



IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MENTAL HEALTH

Pharmacology

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ABSTRACT

During the times when everyone is scared of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an underlying concern regarding the mental health of the people, as the outbreak of a global crisis has a psychosocial impact on individuals. Stress, anxiety and depression may manifest itself differently in different individuals. It appears that almost everyone has been affected by the pandemic in some or the other way. Thus, monitoring the physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioural aspects of individuals becomes important during such times of crisis.

KEYWORDS

mental health, pandemic, stress, COVID-19

Mental health and COVID-19:

The major guidelines recommended by World Health Organization (WHO) and Center for Disease Control and prevention during the times of pandemic due to COVID-19 have been social distancing, and maintaining good hand hygiene as well as respiratory hygiene.

The outbreak of an infectious disease like COVID-19 is leading to stress, anxiety and psychological problems [1] in people irrespective of the age, sex, occupation or socio-economic status. The management of stress and anxiety therefore has become one of the important concerns.

Due to the digital era, in which all news spreads like wildfire, it is hard to imagine the emotional, mental and physical problems which may be associated with the pandemic because of the lockdown. People have enough time to read, listen and watch the news during these times, which may lead to an increase in emotional, mental and behavioural problems. Stress, anxiety, tension, depression, frustration may have become common, and it is really important to understand that some stress and anxiety is normal, but it is crucial for individuals to know how to relieve stress that manifests in themselves and their loved ones. People should give as much importance to mental health as they do to their physical health. Mental health issues can lead to development of diseases internally. Thus, people should focus on maintaining a healthy body as well as a healthy mind.

Overt and Covert implications

Failure to cope up with stress in an individual can lead to various mental and physical problems.

Overt symptoms may include physical and behavioural changes in an individual that can be visibly observed. The physical symptoms may include gastrointestinal symptoms like anorexia or overeating, and headache. There may be worsening of chronic health problems, increased use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs such as benzodiazepines. The behavioural symptoms may be associated with a decrease in the activity or energy levels, insomnia, frequent irritation or anger, and wanting to be alone or isolated. Patients with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) may have obsession of contamination and compulsive hand washing, which may increase during such times [2].

Covert symptoms may include emotional and cognitive aspects that manifest within an individual and cannot be visibly noticed like undue stress, anxiety and depression [3], feeling confused and neglect of oneself.

Stress and COVID-19

People watch news and see how the world is suffering each day and it is only worsening as days go by. This is leading to increased stress level in individuals. Even if they don't watch news and switch to social media, that is also full of Covid-19 facts and updates, thus all they see is the suffering of the world which induces stress. They wonder when life will go back to normal or if this situation is the new normal. The best way to relieve stress is to be optimistic and believe that humanity will overcome this adversity like it always has in case of many others.

The elderly population, people with disabilities, chronic diseases,

children and teenagers, the support staff, doctors [4], nurses and paramedical workers should be treated with concern and respect during these times when the situation is inevitable. There should be a provision of mental health care in these vulnerable populations [3]. People have to be aware of the disease and the facts related to it, and take adequate measures and precautions rather than becoming anxious. One has to keep a close watch on the people prone for psychological problems so that they do not fall prey to depression and substance abuse during these times. Talking to a healthcare provider in case an individual is not able to perform his or her activities of daily living is of critical importance.

Mental health boosters

In order to let go of the stress, one needs to take time off the news to focus on the things that mean a lot to an individual like cooking, gardening, painting, listening to music, playing an instrument, singing, dancing, reading books, watching movies, yoga, exercise or whatever one has wanted to do in life but did not get time. Pursuing hobbies stimulate the mind and keep it engaged so that one does not divulge into negative thinking. Poor mental health leads to poor physical health [5]. Therefore, one should invest their time in some creative and productive work.

In times of loneliness, sadness, anger or stress one should always think of the patients infected, those treating them and their families all of which are in far greater pain than ones' own petty issues. One should be grateful for what they have and also pray for those suffering.

Eating healthy meals, proper sleeping habits, regular exercise, and communicating with near and dear ones would greatly help individuals to be in a positive frame of mind. Understanding the risk and sharing accurate information would go a long way in taking care of mental health of individuals.

Conclusion

There is a need to develop mental health interventions, guide and help the healthcare workers, and vulnerable population. Online counselling and self-help services [6,7,8] would go a long way to help and provide support to the people in order to cope up with stress and anxiety during and after the pandemic.

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