

Psychological Challenges, Mental Health and Psycho-Social Intervention During COVID 19

Asoke Kumar Saha

Department of Psychology, Jagannath University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

asoke_saha@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Psychologists and other mental health professionals play an important role to curb the consequences of the lockdown on mental wellbeing. The COVID 19 lockdown is an opportunity for families to strengthen family bonds. People have more free time to show their creativity. Psychologists explore ways in which people react to this stressful situation globally. Corona outbreak is a serious public health emergency of international concern. The considerations presented in this document developed by WHO to support mental health and psychosocial wellbeing in different target groups during the outbreak. Self-help interventions are proposed by NGOs and Government to find the help of the community people are discussed.

Keywords: covid-19, mental health, psychological challenges, psycho-social intervention

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global emergency situation while the diagnosis of specific disorders needs a specific time period which is a major constraint to quantify the mental health issues. Moreover, many of the survivors may develop mental disorders long after the event. Therefore, multiple and complex confounding variables makes the issue hazy. Fortunately, studies evaluating the mental health issue have been coming out gradually which needs more time certainly to get replicable findings (Kar et al., 2020).

COVID-19 has currently affected over 200 countries. Containment measures, including lockdown, employed in various countries have led to drastic changes in the day-to-day lives of people. Although these changes are requisite to deal with the spread, it is accompanied by certain unintended negative outcomes. Psychologists and other mental health professionals play an important role to curb the consequences of the lockdown on mental wellbeing. Certain important areas that psychologists need to consider while providing interventions are given below

Challenges within the Family

The COVID-19 lockdown is an opportunity for families to strengthen family bonds. However, studies reveal that during this time, there is an upsurge in domestic violence cases (Bradbury-Jones and Isham, 2020), lack of personal space in the family and boredom (Wang et al., 2020). Home-makers might be burdened by shortage of supplies and the sudden need to care for the entire family. Parents might be stressed by the thoughts about the future of their own jobs as well as the education of their children. Spending more time inside the house can lead to physical inactivity and delay in milestones (Glynn et al., 2016) among all family members. Therefore, parents should be educated to encourage



their children to engage in more creative activities including board games, gardening and drawing. Parents should find time to play with the children and engage in daily rituals which strengthens the family relationship and helps to pass time (World Health Organization, 2020).

Time Management Technique

The lockdown provided people with more free time. Some people use this time creatively for self-care, picking up new hobbies and acquiring new skills. On the contrary, some people may get bored and frustrated. This leads to unhealthy daily routines. These include unhealthy sleep habits, extended screen time and lack of self-efficacy activities. Not knowing how to utilize the time effectively can also lead to over thinking, ruminating and losing hope. These unhealthy cognitions could turn into habits which might be carried forward even after the containment of the virus. Therefore, it is advised to prepare a timetable by scheduling time for sleep, exercise, leisure, online socializing and relaxation (WHO 2020).

Anxiety and Stigma

As the virus infection spreads, the anxiety and stigma associated with it also proliferates. Therefore, it is important that psychologists explore ways in which people react to this stressful situation. Anxiety, sleeplessness, fear of contracting the virus, frustration and irritability are some effects of long-term lockdown during pandemics (Johal, 2009). Misinformation and sharing of fake news through social media are some factors that cause anxiety and stigma among people. In this view, the uncertainty adds to an individual's sense of unease, leading to loss of hope and initiative. People who have active symptoms of the disease hesitate to disclose or seek help as they anticipate stigma from the society (Logie and Turan, 2020). Fear and unawareness about health promoting strategies can lead to uncooperativeness towards health workers and governmental instructions. Psychologists should provide awareness about the different stress reactions and provide them with authentic and relevant information about the pandemic. The fear of contracting the pandemic could be more destructive than the virus itself. Therefore, even the uninfected population must be educated about propagation of fake news and should be provided with hope and optimism intervention.

Ignoring Individuals with Substance Use Disorder (SUD)

Quarantine laws and lockdowns pose threats to certain vulnerable communities. Individuals with substance use disorder (SUD) are one such vulnerable section that often goes unnoticed. In addition to the higher risk for contracting the virus due to poorer health and immunity, these individuals might also experience withdrawal symptoms (Kar et al., 2020). As restrictions made on travel and the market would lead to unavailability of substance, some individuals with SUD might engage in hazardous activities including self-manufacturing of the substance and committing suicide. It is hence important that psychologists ensure that such individuals are provided with the access to de-addiction centers or help lines that can treat and guide the individual in the required manner.

The psychological impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown will continue for an indefinite time. Therefore, it is important that psychologists and mental health professionals closely monitor all these areas to provide specialized intervention. Psychologists should ensure that awareness programs are integrated with psychological intervention to help not only the infected but also their family and other vulnerable communities.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Considerations

Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) declared the outbreak of a new corona virus disease, COVID-19, to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. WHO stated that there is a high risk of COVID-19 spreading to other countries around the world? The considerations presented in this document have been developed by the WHO Department of Mental Health and Substance Use as a series of messages that can be used in communications to support mental and psychosocial well-being in different target groups during the outbreak are given herein:

Be empathetic to all those who are affected, in and from any country. People who are affected by COVID-19 have not done anything wrong, and they deserve our support, compassion and kindness. Do not refer to people with the disease as “COVID-19 cases”, “victims” “COVID-19 families” or “the diseased”. They are “people who have COVID-19”, “people who are being treated for COVID-19”, or “people who are recovering from COVID-19”. Minimize watching, reading or listening to news about COVID-19: that causes you to feel anxious or distressed; seek information only from trusted sources and mainly so that you can take practical steps to prepare your plans and protect yourself and loved ones. Avoid rumors and misinformation.

