

PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS DUE TO COVID-19 AMONG IMMIGRANTS WITH TEMPORARY VISAS WORKING IN RETAIL AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRIES: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This research examines psychological distress due to COVID-19 among immigrants with temporary visas. The literature review examined the impacts of COVID-19 on immigrants, primarily those with temporary visas residing in New Zealand and other countries, showing that immigrants are more vulnerable to COVID-19 in regard to job losses because the majority of them work in industries that were hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as retail and hospitality. The literature review also found that immigrants with temporary visas experienced psychological distress due to losing their jobs, working fewer hours, being afraid of contracting COVID-19, and changing immigration rules. The recommendations are to conduct further research in New Zealand with a larger sample to ascertain the psychological distress and other impacts due to COVID-19 and to formulate rules and regulations that will help to lessen the psychological impacts of any future pandemic scenarios.

Keywords: COVID-19; Psychological Distress; Immigrants with temporary visas.

INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) and its associated variants have appeared as the biggest pandemic of the twenty-first century (E. L. Anderson et al., 2020; Issakhov et al., 2021; He et al., 2020; Singhal, 2020). Some COVID-19 variants spread faster and easier than the original COVID-19 variant; for example, the Omicron variant spreads more quickly and easily than the original (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). The current COVID-19 literature demonstrates the detrimental impact of COVID-19 on people's lives, particularly immigrants with temporary visas (Dodd et al., 2021; Duncan, 2020; Fairlie, 2020; Guadagno, 2020; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020; Sabri et al., 2020). Belong Aotearoa (2020), Cénat et al. (2020), Kumar et al. (2020), and Singh (2020) all contend that immigrants were more likely to experience psychological distress in this COVID-19 scenario because it has negatively impacted businesses, including the retail and hospitality industries, where immigrants are vastly overrepresented. Hence, immigrants with temporary visas, for instance, work visas, are concerned about losing their jobs and legal status because their visa is tied to their job position and business (Guadagno, 2020; International Labour Organization, 2021; Sabri et al., 2020). If immigrants lose their jobs, it may be challenging for them to renew their work visas (Guadagno, 2020; International Labour Organization, 2021).

The New Zealand government has successfully prevented the spread of COVID-19 by enforcing stringent lockdown restrictions within the country and strict border closure restrictions (Every-Palmer et al., 2020; New Zealand Government, 2022a). Some businesses in New Zealand, particularly those in the retail,

hospitality, and tourism industries, as well as other small businesses, for example, the cleaning industry, have been negatively impacted by these restrictions (Baum et al., 2020; Robson, 2021). As a result, some employees experienced job loss, while others had their working hours reduced, which led to psychological distress among them (Every-Palmer et al., 2020; Rodríguez-Rey et al., 2020). According to Drapeau et al. (2012) and Leon (2004), psychological distress is a sign of an individual's mental health and might manifest as anxiety or unhappiness, and it is difficult for the individual experiencing psychological distress to manage their daily life (Arvidsdotter et al., 2016; Drapeau et al., 2012). Economist Shamubeel Equb predicted the retail and hotel industries in the Auckland region of New Zealand were to be the hardest hit by job losses, as cited in Robson (2021) because Auckland businesses had to contend with a protracted period of more stringent COVID-19 lockdown restrictions than the rest of the country. Therefore, COVID-19 has led to psychological distress for New Zealanders who are citizens, residents, and immigrants with temporary visas.

This literature review has mainly four sections. Firstly, it introduces the topic and then describes the research objectives and methodology. After that, it discusses the literature review insightfully with gaps. Finally, the literature review concludes with a proper discussion, future recommendations, and references.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The relevant literature was examined to investigate the psychological distress due to COVID-19 among immigrants on temporary visas working in the retail and hospitality industries in New Zealand. Google Scholar, ProQuest, and the Google search engine were used to access relevant published books and journal articles. Additionally, the online facilities of Otago University's Robertson Library were used to access journal publications. The selected research documents and resources were read, reviewed, and analysed to better understand the psychology and psychological distress of COVID-19 on immigrants with temporary visas in New Zealand.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Impacts of COVID-19 on Immigrants – Global Context

