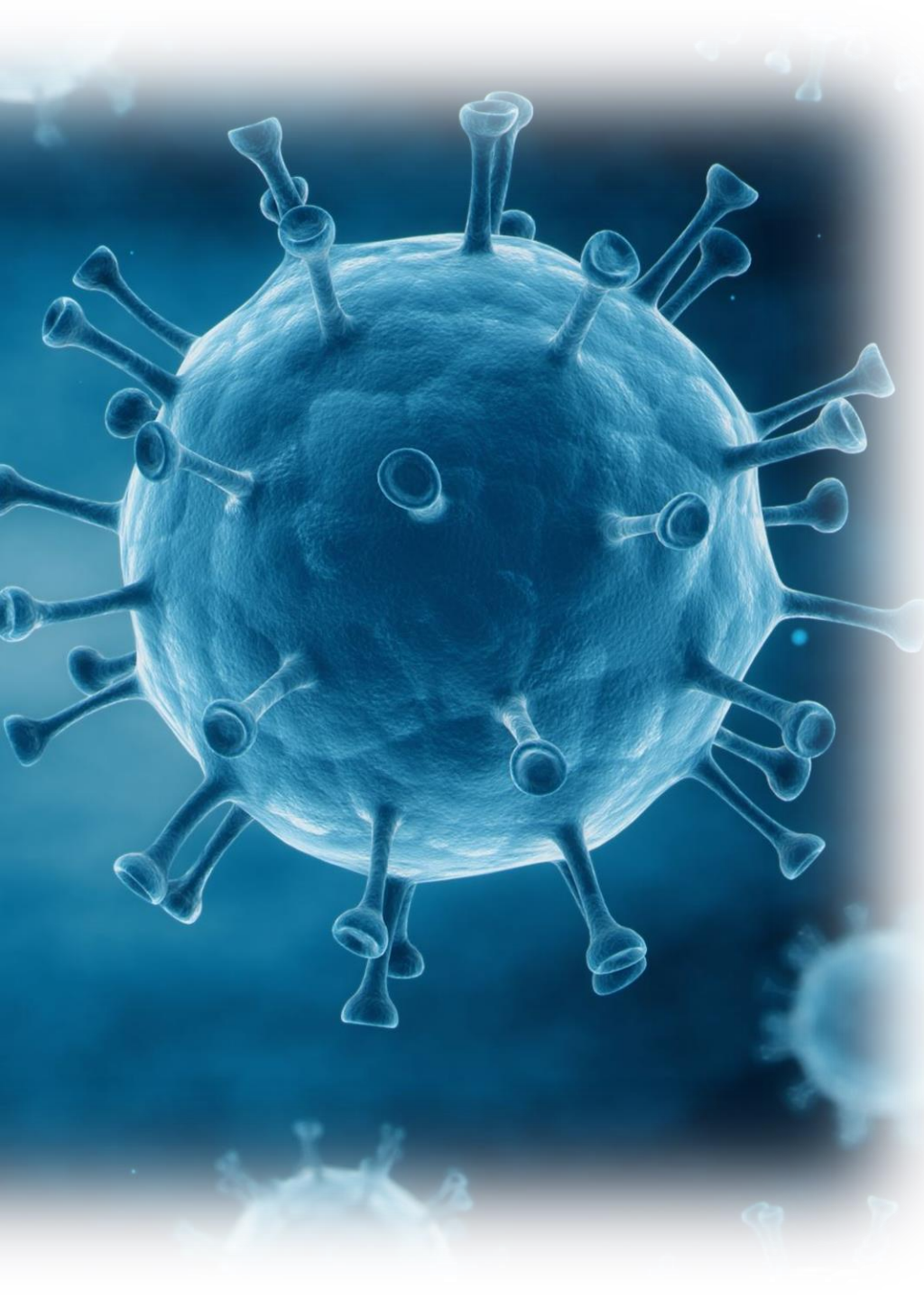
Epidemics

- Disasters have occurred throughout the existence of human history
- Epidemics are the most important of these, jeopardizing public health and threatening significant parts of the world
- In human history they have come in many forms, with the most known and severe, being a plague
- Epidemics are not only a societal disease, having many social, psychological and economic effects. But also, something that forces individuals to take collective measures (unlike diseases that affect individuals), as they have a multiplicity of effects



