

NIP NEWSLETTER

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The whole world is going through such a challenging time that mankind has rarely faced earlier. Where the pandemic of Coronavirus has paralysed the world, socially and economically, it has also shed its implications on psychological domain of every single individual. National Institute of Psychology, Quaid-i-Azam University has initiated an effort to contribute its knowledge and expertise for the well-being of general population. We have decided to initiate a series of NIP Newsletter and invite all the dedicated psychologists across country to share their knowledge and expertise in helping people deal with their psychosocial problems. We have decided to publish special issues of Newsletter, on monthly basis, regarding psychological help in dealing with this pandemic. We also invite all the dedicated psychologists and people who are working in social service sector to join us in this cause and share their knowledge and expertise through our forum.

In this Issue

Mental health and psychosocial support guidelines During the COVID-19 pandemic	1
Living With Covid-19	6
Self- Care Techniques During Covid 19	9

MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT GUIDELINES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Mental health and psychosocial guidelines during COVID-19 outbreak

National Institute of Psychology, Quaid-i-Azam University has developed the mental health and psychosocial support guidelines in response to outbreak of new coronavirus disease, COVID-19. WHO has declared public health emergency as it is rapidly spreading and has effected more than 188 countries across the globe. In March 2020, WHO declared COVID-19 as a pandemic.

Though numerous efforts are being made to contain and limit the spread of this virus, but it is generating considerable amount of emotional reactions including distress, panic, fear and anxiety among various populations. This highlights the fact that along with physical efforts to manage this disease, managing mental health and psychosocial wellbeing is equally important. These guidelines have been prepared keeping in mind the unique psychological needs of different segments of population. Considerable amount of information has also been taken from international documents available.

Guidelines for general public

“Hearing about the outbreak and spread of COVID-19 from different sources like television, social media, newspapers, family and friends can lead to significant amount of distress, fear, panic, depression and anxiety among general public. It is important to understand that all these feelings are normal reactions to this abnormal situation. Many people in the world are thinking, behaving and feeling same as you might be feeling under these circumstances. It is important to

- I. *Be aware of your feelings and reactions.* Try to understand your feelings by educating yourself more about fears, stress and ways of dealing with it. Try to educate yourself about the virus and do not believe in rumors, try to find factual information through reliable sources that might include information shared by government officials, relevant health care department, or international health organizations.
- II. *Seek social support.* Though this pandemic is restricting access to social support structures, such as family, religious places, workplaces, and friends, it is important to think of alternate ways of staying connected with these support networks. As this can help you to stay calm and positive. Talking to trusted sources about your fears and worries can help you handle this