Everyone has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting restricted lockdowns in New Zealand and other countries such as China and Italy (Every-Palmer et al., 2020; New Zealand Government, 2022b; Tandon, 2020). The lives of immigrants, particularly those on temporary visas such as work visas and student visas, have been affected more significantly (Dodd et al., 2021; Duncan, 2020; Fairlie, 2020; Guadagno, 2020; Sabri et al., 2020). Immigrants are more likely to experience psychological distress in these types of circumstances because they are afraid of losing their jobs, concerned about the well-being of their families, and afraid that the local community will not treat them well (Kumar et al., 2020; Singh, 2020). The International Labour Organization (2020) asserts that many immigrants would be the first to be made redundant from their jobs in countries that are drafting laws to lay off foreign employees first if layoffs are inevitable. For example, Malaysia's Ministry of Human Resources announced on April 4, 2020, that foreign employees should be terminated first if redundancies are inevitable (Ministry of Human Resources, 2020).

Nella et al. (2015) found that Greeks experienced psychological distress for seven years after Greece suffered heavily from the global economic and financial crisis in 2008. Many people lost their jobs due to the financial crisis, and those who remained employed were fearful of losing their jobs, causing psychological distress among employees (Nella et al., 2015). According to Landsbergis et al. (2014), fear of job insecurity is strongly associated with psychological distress. Similarly, job insecurity affects compliance with occupational safety regulations (Probst & Brubaker, 2001). Job insecurity also varies according to culture, ethnicity, and immigration status (Landsbergis et al., 2014).

The current COVID-19 situation has severe psychological impacts on people's lives and jobs (Guadagno, 2020; LaRochelle-Côté & Uppal, 2020; Sabri et al., 2020). The psychological impact refers to the influence

on human psychological states induced by natural disasters or human intervention (Doherty & Clayton, 2011; Leon, 2004). These psychological impacts on humans might be positive, such as enthusiasm and delight, or negative, such as excessive alcohol consumption and depression (Leon, 2004).

The International Labour Organization (2021) estimates that 255 million full-time jobs, or about 8.8% of working hours, were lost globally in 2020. Southern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Southern Asia had disproportionately high working-hour losses (International Labour Organization, 2021). Working-hour losses increased almost four times in 2020 compared to 2009, the year of the global financial crisis (International Labour Organization, 2021). This pattern persisted in 2021 as well, with 140 million full-time jobs lost in the first quarter and 127 million in the second (J. Berg et al., 2021). It has also been noted that predicting how quickly employment will return to normal can be challenging because it took more than five years for the labour market to rebound after the Great Recession ended (Handwerker et al., 2020; Rampell, 2020).

Awad (2009) observed that during previous crises, such as the global financial crisis of 2009, immigrants and refugees showed signs of being more vulnerable to job losses. Guadagno (2020) stated that workplace closure could result in irregularity in countries where an employee's immigration status relates to their jobs and business. If an immigrant loses their job or their income decreases because of a reduction in working hours brought on by COVID-19, they may not be able to renew their work visas (Guadagno, 2020; International Labour Organization, 2021). According to Sabri et al. (2020), COVID-19 caused immigration procedures to take longer than expected which in turn delayed the processing of visas for immigrants who were already employed in the United States of America (USA). Because of this, most immigrants with temporary visas were concerned that they would lose their jobs if they did not receive new work visas within time (Sabri et al., 2020). They also disclosed that some immigrants had lost their jobs because of the COVID-19 lockdown in the USA, while others were fearful of losing their jobs (Sabri et al., 2020). As a result, immigrants with work visas worried about their financial condition, which caused conflict for their families to meet necessities such as food and rent (Sabri et al., 2020). These conflicts, ultimately COVID-19's results, have made immigrants—particularly those with valid visas—more psychologically distressed (Cénat et al., 2020; Fairlie, 2020).

Numerous other studies have examined this issue and discovered that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly and negatively affected international students (Alaklabi et al., 2021; Alam et al., 2021; B. Song et al., 2021; Xu, 2021). Additionally, the authors observed that COVID-19's impacts on international students led them to experience moderate to severe psychological distress (Alaklabi et al., 2021; Alam et al., 2021; B. Song et al., 2021; Xu, 2021). According to Xu (2021), the psychological distress experienced by international students during COVID-19 in China was caused by external factors such as lockdown restrictions, social distancing, and a lack of social support, as well as internal factors such as values and learning behaviour in online classes. Additionally, Alaklabi et al. (2021) noted that when educational institutions cut back on student welfare programmes, such as health services, the situation for international students in the USA became more problematic and caused them great psychological distress. Due to these factors, many international students were left with heavy financial burdens, making it difficult for them to buy necessities, for example, food (Alaklabi et al., 2021; B. Song et al., 2021).