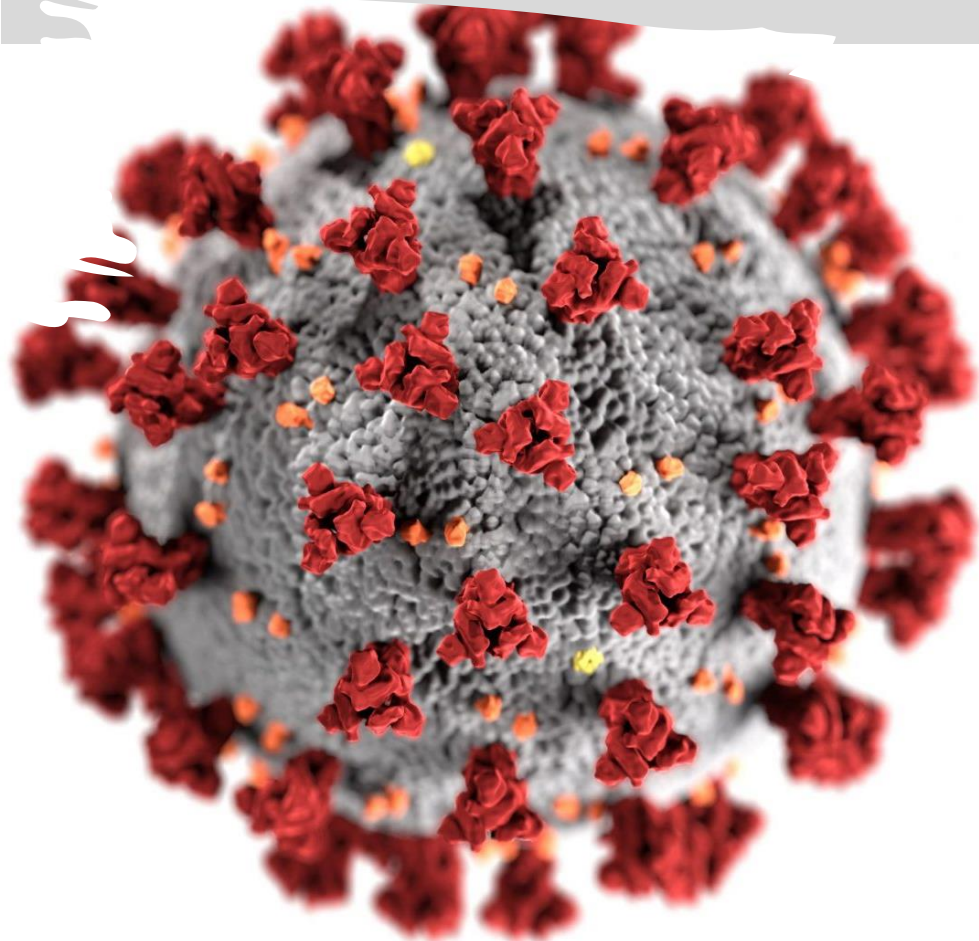
Did it really happen?

- Let us look at our experience of COVID-19 from a metaphoric perspective
- Its impact
- Where we are now
- The way forward



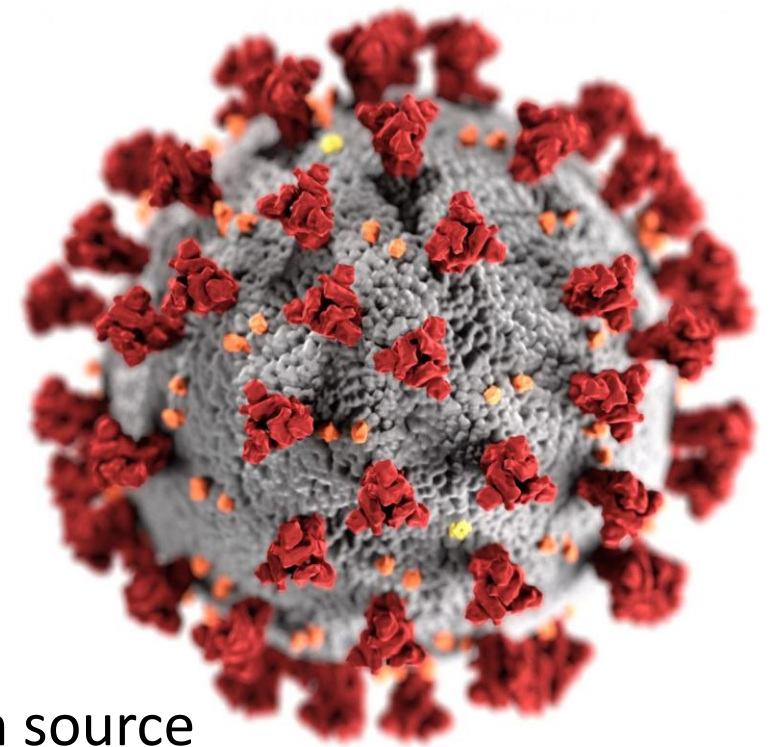
- A study, using a phenomenological method, where individual experiences constituted its basis, aimed to reveal metaphorical perceptions of social media users regarding the term COVID-19, (Fingen Unal Colack, 2022)
- A phenomenological method focuses on phenomena that we perceive but don't have a deep or detailed understanding of.
- Phenomenology is commonly described as a study of phenomena as they manifest in our experience, the way we perceive and understand phenomena, and the meaning phenomena have in our subjective experience.
- By examining an experience as it is subjectively experienced, new meanings and appreciations can be developed to inform, or even re-orient how we understand that experience, and the way forward.