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- isolation and emotional distress. Remember, verbalizing your fears and worries is not a sign of weakness.
- a. Seek support from your family, friends and spiritual/religious leaders.
 - b. Talking to them can help you deal with your fears, anxiety and boredom. It may also help you to develop this understanding that they are also experiencing similar reactions.
 - c. Physically accessing them is not safe, so think of alternate ways of connecting with them via phone, email, video chats or text messages.
 - d. You may document you feelings and experiences and share it with others through social media.
- III. Feeling uncertain about the situation and getting apprehensive are absolutely normal reactions to stress. It is important to remind yourself that these fears are normal. For you it is important to be aware of your emotional reactions. Do not try to suppress your feelings, thoughts and emotions. Keeping hope alive during this period is extremely important. For dealing with this, it is important to educate yourself about healthy and unhealthy ways of coping.
- a. Healthy ways of coping include maintaining a basic self-care routine as this will give a sense of control. It might include maintaining a schedule for daily activities, eating healthy, engaging in physical activities like exercise, modifying your existing plans and setting attainable and achievable goals, redefining your strategies that are not working, revisiting your plans on day to day basis, being flexible in your way of thinking, documenting your small successes, identifying your negative thoughts that trigger distress and replacing them with more positive ones, giving oneself positive self-statements like I can cope with it or I have done well so far, relaxing body and mind by deep breathing, muscle relaxation, meditation, prayer, music, reading, or any other healthy activity.
 - b. Unhealthy coping strategies that need to be avoided might include excessive use of tobacco, drugs, constant worry and thinking that situation will never get better, constantly talking about your fears and worries to others so that it aggravates your fears, acting without thinking, getting involved in high risk behaviors, getting abusive or rude towards your family members, friends, colleagues or others. It is important to identify these signs at the earliest and seek professional help if needed.
- IV. It is important not to attach this disease with any particular country, ethnicity, religious group or any other group of individuals. It is high time to acknowledge the fact that everyone is equally susceptible to it and no one is spreading it intentionally. Being kind, compassionate and empathetic towards other is need of the hour. The way you need support and want to be heard, others want it too. People who have caught this disease have not done anything wrong and they should not be judged, hated or abandoned.
- V. Try to avoid sensational news and media coverage regarding disease. Do not believe on anything that you hear or read on social media or television. Try to limit your and your family's screen time especially before going to bed. Try to educate yourself about disease by sticking to information provided by responsible authorities. Also, do not spread any news related to COVID-19 further without confirming it. This might include forwarded text messages, information received through whatsApp, viber, facebook, Instagram, twitter or any other social media.
 - VI. Keeping hope alive during this period is very important. This can be done by looking for stories of people who have survived. One can get hope by taking social responsibility and helping others in need. This can include involving yourself in safe voluntary activities like helping needy in your neighborhood, providing financial assistance if possible to daily wagers, small entrepreneurs, street hawkers, domestic workers or any other needy person. You can also provide assistance to older people living in your neighborhood to do grocery or other things which they need so that they do not have to go out to purchase these items. Remember, even listening to those who want to share their feelings and validating them in a non-judgmental manner is also a kind of support.
 - VII. Acknowledge the role of health care workers, law enforcing agencies, and volunteers in your community. They are doing their best to make sure that you and your loved ones are safe.
- Remember, mostly COVID-19 cause mild symptoms and in such cases only social distancing for a period of two weeks can help to improve the symptoms. Every person is not likely to be hospitalized because of it. Only people who have breathing difficulties need to be admitted to hospitals. 90 to 95 % of people who catch this virus recover. Further staying at home and maintaining social distance can reduce the likelihood of catching this virus. Try to stay positive and reject the rumors.
- Guidelines for dealing with children**
- The stress of parents and family members can directly or indirectly effect children. As they are likely to see the world and make sense out of things by observing adults. Getting insecure, remaining silent, clingy behavior, crying for no apparent reason, nightmares, complaints regarding pain in different body parts, fatigue, either not eating or eating too much, asking too many questions, frequently inquiring about their own safety and safety of others family members, frequently requesting parents not to go to work, repeatedly asking for reassurance, asking whether their friends and relatives are at risk or not, asking questions regarding when this situation would be over, difficulty in falling asleep are all common reactions and questions that your child is likely to ask you. Present circumstances for them are stressful and they are perceiving it and thus reacting to it as well. It's important to acknowledge that children are also upset about this situation. Following strategies might be helpful:

- I. Try to develop an understanding of what your child is thinking and how he/she appraising the present situation. Let them talk freely so that they can express themselves and listen to them. Spend more time than usual with your children.
- II. Age appropriate information is important. Before answering any question that your child asks make sure that information you are providing is tailored as per age. Be truthful as hiding information or making false promises that situation will get better when you wake up, or in a day or two might not help to lessen the child's anxiety. Rather it will enhance your child's distress and will negatively affect your relationship with child. As he/she might not perceive you a trustworthy source of information.
- III. Help the child to deal with isolation by getting involved in activities that your child enjoys. If your child is of school going age explain the child that schools are closed for the sake of protection. Assure your child that once the situation gets better you will rejoin your school and will be able to meet your friends and teachers again.
- IV. Being supportive is important. Your child might be afraid, depressed, or fearful. Help him understand that these reactions are normal reactions. Give them space, so that they can give voice to their feelings. If they are unable to express their feelings assist them in the process by being empathetic and available.
- V. Try to maintain a routine for the child. The forced isolation which children are facing is disturbing normal routine. Make the child an active partner in process of setting routines. This will lead to healthy discussion and will help you answer many questions which your child might be reluctant to ask otherwise. Maintaining proper mealtime, sleep time and time to play together can helpful.
- VI. You might help your child write a letter or paint for a friend or relative during this period. You can tell your child that he/she can give it to the concerned person once the situation gets better.
- VII. Help your child understand that COVID has nothing to do with the way someone looks, from any geographical area, from any ethnic group, or any language. Educate your child that it's important to be compassionate to people who are sick and those who are taking care of them as well.

