

CHAPTER-15

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CHAPTER-15

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the novel disease from its origin to its psychological impact on the different population around the globe. This pandemic not only changed the social norms but also changed the behavioural pattern of an individual. Insecurity, fear of contracting the disease, anxiety will leave its mark on the psychology of the human being. Losing jobs to fear of losing loved ones, social distancing has its own psychological impact on the population. This chapter will review the psychological impact of COVID-19 on different population and conclude with the number of suggestions which would not only help in overcoming the negative emotions people are facing but also help them in developing the positive well-being.

I. Introduction

The new coronavirus (COVID-19) is the deadliest and highly contagious respiratory disease that emerged at the end of 2019, in Wuhan, China affecting millions of people around the world, causing the World Health Organisation to declare a pandemic and an emergency across the globe. Since, none of the countries has yet developed a

vaccine for COVID-19, leading a feeling of anxiety and stress among people. The World Health Organisation has issued a guideline to manage physical and psychological problems that people are facing at the time of crisis. Considering the situation and crisis across the globe, helpline numbers and online counselling services has started by many NGOs and by many organisations to assist the vulnerable population. Many psychologists and mental health workers have also started writing blogs, columns and also started sharing on radio and television and on social sites how to stay positive and develop immunity and strength to fight disease, improving the well-being of the vulnerable class. As the COVID-19 cases are increasing around globe, stress, fear, anxiety and many psychological problems are also increasing which is natural and quite expected with the changing situations that people are finding themselves [1]. There is also additional stress of Social distancing, lockdown and extended lockdown which is also creating a long-term psychological problem among people. Self-harm, anxiety, stress, depression, insomnia, helplessness, separation anxiety, hypochondriasis, panic attacks, obsessive-compulsive disorder, fear of falling ill and dying, fear of being infected, loneliness, thinking of the past traumatic events or epidemic, restlessness, post-traumatic stress disorder, guilt, anxiety and prolonged grief are some of the psychological impact of COVID-19 on people [2].

After this pandemic gets over it will leave behind its mark in the form of some behavioural changes which are as follows: social isolation and decreased social networking, judgemental attitude towards others, mistrust, physical distancing with outsiders, an obsession of contracting the disease and washing hands frequently or frequent use of sanitisers will be seen. Flu-like symptoms will not be treated casual, avoidance behaviour will be on the rise causing lower self-esteem and constant worry that can impact the person problem- solving skills.

2. The Psychological Effect of COVID-19 on Younger Ones:

It is equally a tough time for children as well. They are likely to be experiencing constant worry, stress and fear, fear of losing their parents, loved ones, siblings, grandparents and oneself. They are also experiencing separation anxiety as they are not

able to meet their friends and get social support for good mental well-being. Child physical, psychological and sexual abuse is a matter of concern for the government. NGOs and child protection cell are continuously working on to rescue the vulnerable child who was not feeling safe in their homes. NGOs have also circulated a helpline number via newspaper, on the Facebook page, twitter, Instagram and also requesting adults to report the same if they encounter or notice such events in their neighbourhood or nearby places. Children have also developed many psychological issues like anger, loneliness, irritability because of the lockdown and have also experienced constant pressure from their parents who are staying in the house for the longest time, earlier child was not used to it [3]. Parents constant worrying about child usage of mobile phones has left them in pressure too. Simple strategies could help the child: Love, affection and attention to the child need and wants. Spending quality time with them, engaging them in purposeful work, maintaining daily schedule and being honest with the child what is happening around can help them to understand the situation. Parents need to behave pro socially and manage their emotions that can help the child to model their behaviour by looking at them.