Metaphors



- Can represent experience more fully than abstract concepts and so can enable more effective communication
- Condense information, making things more tangible and easier to understand
- Have been shown to trigger emotional responses in the brain.
- Triggering the amygdala, which is responsible for processing emotion and reasoning and linking the two.
- It also triggers the motor sensory cortex, part of the brain for processing motion and feeling of the senses
- This approach in understanding the COVID-19 experience is most helpful

- Metaphors are often used in expression and in healing
- For example, “The Road Map to Recovery”
 - We need a few metaphors together to bring about meaning and the message that needs to be conveyed
 - Creative metaphors are more effective when used with source domains (maps, route planning, common things to describe something more abstract)
 - The more strongly felt the experience the more creative the metaphor usually is
 - “Snatching victory from the jaws of defeat”





Metaphors for Covid

- Powerful tool in understanding the perceptions and experiences related to the epidemic
- Lakoff and Johnson (2008) believe, an important part of our conceptual system is structured by metaphorical relationships.
- Facts can appear in various forms such as events, experiences, perceptions, concepts, orientations, and situations in the world.
- It's important to look at subjective experiences, the perceptions and the meanings that are attributed to them
- Metaphors help us to conceptualise the experiences we have encountered in the intangible, with tangible expressions.


- The use of metaphors in qualitative research gives an opportunity to examine phenomena from a unique and creative perspective
- Metaphors can provide structure to data, to understand a familiar process with a new perspective, to identify situation-specific interventions, and to evoke emotion
- There are some limitations to metaphor studies, which can be minimized by following the analysis studies systematically and explaining all meanings.

The background of the slide features a detailed, artistic rendering of COVID-19 virus particles. These particles are depicted as spherical, red, and highly textured, with numerous dark blue, crown-like spikes protruding from their surfaces. The particles are scattered across the frame, with some in sharp focus in the foreground and others blurred in the background, creating a sense of depth. A white rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text for the activity.

Activity

Complete this sentence,

“COVID-19 was like _____
because _____”

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- “Enemy to be beaten”
 - “Tsunami” on mental health services
 - “Glitter that got everywhere”

Covid-19 and Metaphors

Most Frequent metaphors included:

- An unwanted relative
- Love
- An ex-partner
- Gossip
- Cancer

Others included:

- The plague
- Disease
- Mosquito
- Lice
- Curse
- Rain
- Traffic accident
- Serial killer
- Apocalypse, hatred, chewing gum
- filth



In another study a total of 7 COVID-19 metaphor categories were obtained:

