



MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR ADULTS DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

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ABSTRACT

World Health Organization (WHO) in January 2020 acknowledged the outbreak of a new coronavirus disease, COVID-19, to be an emergency of the International Concern. COVID-19 has eminently affected several nations in the world, and this time of crisis is generating psychological concerns throughout the population. In order to avoid the rapid widespread of COVID-19, government sector has taken rigorous measures and have followed lockdown to ensure social distancing to lower the transmission rate of the virus. However, lockdown has caused widespread uncertainty and despair amongst the people, especially those who have a history of mental health disorders. The purpose of this review is to provide pre-emptive strategies to cope with mental health issues in light of COVID-19 lockdown. The paper aims to contribute to highlight psychological challenges that are likely to emerge in the adult population due to the outbreak of the virus. It may provide references for the government and policy makers to prepare strategies and take necessary actions to ensure mental health and wellbeing of isolated populace.

KEYWORDS : COVID-19, lockdown, mental health, psychological considerations, adult population

INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus emerged in 2019 also referred as COVID-19 has been declared as a pandemic, and is also considered as a "crisis" (McFarlane et al., 2020). It originated from Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019 and since then, has acquired nationwide attention due to its rapid widespread and severe implications on health, economy, education and all the essential aspects of the society (Xiang et al., 2020). The outbreak of COVID-19 has augmented transmission due to its emergence in the highly mobile population.

World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a public health emergency and a matter of immediate concern (Lau et al., 2020). In light of its outbreak, several countries including China have imposed lockdown in their states to contain the spread of COVID-19 via human-to-human transmission. Lau et al. (2020) confirmed that taking strict lockdown measures in China has resulted in a decreased growth rate of positive COVID-19 cases among the population. This recognition that the confinement of people minimizes the spread of coronavirus has motivated the governments of several countries to initiate lockdown (Briscese, Lacetera, Macis & Tonin, 2020). In India, considering the onset of COVID-19, the government announced a nationwide lockdown commencing from 24th March 2020.

The ongoing outbreak and the increasing spread of novel coronavirus has caused panic, as there lies limited data on its epidemiological characteristics, there is no cure or vaccination developed (Zhang et al., 2020). COVID-19 pandemic has provided an opportunity to acknowledge its immediate and long-term impact on people mentally and take appropriate actions to minimize its adverse effects.

The purpose of this review paper is to explore the psychological impact on adults of this lockdown in light of COVID-19. This paper highlights the issues observed due to lockdown by referring to the existing academic literature, news reports and articles, on the current topic of research.

Mental Health and its Association with COVID-19

Mental health is an integral and essential component of health. WHO (2002) states: "Mental Health as a state of complete physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being

and not merely the absence of disease."

An individual maintaining optimal level of mental health realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to contribute to his or her community. Mental health is fundamental to collective and individual ability as humans to think, emote, interact with each other, earn a living and enjoy life. On this basis, the promotion, protection and restoration of mental health can be regarded as a vital concern of individuals, communities and societies throughout the world.

According to the WHO report in 2017, almost 7.5% of Indians suffer from major or minor mental disorders needing specialist intervention and neuropsychiatric disorders are estimated to contribute to 11.6% of the global burden of disease. Global evidences suggest that poor mental health can have critical impact on the development of adolescents through adulthood leading to severe health outcomes like substance abuse, risky behaviours, and criminal behaviours to mention few (Wu, Chen & Chan, 2020). In light of current circumstances, people suffering from mental disorders are more susceptible to acquire more issues in the lockdown. According to Scoglio, Reilly, Gorman & Drebing (2019), there is an evident gap in people who require mental health support and those who actually receive support. To close the gap, the mental health sector has expanded to offering various treatments such as psychotherapy, care management, and medication though face to face interaction and online mode.

In light of the current situation, Xiang et al. (2020) stated that mental health is a rising concern among the population, especially health care professionals working in hospitals for treating people diagnosed with COVID-19. They encounter fear and anxiety due to the probability of contagion and spreading the virus among their friends and family members. Xiang et al. (2020) further determined that health professionals working in hospitals during COVID had also reported symptoms of depression and anxiety.