Guidelines for older adults: People with underlying health condition

Older adults with or without an underlying health condition, might feel more helpless, anxious, stressed, agitated and withdrawn. Dealing with isolation can be tougher for them as it can aggravate all the above mentioned emotional states. Following steps might help to manage:

- I. Ensuring emotional support through families and health care providers is extremely important. If there is an underlying health condition and regular visits to doctor is

not possible make sure the E-services of online doctors that are being introduced by government are being used. Ensure that they have all the medicines which they are taking for at least next two weeks.

- II. Older people find it more difficult to stay connected via modern technology like video calls, chats or even phone calls. If that's the case, assist them in this process in a calm and respectable way.
- III. Educate older people, the importance of self-isolation. Explain them that as they are at risk of being effected by virus for this reasons other people have limited their interaction with them in order to protect them. Keep on reminding them that it is for their protection. They are not being abandoned. Try to keep a connection with family and relatives who are living at a distance via phone calls or video calls.
- IV. Share information regarding COVID in as simple manner as possible. Repeat the information when necessary. Educate them repeatedly about what needs to be done e.g. hand washing, staying inside to minimize the risk. Information needs to be concise, clear and brief. It should be provided in patient and respectful manner.
- V. In case if there is cognitive impairment, displaying in writing or pictures about what needs to be done can be helpful. Using digital reminders like it is time to wash hands, or it is time to call a family member might be helpful.
- VI. Limiting access to news, radio shows, talk shows, is very important. This might trigger anxiety which can be difficult to handle.
- VII. Encourage family members who are at a distance to call them regularly and talk to them. This can provide them a self of reassurance that they are being taken care of properly.
- VIII. Make sure that they have the emergency contact numbers and details with them. Moreover, they are aware of whom to call or contact in case of any emergency.
- IX. Maintaining a routine or schedule is extremely important. Make sure that they are not bored or feel being left out. You can help them in doing things that they like i.e. reading books, arranging their things, painting, daily chores, calling family members, etc.

Remember older people are likely to be apprehensive. As a consequence they might repeat what they are feeling. They are likely to exhibit a strong emotional reaction that may vary from complete withdrawal to being aggressive for no apparent reason. Try to spend more time with them and explain them reasons for the way they are behaving. Be very vigilant of these reactions and seek support if needed.

Guidelines for media

Media is a primary source of information in modern world. Following steps need to be taken by media to responsibly provide information that does not aggravates anxiety and

distress related to COVID-19.

- I. Focus only on the facts and do not sensationalize the news as its going to add to fears among people watching it.
- II. Use terminologies very carefully. Commonly used terminologies for people with COVID-19 are “COVID-19 victims”, “COVID families” or “COVID 19 cases”. These need to be replaced with “people being treated for COVID-19” or “people who are recovering from COVID-19.”
- III. In order to inculcate ray of hope among people report in terms of number of people who have recovered from the illness first, then number of people who are dying because of it.
- IV. Do not show the pictures of patients who are in critical conditions as this might be distressing for general population.
- V. Do not disclose the particulars and pictures of individuals tested positive for COVID-19. As it is against the basic privacy rights of the individual.
- VI. Highlight the case studies and strategies used by people who have recovered successfully from COVID-19, so that people in general can develop a thorough understanding for healthy coping strategies.
- VII. Invite people on different forums who are competent enough to talk on the basis of scientific and valid information rather than personal likes and dislikes.
- VIII. Value the services that health care providers and law enforcing agencies are playing in the current situation by recognizing their work so that they feel that their services are being recognized.
- IX. Invite the persons who have recovered form COVID-19 to share their experiences of recovery with general public.

