

Discourse of Fear in the Backdrop of COVID-19: A Corpus-based Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

Covid-19 started from China and spread across the globe resulting in economic challenges, social fracas and psychological unrest. It also triggered strange fear as it was associated with a novel virus and turned-out a pandemic engulfing the whole world. Fear functions as a signal of threat and triggers adaptive responses. This study aimed at examining the e-discourse produced during the spread of the virus and explored the most frequent lexical bundles in the discourse to analyse whether fear appears as a recurrent theme. The e-discourse was developed from webpages that appeared with search word 'COVID-19' spanning over the period of May 03, 2020 to May 20,2020 to build the corpus of one million word during the outbreak of the pandemic. Fear does not take place rather it is a social construct. In contemporary public discourse and popular culture, fear as a basic human emotion is all-pervasive. The study combined quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis for the interpretation of the data. For the quantification of lexical bundles, Corpus tool AntConc 3.4.4w (Anthony, 2014) was used to explore the most frequent lexical bundles in the e-discourse related to COVID-19. The quantitative analysis was complemented with qualitative analysis for the in-depth interpretation of the data. The study revealed the high frequency of linguistic choices related to psychiatry, spread of the disease as a pandemic and mental health issues particularly related to children and youth indicating that besides physiological issues, the pandemic had serious psychological implications. Thus, COVID-19 spread across the globe and resulted in intimidation and fear as the virus had no remedy in the then existing situation. Hence, this suggests taking into consideration the psychological repercussions along with the physiological devastation caused by pandemics.

Keywords: COVID-19, e-discourse, corpus, pandemic, mental health

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Amid the highly-charged milieu of COVID-19, along with the increased political and socio-economic upheavals, the discourse of fear and xenophobia also emerged across the globe. The outbreak of the virus hit China and spread across the globe in a very short period of time; resulting in economic crisis, social disturbance and psychological discontent. Fear functions as a signal of threat and triggers adaptive responses. McFarland (1987) defines fear as a motivational state that results either in escape or defence mechanism. The newness of fear worsens conditions as no previous experience helps tackle with the coercive threat. The global outbreak of COVID-19 also triggered strange fear as it was associated with a novel virus and turned-out pandemic engulfing the whole world. An uncertain situation erupted across the globe; leading to chaos and anxiety as the pandemic overtook the world unawares.

In contemporary public discourse and popular culture fear, as a basic human emotion, is all- pervasive. The news media plays an active role in disseminating fear coverage. The marketization of fear attained focus in the globalised world fighting and devising strategies to overcome COVID-19. Electronic, print and social media are principal contributors to the discourse of fear. When fear is used as an ideological framework then it becomes the arena of discourse. Fear of control and the fear of otherness (xenophobia) spread in the COVID-19 scenario. The dissemination of fear functioned as a strategy to increase public awareness and xenophobic feelings to shift the responsibility to China as the virus-producing country. Thus, anti-China sentiments were created by world leaders in order to overcome their failures in fighting COVID-19. In this case, two types of discourses were constructed i.e. discourse of fear to restrict social gatherings so as to control the spread of the virus and xenophobic discourse resulting in anti-China sentiments.

Media plays a significant role in the construction and dissemination of the discourse of fear. Grupp (2003) argues that individual fears are cultivated more by media than by experience personally. She further says that 'Fear is decreasingly experienced first-hand and increasingly experienced on a discursive and abstract level' (p. 31). She also notes that 'there has been a general shift from a fearsome life towards a life with fearsome media' (p.31). Altheide (2006) notes that popular culture plays a significant role in promoting the discourse of fear. Bourke (2005) in Spreckelsen opines that matters get complicated because the words and phrases employed to describe fear are also shaped by culture and history. Hence, these linguistic choices are not neutrally used for the description and construction of fear.

