PSYCHOSOCIAL COPING DURING LOCKDOWN IN COVID-19 PANDEMICS

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: In the history of pandemics, enough attention has been given to medical practioners for providing medical precautions and treatment of patients. However there has been no attention given to behavioral scientists. The present paper emphasized the need and importance of mental health professionals in coping mechanisms during pandemics.

OBJECTIVES: The primary objective of the study was to describe the relevance and the dire need of mental health professionals in crisis intervention specially in pandemics.

METHODS: This was a review-based paper. The primary focus was to understand the the treatment plans suggested by medical professionals and match it with the need of the society during the pandemics.

RESULTS: The paper has attempted to explore the role of mental health professionals by the review of literature available in dealing with coping strategies in pandemic which will be useful in coping mechanisms for anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts etc during pandemic. The paper highlighted dire need to shift attention towards mental health professionals, its roles and challenges during pandemics.

CONCLUSION: Common treatment strategies were noted in this study. The requirement of mental health professionals was emphasized along with some treatment plans and coping mechanisms by mental health professionals which was missing in review of literature.

KEYWORDS: Psychological, Social, Coping, Pandemics, Covid 19

INTRODUCTION

There are evidences of several forms of pandemics witnessed in human history be it Plague in (430 B.C.),Spanish Flue Pandemic (1918-1920), HIV Pandemic (Early 1980's),Smallpox Outbreak in Former Yugoslavia (1972), Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Swine Flu or H1N1/09 (2009), Ebola Outbreak (2014-2016), Zika (2015-2016) and Covid-19 (2019). History has proved work of several scientists and medical professionals to fight with the pandemics and they have come with medication to fight with it. Most of the medical practioners are providing medical precautions for the treatment of patients. However there has been no attention given to behavioral scientists. Hardly any attention has been given to psychological upliftment of the masses during quarantine and lockdown. This lack of attention is alarming for the societies because of the nature of pandemics. In the realm of history, Pandemics outburst has been seriously damaging the society, wiping out the entire population, bring down the economy of the country. While dealing with pandemics, modern scientists have given little attention on behavioral measures which are crucial at the time of pandemics. Mental health however is the officially accepted public health issues still somehow remain untouched while dealing with any physical ailment which is deadly disease. According to WHO data, in these fast times there is approximately $1/4^{th}$ of the people who meets the criteria of developing any psychiatric/psychological ailments. The outbreak of pandemic and even a thought of its consequences does bring massive stress, depression, anxiety & other psychological distress among general population (Dong & Bouey, 2020).

Over the past few months there is a significant increase in mortality and morbidity owing to this pandemic. Till 20th June, 2020 it was reported more than 85 lacs total cases with 4.5 lacs deaths, more than 15 lacs recovered in more than 200 countries across the globe. USA is having 1st rank in terms of infected persons. India is 4th in rank. Total no. of cases in India (20th June, 2020) was about 4 lacs, with death of 13000 and recovery rate of 48%. Maharashtra is heading in terms of number of cases. The total number of cases in India rose to 85,91,730 in the month of November,2020. As the disease is spreading furiously, majority of victim countries are unable to meet the demands of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and required medical infrastructure (WHO,2020).

Evidences and literature suggest in every pandemic outbreak, techniques such as quarantine, social distancing or lockdown have been used and proved successful in controlling the death rates. Though quarantine has been found to be useful and the only technique in controlling the pandemics but it also brings list of its aftereffects. A major effect of outbreak of Covid-19 has brought some seriously concerning issues across the globe. It has not only affected the diagnosed patients and their family members but it has also affected psychologically, socially and economically to the uninfected sections of the populations. The recently conducted surveys suggests that people in general are not comfortable in dealing with the social –isolation and it has its direct link with mental wellbeing of people, increased anxiety, depression, stress, PTSD, anticipated anxiety about job loss and financial downfall. Recent surveys have also suggested that people are more concerned about their social and psychological wellbeing more than have concerns of physically getting infected with Covid-19. The reasons could be in developing countries/underdeveloped nations the major issue is to earn bread and butter for the family and this itself is huge source of anxiety and stress during this pandemic.

