



Covid-19 & It's Impact Upon Mental Health: Issues & Concerns

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Abstract

Over the last few weeks most parts of the world are under an unprecedented lockdown situation with people being confined to their homes with a view to contain the spread of COVID-19 and minimize the number of lives lost owing to the Pandemic. The magnitude of economic losses this pandemic is going to result in is definitely going to be huge as already hinted by IMF and other international bodies. However, apart from economic losses, the pandemic also poses a severe threat to the mental health of citizens as well as they spend their days confined at home. The present article looks into the impact of COVID-19 upon mental health and tries to examine its related dimensions.

Keywords: COVID-19; Corona Virus; Pandemic; Mental Health; Health Care

1. Introduction

The month of December in the year 2019 is all set to be remembered forever by the world on account of it being the month that brought about the most severe world-level crisis that shook the entire world and is set to change the working model of the world across all dimensions in the coming times. Corona Virus or COVID-19 originated from Wuhan in the Hubei Province of China, where the first case was reported (Surveillances, V. 2020) and since then in a matter of weeks the virus has spread across almost continents of the globe. As on 12 May 2020, according to WHO the current figures suggest that 4.18 million cases have been reported across 212 countries. The reported mortality rate for the disease being 3.4 (Baud, D., et. al., 2020).

2. Background of the study:

The Pandemic COVID-19 has brought the world to a stand-still and in this scenario the uncertainties about the future and health among citizens have increased the chances of mental health risk among the masses.

The impact of the pandemic upon mental health needs to be very clearly understood and appreciated so that the same may be handled in an effective manner.

3. Study Objective(s):

The objective(s) of the enquiry is to clearly understand the mental health repercussions of the pandemic and also suggest measures to resolve the same.

4. Methods:

Review of existing literature on the subject along with discussions with health care workers and also common citizens form the base of this paper.

5. Review of Literature

5.1 Containment Measures & Role of Health Care Providers

Taking into account the exponentially contagious nature of the virus, the public health measures that have been taken majorly focus upon quarantining, testing and containment to arrest the spread of the virus and to

subsequently flatten the curve of COVID-19 spread (Khosrawipour, V, et. al., 2020). However, as these measures are initiated and strictly followed across various nations, other concerns like a growing unrest as a result of being confined at home, escalating financial losses, uncertainty over job remaining secure (especially among private sector and contractual employees), lack of clarity about the messages and information from the respective higher authorities have led to increase in instances of emotional distress and at times contributed to higher risks of other mental health disorders attributed to the pandemic (Wang, C., et.al. 2020). Given such a scenario, health care providers have a critically important role to play in addressing these issues which can be considered as a very crucial part of the present pandemic response.

5.2 THE CRUCIAL CHALLENGES

The WHO has been issuing regular bulletins to keep the world informed in this period of lockdown and it has expressed grave concerns over the potential impact of the pandemic upon the mental health of citizens. The WHO notes that measures of lock-down and self quarantine have had a noticeable impact upon social life of people and it does not rule out instances of increase in number of patients suffering from anxiety, depression and other mental health related disorders. As far as social repercussions of the pandemic is concerned there have been increase in cases of reported domestic violence, depression among almost all sections of the population confined at home, worsening of existing conditions among the elderly and so on. Withdrawal symptoms on account of closing of tobacco shops and liquor outlets have also led to increase in neurotic disorders among people in several states of India (Kar, S. K., et.al., 2020). The lockdown across the country and various parts of the world has been widely agreed upon as the most potent strategy to flatten the curve of instances of COVID-19 infections and subsequently break the

