

A Few Aspects of the Covid-19 Pandemic and their Effects on Mental Health

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Abstract: In the current state of events regarding the worldwide spread of the virus COVID-19, individuals are experiencing a constant state of uncertainty and fear which has very damaging effects on mental health. The isolation, economic decline, risk of infection might render most people unable to maintain a positive outlook on life in general. In order to combat these menacing factors, we need to find alternatives to obsolete ways of going through life and we must accept that with the help of technology, civic sense and spreading correct information, communities around the world could help alleviate some of the damage done by mandatory restrictions against the spreading of the virus.

Keywords: pandemic; crisis; mental health; lockdown

1. Introduction

“As a result of the emergence of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) infection in the Chinese city of Wuhan, a situation of socio-economic crisis and profound psychological distress rapidly occurred worldwide. Various psychological problems and important consequences in terms of mental health including stress, anxiety, depression, frustration, uncertainty during COVID-19 outbreak emerged progressively” (Serafini, 2020). Humans, as social beings, need the everyday social interactions provided by the groups they are a part of: group of friends, coworkers, family and so on. When that is stripped away from the individual, there might appear some issues, even more so as the fear of interaction appears because of the possibility of contracting a virus. Eventually, the individual fosters frustration because of the

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banning of social interactions that he wants and needs to have in order to function properly.

“The economic and psychosocial consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have been far-reaching and unprecedented around the world. These circumstances appear to have had profound psychological effects on all individuals worldwide. One psychological aspect of the COVID-19 pandemic is fear” (Pakpour, 2020). Fear is one of the most fundamental human emotion. It can be a motivating factor, as well as an inhibitive one. Regarding the feelings about an unknown, possibly deadly virus roaming around, the first, most possible response would be fear. Adding to the fear might be also the spreading of false information about the disease or the place it came from.

“Disease itself multiplied by forced quarantine to combat COVID-19 applied by nationwide lockdowns can produce acute panic, anxiety, obsessive behaviors, hoarding, paranoia, and depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the long run. These have been fueled by an “infodemic” spread via different platforms of social media. Outbursts of racism, stigmatization, and xenophobia against particular communities are also being widely reported” (Dubey, 2020).

2. Effects of COVID-19 on Mental Health

a) Anxiety

“People with anxiety-related or mood disorders were more negatively affected by COVID-19 compared to those with no mental health disorder; however, adding to psychological burden, those with anxiety-related disorders reported greater fears about danger and contamination, socioeconomic consequences, xenophobia, and traumatic stress symptoms than the other groups” (Asmundson, 2020).

b) PTSD

“Of the many vulnerable groups affected by the spread of COVID-19, veterans have been especially impacted by the pandemic. Beginning in March 2020, nationwide shelter-in-place orders rapidly led to widespread job loss and economic upheaval; disruption and breakdown of multiple support systems; and increases in family stress, all of which may exacerbate underlying PTSD symptoms” (Held, 2020).

c) Depression

“Feeling depression is high among people and it was significantly more in illiterate, unskilled and Skilled workers and who belong to lower socioeconomic groups. Reasons of feeling depressed were corona fear, lockdown, worried about family, helplessness, etc.” (Heena, Grover, & Kishore, 2020, pg. 27-31).

d) ADHD

“The current COVID-19 virus crisis is creating unprecedented challenges at every level of society. Individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders such as Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are particularly vulnerable and may display increased behavioural problems. The current crisis also poses several important questions for their clinicians on how best to deliver care within the new restrictions” (Cortese, 2020).