Guidelines for people in Isolation/Quarantine

People are put into quarantine/isolation for two basic reasons. If they have a travel history and there are chances that they might have caught the disease, they are put in isolation to see whether they develop symptoms or not. Similarly, those who had a contact with a person having COVID-19 are also put in isolation to see whether symptoms appear or not. In second case, people who have milder symptoms with no complication are put into self-isolation. In both cases, typical reactions include worry, anxiety, fear regarding their own health and also about whom they interacted with. They also might have pressures like financial constraints, job security, and attitude of other people towards them, loneliness, boredom, frustration, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Following strategies might help to deal with such emotions.

- I. Providing them accurate information regarding COVID-19 might help to deal with uncertainty. It also includes provision of details regarding duration of stay in isolation.
- II. Acknowledging their fears as normal reactions and helping them learn ways to deal with stress during this period like praying, meditating, deep breathing and the like can be helpful.
- III. Seeking social support from family via telephone, email or

video chats can help them share their feelings and experiences.

- IV. Encourage them to develop a schedule and try to follow it in order to deal with boredom. Getting involved in healthy activities like prayer, meditation, book reading, indoor games can help an individual to deal with feelings of isolation and boredom.
- V. Address the fears and reassure that they can have a normal life once they go back.
- VI. Once the quarantine/isolation period is over and no symptoms are apparent do not hesitate to go back to your family thinking you might make them ill.
- VII. You are likely to experience feelings of guilt and depression thinking that you were not able to take care of your family during that time. If any of such symptom prevails contact a mental health professional.

Guidelines for people with mental illnesses and caregivers

People with a history of mental illness are likely to be affected more by uncertain situations like COVID-19. Stress, fear and uncertainty may worsen their previous mental health condition. Social isolation is likely to make them more anxious and withdrawn. They might refuse to take medication or even counseling. Under these circumstances immediate steps need to be taken by family members and psychiatrists and psychologists should be contacted without any further delay.

Similarly, people can also develop mental health problems during these conditions. The warning signs that should be considered alarming include:

- I. Major difficulties in work and family life
- II. Recurrent thoughts of death and suicide
- III. Repeatedly abusing medicines and drugs
- IV. Inability to fall asleep
- V. Difficulty in concentration

All these patterns should be taken as a warning sign. If the individual realizes any of these he/she should contact a mental health professional. If the individual is not able to recognize any of these, than the role of family members and friends become crucial. They need to educate the person and seek psychological consultation as early as possible.

Similarly, caregivers of people with mental health problems are also likely to experience more stress during this phase. As in addition to different other constraints like financial difficulties, difficulty in managing work and home, working from home and taking care of other family members can be highly demanding. Under these circumstances, it is important to take care of one’s own self as well. Following steps might be helpful for caregivers

- I. Dedicating some time of the day to your own self, taking a break and spending it the way you like is important. It is important to identify what you like to do. This would help to deal with feelings of overburden.
- II. Do not feel guilty for not being able to manage each and everything. As situation is demanding so some days can be highly productive and others may not be. Give yourself

that margin and be flexible to accept it.