Like other fields of life, the advent of technology also impacted the domain of discourse. With the increased use of the internet, E-discourse emerged as a new hybrid genre in the last few decades. Graddol (1997) declares it as a new variety of language resulting in a new mode of communication in the form of electronic discourse. Yates (2001) conceptualized it as an imaginary means of communication "created by the internet in which people interact and form social relationships" (p. 106). Altheide (2002) argues that fear is socially constructed and manipulated by those who seek to benefit from it. Hence, fear does not take place rather it is a social construction. The role of self-interest inflates socially the constructed fear and cultural internalization. Cultural and historical factors construct the meaning of fear. Similarly, the experience of fear is also structured by socio-cultural agents. Fear is considered as a reasonable response to new events and changes. And, this fear is manipulated by fear entrepreneurs for direct benefit. These agents take the advantage of the situation and introduce their products through specific discourses.

This research study aims at knowing whether fear is constructed in the e-discourse related to COVID-19, if so, then how fear is constructed and reflected in discourse practices by analysing the most frequently used lexical bundles. The discourse used in the awareness campaign of COVID-19 and strategies to control the pandemic is the focal point of the present study. Since this is a newly emerged discourse in the backdrop of the spread of the Coronavirus, this study would help in exploring the linguistic patterns to unveil how fear is constructed and disseminated through the e-discourse in the backdrop of COVID-19.

Research Questions

1: What are the most frequent lexical bundles in e-discourse used/emerged during COVID-19?

2: In what way/s fear is constructed with the help of linguistic choices in e-discourse?

Literature Review

In contemporary public discourse and popular culture, fear as a basic human emotion is all- pervasive. The news media plays an active role in the dissemination of fear coverage. The marketization of fear attained focus in the globalised world fighting and devising strategies to overcome COVID-19. Electronic, print and social media are the principal contributors to the discourse of fear. When fear is used as an ideological framework then it becomes the arena of discourse. Emotions of fear are cognitive experiences of mind. Thus, ideology functions as an ideology to disseminate the discourse related to the Coronavirus. Fear of control and the fear of otherness (xenophobia) were observed in the COVID-19 scenario. The dissemination of fear functioned as a strategy to increase public awareness and xenophobic feelings to shift the responsibility to China as the virus-producing country. In this case, two types of discourses were constructed i.e. discourse of fear to restrict social gatherings to control the spread of virus and xenophobic discourse resulting in anti-China sentiments.

Furedi (2007) states that fear plays a significant role in the consciousness of 21st century. Narrative of fear has attained greater space and influenced the cognitive process of public. In contemporary discourse, we find the catch phrases of ‘fear of politics’, ‘fear of future’ and ‘fear of crime’ (p. 1). Since fears influence human cognition and prove more effective in controlling consciousness, the increased emergence of cultivation of fears was witnessed in 21st century. COVID-19 also emerged as a coercive threat and fear across the globe, creating fear of the spread of virus and death associated with it as no vaccine is available to control this pandemic worsened the conditions. COVID-19 has fallen in the category of ‘quiet fear’ but spread more fear in the globalized world.

Frimpong and Paintsil (2022) reveal the spread of fear among the people working in the healthcare sector. They identified a higher level of anxiety among the people faced with the spread of COVID-19. Anxiety was the common psychological discontent found in the people who were working during the pandemic. Sun et al. (2022) state that Corona is a novel, very complex and extremely destructive virus. The effective role of leadership can help in overcoming the pandemic. This surely incites a strong psychological rejoinder from the workers engaged in pandemic tackling and this had mental outcomes equally on male gender and female gender. Referring to the psychological implications, Mistry et al (2021) reveal “Serious emotional disturbances, insecurity, anxiety and depression are more common among old-aged people in association with social isolation, fear of uncertainty, and economic

difficulties” (p.1). Further reflecting on the epidemiological impact of COVID-19, they state that

“fear has been one of the most frequent emotions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Uncertainty, worry, health anxiety, media exposure, personal health and the risk for loved ones are the predictors of fear for this disease. Fear can affect older peoples’ mood or behaviour and worsen their physical, social and cognitive functions” (p. 2).

