Mental Health Challenges and COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Mental health issues have already emerged as a silent epidemic during the COVID-19 pandemic. From frontline workers to the general population, all have been affected by the wrath of this deadly disease. In these testing times, maintaining an adequate mental health is of prime importance. The healthy way to deal with stress, adapt to new normal lifestyle, and cope positively with the situation is the need for the hour.

Keywords: COVID-19, Mental health, Positive coping, Stress.

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Mental health issues are one of the major challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The noxious mixture of social distancing, isolation, quarantine, lockdown, uncertainty, suffering, witnessing painful death, illness-related stigma, and overburdened healthcare system is affecting the mental health of the population adversely.[1] It has also caused enormous economic downfall on the already deprived and vulnerable section of the society. Among the mental health issues, stress-related problems, depression, anxiety, fear of uncertainty, and fear of future related to COVID-19 are most commonly seen.[2,3] The pandemic has changed our lifestyle and has forced us to stay isolated, maintain social distance, not allowing travel, to work from home, and undergo online classes, all these producing chaos in an individual; thus, accepting the new normal might not be easy for everyone.[4]

People in various countries are trying to break through the restrictions, protesting against strict government policies, want freedom from these chocking situations. However, as the virus is still there with the same virulence, so there is a high risk during this period of having another wave of infection which many European countries are experiencing now. Thus, mental health issues are important as people have not adapted to major lifestyle changes along with a constant fear of contracting the virus either themselves or their close ones.[5]

However, the World Health Organization took several initiatives to take care of our mental health and help others who might need extra support during this difficult and testing times.[2] The key points from the recommendations are having a structural routine of day-to-day activities, eat a balanced diet, exercise regularly and keep oneself fit, divide the time for work and time to relax, and enjoy with family. It is also recommended to minimize watching, reading, and listening to news related to COVID-19. However, information can be obtained from an authentic source from time to time. Social contact is important and can be done through the online platform, and people can be connected with their loved ones. Apart from all of these, they should also refrain from substance use, post positive and hopeful messages in social media, try to help others especially the elderly and other vulnerable populations, and support health care workers. Finally, not to discriminate or stigmatize anyone who had suffered from COVID-19 or the frontline healthcare workers who are risking their lives and dealing with this deadly disease.[6–8]

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed a tremendous strain on the mental health of frontline healthcare workers. Not only are they working long hours under extremely stressful circumstances, but

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many of their patients are dying despite heroic efforts to save them. In addition, many live in fear that they might contract and transmit the disease to their family and friends.[9] Thus, there is also an urgent need to provide adequate psychological crisis intervention in this group to make them more productive and efficacious for optimal healthcare delivery.[10]

This novel disease has come up with novel challenges and requires out-of-the-box thinking and practical solution. Research and exploration into this matter have provided us with better information and have equipped us with better clinical understanding. At this testing time, the spirit of humanity has to stand tall, and with a balanced mental health armoured with positive coping skills, together we will win over this challenging situation.

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