

Mental Health during COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND

COVID-19 or coronavirus disease 2019 is the pandemic that had hit all the aspect of the human life in a negative way. Proper solutions needs to be find out before situation worsens.

SUMMARY

COVID-19 affected the mental wellbeing of all the people inhabiting the earth in some way or the other. As extreme uncertainty is attached to the event, it is impossible to forecast the future which everyone care about. In that quest we become anxious and forget to fully live the present which can be a slippingpoint to depression. Proper use of technology like telemedicine can be done to ensure larger penetration of psychological services.

CONCLUSION

More study between the effects of pandemic and its effect on mental health needs to be done. Telemedicine and communication can be the game changer in such times of distress to tackle the problem of social distress.

INTRODUCTION

The unprecedented nature of the medical emergency has been currently ongoing for almost last one year. The novel coronavirus or SARS-COV-2 is the culprit virus behind the unprecedented situation. Coronavirus disease 2019 or COVID-19 caused by SARS-COV-2 or novel coronavirus has wreaked all of the aspects of human life. Since its initial occurrence in Wuhan city of the Hubeiprovince in China,(1)its devastating consequences has been felt all over the world. From China to Europe and now in UnitedStates of America, no signs of stoppage can be seen. As of January 6, 2021, 86,809,552 number of infection caused due to COVID-19 infectious disease has been reported and 1,876,156 case fatalities or mortalities has been registered from more than 200 regions of the world(2). The case fatality rate is way less than its previous counterparts of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)(3) and Middle Eastern respiratory syndrome (MERS) and stands

at one to two percent(4). But the extent of the disease and deadliness has far exceeded the previous two outbreaks making one of the worst event in the human history of last hundred century. In fact on march 11, 2020, World health Organization (WHO) was compelled to designate the COVID-19 as pandemic(5), one of its kind announcement about the disease outbreak made by WHO since its inception. Before that it was designated as public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC). United States of America, India, Brazil, Russian federation, France, and United Kingdom are the torchbearers of the most number of cases(6). In fact these six countries alone accounts for more than half of the total infection caused by the novel coronavirus and case fatalities from the same due to medical complications attached to it. Also the new mutated strain has been discovered after genomic study of the samples from United Kingdom(7) and South Africa(8). The new strain is

supposedly seventypercent more virulent than the current one. Many countries are reporting to impose lockdown again to restrict the spread of the new virus. Many aspects of human life has been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. One of which is less talked about that is mental health. Pandemic has affected humans not only physically but also mentally. Lockdown induced loneliness,frustration, anxiety were all result of uncertainty attached to the situation(9). Many groups of population were affected differentially. Health care professionals who were and are at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19 pandemic are tremendously stressed due to working culture and anxiety attached to COVID-19 era. Elderly and pregnant women who are already designated as vulnerable section has been under great depression.Likewise students are also experiencing mild to severeanxiety and depression based on various factors. In this article the holistic overview has been done in order to understand all these topics.

PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

A less noticed condition is brewing among the medical professionals and it is quite often neglected. The psychological distress among health care professionals is a grave cause of concern as they are the backbone of the fight against COVID-19. They are not only getting physically reduced but mentally they are on lowering side. In the initial days of the pandemic, as the uncertainty attached to the disease was tremendous, doctors and other allied health care professionals faced huge hardships in terms of social stigmatizations. Doctors and other alliedhealth care workers were attacked upon on several instances if the kin of the patient was not aware of the deadly nature of the pandemic. They were evicted from the buildings they reside, new places were barred because of possible spreading of the disease. The height of

insensitivity reached when a doctor died due to COVID-19, the medically illiterate people denied him funeral space which is the fundamental right of any human being and also morally incorrect. This and many more news about such incidents createda negative sentiments among the serving health care professionals and induced a certain degree of psychological distress. Health careworkers felt that their efforts of containing the virus means nothing to people(10). The huge virulent nature of the virus had already overwhelmed the health care facilities. But the number of health care professionals per unit population is already not up to the mark. It creates unbalance as huge number of patient influx creates problems in dealing with the pandemic. Doctors and nurses were stressed that they have to work round the clock. Also they have to followguidelines which mandates compulsory donning of personal and protective equipment's (PPE) kit in order to safeguard themselves from the virus. This has created huge challenge as PPE kit cannot be intermittently worn and done away with and one has to work continuously for around 12 hours. The physical strain was so much that many worker felt low on energy and completely exhausted. Also the constant fear of transmitting the virus to their family members and loved ones was nagging them and this induces anxiety and depression(11). Contracting the virus to themselves was always present there. Sometimes lack of PPE kits and proper working gears also proved to be taking toll on mental health as one has to live in constant fear of getting infected by the lethal virus. Fatigue was a routine phenomenon as the long working hours without getting any leave has to be completed. A study conducted in Himalayan country of Nepal showed that around 41.9 percent of health care professionals had symptoms of anxiousness, three out of everyeighth health care professionals were having depression which constitutes to around

37.5 percent and around a third of them had insomnia or sleeping sickness. Inadequate supply of preventive kits and improper implementation of mitigating measure accounted for anxiety at workplace. The huge fatalities among health care professionals were also seen as negative news and induced anxiety. According to International nurses council more nurses had died during the COVID-19 duty and due to same complications than in First World War(12).

PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG POPULATION

With the inception of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, uncertainty was already coupled with it as the novelty of the disease was huge and there was no precedent of the disease spread. Steps in dark were taken and blanket measures found the most favorite option among governmental agencies as little was known about the containment of the virus. The initial steps of lockdown and movement restrictions were the result of the same along with various other non-pharmacological interventions. This left the large chunk of the population confined at home. Most of them were on their technologically advanced devices such as smartphones and television. The information explosion that people are getting from these devices are most of the time unverified and negative. This has already induced huge anxiety among the people. Home confinement means away from your loved ones and family members who might be in different city altogether, but due to lockdown and movement restrictions, it was not possible to meet them creating fear of not seeing them physically. Main reasons of pandemic induced anxiety were fear of getting contracted with the virus, frustration, unknown anxiety, loneliness and boredom. Uncontrolled fear related to infection was widely seen(13). As the true pictures coming out of Italy and Spain of vast number of case fatalities due to COVID-

19, people were natural nervous about the grim scenario. They started any symptoms which is not even related to COVID-19 considering as COVID-19 symptoms. This had taken huge on their physical as well as mental state. Also news of some relatives being positive for the infection increases their fear and they started to worry more about their and families health. Man is a social animal and pandemic has separated and made them socially isolated due to high transmissibility of the viral infection. Also COVID-19 infected patient were isolated and quarantined in home or in a COVID-19 care facility. They were not allowed to meet their family members and loved ones. So do family members and loved ones were prohibited to meet the patient. The long period in isolation and no contact with the family instils a fear of missing out on various events. Especially the vulnerable sections such as elderlies and pregnant women were the hardest hit group among population. In elderlies, they are already in their solitude time and remains cut off from the mainstream events already due to their health concern. Pandemic designated them as most hit section of the society in terms of case fatalities and various guidelines regarding prohibition on the movement of the elderlies were issued in order to protect them. This creates anxiety in them which would worsens the situation. Also in pregnant women who is already in tension about the outcome of the pregnancy, pandemic adds to the woes of the mothers bearing child. They are protective about their upcoming offspring in turn under constant anxiety and fear. Frustration and boredom due to monotonous tasks and work from home has been introduced. Ban on going out hits the food refreshing option and render it ineffective(14).

In a study conducted among 398 respondents, stress level after trauma that is post traumatic disorder were almost four times higher in quarantined respondents than the non-quarantined one. The alexithymia traits can be one possible

reason behind the quarantine related stress. It is known to reduce psychological resilience which can be helpful in such situation to manage the situation. It may induce suicidal behavior. Uncertainty about necessary supplies also a reason for the frustration and anxiety. Hoax spread in Infodemic like artificial shortage of commodities are creating general perception that things won't last long and they should stock up all the things necessary for survival. The needs must be addressed or assurance must be provided by government in order to ease up the tense situation. It is seen that people mostly male addicted to bad habits such as liquor consumption and other psychotropic substances have found to be indulging in domestic violence with their spouses. Loss of job and livelihood has been the reason behind building up the hidden rage and anxiety and it vented out on physically weaker spouses which is completely unacceptable. Rise in domestic violence is a grave cause of concern as generally victim is the women of the house or children's which are physically weaker. This can induce childhood trauma which last lifelong along with children. Women may go into depression and even become suicidal due to negative and hostile environment towards her. This needs to be stopped and proper precaution must be taken. Also several million unwanted pregnancies are expected as the lockdown as prohibited to access the necessary contraception which must be used during copulation(15).

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT ON STUDENTS

According to study conducted among Chinese students there were remarkable rise in anxiety. A seven item questionnaire was distributed among 7143 respondents. Approximately 1 percent of the respondents showed severe symptom of anxiety, 21.3 percent students were experiencing milder symptoms of the anxiety. There were some protective

factors found in the study. For example financial backup, living with parents etc. Provided cushion for the psychological distress. Urban students were more anxious as third lifestyle was stopped after the announcement of the lockdown. Rural students were comparatively less panicked as viral spread was less in rural areas as compared to urban areas(16). Weather was pleasant and air cleaner made at least their mood lighter. Academic delays and uncertainty attached to it made the environment hostile for the students. No information on exams and promotion to next class was given which darkens the mood of the students. Link from the study was broken and folks felt depressed. Especially Uncertainty has made all the schedules and future planning of students go in vain. Uncertainty about the future, distance apart from the parents, lack of financial resources and employment are the key factors affecting the youth.

