



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES  
CAVE HILL CAMPUS, BARBADOS, WEST INDIES

## A COVID-19 RAPID RESPONSE SURVEY

### COVID-19 Psychological Vulnerabilities Among Barbadian Workers

Last month, when it was announced that Barbados recorded its first two confirmed cases of COVID-19, there was widespread concern that workers who interact daily with members of the public would be among those most vulnerable to COVID-19. Therefore, understanding the psychological vulnerabilities that these front-line workers are experiencing is key to supporting their well being and, more broadly, enhancing the effectiveness of our national response to COVID-19.

To this end, a research team from The UWI conducted the first phase of a rapid response electronic survey between the 21st and 30th of March 2020 to explore the psychological and behavioural effects that COVID-19 is having on workers in Barbados.

The study is ongoing, but the findings obtained thus far provide a preliminary “snapshot” of the experiences of Barbadian workers. The research was spearheaded by Dr Mia Amour Jules, lecturer in Psychology at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus. The other members of the research team include Professor Donna-Maria Maynard from the Faculty of Humanities and Education and Dr. Michael Campbell and Dr. Maisha Emmanuel from the Faculty of Medical Sciences.

Twelve key findings have emerged:

1. Among some 330 employees (19% male and 80% female), the number of dependents a worker had (i.e., children or elderly persons or both), was positively associated with the extent to which COVID-19 was perceived as a threat.
2. Further, respondents' perceived threat from COVID-19 was associated with difficulty in completing work-related tasks, taking care of things at home, and getting along with other people.

*This is understandable given that many concerns of these workers centered around “fears of catching COVID-19” from people they interact with and “passing it [COVID-19] onto their families”*

3. Both younger (18 - 35) and older workers (36 - 65) reported similar levels of anxiety and did not differ significantly in their perceived threat of COVID-19.
4. However, older workers were more likely to engage in protective behaviours against COVID-19 than their younger counterparts.

*All generations are susceptible to contracting COVID-19, which may account for similar levels of anxiety and perceived threat among all ages. However, given that older generations are more likely to develop severe symptoms with COVID-19 infection, it is understandable that, as age increases, so too does one's engagement in protective behaviors. This finding is especially concerning, because persons of all ages ought to be engaging in protective behaviours to the same degree, given that anyone (regardless of age) can spread COVID-19.*

5. Younger workers reported greater levels of loneliness than older workers

*Developmental theory suggests that individuals between the ages of 18 and 35 are trying to resolve the crisis of intimacy versus isolation. This has important implications, because desire for physical closeness can contribute to risk of contracting COVID-19. Indeed, the mandate for physical-social distancing during this time may be contributing to feelings of loneliness for this group. It's not just the elderly that need us to check in on them; we must be mindful that younger members of our society may also be struggling with feelings of loneliness.*

# COVID-19 Psychological Vulnerabilities Among Barbadian Workers

6. Too much news isn't healthy. As the amount of time spent watching news reports about COVID-19 increased, there was a corresponding increase in feelings of anxiety and loneliness among workers.

*Given that news reports often emphasize COVID-19 contraction rates, death rates and the difficulties that societies are facing globally, moderation should be exercised when tuning into news reports. Mental health professionals recommend scheduling specific times to watch or read news, perhaps two or three times daily.*

7. Social media comes with particular risks. Overall, anxiety levels were highest among those workers who used social media as their most preferred news source.  
8. The most preferred news source of the 18-35 age group was social media (38%); the 36-65 age group preferred television (40%).

*Social media platforms provide constant streams of information about COVID-19 but can also be used to spread incorrect, and even harmful, information. Hence, people should be wary of information obtained through social media.*

9. When workers felt that they were a part of a wider community or group expecting them to practice protective behaviours against COVID-19, their engagement in such practices increased.

*This finding highlights the importance of group norms and social support in behaviour change. Our influence on others can have a powerful positive effect on their adoption of COVID-19 protective behaviours, such as frequent handwashing and physical-social distancing.*

10. When workers believed that they had the ability to practice protective behaviours they were more likely to engage in such behaviours.

*The extent to which individuals believe that they can engage in protective behaviours against COVID-19 is influenced by the opportunities afforded in their external environment. For example, a worker who has been provided with hand soap or hand sanitizers and is given enough space at work that is a safe distance from others will be more likely to believe that he can practice protective behaviours and by extension engage in such behaviours.*

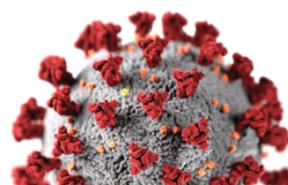
11. Men and women had similar levels of accurate knowledge about COVID-19.

12. However, women experienced greater levels of anxiety and practiced protective behaviours against COVID-19 to a greater extent than males.

*It can be argued that Barbados like most other Caribbean nations is a matrifocal society, and hence it is possible that women tend to carry most of the responsibility for caring and providing for children and elderly relatives. Therefore, it is understandable that women experience more anxiety during this COVID-19 outbreak since the financial, social and emotional burden is arguably more likely to fall on their shoulders. Hence, in an effort to protect the wellbeing of those individuals in their charge, women may be more vigilant in engaging in the necessary COVID-19 protective behaviours.*

**Please note that these findings do not represent the experiences of the entire Barbadian workforce.**

**COVID-19**  
The CORONAVIRUS



**If you are displaying the following symptoms:**

1. High Fever
2. Dry Cough
3. Difficulty Breathing

**STOP** and call the COVID-19  
Hotline at (246) 536-4500