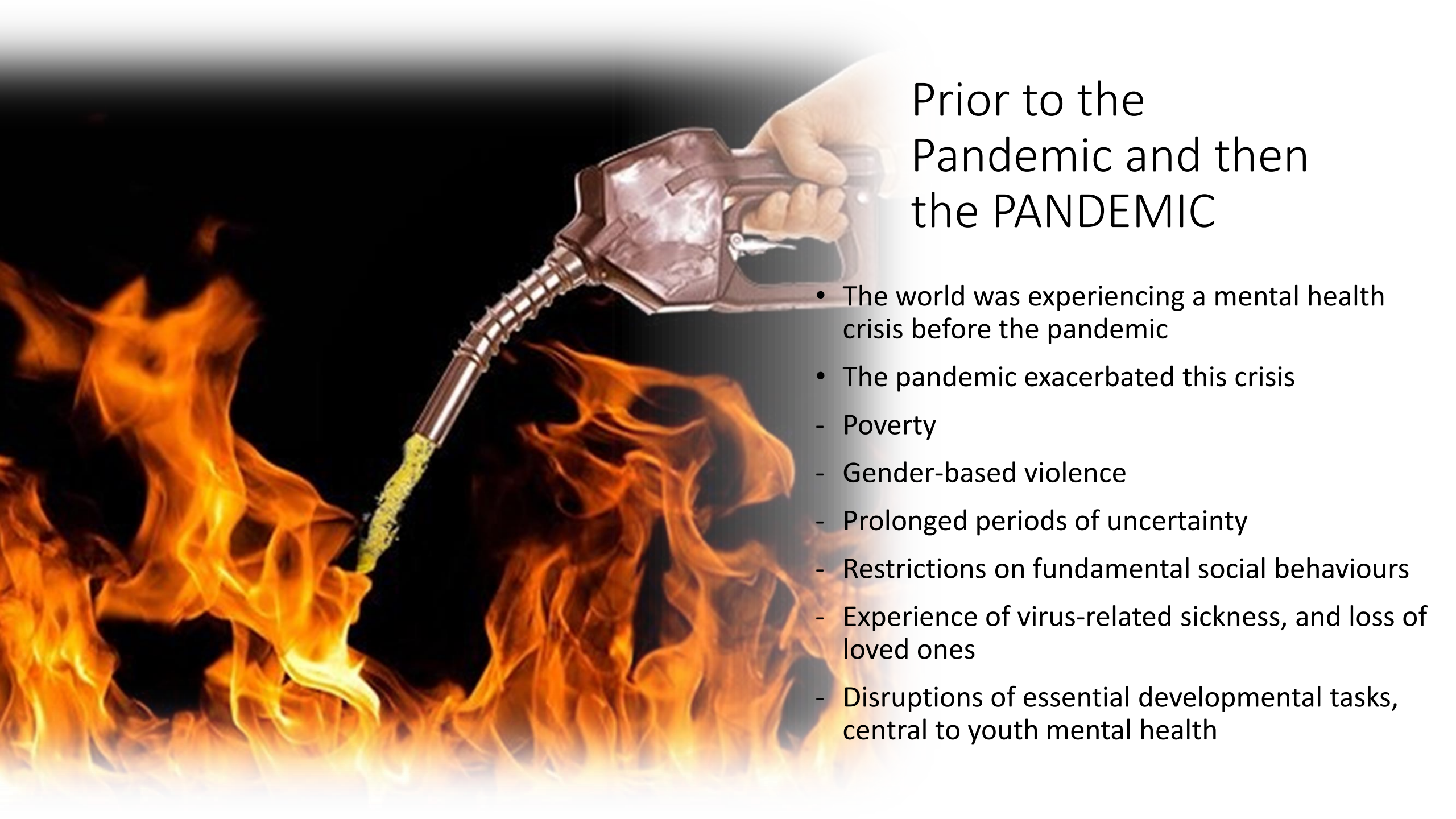
- Being restricted
- Restlessness
- Uncertainty
- Deadly/dangerous
- Struggling
- Faith/Destiny
- Supernatural



- A significant part of the metaphors evoked disasters and unexpected events.
- All had negative meanings, and although the metaphors of love initially seemed positive, the expressions that were derived were related to negative and disruptive aspects of love (Thanos, Balance, Restoring Nature)
- The vast majority saw COVID-19 as an unwanted phenomenon, disrupting the order/flow, and how the pandemic revealed the unpreparedness and desperation of individuals and society.

Impact on Normal Life

- Drastic Change
 - Lockdowns
 - Social distancing decimating social support structures
 - Loss of income
 - Business closures
 - Reductions in physical activity
 - Wearing masks
 - Stricter cleaning measures
 - Missing milestones


A hand holding a lit blowtorch, with a bright yellow flame emerging from the nozzle, set against a background of larger, orange and yellow flames. The image is partially obscured by a white semi-transparent box containing text and a list.

Prior to the Pandemic and then the PANDEMIC

- The world was experiencing a mental health crisis before the pandemic
- The pandemic exacerbated this crisis
 - Poverty
 - Gender-based violence
 - Prolonged periods of uncertainty
 - Restrictions on fundamental social behaviours
 - Experience of virus-related sickness, and loss of loved ones
 - Disruptions of essential developmental tasks, central to youth mental health

- Trauma (Sickness, Death, Uncertainties around death and the future)
- Loss and Grief / Apprehensive Grief
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Depression
- Anxiety Disorders
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
- Substance Abuse



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- As we enter the 4th year of the pandemic, it appears the worst is now behind us
 - Most are returning to a pre-pandemic cadence of life, and many seek to move on from the pandemic
 - We find ourselves reflecting on what happened, thinking 'did it actually happen' and processing the associated emotions

denial, sadness, shock, disbelief, confusion, loss, trauma




IT DID REALLY HAPPEN,

and we need to acknowledge that and derive important lessons on its impact on health and social circumstances.