Protect yourself and be supportive to others: Assisting others in their time of need can benefit both the person receiving support and the helper. Find opportunities to amplify positive and hopeful stories and positive images of local people who have experienced COVID-19. For example, stories of people who have recovered or who have supported a loved one and are willing to share their experience. Honour careers and healthcare workers supporting people affected with COVID-19 in your community. Managing your mental health and psychosocial well-being: during this time is as important as managing your physical health.

Take care of yourself at this time. Try and use helpful coping strategies: such as ensuring sufficient rest and respite during work or between shifts, eat sufficient and healthy food, engage in physical activity, and stay in contact with family and friends.

Some healthcare workers may unfortunately experience avoidance: by their family or community owing to stigma or fear. This can make an already challenging situation far more difficult. If possible, staying connected with your loved ones, including through digital methods, is one way to maintain contact. Use understandable ways to share messages with people with intellectual: Know how to provide support to people who are affected by COVID-19 and know how to link them with available resources. This is especially important for those who require mental health and psychosocial support. Keeping all staff protected from chronic stress and poor mental health during this response means that they will have a better capacity to fulfill their roles.

Ensure that good quality communication and accurate information updates are provided to all staff. Rotate workers from higher-stress to lower-stress functions. Ensure that staffs are aware of where and how they can access mental health and psychosocial support services and facilitate access to such services. Orient all responders, including nurses, ambulance drivers, volunteers, case identifiers, teachers and community leaders and workers in quarantine sites, on how to provide basic emotional and practical support to affected people using psychological first aid.

Manage urgent mental health and neurological complaints (e.g. delirium, psychosis, severe anxiety or depression) within emergency or general healthcare facilities. Ensure availability of essential, generic psychotropic medications at all levels of health care. Help children find positive ways to express feelings such as fear and sadness.

Keep children close to their parents and family, if considered safe, and avoid separating children and their caregivers as much as possible. Maintain familiar routines in daily life as much as possible, or create new routines, especially if children must stay at home. During times of stress and

crisis, it is common for children to seek more attachment and be more demanding on parents. Discuss COVID-19 with your children in an honest and age-appropriate way.

Older adults, especially in isolation and those with cognitive decline/dementia may become more anxious, angry, stressed, agitated and withdrawn during the outbreak or while in quarantine. Share simple facts about what is going on and give clear information about how to reduce risk of infection in words older people with/without cognitive impairment can understand. If you have an underlying health condition, make sure to have access to any medications that you are currently using.

Be prepared and know in advance where and how to get practical help if needed, like calling a taxi, having food delivered and requesting medical care. Learn simple daily physical exercises to perform at home, in quarantine or isolation so you can maintain mobility and reduce boredom. Keep regular routines and schedules as much as possible or help create new ones in a new environment, including regular exercising, cleaning, daily chores, singing, painting or other activities. Keep in regular contact with loved ones (e.g. via telephone, e-mail, social media or video conference). Stay connected and maintains your social networks. During times of stress, pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in healthy activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Exercise regularly, keep regular sleep routines and eat healthy food. A near-constant stream of news reports a Seek information updates and practical guidance at specific times during the day about an outbreak can cause anyone to feel anxious or distressed. From health professionals and WHO website and avoid listening to or following rumors that make you feel uncomfortable.

Suggested Interventions

What governments and NGOs can and should do today. There is broad consensus among academics about the psychological care following disasters and major incidents. Here are a few rules of thumb: Make sure self-help interventions are in place that can address the needs of large affected populations; Educate people about the expected psychological impact and reactions to trauma if they are interested in receiving it. Make sure people understand that a psychological reaction is normal; Launch a specific website to address psychosocial issues; Make sure that people with acute issues can find the help that they need.

References

- Carmen H. Logie & Janet M. Turan (2020). How do we balance tensions between covid-19 public health responses and stigma mitigation? Learning from HIV research. *AIDS and Behavior*, 24, 2003–2006.
- Caroline Bradbury-Jones, and Louise Isham (2020). The pandemic paradox: The consequences of COVID-19 on domestic violence. *J Clin Nurs*, 29(13-14), 2047-2049. DOI: 10.1111/jocn.15296
- Johal S. S. (2009). Psychosocial impacts of quarantine during disease outbreaks and interventions that may help to relieve strain. *N Z Med J*, 5(122), 47-52.
- Logie C. H., & Turan J. M. (2020). How do we balance tensions between covid-19 public health responses and stigma mitigation? Learning from HIV research. *AIDS and Behavior*, 24, 2003–2006.
- Sujita K. K., S. M. Yasir Arafat, Russell Kabir, Pawan Sharma, and Shailendra K. Saxena. (2020). Coping with mental health challenges during covid-19. *J Clin Nurs, Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)*, 199–213. doi: 10.1007/978-981-15-4814-716

-
- Tiffany R. Glynn, Kristi E Gamarel, Christopher W Kahler, Mariko Iwamoto, and Don Operario (2016). The role of gender affirmation in psychological well-being among transgender women. *Psychol Sex Orientat Gend Divers*, Sep; 3(3), 336-344.
- Wang Y., Zhang D., & Du G. (2020). Remdesivir in adults with severe COVID-19: a randomised, double-blind, placebo-controlled, multi-centre trial. *Lancet*. Doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(20)31022-9.
- World Health Organization (2020). https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019?gclid=EAlalQobChMIwpSdzvm98wIVYZImAh1C-ArhEAAYASAAEgIJ0fD_BwE.