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The Coronavirus Pandemic and Its Impact on Mental Health

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Abstract: But according to scientists the Covid-19 pandemic is not just a medical phenomenon; it affects individuals and society and causes disruption, anxiety, stress, stigma, and xenophobia. A very serious aspect of the pandemic is that the behaviour of an individual as a unit of society or a community has marked effects on the dynamics of a pandemic that involves the level of severity, degree of flow, and aftereffects. Reflecting on mental health in pandemic one realizes that more than making a political or religious or economic issue out of the rising situation, the need of the hour is to cope with the mental state of us humans (Fox, 2020). Hence all people of responsibilities as medical scientists, psychologists and psychiatrists, of all fields to be empathetic and compassionate

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to humanity as all of us are placed in this situation irrespective of one's state of life.

Keywords: Covid-19 Pandemic, Mental health, Risk, Stigmatisation

The common understanding of pandemic is merely a medical phenomenon. But according to psychologists, a pandemic is not just a medical phenomenon; it affects individuals and society and causes disruption, anxiety, stress, stigma, and xenophobia. A very serious aspect of the pandemic is that the behaviour of an individual as a unit of society or a community has marked effects on the dynamics of a pandemic that involves the level of severity, degree of flow, and aftereffects (Javed et al., 2020). For example, the rapid human-to-human transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 resulted in the enforcement of regional lockdowns to stem the further spread of the disease. Isolation, social distancing, and closure of educational institutes, workplaces, and entertainment venues consigned people to stay in their homes to help break the chain of transmission. However, the restrictive measures undoubtedly have affected the social and mental health of individuals from across the board (Javed et al., 2020).

As more and more people are forced to stay at home in self-isolation to prevent the further flow of the pathogen at the societal level, governments must take the necessary measures to provide mental health support as prescribed by the experts. The psychological state of an individual that contributes toward community health varies from person to person and depends on his background and professional and social standings (Javed et al., 2020). Thus as human persons, we are segregated and alienated at this juncture, and more than ever before humanity is segregated and our interpersonal relationships are affected in space and time.

Studies tell us that quarantine and self-isolation can most likely harm one's mental health. A review published in *The Lancet* said that the separation from loved ones, loss of freedom, boredom, and uncertainty can cause a deterioration in an individual's mental health status (Javed et al., 2020). To overcome this, measures at the individual and societal levels are required. Under the current global situation, both children and adults are experiencing a mix of emotions. They can be placed in a situation or an environment that may be new and can be potentially damaging to their health (Javed et al., 2020). Some of the areas of risk groups that should be taken are the following;

Children and Teens at Risk

As we are in the pandemic, children, away from their school, friends, and colleagues, staying at home can have many questions about the outbreak and they look toward their parents or caregivers to get the answer. Studies tell us that not all children and parents respond to stress in the same way. For example, kids can experience anxiety, distress, social isolation, and an abusive environment that can have short- or long-term effects on their mental health. Some common changes in children's behaviour can be:

- Excessive crying and annoying behaviour, Increased sadness, depression, or worry
- Difficulties with concentration and attention
- Changes in, or avoiding, activities that they enjoyed in the past
- Unexpected headaches and pain throughout their bodies
- Changes in eating habits

To help offset negative behaviours, psychologists advise parents to remain calm, deal with the situation wisely, and answer all of the child's questions to the best of their abilities.

Parents can take some time to talk to their children about the COVID-19 outbreak and share some positive facts, figures, and information. Parents can help to reassure them that they are safe at home and encourage them to engage in some healthy activities including indoor sports and some physical and mental exercises (Javed et al., 2020). Parents can also develop a home schedule that can help their children to keep up with their studies. Parents should show less stress or anxiety at their home as children perceive and feel negative energy from their parents. The involvement of parents in healthy activities with their children can help to reduce stress and anxiety and bring relief to the overall situation (Javed et al., 2020).