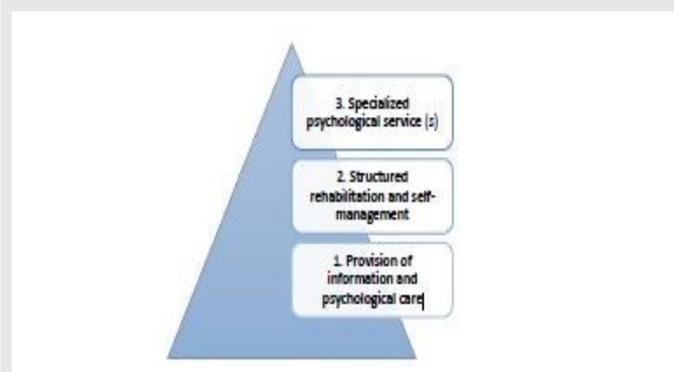
- III. Your environment might not be considered supportive as you are dealing with a person who is having trouble dealing with his/her emotions. So, that much needed recognition and appreciation can be missing from environment. Under these circumstances, try to give yourself positive messages like you are trying to do your best and have done well so far.
- IV. Various governmental and non-governmental organizations are arranging online support forums which include webinars, online support groups, email based and telephonic counseling. Try to find these avenues to give vent to your feelings.
- V. Seek support and talk to a mental health professional if at any point you feel that you are not able to manage yourself properly.

Guidelines for people recovering from COVID-19

As COVID-19 is a novel virus so limited data is available regarding psychological, emotional and cognitive needs of people who are recovering from this illness. However the common emotional reactions might include presence of anxiety, irritability, low mood, over-sensitivity or hyper vigilance regarding bodily symptoms, somatic complaints, nightmares, sleep related problems, memory impairment, denial, poor mental processing paired with decline in areas of executive functioning i.e. thinking, reasoning and judgment, apprehensions regarding recovery as well as fear of stigma and abandonment. While physically managing the problem, these psychological aspects are critical as they tend to determine the outcome of treatment. In case of hospitalization, following factors are an additional threat to wellbeing of individuals.

- a. Physical barriers that hinder communication with staff because of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- b. Isolation from family and loved ones
- c. Environment of hospital that might include noise, alarms, lack of day light, disturbed circadian rhythms (especially for those who are in Intensive Care Units).
- d. Watching other patients on ventilators or deaths
- e. Concerns regarding delays in checkups and lack of staffing and equipment

Keeping in view all these factors, the psychological rehabilitation needs to be designed very carefully focusing on the above mentioned facts. As a general guiding principle, it can be planned at three levels.



1. Provision of information and psychological care

This component can be further divided in to two facets one focusing on what needs to be done at the time of discharge and second regarding follow up sessions after discharge.

a. Before discharge

- I. Before discharge it is important that detailed debriefing sessions are held with all patients who have recovered from the illness. A team comprising of psychiatrists, psychologist and counselors could help patients understand their emotional reactions.
- II. The team should brief them about any potential physical and psychological symptom that patient might experience later on. It is equally important to explain reasons that why the patient is likely to experience these symptoms. During this phase it is important to encourage patients to ask questions so that their queries are addressed by a reliable source.
- III. Similar information and reading material that has been verbally shared with patient should be provided to patient in written form. It might include informative and educational brochures regarding recovery process, success stories, potential sources of referral who can be contacted later on if needed etc. so that he/she can consult it later on and share it with family members and other members of the community.

b. Follow up sessions

- I. Early follow up session are recommended after discharge to assess both physical and psychological wellbeing. It could be planed within a month or two of discharge. This can include in person visit by the person who has recovered, and family or through video or on call inquiry by team of professionals working with the person.
- II. Brief psychological assessments involving questions related to sleep wake cycles, cognitive functioning, adjustment after recovery, relationship with family members, experience of being at hospital, any memory or thought that patient find hard to forget, any aspect of illness that is still bothering the patient or family, reactions of society towards the person and family, post-traumatic stress symptoms and cognitive functions are essential for follow up sessions.
- III. Support groups can be held where patients who have recovered are brought on a single platform and under expert supervision of psychologists they can share their experiences which helped them cope with this illness. Mere listening to experiences of others will help the individual to develop an understanding that he/she is not the sole one going through it. There are many others who have gone through similar emotional reactions. Similarly experience sharing regarding which coping strategies helped them and which did not work can also provide useful insight.
- IV. It is important to realize that caregivers (including family members, spouse, children, or any significant other) are also susceptible to develop emotional and psychological

reactions. Addressing their queries and problems they are facing (if any) is equally important. So, it is important to involve them in the process of psychological rehabilitation. Remember, their reactions are not only going to effect the patient's recovery but also their own wellbeing.

