

# Characterizing Mood Symptoms in Long Covid: A Qualitative Perspective

Lilly Lerer BA, Michael Marcangelo MD, Leora R Cherney PhD, Elliot Roth MD

## Background

- 1 in 13 US adults have symptoms of Long Covid [1]
- Cognitive, communication, and mood symptoms are commonly experienced by individuals with Long Covid
- Etiology of mood symptoms is not well understood
- Understanding the scope of mood symptoms is essential for comprehensive treatment of Long Covid

## Methods

- Semi-structured interview guide adapted from the McGill Illness Narratives Interview (MINI) and the Work Rehabilitation Questionnaire (WORQ)
- Interviews were coded and analyzed using grounded theory methodology and NVivo Software

## Participants

- N=8 participants recruited from a general rehabilitation clinic in Chicago, IL from November 2021-March 2022
- All participants currently or previously engaged in full-time employment

Participants met WHO definition of Long Covid [2]:

*A history of probable or confirmed SARS CoV-2 infection, with symptoms that begin within 3 months and that last for at least 2 months and cannot be explained by an alternative diagnosis.*

## Results

Commonly reported symptoms included:

- Anxiety
- Worry
- Irritability
- Insomnia / hypersomnia
- Myalgias
- Fatigue
- Nightmares
- Guilt and shame
- Hypervigilance
- Apathy
- Hopelessness
- Inattention
- Anger
- Negative self image
- Social isolation
- Pain
- Avoidance
- Anhedonia

## Experiences of distress

### Uncertainty

“I had nightmares about work...about what my permanent situation would be.”

### Hypersomnia

“I would sleep sixteen hours a day and still not feel rested.”

### Isolation

“I have isolated from my friends.”  
“I can’t function socially.”

### Future planning

“I’m 63 and I don’t know what I’ll do next... my trajectory has just been smashed.”

### Self-image

“I felt really slow and dumb.”  
“I felt like an idiot.”

## Trauma Reactions

“if someone's sneezing or coughing...I freak out...I panic.”

“Seeing unmasked people...I feel horrible. I'm angry. I'm stunned.”

“Covid was a death sentence, and I survived.”

“I resent that I got Covid from work... I couldn't sleep I was so anxious about going back.”

## Pre-morbid Psychiatric Conditions

- Participants reported pre-morbid psychiatric conditions including major depressive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; most conditions worsened while some improved

## Conclusion

- Long Covid is associated with the development of significant psychiatric symptoms
- Long Covid psychiatric symptoms had a substantial negative impact on many domains on function

## References

[1] The U.S. Census Bureau and National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). Household Pulse Survey. 2022.

[2] World Health Organization (WHO). A clinical case definition of post COVID-19 condition by a Delphi consensus, 6 October 2021.