Immigrants undoubtedly lost jobs because of COVID-19's influence on industries where they were heavily represented, such as retail and hospitality; they also experienced other issues, including fear of contracting COVID-19, discrimination, criticism, and harassment, all of which have led to psychological distress in them (Baum et al., 2020; Borjas & Cassidy, 2020; International Labour Organization, 2021; Mia & Griffiths, 2020). However, Barrero et al. (2020), Barrero et al. (2021), and the International Labour Organization (2021) reported that several higher-skilled service industries, such as information technology (IT) and financial services, experienced positive employment growth during and after COVID-19.

Impacts of COVID-19 on Immigrants – Australia and New Zealand Context

According to Askola et al. (2021) and L. Berg et al. (2020), the COVID-19 crisis, related restrictions, closures, and adjusting immigration rules created job insecurity in the job market in Australia. Temporary visa holders were more vulnerable to these circumstances because they were working in industries with high job insecurity, such as the retail and hospitality industries. According to Dodd et al. (2021), who conducted a significant study in Australia, a job is one of the main ways that domestic and international students support themselves financially while studying. Over half of the 787 university student participants, including domestic and international students, had their employment significantly impacted by COVID-19 (Dodd et al., 2021). Therefore, it was challenging, especially for international students, to fund their upcoming tuition without a secure job because they pay much higher tuition fees than domestic students (L. Berg et al., 2020; Dodd et al., 2021). Likewise, they struggled to pay for necessities such as food and rent (L. Berg et al., 2020; Dodd et al., 2021). The study also showed that domestic and international students in Australia who took online courses due to COVID-19 experienced psychological distress, particularly in relation to the difficulty of corresponding with a lecturer (Dodd et al., 2021).

According to a few other studies, students who were studying online because of COVID-19 reported facing difficulties in communicating with their lecturers and balancing their studies with other responsibilities at home (Chakraborty et al., 2021; Clarke & Munro, 2021; Malik & Javed, 2021; Martin, 2020). Additionally, Dodd et al.'s (2021) research support findings from a national survey of 5000 temporary visa holders in Australia (Unions NSW Report, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic caused 60% of international students to lose their jobs and a significant reduction in working hours by 21%. To save money due to their precarious financial situation, 26% of participants shared a bedroom, and 46% were compelled to skip meals every day (Unions NSW Report, 2020). Therefore, because of COVID-19, international students were more vulnerable, and some of them were willing to work for less than the minimum wage in Australia to support themselves, which worsened their situation (Farbenblum & Berg, 2020; Vincent, 2020).

Most countries closed their borders as a result of COVID-19 (Han et al., 2020), including New Zealand, which reopened its border fully on 1 August 2022 (New Zealand Government, 2022b; New Zealand Immigration, 2022). Many New Zealand businesses, particularly small and medium-sized ones, suffered negatively as a result of COVID-19 restrictions, which caused them to cut staff (Baum et al., 2020; Stats NZ, 2020). As a result, many people lost their jobs in New Zealand (Stats NZ, 2020), and immigrants with work visas were particularly vulnerable to losing their jobs (Belong Aotearoa, 2020; Duncan, 2020; Fairlie, 2020; Guadagno, 2020; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020; Robson, 2021; Sabri et al., 2020).

A study on immigrants living in New Zealand by Belong Aotearoa (2020) discovered that immigrants on temporary visas, especially those on work visas who lost their jobs, were more vulnerable and required more support because they were going through psychological distress due to their job loss. Also, according to Belong Aotearoa (2020), immigrants found it challenging to change to a different profession due to the restrictions imposed by their work visas, and this was further exacerbated by the significant uncertainty in the job market brought on by COVID-19. Additionally, research suggests that re-entering the job market after being out of it is challenging because job seekers will be competing against more skilled job seekers (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). In order to meet the new employment requirements and compete with more skilled competitors, some immigrants had to convert their work visas to student visas by applying for further study, and others were planning to do the same within the next 12 months (Belong Aotearoa, 2020).