Society, in many ways, is structured on fear, thus discourse of fear pervades in a society. This study examines how the discourse of fear was taken up, constructed, disseminated and culturally internalized related to pandemic COVID-19. Fear discourse, in this case emerged globalized irrespective of ethnicity, gender, social class, nationhood etc. Globalised discourse of fear was created reflective of collective conditions. Interestingly, an institutionalized discourse of fear and xenophobic sentiments were structured. Altheide (1999) defines fear of discourse as “the pervasive communication, symbolic awareness and expectation of danger and risk as central features of the effective environment” (pp. 475-76).

Media amplifies ‘quiet fear’ through the distinct discourse of fear that raises the magnanimity of an issue. Analysis of fear is associated with specific issues, how fear is linked to the emergence of an issue. In the case of COVID-19, the distinct discourse of fear and xenophobia emerged across the globe. Hankiss (2001) pointed out the scarcity of research in social sciences as fear has attained ‘serious attention in philosophy, theology and psychiatry, less in anthropology and social psychology, and least of all in sociology’ (p. 14). Elias (1978) argues that fear functions as one of the most significant mechanisms in which “the structures of society are transmitted to individual psychological functions” (p.18). Fear has been a much-neglected arena in the domain of social sciences. This research study examines the discourse of fear raised in the backdrop of COVID-19.

Issuing health warnings reflects the institutionalization of fear through discourse practices. This construction of the fear makes fear more fearful than the experience of fear. Fear has increasingly become an autonomous problem; thus, fear becomes discourse. Potential always exists to convert health anxieties into a major problem, if fear is created that there exists a potential threat to health; at the same time this fear itself is hazardous to health. The internalization of fear also poses a threat to health. In the emergence of COVID-19 too, it turned out this pandemic had more psychological disturbances than physiological predicaments. Fear, in present society, has become unpredictable and free-floating. Fear migrates from one problem to another irrespective of cause or logic. The culture of fear is constructed and naturalized through discourse practices. Vulnerability to a certain risk worsens the situation as an individual thinks of himself to be a part of a vulnerable group. Rather all are seen as vulnerable in one way or the other. Furedi (2007) argues that “The sense of vulnerability is so deeply ingrained today that it is easy to overlook the fact that, relatively speaking, it is a recently-invented concept” (p. 7).

Furedi (2007) states that in “twenty-first century fear culture is increasingly being normalised as a force in its own right. In such circumstances, fear is a means through which people respond to and make sense of the world” (p. 8). In order to disseminate and naturalize fear, media is used for this purpose as it is an effective and economical platform. The spread of fear may be used as a tool to control the masses as fear is associated with different issues. In the case of COVID-19, the construction of fear is reflected in different mediums of

communication namely; print media, electronic media, social media etc. COVID-19 is presented as an uncontrollable virus and it is a threat to everyone across the globe. Vulnerability functions as an effective tool for creating fear as Furedi (2007) argues that "The emergence of vulnerability as an identity is linked with the objectification of fear" (p. 7).

Discourse practices and social practices are closely interlinked. Referring to this intricate relationship of discourse and society, Fairclough (1992) states that discourse can be philosophically examined at three levels; discourse at the textual level, discourse as discursive practice and discourse as a social practice. Linguistic features and word patterns reflect the construction of discourse practices and the reflection of social practices. Hart and Cap (2014) argue that discourse aims at creating, naturalizing and/or transforming the social status quo. Discourse practices help in introducing social change. Discourse studies merges linguistic choices and social theory. Dar (2021) states that metaphors play a significant role in shaping thoughts. These expressions are frequently used, thus influencing thought and structures of language. She explored the frequent metaphors used during pandemic of COVID-19. Mostly metaphors are used from the domain of war, calamity and crime to highlight the gravity of this pandemic.

The role of media is crucial in the construction of social realities. Mills & Keddie (2010) argue that media is an influential and central tool used in disseminating credible knowledge of current events. However, it constructs realities as it describes them. The description of events, in a way, is moulding worldview in a specific way. In the same vein, Welch et al. (2002) state that media constructs moral panics by giving a unique and original twist to an old story. Such construction indicates the tendency towards a certain ideology. In the construction of new images, Bartie (2010) holds the notion that a new image is constructed from a "readymade stock of images" (p. 319).