Across the globe Covid-19 has damaged the societies in terms of unbearable death rates, turning down of economies of the country, In order to be able to respond to such a global challenge WHO, APA and other psychological associations has been enormously doing its efforts to make the world understand the importance of mental health during such pandemics. The pandemic situations is so dangerous with the only solution is social distancing or lockdown which is not only challenging to the general population as people would have to change their life styles, sudden change in job demands, social cut-offs, employment crisis etc but it also brings number of challenges for mental health professionals to provide therapeutic treatment/counseling while maintaining social distancing i.e. through online methods such as webinars, zoom meetings, skype calls or telephonically. Despite of the utmost attention on the need to handle the mental health of people of all sections of the society, approaches to mental health care is still in infancy. This is high time for us to understand mental and physical health goes hand in hand and are not separate from each other.

The only treatment which has been successful during pandemics is social-isolation or lockdown. Being in social isolation/lockdown can be pleasant for some but can be extremely unbearable to others. For many, all these changes further lead to disruptions in work, gross distortion in daily routine, change of lifestyles which further may lead to variety of mental health problems such as stress, depression, death anxiety, mood variations, boredom, frustrations, job insecurities etc. It has been observed that during lockdown people mainly try to cope with the social isolation by looking to TV channels, movies and media news. Repeated hearing of the negative news would further create panic and anxiety among the people. Such depiction of negative news mainly about increase in cases, death rates and watching of other psychosocial negative events 24 x 7 would lead to the behavioral contagion effect. Managing and controlling behavioral contagion on individual and community as well as global level is the primary concern of mental health workers (Huremovic, 2019).

Researches have shown that specific population such as people already diagnosed with mental health issues have to face more challenges and gets affected more to cope up during pandemic Chatterjee (2020)

To deal with behavioral contagion effect of stress and death anxiety, researchers have used *Psychological First Aid* which is one of the methods in order to help people to come out of distress. It helps as a coping mechanism and provides the feeling of security, safety and optimism. The role of the mental health workers here is crucial to train people how to handle the social isolation gracefully. Some of the points to be dealing with this pandemic is to handle social isolation. The psychologists are conducting training and webinars during this time for the general masses to provide them tips to handle the situation with ease. The following are the ways to for self help during lockdown to deal with stress:

1. Stay Informed but not overloaded – Excessive negative news regarding increasing covd-19 cases and increasing death rates would create panic, state of apprehension.
2. Avoid discussions of Covid-19 and discuss other interesting topic to divert your attention.
3. Put your energy in taking care of your physical and mental health by practicing

yogic kriyas and meditation of your own choice and convenience.

4. Maintain social distancing but be connected with your family and loved ones through various social medias and telephones
5. Make a plan of the time if any close one in your family get infected with Covid-19. Plan your steps and strategies in advance to fight with the corona virus to lessen your stress and anxiety.
6. Mutual harmony has to be maintained within the family. Making action plan including all the family members from grandparents, parents and kids in the family.
7. Pay extra attention to older persons in the family. Pay special attention to their daily routine needs and medicines etc.
8. Kids are to be engaged in some physical and mental activities in order to save them feeling boredom, fatigue and anxiety.
9. Listen to music of your choice. Music has been a relaxation technique for many.
10. Develop hobbies or revive old hobbies which you could not afford earlier due to hectic lifestyle.

Consult Psychologist/Mental Health Workers

If an individual despite of all his efforts to stay relaxed, calm and anxiety free. Still unable to get rid over of negative thoughts should talk with friends and trust worthy people. The person should never hesitate to discuss these issues with mental health professional in order to cope with the situation. Check your govt. website to find the professionals/ counselors /psychologists/ who are dealing with this pandemic outbreak.