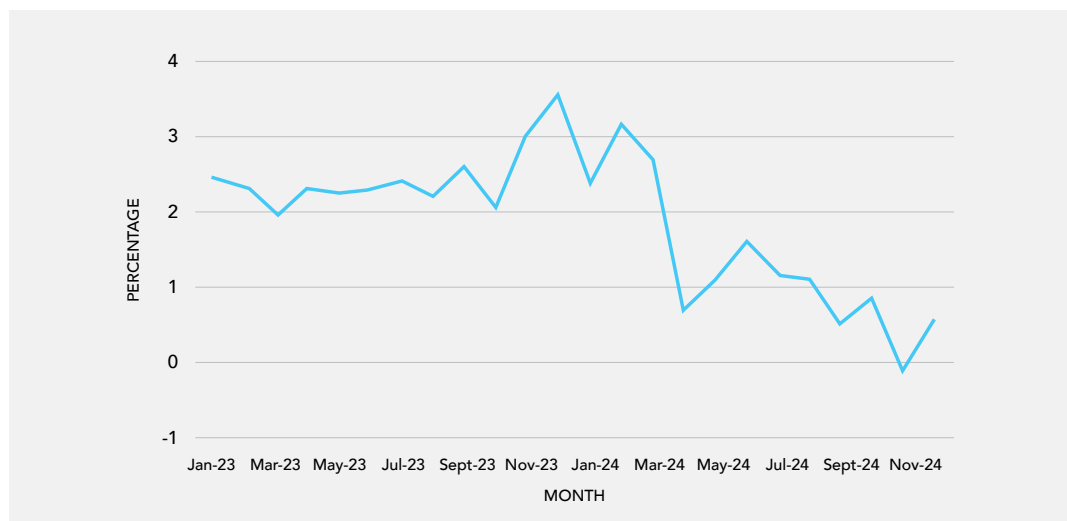
Various studies found that job losses caused by COVID-19 were directly related to individuals' psychological distress, especially immigrants' psychological distress (D. Anderson et al., 2020; Basyouni & El Keshky, 2021; Belong Aotearoa, 2020; Cénat et al., 2020; Every-Palmer et al., 2020; Fairlie, 2020; Sabri et al., 2020; Serafini et al., 2021). Aside from job losses, some other factors were linked to the psychological distress of immigrants with temporary visas. J. Song and McDonald (2021) found that registered Chinese nurses in

New Zealand throughout COVID-19 experienced a variety of issues: 47.06% of the participants experienced unpleasant work experiences, including criticism, racial discrimination, and workplace harassment. These unpleasant experiences during COVID-19 at work potentially caused these nurses to experience psychological distress (Labrague & Santos, 2020; Master et al., 2020; World Health Organization, 2020).

According to the Economist Shamubeel Eaqub, as cited by Robson (2021), Auckland, New Zealand, was expected to be hit the hardest by job losses in 2021, particularly in the retail and hospitality industries, due to more extended COVID-19 lockdown restrictions than the rest of the country (New Zealand Government, 2022a; Robson, 2021). The number of unemployed people in Auckland, New Zealand, increased by 15,800 in September 2020 compared to the previous quarter, March 2020, and by 14,200 compared to the previous year's quarter, September 2019. (Stats NZ, 2020). However, employment in the housing, retail trades, and food services industries in Auckland, New Zealand, fell by 6.5%, indicating a significant impact on these sectors (Stats NZ, 2020).

Despite about 38,000 more jobs being filled in December 2020 compared to November 2020, New Zealand's annual growth remained below pre-COVID-19 levels (Stats NZ, 2021). However, job growth was only 0.6%, or just under 13,000 jobs, when compared to the same period in 2019, as shown in Figure 1 below (Stats NZ, 2021). Figure 1 demonstrates that before the COVID-19 pandemic in New Zealand, there was a 2% to 4% increase in job growth between January 2019 and March 2020. (Stats NZ, 2021). After accounting for seasonal effects, the number of filled positions increased by 0.8%, or nearly 17,000, between September and December 2021. (Stats NZ, 2022). According to these numbers, employment growth has resumed, though much more slowly than it was prior to COVID-19. It is undeniable that New Zealand's employment growth has recovered since the COVID-19 impact, but it is still unknown how many immigrants on temporary visas are taking advantage of these job opportunities.