2. Structured rehabilitation and self-management

There will be few patients who might experience significant psychological, emotional, cognitive and functional impairment following hospitalization. A more structured rehabilitation comprising of multidisciplinary team including psychologist, psychiatrist, physiotherapist, speech/language therapist, occupational therapist, nurse and doctors is needed as per the requirement of each individual. At this level the areas that are likely to be addressed include:

- I. Extensive Psychoeducation sessions focusing on the reasons why individual is facing a particular problem and what can be done about it
- II. Supporting patients who are experiencing emotional distress.
- III. Counseling on issues related to self-esteem, fears,

perceived anxiety that might help patient to resume normal day to day activities.

- IV. Peer and family involvement to help address the reasons and design strategies to deal with problems that individual is facing after recovery.

3. Specialized psychological services

There will be some individuals who after recovery from COVID 19 might experience continuous anxiety, distress, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, problems related to substance abuse despite of early interventions given to them. Such individuals should be referred for intensive psychotherapy. Similarly individuals with cognitive difficulties should be referred further for neuropsychological services.

To sum up, it is important to take care of one's own self and provide support to others as well during this pandemic. Not associating any stigma with the person who is being treated for COVID-19 is equally important. Without any discrimination, it's crucial to accept and welcome people back to community who are recovering from this disease.

LIVING WITH COVID-19

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Merriam Webster Dictionary (2020), defines coronavirus as, "any of a family (Coronaviridae) of large single-stranded RNA viruses that have a lipid envelope studded with club-shaped spike proteins ". SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) was first recognized in China in 2003, during an outbreak that affected about 8000 people in 26 countries (World Health Organization, 2003). SARS included flu-like symptoms, fever, diarrhea, shivering, and headaches. Intermountain healthcare (2020) defines a pandemic as "an epidemic that's spread over multiple countries or continents". The Spanish Influenza of 1918, has been considered the deadliest pandemic to date (Morens & Fauci, 2007). An estimated 500 million people were affected and about 50 million deaths occurred, accounting for about 2% fatality rate. During this pandemic, people were required to wear masks, adhere to quarantine rules, and use disinfectants. The influenza pandemic occurred in the pre-antibiotic era when there were no antibiotics to treat secondary bacterial infections. There wasn't a vaccine then, just like there isn't a vaccine available during the current COVID 19 pandemic (Morens & Fauci, 2007).

The current pandemic is enormous in scope and has posed unique challenges globally. The current coronavirus is referred to as the COVID-19 virus (World Health Organization, 2020). The World Health Organization declared this outbreak a pandemic on March 11th, 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020). The United States is currently leading the globe in the number of COVID-19 cases and

related deaths, with 4,339,997 reported cases and 148,886 deaths as of July 29, 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020). COVID-19 virus attacks the respiratory system leading to difficulties in breathing especially for people with other underlying respiratory conditions and may cause death in severe cases.

Due to the increase in number of infections and COVID-19 related deaths, these statistics are raising fear and anxiety among the American people. According to Psychology Today (2020), COVID-19 pandemic has created an epidemic of anxiety among people. Quarantine has been emotionally challenging and has had a serious impact on mental health (Parmet & Sinha, 2020). For the majority of people, the idea of staying inside for long periods, social distancing, frequent hand washing, and wearing masks has affected their thoughts and led to anxiety.

The current pandemic is also linked to loss of jobs or people have been put under indefinite unpaid leave (Nicola et al. 2020). The United States has not previously recorded this level of job loss since the great depression. This has pushed many families to depend on food banks and await government assistance (Baker et al, 2020). In New York City, there are about 229,000 confirmed cases and 22,982 reported deaths (World Health Organization, 2020). For people living in New York, a crowded city that is ever busy and has high population density, the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected people's lives, both physically and

mentally. Mental health controls one's thoughts, behaviors, and emotions. COVID-19 pandemic has put people's mental health at risk and their psychological and emotional well-being need to be considered. A person's mental state is just as important as their physical health during this pandemic (Holmes et al, 2020). People need to make critical decisions to either stay at home and contain the spread of the virus or go out and put their lives and those of their families at risk of contracting the virus.

