Anxiety and depression levels in Malta: A year into Covid-19 pandemic
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Background:
Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a number of lifestyle changes and restrictive measures. The aim was to assess for the impact of Covid-19 on anxiety- depression levels and associated behavioural attitudes among the adult population of Malta.

Methods:
An anonymous survey using Google Forms was disseminated on social media (1st to 26th of February), targeting the adult residents of Malta. The survey’s questions assessed for socio-demographic characteristics, changes in physical activity levels, and body weight. The Generalised Anxiety Disorder assessment tool was used to evaluate the level of anxiety and the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 assessment tool was used to evaluate the level of depression among the participants during the pandemic. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were performed.

Results:
A total of 1,034 participants responded. Mild anxiety levels (41.20% CI95%:38.24 - 44.23) and minimal depression levels (54.23% CI95%:51.17-57.25) were generally reported. On stratification by employment status, students reported severe anxiety levels (p = <0.01). Indeed, a participant reported, “COVID-19 made me very anxious...not knowing if I will be finishing my degree”. Covid-19 also impacted on behavioural attitudes, “I am eating more, I put on weight...resulting in feeling a bit depressed and have nothing to look forward to”. Indeed, a proportional increase in body weight was reported among those with mild to severe anxiety levels (p = <0.01). An inverse trend with an increase in anxiety and depression scores and decrease physical activity levels was observed (p = <0.01 respectively).
Conclusions:
The population’s mental health has been impacted differently, with some societal groups more susceptible than others. An increase in body weight and a decrease in physical activity appears to be linked with both anxiety and depression levels.

Key messages:
● Increase in mental health burden and obesity prevalence is anticipated as a resultant effect of Covid-19.
● Enhanced psychological support and prevention strategies targeting mental health and obesity are recommended.