3. Psychological Effect of COVID-19 on Older Population:

This is the most vulnerable population as far as COVID-19 pandemic is concerned. In the news and every single announcement by the community workers and even by the WHO members, they issued a warning for elderly people saying, they are ones who need to take proper precautions and care, because of their low immunity and number of health issues [4], they are the ones who will easily get infected and recovery is low, this could be a frightening and fear-inducing message for the elderly [5]. The psychological impact like constant anxiety about the family members staying far, anxiety for the future outcomes, fear of dying, fear of catching an illness, loneliness is very difficult for them to handle especially if they are suffering from dementia [6], Alzheimer or suffering from a prolonged illness, especially if they are bed-ridden, or if they are living alone, social isolation and loneliness could worsen the situation and can cause negative effect on their mental health as well [7]. Strategies that can save the mental health of elderly people are as follows: they

should focus on their diet. Meditation, while lying or sitting, will help. Stick to the routine, if they are the digital person they can talk to their friends and family members over a video call, engaging in purposeful activities will encourage them [8]. Spending less time on television could be an additional benefit [9]. Watching movies, songs can heal their mind and spread positivity around them.

4. Psychological Effect of COVID-19 on Women:

This is the population who is positive as well negatively charged with the COVID-19 pandemic. An expert believes that women's mental health needs to be a priority for the nation. On a positive note, women are getting family time with their children and spouse. Spending quality time act as a stress-busters for women. Whereas on the other hand, lockdowns and quarantine have increased the workload on women especially when all the family members are staying together and are home-bound and if women are menstruating or pregnant, lack of social and emotional support from the family will harm them psychologically and physically both. Depression, anxiety, lack of concentration, developing negative emotions about herself, sleep disturbance, constant worry about her future, self-harming tendencies, mental exhaustion, panic attacks could develop. There is another issue where most of the women during COVID-19 outbreak, faces emotional and physical violence in the family. Many women are isolated at home with their abusive spouses and in-laws causing an adverse effect of social-distancing on women's mental health. In India as well as in other countries commission for women has raised an alarm about the rising number of domestic violence cases since the lockdown began [10].

Lockdown may have caused women to live with their relatives or with the abusers in an unsafe place, many women have called their home an unsafe place to live in causing unwanted pregnancies, rape and sexual assault. It may create a long-term negative effect on their mental health which may develop self-harming tendencies and mental shock and mental trauma, distrust, lower self-esteem for which proper care and therapies from the expert is needed to lead a normal life post lockdown. The world is also witnessing an increase number of divorce cases among couples. COVID-19 have a devastating effect on

women worldwide. Gender-based violence and unwanted pregnancies (whether it is caused by marital rape, sexual abuse or lack of contraceptives) may have a devastating effect on the mind of the women or girls. Anxiety, self-harming tendencies, unmanageable post-partum depression, acute depression, sleep disturbance, lack of proper prenatal care and postnatal care can cause long term psychological impact on the concerned population. Many NGOs and women helpline numbers are working around a clock to rescue women who are suffering from such issues, they safely rescue the women and placed them in a temporary home and strict actions would be taken against the person involved in violence and abuse.

5. Psychological Impact of COVID-19 on Healthcare Professionals:

Health professionals includes doctors, care giving staff, ambulance drivers to sanitation workers those who are working endlessly day and night without break, and also bearing physical assault, social rejection [11] from the society for transmitting the disease have increased the burden of psychological trauma and negatively affecting the mental health of the people working day and nights without break, without meeting their families, maintaining social distancing with them [12]. Social rejection by the people for spreading of disease lead the medical staff on an additional anxiety and social isolation, constant worry for the self and family have put their mental health at risk and developing a new level of stress in them [13]. Mental health of the people working in a concerned area are least talked about. In such situations, where they are working as a counsellor, friend and caretaker to the patients as outsiders, families are not allowed. Sometimes to reduce the mental fatigue as well as physical stress, professionals started taking alcohol, eating less or more, taking pills to build their immunity. Psychological help is mandatory for them [14]. Respecting them, honor them for their hard work. Family should support them by checking on them on a regular basis [15]. Psychological aid should be provided to them as they are also facing the grief and emotional breakdowns. Talking to their children, and loved ones could help them in maintaining their positive mental and physical health both [16]. Psychological Burden of COVID-19 on Migrant Workers: After the outbreak of

COVID-19, lockdown and extended lockdown has created a loss of Job, food, shelter and induced a fear of contracting virus among migrant workers. Insecurity for their jobs, finance, fear of dying in an unknown city, fear of losing family are some of the factors creating a psychological burden on migrant workers [17]. Medical check-ups, Quarantine before reaching home is like an additional trauma for them. Suggestion could be: Respecting emotions of the migrant worker with dignity and help them in every possible way, helping them in reaching home, providing them with ration and proper food [18], and helping them with some finances are the areas which can relax them, at least on a temporary basis. Feeling of social rejection [19], depression and anxiety of losing work and insecurity for their future may rise as lockdown has extended.