INFODEMIC

Along the sidelines of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is another pandemic is brewing also known as misinformation pandemic or Infodemic. World Health Organization (WHO) has to come up with the term so as to underline and highlight the menace that it has been spreading all across the globe. Infodemic is basically transmission of unauthorized, fake messages, mis information, wrong claims, and cyber frauds and so on to exploit the ordinary person who has lesser knowledge about technology to exploit him or her emotionally, financially and to misguide him or her on various issues(17). As the penetration of technology reached several times than previous era, more and more people got hands on smartphones and internet. But they often lack digital literacy which makes them vulnerable and soft targets of such Infodemic. The problem is so deep rooted and encrypted that it is not easy to track the messages that are fake or wrong in nature. Mis information can create menace that needs separate

machinery to handle. Some examples are eye opener and tells us why we need to tackle them at their speed. After pandemic arrived and lockdown was announced across the world, billions of people utilized the time on being on social media and other such websites. Various messages were circulating all across social media platforms claiming fake cure about COVID-19 and urging people to try at least once. This can create huge medical disaster as self-medication in lethal disease like COVID-19 may back fire and can create another health emergency. Quackery was also on rise and various tantric and false spiritual people were claiming to have found the cure of the COVID-19 and will only give to those who are able to pay hefty amount of money. People with various contraindications need to be extra cautious before trying any medication on their own. Various testimonials of the fake patients recovered from COVID-19 about due course of treatment were doing rounds on social media(18). These were fake and need not to be believed. In the start of the lockdown hoax messages about the never ending lockdown and urging people to stock up as much as they can created a huge panic buying chain and put severe strain on logistics and distribution cycle. Also black marketing and selling fake goods were on rise and it was later understood that that message was fake but after the damage was done. These messages spread like wildfire and are difficult to trace. This also creates mental stress and widespread social distress as constant hammering of unverified negative news disheartens the people(19). Increased screen time may harm not in physical way but in mental way too. Financial fraudsters found space when lockdown was announced (20,21). Various phone calls, messages and links were sent to victim in order to fraud him or her of money. Especially pensioners and age old people. They have less knowledge about how to use technology safely. This same thing

was exploited and large sums of money were looted from them. Already under distress, looted and defrauded people were left helpless and were pushed in depression (22-24). Many of them have committed suicide due to these frauds. Urgent action to curb these frauds and online misappropriation of funds needs to check in order to safeguard people from another Infodemic (25,26).

MITIGATING STEPS

The pandemic has brought the world at standstill and we need to find the way out. Those factors which are resilient be it humans or conditions or habits were sailed through the storm. Therefore building resilience in every aspects of our life can make us stronger inside out. ESPECIALLY mental resilience is the key as if mental health is not well then the physical health affects automatically in a negative way. Therefore maintaining mental well being can bring overall wellness in our body. ENABLING effective communication and maintaining it can be a game changer as lack of communication can cause catastrophic change. It frees up the person with rage and anxiety that is deep hidden. Also effective communication can stimulate will power which is strongly associated in building resilience in tough times. In addition providing sufficient and minimum psychological and mental health services to all despite of their nature may prove as a screening test in the time of such social distress. Accessing or seeking psychological help is still not openly accepted in our society and considered as sign of mental illness. But that is not the case. Effective communication and solution problems of the psychologically distressed patient can be effectively delivered by psychological specialist or service provider. Therefore it is essential to first accept the condition and then act upon it in order to solve it. Mental health education is a must in order to sensitize the society about these problems. OTHERWISE these

problems culminates in top bigger which can prove fatal in the form of suicides or aggressive tendencies. Usage of telemedicine can be effectively fine to serve the purpose of consultations. Wide range and constant connection can be ensured to multiple patient can be achieved through telemedicine. Also no rule of movement restrictions will be violated as access to the technology only needs smart phones and internet connection which are by far now everywhere available.

CONCLUSION

Pandemic has done one thing good and that is raising voice about mental illnesses. The socially distressed situation has create a major challenge and needs huge investment in various models dealing with the same. Infodemic needs equally raging response from the competent authority along with the help of non-governmental organization and civil society groups in order to deal with the problem. The anxiety and depression becomes graver and graver if left untreated or unexamined at first place. Various recreational activities can be done in order to release pressure form patients mind. Yoga and meditation are the places where one can take refuge and experience blissfulness. Remaining positive in all the situation may also be helpful in tackling such situation. After all mental wellbeing ensures physical wellbeing.

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