

# Chapter 2

## PROTECTION MOTIVATION THEORY AND COVID-19: A GENERAL ASSESSMENT

Meltem CANOĞLU<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

Fear can be defined as an emotional phenomenon that protects someone from a perceived danger, panic, or fright; or a motivational wonder that takes someone away from a potentially harmful event. It is also an interactive variable derived from stimulating conditions and reaction variables that motivate an organism in avoidance. It is one of the central emotional responses during a pandemic. When a threat is doubtful and constant, as in the current coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, fear can become persistent and oppressive. If fear is disturbing, this can have pernicious influences on an individual and social level (e.g., mental health concerns such as phobias, social anxiety, panic shopping, or xenophobia). If there are insufficient fear and people who ignore state devices to decrease the coronavirus, this condition can also injure both individuals and society (Rogers, 1975, p. 95; J. Van Bavel et al., 2020, p. 461; Mertens et al., 2020, p. 3).

The outbreak of COVID-19 has caused a wave of fear worldwide and most extremely in countries such as China, Italy, Spain, the USA, France, Germany, Iran, and the (Addo et al., 2020, p. 482). It is believed that, within just a few months of its emergence, COVID-19, which infects millions of people in almost every country, kills hundreds of thousands and seriously shakes many economies, can only be slowed down by extreme behavior change and

<sup>1</sup> Asst. Prof. Dr. Meltem Canoğlu, Osmaniye Korkut Ata University, meltemcanoglu@osmaniye.edu.tr

to take protective measures that are meaningfully impressed by the perceived high-risk level. Thus, it is vital to get information from several origins such as public health experts, the government, and the media during the pandemic to improve people's perception of risk and take preventive measures (Khosravi, 2020).

In line with previous research conducted during viral outbreaks, studies on COVID-19 refer to rising fear worldwide levels. Fear can motivate behavior change in COVID-19, particularly when combined with high self-efficacy and perceived benefits. It can also play an essential role per public health measures related to COVID-19 (Harper et al. 2020; Pakpour & Griffiths 2020). On the other hand, extreme fear of COVID-19 (such as becoming infected or infecting others) can worsen anxiety symptoms and cause psychological distress in people with pre-existing psychological disorders (Alyami et al., 2020).

The future communication measures of COVID-19 related public health institutions should highlight the altruistic aspect of the efforts within the framework of the protection motivation theory and provide evidence of its high effectiveness in reducing the risk of infection with COVID-19 at both individual and collective levels (Camerini et al., 2019). Based on the protection motivation theory, a coping message should advise participants to minimize their risk exposure and highlight the potential negative consequences of not adopting the proposed action, with the threat appeal (Van Bavel et al., 2019, p. 29).

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