



## Psychic Reactions to Pandemic and Self-Isolation

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### Letter to the Editor

On 6<sup>th</sup> May 2020 to 8<sup>th</sup> May 2020, members of the Inter-Regional Public Organization European Confederation for Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy (Russia) were providing free psychotherapeutic assistance and psychological support to the Russian population in situation of pandemic and self-isolation, which had lasted for 1.5 months by then. 52 ECPP specialists from 20 regions of Russia participated in this event. Information was provided about each specialist including his or her name, qualification and email address. Each specialist agreed to conduct three free 30-min sessions on phone or Skype during these three days. It should be mentioned that specialists have varying reactions to the news about the event. Some colleagues thought it was useless, others considered it dubious; still others called it a PR move, while working these three days without being paid was just normal behavior for a specialist and a citizen in the current situation. I would like to note that all respondents were sincerely grateful for the opportunity to talk to a specialist. More than 80% of them sought help of a psychotherapist or a psychologist for the first time. As expected, after 1.5 months of self-isolation and information overload, all respondents had developed a syndrome of "learned helplessness" in regard to the pandemic, while their somatic and psychological problems had also become more acute, which was the focus of the sessions. Some specialists participating in the event did not receive any applications for their free sessions. This may be due to shortcomings of informational support of the event and/or specifics of psychological and psychotherapeutic culture in certain regions. Although 52 specialists could have conducted 468 sessions, only 117 were actually conducted. That is, the effectiveness of the event was about 25%. According to the specialists, the cause of low effectiveness was the lack of informational support of the event. All respondents spoke Russian, most of them were from Russia (95%), and some individuals from Estonia, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kirghizia and the USA. There were 76% of women and 24% of men among them. With the exception of outliers (three 17-year-old and one 70-year-old individual), the respondents were from the most active age group from 25 to 60 years. Psychological rehabilitation after the lockdown should be aimed at this group. Research has shown that after a powerful national trauma the number of people requiring psychotherapeutic help decreases in the first 2 to 3 years and then increases in 10 years up to 200% from the initial level. The participants of the study gave information on their main syndromes that is summarized in Table 1.

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Thus, only 18% of respondents were calm in response to this abnormal situation. The rest of them, 82% of cases, reacted with increased anxiety, depressive symptoms or psychosomatic reactions (these three categories combined gave 65% of cases); these states require correction but still can be categorized as normal reactions to an abnormal situation. The event is planned to be repeated, and

**Table 1:** The main syndromes (%) revealed during the sessions.

Ranking	The main syndrome	Number of cases	Percentage from total number of cases
1	Anxiety	35	30%
2	Emotional calmness	21	18%
3	Dysphoria, depression, apathy	18	15%
4	Psychosomatic problems	12	10%
5	Intensified emotional reactions	9	8%
6	Dull emotional reactions	7	6%
7	Verbal aggression	6	5%
8	Confusion	4	3%
9	Panic reactions	4	3%
10	Anger	1	>1%
Total	----	117	100%

the results will be made public too. The research was conducted by 52 authors; therefore this paper is published by the ECPP President as a generalization of this collective effort, so that he is not to be considered its single author.

In June 2020 we conducted a second campaign to provide free psychotherapy to the population. The number of participants and the volume of material were doubled. But the results were exactly the same with a variation of 1% to 2%.