

Coronavirus Disease-2019 Pandemic: Meeting the Mental Health Needs of the General Population

Saurabh R Shrivastava¹, Prateek S Shrivastava²

ABSTRACT

The ongoing global coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) outbreak has attained a pandemic status and is increasing with each day in terms of caseload, attributed deaths, and geographical distribution. Owing to the unknown nature of the disease, there is a lot of myth, misconceptions, and fear prevailing about the nature of the disease, and thus, people are very much prone to psychological and mental illnesses. At the same time, the practice of quarantine, which separates healthy individuals for 14 days from their family members, the probability of the development of anxiety, and depression also increase extensively. Considering the fact that the disease infects everyone and no population group or socioeconomic class is immune, it is the need of the hour to be empathetic and compassionate toward the affected, treated, or recovered individuals and not encourage stigma against them. In conclusion, mental illnesses and poor mental health are the potential adverse effects of this novel COVID-19 pandemic. It is the time wherein we all have to together approach toward the problem as a team and improve the mental look out of the general population as well as the diagnosed patients and their family members.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, Health personnel, Mental health, World Health Organization.

SBV Journal of Basic, Clinical and Applied Health Science (2021): 10.5005/jp-journals-10082-03107

INTRODUCTION

The ongoing global coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) outbreak has attained a pandemic status and is increasing with each day in terms of caseload, attributed deaths, and geographical distribution. Since the start of the outbreak, a total of 88.7 million cases have been detected worldwide, of which 1.9 million patients have lost their lives to the complications associated with the disease.¹ It is an alarming fact that the disease which started with a cluster of pneumonia cases in a single city of China have now been reported in 222 nations and territories, which is a clear indicator of the potential of the international spread of the disease.¹

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS FOR IMPAIRMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH

Owing to the unknown nature of the disease, there is a lot of myth, misconceptions, and fear prevailing about the nature of the disease, and thus, people are very much prone to psychological and mental illnesses.^{2,3} At the same time, the practice of quarantine, which separates healthy individuals for 14 days from their family members, the probability of the development of anxiety, and depression also increase extensively.³ Considering the fact that the disease infects everyone and no population group or socioeconomic class is immune, it is the need of the hour to be empathetic and compassionate toward the affected, treated, or recovered individuals and not encourage stigma against them.^{3,4}

SAFEGUARDING MENTAL HEALTH

It is important that the general population should take measures not only to protect themselves but also to give respect to the health personnel involved in the care of COVID-19-affected individuals.⁴ Further, instead of watching some news about the disease throughout the day and feeling distressed, it is ideal to

^{1,2}Department of Community Medicine, Shri Sathya Sai Medical College and Research Institute, Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth, Chengalpattu, Tamil Nadu, India

Corresponding Author: Saurabh R Shrivastava, Department of Community Medicine, Shri Sathya Sai Medical College and Research Institute, Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth, Chengalpattu, Tamil Nadu, India, e-mail: drshrishri2008@gmail.com

How to cite this article: Shrivastava SR, Shrivastava PS. Coronavirus Disease-2019 Pandemic: Meeting the Mental Health Needs of the General Population. *J Basic Clin Appl Health Sci* 2021;4(2):49–50.

Source of support: Nil

Conflict of interest: None

limit screen time and look for positive experiences, wherein one individual has recovered from the disease.^{2–4} From the healthcare professional perspective, it is obvious that they will feel the stress of the work and the potential risk of getting infected, but it is essential for them to maintain their mental well-being, which essentially includes taking adequate rest, eating healthy foods, and refrain from harmful practices.⁵

ADDITIONAL EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

Moreover, to avoid any mental consequences, it will be good to be in touch with family members at least on the phone and practice stress-relieving habits (e.g., yoga and music). Finally, health professionals should have a supportive behavior toward the population and patients and should try their level best to extend the psychosocial support.^{4,5} The managers of a health facility have even more responsibility as they have to ensure that all health professionals work for the prescribed amount of time without getting stressed out and they should not only have better communication skills but also take steps to ensure that their entire

team is aware of the availability of mental health experts and when to approach them.^{2,3} Furthermore, paramedical workers should also be trained to offer first aid in terms of psychological support to the people and quarantined individuals.³

MEASURES FOR VULNERABLE POPULATION GROUPS

In the case of children, the health professionals should try to identify the way in which a child expresses their emotions, as it will help in the detection of mental illnesses at the earliest.⁴ The entire process can be expedited by engaging them in creative tasks or by keeping them close to their parents–family–caregivers, and efforts should be taken to not disturb the daily routine of the children. On the contrary, the elderly people tend to suffer from severe forms of disease and also have various psychiatric concerns linked with isolation, and thus, they are in immense need of emotional support.⁴ It is the responsibility of the health personnel to share simple information with them without scaring them about the disease.^{4,5}

MAINTAINING DAILY ROUTINE AND ROLE OF HEALTH SECTOR

It is extremely essential that the people who are under isolation should continue to be a part of their social network, maintain their personal daily routine, and focus on their own needs by getting involved in healthy activities.²⁻⁴ As healthcare facilities are supposed to be a high-risk place where the general population is very much reluctant to visit, the health professionals have come with a structured letter therapy, which is a psychological intervention and can aid in the process of consultation, detection, and treatment of mental illnesses, all in one go.⁶ Further, health establishments should have facilities for the provision of urgent

mental illnesses like delirium or psychosis or other severe mental illnesses, including drugs.⁴

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, mental illnesses and poor mental health are the potential adverse effects of this novel COVID-19 pandemic. It is the time wherein we all have to together approach toward the problem as a team and improve the mental look out of the general population as well as the diagnosed patients and their family members.

REFERENCES

1. World Health Organization. Weekly epidemiological update – January 12, 2021; 2021. Available from: <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/weekly-epidemiological-update—12-january-2021> [Last accessed on January 14, 2021].
2. Xiang YT, Yang Y, Li W, Zhang L, Zhang Q, Cheung T, et al. Timely mental health care for the 2019 novel coronavirus outbreak is urgently needed. *Lancet Psychiatry* 2020;7(3):228–229. DOI: 10.1016/S2215-0366(20)30046-8.
3. Park SC, Park YC. Mental health care measures in response to the 2019 Novel Coronavirus outbreak in Korea. *Psychiatry Investig* 2020;17(2):85–86. DOI: 10.30773/pi.2020.0058.
4. World Health Organization. Mental health and psychosocial considerations during COVID-19 outbreak. Geneva: WHO Press; 2020. p. 1–5.
5. Kang L, Li Y, Hu S, Chen M, Yang C, Yang BX, et al. The mental health of medical workers in Wuhan, China dealing with the 2019 novel coronavirus. *Lancet Psychiatry* 2020;7(3):e14. DOI: 10.1016/S2215-0366(20)30047-X.
6. Xiao C. A novel approach of consultation on 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)-related psychological and mental problems: structured letter therapy. *Psychiatry Investig* 2020;17(2):175–176. DOI: 10.30773/pi.2020.0047.