While mental health problems are considered as common issues, yet, the patients, and healthcare workers are not receiving any training in providing mental health care. According to WHO (2020), it is imperative for the healthcare professionals to manage their mental and psychosocial

wellbeing. It is essential to use coping strategies for all the people getting affected from the current situation and lockdown. According to Druss (2020), fear, uncertainty, and depression are common entities encountered by individuals during the scenarios of biological disasters. These issues can create barriers and challenges in handling the current situation and outbreak of the virus. Yet, the stigma often related to mental health problems may cause reluctance among those who have issues to seek support for both COVID-19 and mental health conditions.

Impact of COVID Lockdown on Mental Health of Adults in Isolation

COVID Lockdown is a proactive measure taken by the government of India to ensure the prevention of COVID-19 spread through social distancing and isolation. This means is a necessity considering the outbreak of the virus in the world where countries such as US, Italy, and France are struggling to control the rapid spread. Lockdown means that all individuals are required to stay at home and only leave house for buying necessities (Nguyen et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2020). While, this situation of lockdown can be comfortable for some, it can be overwhelming and panicking for others. According to WHO (2020), older adults who are isolated are susceptible to face mental health issues such as anxiety, stress, depression, and frustration, especially the ones having existing cognitive disorders. Adults during quarantine and isolation may feel agitated leading to panic that can have adverse impacts on their wellbeing.

According to Nicolás (2020), restrictive measurements taken by several countries for social distancing can have an eminent negative impact on the mental health and wellbeing of people. Due to isolation and physical distancing, coronavirus crisis, closure of schools and workplaces, people are bound to feel fear, anxiety and loneliness. It has become relevant to estimate the effects of home quarantine and isolation, especially when people might also fear for getting infected with the virus, on mental health of people and how to overcome the issues to minimize the negative impacts. Considering the uncertainty regarding the time period of lockdown, it is ideal to address the public mental health of people during the days of lockdown.

Marker (2020) revealed that there has been a significant amount of increase in the number of mental health-related cases during the coronavirus crisis and is estimated to increase overtime, given the severity of the situation. The mental health and psychosocial conditions can be more severe for adults who have suffered before with different forms of anxiety disorders, depression, panic attacks, stress, OCD, hypochondria, or claustrophobia. The researcher determined few of the common health issues during COVID lockdown:

- Severe anxiety symptoms, difficulty in breathing, headaches and chest pains.
- Worsening of previously occurring anxiety attacks and depression.
- Encountering repetitive compulsions of hand-washing, checking, doubting and cleaning.
- Feeling lonely, helpless, and tired.
- Having negative thoughts and constant worrying feelings that cannot be controlled or stopped.
- Feeling irritated and having thoughts of impending doom.
- Difficulty in sleeping, eating, and concentrating on any task.

Such symptoms and mental health issues in adults can also lead to substance abuse. Lockdown has also given rise to unemployment where several people have lost their jobs. These adults are also susceptible to fall in depression (Smith, 2020). The social isolation and lockdown can prove to have significant negative impact on mental health of people

diagnosed earlier with mental health issues. Li et al. (2020) asserted that, the "uncertainty of the upcoming situation causes cognitive dissonance and insecurity; this produces a feeling of mental discomfort."

Bhuyan (2020) revealed that in India, nearly 15% of the adults are dealing with one or more mental health issues and require psychological considerations and interventions. A more holistic approach is required to deal with issues concerned with mental and emotional wellbeing arising due to self-isolation and home quarantine (Walton, 2020). Several organizations have laid down guidelines to help their employees and populace on how to deal with mental health disorders and take preventive measures to avoid any emotional issues.

Suggestive actions

People have shown more negative emotions (anxiety, depression, and indignation) and less positive emotions (happiness) after the declaration of COVID-19 and lockdown measures. Strategies such as appropriate rest, eating healthy food, engaging in some physical activity, and spending time with friends and family are some coping mechanisms (WHO, 2020). Using strategies that have helped people in the past can also be adopted to reduce the stress-levels and cope from depression or other mental health problems (McFarlane et al., 2020). Indulging in drug abuse and alcohol drinking are unhelpful strategies that must be avoided as they can have long-term negative repercussions (Zheng, Goh & Wen, 2020). WHO has initiated self-help intervention that helps in reducing the psychological and social distress in the current situation of crisis (WHO, 2020). The guided self-help is considered to be an effective strategy that can provide mental health support and extract positive results. Public health agencies and experts in all countries are working on the outbreak to ensure the availability of the best care to those affected.