6. Psychological Effect of Quarantine on People (suspected carrier of spreading virus):

Quarantine is the separation and limited movement of those who are exposed to a contagious disease and are risk of infecting others. It is an unpleasant experience for all who are experiencing it. Staying away from family and friends [20], restriction of movements, loss of freedom, anxiety and fear over blood sample status (whether it will come positive and negative, for how long I need to stay here) create negative effects on the mind of the people. Suicide, anger and fear of stigmatized by people are the factors which bring down the person morale, irritability, insomnia and lead a person to develop a negative self-image and also develop a tendency to self-harm [21]. A study reported that after the quarantine periods gets over, many participants started showing long term behavioural changes like avoiding crowded places, frequently washing hands, hand-shaking to physical distancing [22]. Psycho-educate them about telling why they are quarantined and how many days are expected, meaningful and transparent communication, and purposeful activities should be communicated to them by counsellors to reduce their boredom [23]. Providing all the necessary medical and household supplies will help, talking to loved ones over video and audio call will channelize their negative behaviour to a positive one.

7. Psychological Effect of Social-Distancing on People:

Along with the COVID-19, the most stressful thing people are currently facing is a “New Normal” living style, i.e. social distancing also known as physical distancing, and self-isolation which is mandatory by the government to reduce the spread of coronavirus [24]. Humans are social creatures, they tend to interact, socialise and share emotion with family, friends and near and dear ones. Once, this process is restricted by any other means, it will create psychological distress in human beings [25]. Nowadays video call, audio call, Face time everything is available, but physical distancing still causing nightmares, loneliness, anxiety and emotional turmoil especially to the vulnerable population that is elderly ones. Stick to routine, exercise and meditate regularly, stay in touch with family members over the phone, voice call, following passion like singing and painting will help in developing positive attitude and help in the fight with the disease. Limited use of COVID-19 news can also help in reducing anxiety and stress. Fear, anxiety and stress should be acknowledged and if it is interfering in a day to day life should not be ignored and in that case, seek expert help [26].

8. Psychological Effect of Rehabilitation on Recovered Patients of COVID-19 (Post Quarantine):

Recovered patients may have a feeling of guilty for getting the infection and spreading in the family or community. This may lead to a feeling of helplessness and anxiety. Their rehabilitation in the society is sometimes difficult, because of the stigma people have for the recovered or suspected individual. The risk of stigma occurs when people get confused between the virus and the individual. People need to understand precaution and six feet distance is important but avoiding individual and their family can develop a sense of rejection, a feeling of exclusion and can lead to a self-harming tendency in them.

Conclusion:

On a positive note, there are many psychological impacts of COVID-19 on people from insomnia to depression on every age group, class, creed, gender, religion, colour, race, language and borders. Practising meditation, yoga, breathing exercises will help in concentrating and focusing on the positive things around. Practice Gratitude. Grounding at the time of anxiety will help in controlling the emotions [27], walking in nature can help in reducing anxiety, stress and will enhance creativity and togetherness. Practise mindfulness. Spending time with family, shared household work between couples, respecting and acknowledging every emotion will help in developing a positive thought. When people face fear, or anxiety they can ask themselves a few questions as: Is there anything under my control? When I was stressed in the past, how have I managed myself? What are the things that can divert my mind and calm me down? Staying connected with others via phone call ,video call will also help in reducing the negative effect of COVID-19. Don't discuss disease and statistics, discuss happy events and memories, cooking, singing and playing games, spending time with yourself will keep the problem at bay. If negative emotions or feelings still persists in you, contact the expert and seek counselling. Apart from these, the technological upliftment can ease in combating the COVID-19 situation across the globe [28].

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