Language is not a medium of transmission of information. Rather, Phillips and Hardy's (2002) argue that discourse constructs social reality. Changes in discourse also change the social world. Rather language is a machine that generates meaning and constructs the entire social world. Discourse constitutes social relations and social identities. Hart and Cap (2014) note that Critical Discourse Studies are the combination of linguistic and social theory. Its canvass works both at the micro level and macro level. This study also concentrates on how COVID-19 is constructed and reflected by using linguistic choices across the globe. It looks at how this spread of the virus is structured and disseminated through media. In what way/s fear is constructed with the help of discourse is the focal point of this study.

Fairclough and Wodak (1997) consider the connection of society and discourse as a dialectical one. Pointing to the role of Discourse analysis, Van Dijk (1995b) states that "discourse analysis is ideology analysis" (p. 17). Fowler (1991) maintains that thoughts and events do not ever imitate neutrality "because they are transmitted through the medium that contains certain structural features which, in turn, are impregnated with social values that form some perspective on events (p.11)". Thus, discourses are structured from a certain viewpoint for a definite purpose. However, this complicated process is affected in a veiled manner.

With the increased use of internet and technology, electronic discourse emerged as a new genre. Graddol (1997) declares this newly emerged type of electronic discourse and pronounces it a novel variation of language. Wolters et al. (2001) state it as a conceptualized e-discourse as an imaginary means of communication "created by the internet in which people

interact and form social relationships” (p. 106). The concern of this study is also with the e-discourse developed during the outbreak out of COVID-19. However, this study concentrates on the lexical bundles to understand the construction of the newly emerged discourse. Biber (1999) describes lexical bundles as the most frequently trendy lexical orders in a particular genre. These are the pre-fabricated expressions that play a significant role in the construction of meanings. Mainly, these manifestations function as building blocks in the discourse practices in order to create specified meaning for a specific purpose. These lexical bundles trail the patterned grammatical structures.

For the analysis of language, corpus linguistics (CL) is an effective tool. Pointing this role, Hunston (2002) positions that corpus is a “a collection of naturally occurring examples of language, consisting of anything from a few sentences to a set of written texts or tape recordings, which have been collected for linguistic study” (p. 2). This study combines corpus linguistics with critical discourse analysis (CDA). To overcome the weaknesses of CDA and CL, scholars support the combination of both. This would lend more reliability and authenticity to the findings of the study since CL takes greater amount of the data whereas CDA helps in providing more in-depth insights into the texts. (See e.g. Baker et al., 2008; Baker, Gabrielatos, and McEnery, 2013b; Salama, 2011). The combination of both imparts synergy to the research as Baker et al. (2008) and Baker (2012) posit the view that combining CDA’s qualitative stance and CL’s quantitative stance becomes make research more fruitful and rigorous.

Research Methodology

The study examined the e-discourse created during the spread of COVID-19. For this study, the corpus was developed out of the E-discourse produced during the spread of the Coronavirus across the globe. The corpus was developed from the webpages that appeared with the search word “COVID-19” from May 3, 2020 to May 20,2020. The e-corpus was developed from these webpages by copying the texts from webpages to machine-readable. These word files were converted into plain texts to make them machine-readable. Corpus linguistics was used as a methodological framework to explore the most frequent lexical bundles in the corpus selected for the current study. AntConc 3.4.4w (Anthony, 2014) was used to explore the most frequent lexical bundles in the e-discourse related to COVID-19. This software helps in exploring linguistic features like concordance, lexical bundles, concordance etc. in texts. The program has a feature to categorise lexical bundles, which are given in the form of N-Grams. The total no. of N. Gram Types found in the corpus was 618328 and the total no. of N. Gram Tokens was 1023667. Four-word lexical bundles were selected for this study as Biber (1999) states that lexical bundle recur at least 10 times per million words. Since lexical bundles reflect textual consistency, these play a significant role in assigning meaning to discourse. This corpus tool was used for the exploration and quantification of lexical bundles in the corpus built up for the present study. For an in-depth interpretation of the data, qualitative analysis was used by employing Critical Discourse Analysis, examining how the discourse of fear was constructed with these linguistic choices. Fairclough (1992) states that discourse can be philosophically examined at three levels; discourse at the textual level, discourse as discursive practice and discourse as a social practice. Biber (1998) argues that the corpus-based study needs both quantitative representations augmented by qualitative interpretation. Hence, this study operationalizes both quantitative and qualitative analyses for an in-depth understanding of the results.

