



IMPACT OF SOCIAL ISOLATION ON MENTAL HEALTH DURING COVID 19 PANDEMIC: STRATEGIES FOR SELF CARE

Healthcare

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KEYWORDS

1.Mental Health 2. Social Isolation 3.Covid 19 Pandemic

INTRODUCTION

Social isolation is a multi-dimensional construct that can be defined as the inadequate quantity and/or quality of interactions with other people, including those interactions that occur at the individual, group, and/or community level.¹ During the COVID-19 pandemic the need for physical distancing due to virus mitigation efforts has exacerbated the isolation of many older adults.² Although there are fewer studies with young and middle aged adults, there is some evidence of a similar pattern of greater isolation being associated with negative psychological outcomes for this population.³

Loneliness is often described as the state of being without any company or in isolation from the community or society. It is considered to be a dark and miserable feeling, a risk factor for many mental disorders like depression, anxiety, adjustment disorder, chronic stress, insomnia or even late-life dementia.⁴

It has been well-documented that long periods of isolation in custodial care or quarantine for illness has detrimental effects on mental well-being.⁵

This has increased the prevalence of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorders and insomnia in the population. It also contributes to fatigue and decreases performance.⁶

A systematic review of suicide risk also found that loneliness is associated with both suicide attempts and completed suicide among older adults.⁷ Loneliness, along with depressive symptoms, are related to worsening cognition over time. A systematic review concluded that loneliness and social isolation were significantly associated with incident dementia.⁸

Strategies For Self-care

Self-care strategies are good for mental and physical health

- **Enough sleep.** Go to bed and get up at the same times each day. Stick close to your typical sleep-wake schedule.
- **Regular physical activity.** Regular physical activity and exercise can help reduce anxiety and improve mood. Find an activity that includes movement, such as dance or exercise apps. Get outside, such as a nature trail or your own backyard.
- **Healthy Diet.** Take a well-balanced diet. Avoid junk food and refined sugar. Caffeine as it can aggravate stress, anxiety and sleep problems.
- **No tobacco, alcohol and drugs.** Because COVID-19 affects the lungs, smoking increases risk even more. Using alcohol make risk worse and reduce your coping skills.
- **Relax and recharge.** Few minutes of quiet time help to settle mind and reduce anxiety. Practices such as deep breathing, tai chi, yoga, mindfulness or meditation will be helpful. Listening to music, or reading helps to relax.
- **Focus on positive thoughts.** Choose to focus on the positive things in your life, instead of dwelling on how bad you feel. Consider starting each day by listing things you are thankful for. Maintain a sense of hope, work to accept changes as they occur and try to keep problems in perspective.
- **Connect with others.** Social media platforms such as Facebook, Skype, Twitter, LINE, and Instagram enable people to stay connected in a variety of ways.
- **Look for psychiatric symptoms.** Depression, anxiety, and sleep disturbance are common, especially when one is under quarantine or self-isolation. Medical assistance should always be sought when necessary, particularly in response to the expression of suicidal tendencies.

- **Take care of cognition, emotion, and mood.** Loneliness is often associated with negative thoughts. Anxiety and depression may cause social withdrawal which will exacerbate the loneliness and isolation. Conscious breathing, meditation, and other relaxation techniques are helpful for the mind and body and can decrease anxiety and depression.
- **Make connections.** If you work remotely from home or you need to isolate yourself from others due to COVID-19, avoid social isolation. Make virtual connections by email, texts, phone or video chat. Enjoy virtual socializing and talking to those in your home.

CONCLUSIONS:

The societal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been broad and very challenging. No aspect of normal societal functioning has been spared. Quarantine and social distancing are necessary measures to prevent the virus from spreading but also lead to elevated levels of loneliness and social isolation, which in turn produce physical- and mental-health related repercussions. Adopting appropriate steps to keep social and familial connections, maintain healthy activities, and manage emotions and psychiatric symptoms can help relieve the adverse consequences of loneliness and isolation.

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