

South Africans on the verge of a lockdown meltdown

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28 Jul 2020

Ask Afrika's Covid-19 socio-economic research shows levels of distress not abating



Depression and a heightened sense of anxiety continues to be prevalent amongst South Africans as the number of positive cases of Covid-19 escalates, according to the most recent results of the Ask Afrika Covid-19 Tracker study for the period 8 to 14 July 2020. The main aim of the study is to understand the socio-economic impact that the coronavirus, lockdown and gradual re-opening of the economy has on South Africans. This research is conducted pro bono, with the objective of giving equal voice to citizens during decision-making at government, business and NGO forums - whilst not being sponsored by any of them.

The study has found that the emotional impact of the coronavirus is taking a toll on citizens. The fear of contracting the virus is currently at its highest since the lockdown came into effect in Level 5 and many people are experiencing a sense of hopelessness. Those feeling hopeless have given up personal responsibility and handed it over to healthcare experts. Levels of discouragement have grown in recent weeks with only 25% of South Africans managing in advanced Level 3.

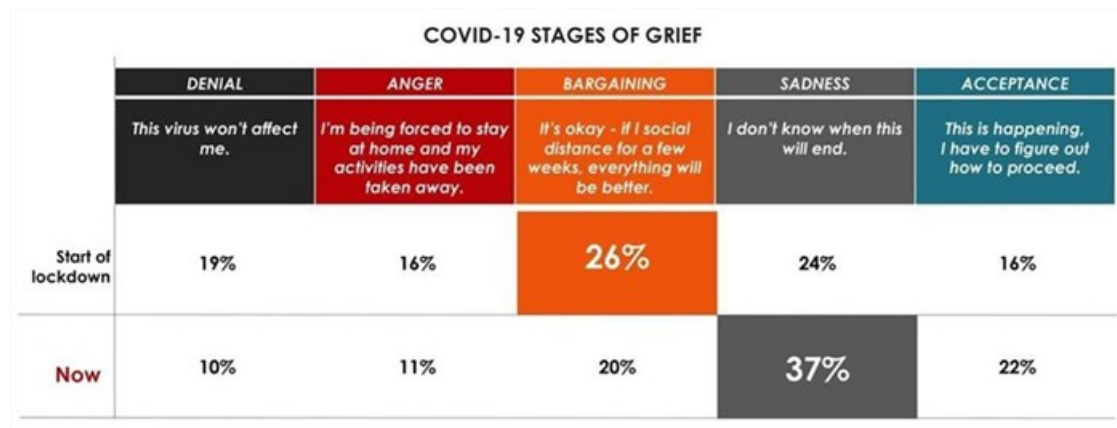
The Ask Afrika Covid-19 Tracker study reveals that the impact of the lockdown on both socio-emotional and economic factors has been significant. Despite overall distress levels declining slightly by one index point to a total of 30 index points (from a high of 37 points in April during lockdown Level 5) distress levels remain particularly high in the North West, Mpumalanga, Limpopo and the Eastern Cape. Limpopo residents are exhibiting the highest levels of emotional distress while food security remains problematic in the Eastern Cape.

The prolonged lockdown – albeit now with a loosening up of some regulations – is leaving many people discouraged as they face an uncertain future characterised by higher levels of debt and, in lower income households, poor levels of food security. At the start of the lockdown, the study found that 35% of adults went to bed hungry due to a lack of food. That figure has fallen to 26% at Level 3 advanced, however, an alarming 55% of citizens are worried about where their next meal will come from. A total of 18% of respondents mentioned that adults in their home went an entire day without food, compared to 23% in Level 5.

Ask Afrika's study has adapted five overarching stages of grief associated to the Covid-19 pandemic from a pre-existing grief model: denial (the virus won't affect me); anger (I'm being forced to stay at home); bargaining (if I social distance for a few weeks everything will be better); sadness (I don't know when this will end); and, finally, acceptance (this is happening and I have to figure out how to proceed).

At the onset of the lockdown the study found that around 19% of people were in denial about how the virus could affect them. The rapid rise of new cases in recent weeks has changed this perception and introduced a new opinion that the

lockdown will not end anytime soon (37%). Only 22% of respondents are accepting the new normal and preparing for the future.



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Overall there has been a deterioration in the state of people's mental health in terms of how well they are coping over the course of the past few weeks. During lockdown Level 5 citizens showed high levels of fortitude in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, especially those living in Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal. This level declined significantly in Level 4, with only 24% saying they were managing. Level 3 saw a small improvement to 26% saying they were managing. However, since moving to Level 3 advanced, this figure has dropped again to 25%, indicating growing levels of fear, anxiety and frustration with the current situation.

Despite the economy starting to open up, South Africans are taking strain with the current situation, which is clearly having a detrimental impact on mental health. How much more the country's citizens can take is clearly up for debate.

Ask Afrika's quantitative research is conducted via computer aided telephone and online interviews.

The research explores different themes and topics each week in order to better understand relevant issues and provide an immediate statistic. Companies are able to participate in the research to establish how the current situation is impacting their particular brands.

For more information on Covid-19 research opportunities please contact:

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Social research decisions are required around HIV/Aids and more recently, Covid-19. Educational and early childhood development, fair-trade shopping, media and financial research are some of the areas we love to work in. NGOs, public- and private sector clients choose to work with us to get the pulse of the nation.

Besides being **decisioneers** in brand and customer experience research, Ask Afrika is well known for creating some of the most useful, go-to industry benchmarks, including the Ask Afrika Orange Index®, the Ask Afrika Icon Brands®, the Ask

Afrika Kasi Star Brands and the Target Group Index (TGI). Ask Afrika's knowledge of brands is extensive. The Target Group Index (TGI) survey, which measures psychographics, service, products, media and brands, has been used by the majority of the top 50 advertisers and media owners in South Africa for nearly two decades.

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