A “postmortem” is necessary to understand the consequences of not only the policies but also the significant emotional, psychological, physical, social and developmental impact

As well as to prepare society for future pandemics, in the context of ever greater conflict between the natural world and human settlements.

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- Mental health problems are often known to run chronic courses and can have enduring consequences.
 - We are still yet to witness the long-term impact of the disruption experienced, especially for the younger generations, or the effects that socioeconomic adversities at least partly attributable to the pandemic (such as recessions, civil unrest, and increased social inequalities), will have over the coming years.
 - PLOS Medicine (2023), have documented research examining mental health aspects of the pandemic with the potential to mitigate such mental health consequences, strengthening the global response to future pandemics, while informing mental health policy and practice more generally – “build back better”
 - There was particular interest in research that addressed vulnerable populations and the pandemics impact on existing mental health inequities, health system responses to increased demand for mental health care, and mental health consequences from a life-course perspective.

Findings

First

- The increase in prevalence of mental health problems were primarily concentrated on mood and anxiety conditions, and not severe mental health problems

Second


- There was a strong association of the prevalence of mental health problems with contextual factors such as the stringency of lockdowns and the severity of the pandemic, and socioeconomic factors
- Notably, the strength of some of these associations fluctuated during the first 2 years of the pandemic, with certain factors, such as higher national death rates, individual fears about catching COVID-19, and worries about accessing essentials like water and food, weakening as predictors of poorer mental health over time.
- *This highlights that while we can anticipate certain factors that will be triggers for worsening mental illness, we must remain alert during pandemics to their constantly changing nature and the extraordinary circumstances they give rise to in designing responsive context-specific policies.*


Third

- The increased burden of common mental health problems was inequitably distributed, particularly affecting women, young people, and low-income groups, exposing and widening fault lines that exist in the foundations of our societies

- In summary the research revealed that the impact of the pandemic on mental health has been selective (with a particular impact on mood and anxiety problems), influenced by time-varying contextual factors related to the pandemic and consistent with social determinants that were well recognized before the pandemic.
- The body of evidence is consistent with other similar reviews on this subject, but also suggest that contrary to our worst fears, populations globally may have navigated these extraordinary years of uncertainty and loss with remarkable resilience and fortitude
- Other studies have however witnessed dramatic changes as they deal with the fall out of the pandemic such as, returning to in-person work and travel and global economic uncertainties.



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- The pandemic has witnessed a dramatic increase in awareness and concern about mental health and fueled fast-growing adoption of new digital technologies for care, notably telemedicine and telecare.
 - This renewed attention, solidarity, innovation, and science has offered a historic opportunity to reimagine mental health.
 - But there are still large unmet needs for care that need to be met
 - This research holds a body of hope: most individuals have remarkable wells of resilience to draw from in unprecedented times that are imaginably difficult, but these are heavily influenced by inequities, social determinants, actions by the government, and compassion by others in their communities.
 - The evidence facilitates a move from a nihilistic view about the lack of evidence to a hopeful view, where a suite of evidence-based interventions, spanning policy actions at the societal level to individual actions in personal encounters, can be marshaled for the prevention and care of mental health problems.
 - This is at the heart of a reimagined journey to recovery, both for our societies that face immense challenges and for the individuals who experience mental health problems.

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- Communities have the potential to function effectively and adapt successfully in the aftermath of disasters.
 - Theory of resilience that must encompass contemporary understandings of stress, adaption, wellness, and resource dynamics.
 - Community resilience is a process linking a network of adaptive capacities to adaptation after a disturbance or adversity.
 - To build collective resilience, communities must reduce risk and resource inequities, engage local people in mitigation, create organisational linkages, boost and protect social supports, and plan for not having a plan, which requires flexibility, decision-making skills, and trusted sources of information that function in the face of the unknown. Fran H Norris et al (2008)



Resilience



Trauma and Resilience



Support

- Resilience as individuals/community/the world
- Coming together
- Working together
- Support systems





This is what happened

What we need going forward

- Awareness
- Assessment
- Regular check ins
- Maintenance
- Repair
- Safety checks
- Minimising risks
- Lifeboats
- Supplies
- Crew members



The Way Forward



References

Patel V, Fancourt D, Furukawa TA, Kola L (2023) Reimagining the journey to recovery The COVID-19 pandemic and global mental health. PLoS Med 20(4): e1004224

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