Figure 1 – Growth in Filled Jobs, January 2019–December 2020 (Stats NZ, 2021)



Note. This figure illustrates growth in filled jobs between January 2019–December 2020 in New Zealand. From Stats NZ (2021). (<https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/jobs-up-in-december-but-annual-growth-slows>).

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (2022) observed in New Zealand that a rise in the number of job positions advertised in the year leading up to February 2022 indicated a persistent rise in labour demand. Clerical and administrative jobs (40%), professional jobs (36%), and sales jobs (35%) were

the professions with the highest increases in positions advertised during this period. The primary and hospitality industries experienced the lowest increase in job positions advertised in the year up to February 2022 (Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, 2022). Although some industries, such as IT and clerical and administrative jobs, are experiencing increased demand for employees, the researcher is unsure whether immigrants on temporary visas are benefiting from job growth in these industries due to their restricted visa conditions and qualifications.

Gaps in the Literature

There is little relevant literature available on the psychological distress and impacts of COVID-19 on the lives of employees and immigrants on temporary visas in New Zealand (D. Anderson et al., 2020; *Belong Aotearoa*, 2020; Every-Palmer et al., 2020; J. Song & McDonald, 2021). Moreover, several studies have indicated that the financial and IT industries have been significantly contributing to total employment growth throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (Barrero et al., 2020; Barrero et al., 2021; International Labour Organization, 2021; Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, 2022). However, it is unexplored if individuals on temporary visas are able to apply for these positions.

CONCLUSION

New Zealand's initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic included strict lockdown restrictions throughout the country as well as border restrictions to reduce COVID-19 community transmission. However, the success of these strategies did not come without a cost, both financially and socially (Every-Palmer et al., 2020). The systematic literature analysis revealed that immigrants on temporary visas have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and are more vulnerable to its impacts on their job prospects worldwide. Most immigrants with temporary visas, particularly those employed in industries such as retail and hospitality, were disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and reported higher levels of psychological distress (Baum et al., 2020; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020; Rodríguez-López et al., 2021). They experienced job losses, reduced working hours, altered immigration rules, workplace hostility, and a fear of contracting COVID-19 (Baum et al., 2020; Borjas & Cassidy, 2020; Dodd et al., 2021; Duncan, 2020; Fairlie, 2020; Guadagno, 2020; International Labour Organization, 2021; Mia & Griffiths, 2020; Sabri et al., 2020). Due to job losses and reduced hours of work, it was even difficult for them to meet their family's basic needs, such as food and rent. It was extremely challenging for international students who lost their jobs as a result of the COVID-19 impact to maintain their financial stability (Alaklabi et al., 2021; L. Berg et al., 2020; Dodd et al., 2021; B. Song et al., 2021). As a result, the primary factors closely connected with the psychological distress of immigrants on temporary visas were job loss or worry of job loss, fear of contracting COVID-19, and changes in immigration rules as a result of COVID-19 (*Belong Aotearoa*, 2020; Dodd et al., 2021; Guadagno, 2020; Sabri et al., 2020; Serafini et al., 2021). This study also discovered that several industries, such as IT and financial services, are now enabling to reduce unemployment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Barrero et al., 2020). However, it is unsure how many immigrants on temporary visas are benefiting from these job prospects.

Thus, the first recommendation is that more research should be undertaken in New Zealand with a larger sample of New Zealanders, permanent residents, and the various categories of temporary visa holders, such as working holiday visas and visitor visas, to ascertain the psychological distress and other impacts of COVID-19 on them since these are not always identical for everybody. The results of more research will assist in formulating a number of rules and regulations that will help to lessen the psychological impacts of any future COVID-19 outbreaks for all residents of New Zealand, including immigrants on temporary visas. The final recommendation is that research should be undertaken to determine the number of immigrants with temporary visas who have benefited from and continue to benefit from finding a job in other industries with high employment growth rates, such as IT and financial services, after losing their jobs due to COVID-19 in the hard-hit industries such as retail and hospitality.

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