transmission chain, However, it cannot be ignored that the lockdown has also resulted in a restlessness among those confined at home and it has also affected children in a very pronounced manner. The present scenario is definitely not an unexpected one because the fear induced by a pandemic of such nature is very high and owing the high degree of contagiousness associated with the disease it is but natural that population at large is in a state of anxiety owing to the possibilities of getting infected (Montemurro, N., 2020). Moreover, there's a lot of speculation all around in the absence of any authoritative and conclusive information related to the disease with currently no definite treatment to counter it after it has occurred or prevent it from occurring. The mental turmoil and anxiety associated with COVID-19 is more compelling and intense than the same associated with SARS that occurred almost two decades back owing to the fact that in the present age the amount of air travel and other transportation modes have increased significantly which has unfortunately made the spread of Pandemic much easier than in the past. Media which is playing a very important role in enhancing awareness about the pandemic, at times does adversely impact the psychological health of viewers due to extensive and vivid coverage of the patients and their conditions.

Research exploring the psychological impacts of a disease suggest that pandemics can indeed trigger mental health issues even among those who had no history of mental problems and they may also rapidly worsen the conditions of those who are having existing pre-conditions. Further, pandemics may also wreck havoc among those who are looking after affected individuals as well.

Moreover, being the age of information the ready and 24x7 availability of information through social media has added to the stress and anxiety levels of citizens. Due to various social media platforms there have been numerous instances of fake news and unverified

reports which have added to the state of mental unrest. As reported by various news channels there have been cases of persons being reluctant to admit their foreign visit and subsequently contracting the virus, on account of fears of being separated from families not realizing the latent dangers associated with such acts. For such sections of the population in-depth psychological counseling by specialized health care workers is very urgently needed.

Any pandemic is associated with a significant loss of human lives and COVID-19 is no exception. Till date there have been 286 thousand deaths world-wide and more than 2200 deaths in India. No one is sure of the final tally till the severity of the pandemic is totally under control. There is a pressing need for providing emotional support to the members of a family who are recovering after losing their dear ones. Children confined at home are acutely missing peer support and outdoor activities (Ghosh, R., et. al., 2020). They need to be supported by adults well in these tough times. However, the adults also need proper psychological counseling. Supportive environment and guidance are very important for everyone as we brave out this lockdown period during the pandemic.

6. Findings:

There is a pressing need for providing emotional support to the members of a family who are recovering after losing their dear ones. Children confined at home are acutely missing peer support and outdoor activities. They need to be supported by adults well in these tough times. However, the adults also need proper psychological counseling. Supportive environment and guidance are very important for everyone as we brave out this lockdown period during the pandemic.

7. LOOKING AHEAD

The health care workers, a segment that these days are widely addressed as 'Corona Warriors' are indeed playing the most important role in these challenging

times (Pandey, S. K., & Sharma, V., 2020). The well-being of these health care professionals is extremely important. They have been discharging their duties under extremely challenging circumstances and they are always under risk of getting infected as they work in close contact with corona infected patients. The concerns of health care workers have been taken note of WHO and guidelines for their welfare have been laid out elaborately (Driggin E., et al., 2020).

Problems facing developing countries like India are more severe as compared to the rest of the world given the large population and proportionately lesser number of medical staff. Further, mental health care professionals are even scarcer especially in today's times when mental health care is being very deeply needed by the population locked indoors and facing uncertainties related to the future. Given this scenario, where the public health infrastructure in India is not well equipped to handle an epidemic of such proportion, it is important that people evolve indigenous support plans to work in parallel with those being provided by the corona warriors.

It is further important to note that the corona warriors all across the world are working under a great deal of stress and tension and they are being away from their families for long period of time. It is important that measures be taken for the well being of all corona warriors.

In the future till the vaccine is found there has to be a phased easing of lockdown across various parts of the world and it is expected that mental health of citizens gets due attention as well.

8. Conclusion:

The public health infrastructure in India is not well equipped to handle an epidemic of such proportion. It is therefore important that people evolve indigenous support plans to work in parallel with those being provided by the corona warriors.

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working under a great deal of stress and tension and they are being away from their families for long period of time. It is important that measures be taken for the well being of all corona warriors. In the future till the vaccine is found there has to be a phased easing of lock-down across various parts of the world and it is expected that mental health of citizens gets due attention as well.

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