

# Life@2m

**Aarthi Ratnam**

Department of International History – 2020 alumnus

*(noun) The awareness that we are not limited by our physical distance, but are defined by our empathy*

As the world around us was re-defined, our experiences and encounters also changed. The disruption to daily routines, movements and interactions has caused severe consequences to physical and mental well-being. With declining access to social support and emotional regulation, isolation and uncertainty created an increase in reported cases of eating disorders and mental health issues.

In India, it was reported that suicide was the leading cause for over 300 non-coronavirus deaths due to distressed triggers by the lockdown. By August 2020, eating disorders became the fifth most prominent mental health condition in the United States. The recommendation to limit activities including grocery shopping along with the perception of food scarcity has increased the risk of eating disorders. Further, the increase usage of video communication has created heightened body image issues.

My research will focus on the importance of normalizing dialogues about eating disorders and mental health. It will also shed light on how difficulties to access support may exacerbate existing health inequalities. During the pandemic, comparative suffering became a common feeling amongst most people. This tendency deprives oneself of the simple but powerful permission to feel. Looking at this newly defined world it is increasingly important to emphasise that empathy is not finite. Life may have been restricted to a physical distance, but in this post-COVID world we must never compensate for emotional connections and empathy.