Hart and Cap (2014) demonstrate that the combination of the corpus linguistic approach with CDA helps in answering criticisms related to possible bias in the selection of data and the statistical value of findings. Corpus linguistics helps in analysing a larger amount of data with objective and CDA provides an in-depth interpretation of the data. Hence, CDA and CL complement each other and lend more reliability and authenticity to the research. As Flowerdew and Richardson (2018) state that the corpus linguistic approach offers varied analytical techniques like prosody and collocation analysis; the present study combines CL and CDA to examine the discourse related to COVID-19. Themes in result section have been presented on the basis of frequency of lexical bundles in the corpus.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and discussion based on the corpus developed of the e-discourse related to COVID-19. The study explored the most frequent four-word lexical bundles in the corpus of the current study. Total no. of N. Gram Types found in the corpus is 618328 and the total no. of N. Gram Tokens is 1023667. The study is delimited to the top twenty lexical bundles to examine the linguistic patterns used in the e-discourse produced during COVID-19. The top twenty-four-word lexical bundles are given in Table 1.

Table 1

Four-word Most Frequent Lexical Bundles

Sr No.	Freq.	Bundles
1	225	child and adolescent psychiatry
2	201	spread of the virus
3	172	live updates on the
4	168	the spread of the
5	160	the first case was
6	153	visit our coronavirus hub
7	136	disease control and prevention
8	136	of the virus in
9	134	for disease control and
10	133	the spread of covid
11	126	http www cambridge org
12	126	www cambridge org core
13	124	prevent the spread of
14	121	the world health organization
15	120	in the united states
16	115	the child and adolescent
17	115	the mental health of
18	114	centres for disease control
19	112	on the mental health
20	111	of the general population

Mental Health

The first theme reflected in the discourse of COVID-19 is the mental health since the most frequent occurring lexical bundle in the entire corpus is *“child and adolescent psychiatry”*. This lexical bundle occupies the highest frequency of 225, indicating the high concern related to mental health of children and adolescents. Fear is a psychological construct; the lexical bundle is reflective of fear that is generated during COVID-19. The highest frequency of the lexical bundle suggests that psychological issues specifically in children and youth have risen and attracted more attention during the spread of Coronavirus. Along with physiological diseases, COVID-19 has triggered a number of psychological problems. It indicates that fear has become all-pervasive because the pandemic changed socio-economic conditions throughout the world. Hence, this pandemic resulted in more psychological issues than physiological concerns as it resulted in the change of social and economic scenarios.

Fear of the Spread of Coronavirus

The next theme reflected in the given corpus is the fear linked to the spread of the virus. In the corpus built up of the e-discourse of COVID-19, the second highest lexical bundle *“spread of the virus”* appears 201 times. The recurrent appearance of this chunk indicates fear as both “spread” and “virus” are synonymous with a severe threat. Referring repeatedly to the spread of the virus, in the discourse of COVID-19 represents the fear that prevails across the globe. To disseminate awareness regarding the virus may also construct fear as people have become afraid while repeatedly highlighting the current phenomena in media. Adults in general and children in particular develop fear mentally as it is internalized by the frequent appearance in media. Hence, the discourse of fear can result in increasing issues related to mental health.