3. Coping Methods**a) Social Media**

“...an excessive use of social media content during a public health crisis could be rewarding in terms of obtaining informational, emotional and peer support, but at the same time, it might take a toll on mental health. There is no easy fix to people's stress disorders during a pandemic. Some may choose ordinary coping methods they used before to deal with new stressors, while others try to reinforce a strong sense of resilience. The findings imply that taking a social media break from time to time helps improve people's mental well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic” (Zhong, 2020). One of the reasons social media is so popular is because of the various communities that people have access to, based on common interests which are not always shared by our offline community. The power of this connection can very well bring comfort to people during the lockdown, by distracting even for a little from the unpleasant events that are taking place.

b) Religious coping

“In times of crisis, humans have a tendency to turn to religion for comfort and explanation. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic is no exception. Using daily data on Google searches for 95 countries, this research demonstrates that the COVID-19 crisis has increased Google searches for prayer (relative to all Google searches) to the highest level ever recorded. More than half of the world population had prayed

to end the coronavirus” (Bentzen, 2020). Every individual has certain beliefs about the nature of his surroundings which help with coping when things seem to make no sense: by trying to tie a random succession of events to a power that is not in our control, we feel relieved of negative emotions or other burdens. While constantly being threatened by a virus, losing a job or even rising tension between family members who cohabit in a lockdown, we need an exterior means of support which translates into each own’s religious beliefs.

c) Conspiracy theories

“...results showed that COVID-19 related (Conspiracy Theory) CT beliefs were: strongly related to broader CT beliefs, higher in those with lower levels of education; and, positively (although weakly) correlated with more negative attitudes towards government responses” (Georgiou, 2020). Given the fact that rumoring is a way of bonding, people would be more likely to make up “conspiracy theories” and share them in order to feel a sense of belonging, or to check if their opinions are shared, even more so while being confined, when feelings of loneliness accentuate.

4. Support

a) Telehealth

“COVID-19 and related safety restrictions have thrust healthcare workers and researchers into a new reality of healthcare that relies heavily, or even exclusively, on telehealth methods. These changes have forced treatment providers and researchers to be agile in adopting these methods in order to maintain continuity of patient care and data collection” (Kleykamp, 2020).

b) Information

“During the ongoing outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), people use social media to acquire and exchange various types of information at a historic and unprecedented scale. Only the situational information are valuable for the public and authorities to response to the epidemic. Therefore, it is important to identify such situational information and to understand how it is being propagated on social media, so that appropriate information publishing strategies can be informed for the COVID-19 epidemic.”(Li, 2020) “Knowledge is power”, the famous words of Thomas Jefferson resonate and are applicable even to a pandemic. By remaining

informed about the real risks and by differentiating between facts and fiction, people can decrease feelings of anxiety, stress, uncertainty regarding the virus.

5. Conclusions

While initially, the reality of lockdown has risen a wave of shock regarding the mild but extremely necessary confinement of freedom, eventually other feelings got highlighted: anger, frustration, anxiety, sadness and so on. Every means of alleviating these feelings has a downside too: by constantly searching for information about the pandemic people could start believing everything they hear or read, including fake news. The appeal of fake news or news that deviate from the majority's opinion is that they could appear like a 'hidden truth' discovered only by a select few; spreading information that deviates from what the majority believes in might give individuals some sense of importance. The optimal information-seeking behavior would be trusting the official sources, but also not being personally affected by the statistics.

Keeping in touch with family and friends from a distance is very important also during the pandemic, in order to get and give the moral or emotional support that is needed.

While there may not be so many benefits to a lockdown, changing the perspective we see things through might give us more feelings of hope.

In order to not focus so much on the negative side of lockdown, individuals could focus more on hobbies and other activities that alleviate stress.

Some aspects of our social and working sphere of life might need some adjustments, by transforming even the small 'real' portion of life into a digital one. By any means we should not forget that not everyone has access to or is very skilled in this domain, so the least we can do is show support regarding this issue.

The most useful behavior we can adopt is trying to stay positive and also spread positivity around us. There is no need to add our own contribution to the already existing wave of paranoia, fear and chaos.

In general, behaving like good citizens regarding the pandemic is most needed in this time: following the rules and indications of authorities, trying to keep a healthy hygiene of the mind and body can give us a sense of relief that we did everything in our power to protect ourselves and our community.

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