

## IS 2020 A WORST YEAR?

What do you think about the year 2020? If you are like most of the people, you are likely to say that it's the worst year you have ever seen. What do we mean by that? When asked, people come up with all the negative events such as pandemic, lockdown, changes in routine, uncertainty, economic crisis, conflicts with neighboring countries, death of the most loved celebrities, rainforest fire, cyclonic storms, floods etc. to call 2020 the worst year of all. If we look beyond all these reasons, some underlying psychological factors appear to have played role in making us think this way.

### **Rocky past -Rosy future**

We humans, when evaluating the past, often take the reference of our personal struggles (which may or may not be significant enough), in order to make ourselves feel good and satisfied with life. Similarly, after having experienced self-perceived struggle and a bad phase, we also show tendency to expect the best things to happen in the future. When things don't meet the expectations, it makes us feel bad about it. The same phenomenon of rocky past and rosy future seems to have played role in deciding that the year 2020 is bad, as looking at the personal struggles of the previous year, this year hasn't been the same as most people had expected it to be.

### **Availability of Information**

We are also prone to experience availability bias which makes us judge the situations, events, or people around us on the basis of the information that is available to us at that particular moment. Both the media and social media are flooded with and constantly expose us to the negative news that overshadow the good things happening around us, which ultimately make us believe that these are the only events taking place in the world. Ever since the year 2020 began, constant news regarding the number of COVID cases, deaths of celebrities, natural calamities, made most of us believe that nothing positive is happening in the world.

### **Negativity under the spotlight**

According to evolutionary perspective, we tend to focus more on the negative, threatening and harmful events compared to the neutral or even positive ones. This natural tendency helps

humans increase the chances of survival by making oneself ready to face the harmful things in advance. Ever since this year began, our attention is oriented to watch, talk about and listen to the news related to illness and natural calamities and other threatening events which kept out of attention all the good news such as research progress in developing vaccines, reduction in pollutions, our improved hygienic habits, increased preferences for organic over artificial, increasing awareness about health related issues, people raising money for the needy, river restoration programs, technological advancements in all the work settings etc.

Having a flawed perception of reality is harmful in many ways. Constant exposure to negative events results into dissatisfaction with life, decreased self-efficacy, and leads to the development of mental health problems like anxiety, panic, or even depression. Although we humans are prone to experience many biases when perceiving reality, one can always learn to identify and then control them in effective ways.

1. One must acknowledge the fact that the type of social media, the type of content and the type of people we are in contact with affect our perception of reality in drastic ways. Thus we must be mindful of the information we receive, who shares it, and through which media platform we receive it.
2. To control the availability bias, one must not rely on the only piece of information available to us at the present moment, rather one must search for things he/she is missing out.
3. Lastly, people need to value what they already have and also need to start appreciating positive changes in their lives no matter how small they may appear. The understanding that, this is not a bad year but its just the bad things or events taking over the good ones, is must. The pandemic may be scary, but at least people are not medieval peasant with no understanding of how viral works.

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