The following are few of the actions that can be followed to ensure positive thinking and dealing with mental health issues.

1. It is essential for the populace to be aware regarding the facilities that can be accessed to receive mental health and psychosocial support. Mental health support and complaints including psychosis, severe anxiety or depression must be addressed by ensuring that general healthcare facilities are provided to all. It is essential to ensure that appropriate trained and qualified staff are deployed in various facilities that are assessable to the general populace.
2. Adults facing mental health issues must seek practical and emotional support through their families and close ones. Staying in touch with friends and families through social media and technology can be productive in tackling the issues. In case of severe anxiety or depression instances, it is essential to seek help from the medical professionals who can prescribe the necessary medication.
3. Adults dealing with mental health problems can engage in online psychological consultations through video chat or chat-box. This can be an alternative as opposed to face-to-face services, which can be difficult for certain population.
4. The online consultants or therapists in health care facilities must be trained and must ensure that they provide valid information on how to reduce risk of infection in simple terms to adults and older population. With clear and concise information, and helping people gain awareness through support networks, adults can be motivated to practice preventive measures and gain confidence through knowledge. This can be helpful and

motivating, which can act as a strategy to cope stress and other mental health issues.

5. The government also needs to generate funds and allocate them to the medical industry to ensure the appropriate delivery of counselling and psychological services without the normal restrictions on distance. The funds can be used for acquiring equipment, providing training, and preparing billing structure etc.
6. Home care programs must be initiated as in hospitals, the psychiatric beds will be most likely diverted to those suffering from COVID infection. Home care programs must include increasing monitoring and support of those who are at high risk of deteriorated mental health.
7. The government must also invest in long-term impact of COVID-19 and also on suicide prevention. In the SARS aftermath, a lot of people above the age of 65 committed suicide, and the government now must be prepared for dealing such a situation, if risen, in India.

Some measures that can be followed by the adults during COVID lockdown are listed below:

1. Developing a hobby, integrating it within the routine, and strictly following that routine can be helpful in brightening the mood and instilling positive thoughts. This gives a sense of purpose and can help people recover from challenging situations. Healthy and relaxing activities must be encouraged. These include meditation, yoga, and proper sleeping patterns.
2. Serving others in any way, via a show of small kindness, can be effective in negating negative thoughts, depression, and anxiety.
3. Learning and practicing simple daily physical exercises that can be easily performed at home could also be beneficial. This will ensure higher mobility and also reduce boredom. The routine can include daily exercises, household chores, extra-curricular activities (painting, dancing, reading, singing, playing board games etc.).
4. Using telephone, social media and other applications for video conference or chatting is a good measure to stay in contact with the loved ones. Maintaining social networks and staying connected is an essential way to remain calm and reduce stress levels.
5. Watching news reports constantly regarding COVID outbreak and its spread can cause more panic and anxiety. To avoid this, it is better to keep yourself updated on proactive measures and practical guidelines that can be helpful. Avoid listening to rumours and fake news.
6. Another way to avoid boredom and reduce stress is to focus on acquiring new skills. This can be anything ranging from learning musical instruments, language or painting.
7. Engaging in gardening and planting is an effective exercise that can be calming and encouraging. Spending more time with nature boosts happiness in individuals.
8. Doing some DIY (do it yourself) projects at home such as decorating house and wall painting can prove to be relaxing and recreational activities that can help oneself deviate from negative thoughts during lockdown and social isolation.
9. If negative emotions persist for several days, it is advised to reach out to someone with whom the feelings can be shared. Online consultants or helpline numbers can be called to share the issues.

CONCLUSION

COVID-19 infection is a rapidly increasing disease for which there is no treatment. With no standard treatment, providing supportive treatment and following preventive strategies is the best mechanism against coronavirus. Although many experimental trials are on the way, the best we can do to prevent a rampant outbreak is stringent infection control operation. Lockdown is one such method that ensures social

distancing and isolation, thereby reducing the probability of human to human transmission. With lockdown, however, mental health issues and problems such as stress, anxiety, and depression have risen, which imposes grave consequences on individual health. This review has therefore emphasized on providing suggestive actions and measures that can help people in dealing with their mental health concerns. The suggestions and recommendations can also be useful for the governments in developing necessary policies and strategies to provide better mental healthcare services to adults.

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