Elders and People with Disabilities at Risk

In this situation, elderly people are more prone to the COVID-19 outbreak due to both clinical and social reasons such as having a weaker immune system or other underlying health conditions and distancing from their families and friends due to their busy schedules. According to medical experts, people aged 60 or above are more likely to get the SARS-CoV-2 and can develop a serious and life-threatening condition even if they are in good health (Javed et al., 2020 & Davis, 2015).

The consequences of Physical Distancing

Physical distancing due to the COVID-19 outbreak can have drastic negative effects on the mental health of the elderly and disabled individuals. Physical isolation at home among family members can put the elderly and disabled person at serious mental health risk. It can cause anxiety, distress, and induce a traumatic situation for them. Elderly people depend on young ones for their daily needs, and self-isolation can critically damage a family system. The elderly and disabled people living in nursing homes can face extreme mental health issues. However, something as simple as a phone call during the pandemic outbreak can help to console elderly people (Karimundackal, 2020). COVID-19 can also result in increased

stress, anxiety, and depression among elderly people already dealing with mental health issues (Ronald, 2020).

Family members may witness any of the following changes to the behaviour of older relatives, such as Irritating and shouting behaviour, change in their sleeping and eating habits, and emotional outbursts (Javed et al., 2020).

The World Health Organization suggests that family members should regularly check on older people living within their homes and at nursing facilities (Javed et al., 2020). Younger family members should take some time to talk to older members of the family and become involved in some of their daily routines if possible.

Health Workers at Risk

Dealing with the pandemic, doctors, nurses, and paramedics working as a front-line force to fight the COVID-19 outbreak may be more susceptible to develop mental health symptoms (Javed et al., 2020). Fear of catching a disease, long working hours, unavailability of protective gear and supplies, patient load, unavailability of effective COVID-19 medication, death of their colleagues after exposure to COVID-19, social distancing and isolation from their family and friends, and the dire situation of their patients may take a negative toll of the mental health of health workers. The working efficiency of health professionals may decrease gradually as the pandemic prevails. Health workers should take short breaks between their working hours and deal with the situation calmly and in a relaxed manner (Javed et al., 2020).

Stigmatization

Another cause of great concern is of people recently released from quarantine can experience stigmatization and develop a mix of emotions. Everyone may feel differently and have a different welcome by society when they come out of quarantine. People who recently recovered may have to exercise social

Health workers who try to save lives and protect society may also experience social distancing and changes in the behavior of family members!

distancing from their family members, friends, and relatives to ensure their family's safety because of the unprecedented viral nature. Different age groups respond to this social behaviour differently, which can have both short- and long-term effects (Javed et al., 2020).

Health workers who try to save lives and protect society may also experience social distancing, changes in the behaviour of family members, and stigmatization for being suspected of carrying COVID-19 (Javed et al., 2020). Previously infected individuals and health professionals (dealing with pandemic) may develop sadness, anger, or frustration because friends or loved ones may have unfounded fears of contracting the disease from contact with them, even though they have been determined not to be contagious (Javed et al., 2020).

Medical experts in mental health tell us that the current situation requires a clear understanding of the effects of the recent outbreak on the mental health of people of different age groups to prevent and avoid the COVID-19 pandemic (Javed et al., 2020). For this the following guidelines can be followed by every one of us as we are related to one another and responsible for one another:

- Understanding the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak on the mental health of various populations are as important as

understanding its clinical features, transmission patterns, and management.

- Spending time with family members including children and elderly people, involvement in different healthy exercises and sports activities, following a schedule/routine, and taking a break from traditional and social media can all help to overcome mental health issues.
- Public awareness campaigns focusing on the maintenance of mental health in the prevailing situation are urgently needed (Javed et al., 2020).

Conclusion

Reflecting on mental health in pandemic one realizes that more than making a political or religious or economic issue out of the rising situation, the need of the hour is to cope with the mental state of us humans (Fox, 2020). Hence all people of responsibilities as medical scientists, psychologists and psychiatrists, of all fields to be empathetic and compassionate to humanity as all of us are placed in this situation irrespective of one's state of life (Pandikattu, 2020). Therefore, no one is superior or inferior in this hour, we are mere fellow-servants of one another as one humanity, reminding us the teaching to 'love our neighbour as oneself.'

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