For 172 times the lexical bundle *“live updates on the”* appears in the corpus built up for the present study. Coronavirus appeared as a great threat across the world and the dissemination of information attained much consideration. The frequent appearance of this lexical bundle is the reflection of depicting COVID-19 as an imminent threat so live updates can be accessed across the globe. In live updates a number of patients and death have been shared that lead to fear among readers as an increasing number of patients also creates fear among people. Similarly, *“the spread of the”* occurs 168 times, referring to the spread of the virus. This also results in fear as people realize the widespread of the virus that can also attack their life.

The next most frequent lexical bundle in the corpus is *“the first case was”* that appears 160 times. As COVID-19 appeared as a pandemic, so its spread has become a universal issue. The recurrent appearance of this lexical bundle shows a threat to every country indicating that the virus has also reached a particular area, thus increasing fear in the people as Coronavirus has also appeared in their area. The frequent appearance shows the advent of the virus that can result in the loss of life. In the same way, *“visit our coronavirus hub”* appears 153 times in the e-discourse related to COVID-19. To facilitate the public about guidelines of the virus, they are directed to consult the hub to update their information to protect themselves from the attack of this virus.

Likewise, the most frequent lexical bundles *“disease control and prevention”* attains the frequency of 136. This also constructs a cognitive psychological impact because the virus is associated with a disease, resulting in generating fear. However, fear is also managed by

declaring in control and also suggesting prevention. Moving further in the list of most frequent bundles, “*of the virus in*” occupies the frequency of 136. The lexical bundle is fear mongering as it refers to the virus that has already become a threat for the entire world. The recurrence of this chunk is reflective of fear and threat that prevail across the globe. What makes fear worsened is the absence of vaccine to cure this pandemic. Hence, the virus is associated with a phenomenon since its presence and spread is synonymous to a severe threat. Linguistic choices in the discourse of COVID-19 reflect the pandemic as fear mongering and threat construction.

With the frequency of 133, the lexical bundle “*the spread of covid*” occurs. The frequent appearance of the chunk again refers to the spread of the virus as a pandemic and engulfing the whole world. In this way, it generates fear that is reflected through the e-discourse related to COVID-19. The high frequency of this lexical bundle is suggestive of the threat associated with the spread of the virus. This indicates the spread of discourse of fear to disseminate information as well as fear to make people conscious of potential threats to adopt precautions in such precarious conditions. The next two lexical bundles “*http www cambridge org*”, “*www cambridge org core*” appear 126 times each. The recurrent occurrence of these bundles highlights the significance of the issue as a prominent institution has dedicated space and research to the current pandemic. The intensity is reflected through the appearance of Cambridge frequently as high as 126 times in the discourse particular to this pandemic.

Prevention of the Virus

While analysing the discourse of COVID-19, the lexical bundle “*prevent the spread of*” occurs 124 times. As the novel virus has already been declared incurable since no vaccine is available, the focus is on how to prevent its spread. As previously pointed out, this chunk also highlights fear related to the virus. The linguistic choice ‘spread’ results in generating feelings of fear as the spread of an incurable disease is certainly synonymous with a potential threat to human life. However, the same fear is somehow minimized with the ‘prevent’, thus showing that the potential threat is somehow manageable. The next lexical bundle related to the language of COVID-19 “*the world health organization*” appears 121 times. As the virus turned out pandemic, thus WHO (World Health Organization) is the central body that helps in controlling the widespread virus. This also reflects and constructs sense of satisfaction as policies and steps taken by WHO can help in fighting against Coronavirus. Besides generating fear, it also reflects somehow relief for the public to minimize the intensity of the spread of COVID-19. Certainly, it will bring psychological relief as this pandemic demands more mental solace than physiological relief.