Reach to Mental Health Problems in Your Neighborhood/ Online Webinars & Workshops

Stay vigilant of your near and dear ones. Do notice changes in mental health of your family members as well as of your neighbors. Notice marked variations in sleep cycle, Unable to focus attention on any work, Increase use of alcohol, tobacco or drugs, Mood variations, feelings of depression. If the problem persists consult mental health professionals.

Vulnerable Persons: (Children, Elderly and People already suffering with Psychological problems)
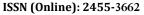
Persons who are already diagnosed with mental illness may face newer challenges during lockdown. Extra care and attention needs to be given to those who are already dealing with mental health issues such as depression, OCD, Mood disorders, Irritable behaviour etc. Their condition may worsen and they are on higher risk of relapse (Yao et al., 2020a) .Family members should seek help from mental health expert to provide them online counseling and consultation from psychiatrist or psychologist for continuation or change in their medicines.

Elderly people also needs some extra care and attention by family members as change in their daily routine may make them irritable, frustrated and may worsen their physical and mental health. It's the role of the young family members to make them at ease and take care of their medicines if they require. At times online counseling or telephonic counseling can also be provided to them to make them positive. Positive mental state at the time of crisis does play a role to cope with the crisis.

Therapeutic Interventions and Coping Mechanism of Covid -19

There has been enough evidence of importance of mental health professionals in the literature from Western Countries. However still there is dearth of literature about the relevance of mental health workers and mental health needs of an individual in Asian countries. Psychologists and other mental health professionals have to achieve targets to convince the importance and need to care for mental health in their respective societies. There is emergent need for a mental health professional to (i) educate the public about the importance of psychological problems during the pandemic and otherwise too. (ii) Conducting online webinars / discussions to motivate public about how to deal with psychological issues during the crisis (iii) Educating public about problem solving strategies to cope with pandemic (iv) Rendering their services to the society with available health care. (v) Empowering patients suffering with corona virus and their caregivers. (vi) Provision of mental health care to health workers (Banerjee, 2020).

The challenge which has to be addressed by mental health professionals globally is to develop team of professionals to address psychological impact during pandemic and how to deal with the emotional distress of the public (Duon &Zhu, 2020), the development and collection of mental health surveys to get the real condition of the infected patients, the caregivers of infected patients and people in general (Liuet. Al, 2020b); the training of community health workers (Duon & Zhu,2020); Provision of online/ telephonic counseling as well as self help practices (Liu et.2020b); the development of telemedicine services for diagnostic purposes (Zhou et.al, 2020); and very importantly to cover the entire section of people for online counseling including lower socio-economic class (Yao-et.al, 2020b). Such online strategies if practiced by mental health professionals would be of great help in any pandemic outbreaks. Thus it is highly important for the Govt. to provide proper training and basic availability

of technology to doctors and health professionals who further would help the society in accessibility of online counseling and services. More and more researches have to be done by health professionals to know its limitations and shortcomings so that it can be addressed appropriately

CONCLUSION

With the increase in number of cases of Covid-19, there is a boom in the awareness of the psychologists and other mental health professionals in India. On one hand for the wellbeing of the society, Psychologists and mental health professionals are facing huge responsibilities and challenges to find out the measures which can reach to all sections of people in society including children, women & men, working or non-working, young and old ,rich as well as poor and on the other hand, it has also come up as an opportunity in country like India where mental health is still not an emerged branch and considered secondary to medical professionals, to work towards planning ,making and incorporating strategies for uplifting mental health needs of general as well as diagnosed population by providing online consultation /counseling/ webinars during lockdown. Further, there is a dire need that Psychologists & other mental health professionals with the help of the Govt. aims to develop mental health policies to be implemented in general routines as well as which can be implemented during any crisis situations like pandemics. Once developed, such interventions should be tested in the form of pilot studies so that limitations if any can be ruled out in final development of mental health policies.

Conflict of Interest: No Conflict of Interest

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