Occupying the frequency of 120, “*in the united states*” appears in the corpus made up for the present study. As already stated, this is a pandemic and spread across the globe. It hit not only the third world countries but also hit the most advanced countries including the US. The repeated appearance of the United States reflects how uncontrollable the pandemic is as it has also caused a great loss of property and lives to the advanced world as well. This also results in creating fear as no place is safe from the calamity of this virus. Another significant chunk of language “*the child and adolescent*” appears 115 times in the corpus. In this corpus, the occurrences related to children and adolescents are very high in frequency. It suggests that COVID-19 has increasingly influenced younger people as compared to grown-ups. Young are more vulnerable to be mentally affected by such a pandemic as psychological issues emerge during such precarious conditions. Cognitive and linguistic mechanisms are interconnected; thus, these linguistic choices reflect psychological concerns in the e-discourse constructed in the wake of COVID-19.

With the frequency of 115 *“the mental health of”* is the next most recurrent chunk in the language related to COVID-19. Again, the lexical bundle indicates the increased concern regarding mental health. As previously pointed out, the linguistic choices relevant to mental and psychological concerns find the high frequency in the discourse generated in the backdrop of this pandemic. The attack of Coronavirus resulted in a loss in multiple ways: social, economic, political, mental etc. This led to fear generation as the spread of this virus changed the whole scenario. With its spread multi-faceted uncertainties emerged, resulting in the generation of fear. Further, this is traced through the discourse of fear produced in the backdrop of this pandemic. *“centres for disease control”* finds 114 appearances in the language used during COVID-19. In news media and public discourse, fear appears all-pervasive. The frequent appearance of ‘disease’ in the corpus stands for the coercive threat for the people especially with no remedy. This discourse reflects fear as the current pandemic is all-pervasive and uncontrollable. Hence, the linguistic choice permeates the already created fear enmeshed subtly and profoundly.

As already stated, mental health appears central concern in the selected corpus of COVID-19. Continuing the similar focus, the next lexical bundle also highlights issues related to mental health. With a considerable frequency of 112, the linguistic chunk *“on the mental health”* finds conspicuous representation in the corpus. It insinuates that the spread has proved more hazardous to mental health than physiological health. As COVID-19 changed the social milieu, so all the fields of life underwent changes, among them more significant is mental health. Further, it is specifically associated with children and adolescents. The implications of the virus are multifaceted; for the old, it turned fatal physiologically but devastated children and adolescents psychologically. Last but not least *“of the general population”* appears for 111 times across the selected e-discourse. Public discourse represents the general perceptions regarding an issue. Considering the present lexical bundle also indicates how much concern is shown about it.

Conclusion

The pandemic resulted in multiple problems as revealed through the e-discourse. However, the most frequent lexical bundles are related to psychiatry, the spread of the virus and mental health. The repetition of these linguistic items reflects the intensity and sensitivity of the issues related to Coronavirus. According to aforementioned expressions, the virus appears as a potential threat to mental and physical health. COVID-19 spread across the globe resulting in intimidation and fear as the virus has no remedy in the existing situation. E-discourse related to COVID-19 reflected the precarious conditions prevailing in the entire world. Linguistic strategies exercised in public discourse revealed the high frequencies of lexical bundles related to mental health, children, adolescents and the spread of the virus. Moreover, linguistic choices used in the language about the virus revealed it to be pandemic; causing issues related to mental health particularly among children and adolescents. Surprisingly, COVID-19 resulted in more psychological issues than physiological problems due to linguistic choices that revealed the frequent appearance of lexical bundles about mental health. It revealed that calamities like this pandemic have also psychological implications along with physiological concerns. These linguistic expressions show that fear and the spread of the virus are feelings found in this corpus. Hence, considering the psychological repercussions alongside the physiological devastation caused by pandemics is recommended. While taking care of the medical needs of people, psychological counselling and solace are equally important to face such worldwide challenges effectively. Mental health issues occur on a larger scale in such crises and need prompt and effective measures to address precarious conditions. Such

conditions result in fear as reflected through the discourse of fear. Fear leads to uncertainties, thus resulting in mental issues. Proper management of these issues must be dealt with serious efforts.

Future Research

Future research can be conducted about the mental issues caused by such pandemics particularly about children and youth so as to address these issues effectively and efficiently along with the physiological devastation.

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