Mental health among healthcare workers involved in COVID 19 response

COVID-19, affects both the young and the elderly and more severe cases are reported for those with pre-existing medical conditions (Götzinger et al, 2020). The responsibility of taking care of severely ill COVID-19 patients including older adults and those of any age with serious underlying medical conditions lies with medical professionals. However, most people with mild illness can recover at home. The health care workers and their families are at a higher risk of contracting the virus. Health care professionals are experiencing severe stress due to the overwhelming number of COVID 19 patients and having to work for long hours (Liu et al, 2020). Healthcare professionals should take the right precautions to keep their families and themselves safe from the virus. Amaassn (2020) highlights some of the precautionary measures against COVID-19, "Again, trying to get folks into the right setting and using the appropriate respiratory protection, gowns, gloves, droplet protection, and N95 or higher respiratory protection". Nurse.org (2020) also acknowledges that "Many nurses will be working long stressful shifts during which they are exposed to a great deal of human suffering". This can cause a feeling of burnout, depression, and loneliness among nurses. According to helpguide.org (2020), "Burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress". Nurses should be monitored to ensure that they are healthy and in a good physical and mental state (Liu et al, 2020).

Mental health status of the general population in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 has significantly affected people psychologically (Li, et al, 2020). Psychological moods and attitudes can have a major effect on people's health especially due to job loss, financial struggles that many people are currently facing, devastating media reports, and even challenges with reference to families living together as a result of quarantine. One of the psychological disorders that many people are currently experiencing is that of contamination OCD (Fineberg et al, 2020). Contamination OCD is where one fears germs and becoming sick. Before the current pandemic, about 25% of the United States population suffered from contamination OCD. However, following the pandemic, the number of people with OCD has drastically increased. Apart from OCD, people have developed a heightened level of anxiety. Mayo clinic (2020), defines

anxiety as when people, "frequently have intense, excessive and persistent worry and fear about everyday situations". Some of the anxiety-related symptoms include; sweating, trembling, trouble sleeping, feeling tired, etc. In addition to psychological effects, COVID-19 affects the lungs and the brain as well (Zhou, Zhang, & Qu, 2020). The effects on the brain include headaches, dizziness, and loss of smell and taste, all of which are controlled by the central nervous system. The virus causes damage to the brain cells and the damage can be irreversible.

Safety precautions against COVID 19

Social distancing has been globally recommended as one of the precautionary measures against COVID-19. CDC (2020) defines social distancing as, "Social distancing, also called "physical distancing," means keeping space between yourself and other people outside of your home". World Health Organization (2020), recommends a distance of six feet apart from one another and people should avoid large crowds to help prevent the spread of the virus. Social distancing helps to protect oneself and others around you. Essential businesses are keen on social distancing and they utilize signage and duct tape to guide their customers. Businesses also ensure that their employees and their customers use face masks all the time (Kornack et al, 2020). In addition to social distancing, there are approximately ten additional safety measures that may be used to help prevent COVID-19 infections. They include; proper handwashing, disinfecting surfaces, refraining from handling food if feeling unwell, not sharing towels with sick individuals, not shaking hands/hugging/kissing others, not touching your face, avoiding crowds, wearing gloves in public, and practicing good hygiene (Elston, 2020). However, some of the cons of social distancing include lack of intimacy or refraining from physical contact with the ones we love. Couples and families that are not quarantined together are struggling and have to rely on video chatting or other means of communication. Quarantine is a precautionary measure currently implemented to contain the spread of COVID-19 (Elston, 2020). There are several advantages of quarantine in addition to reducing the spread of COVID-19 (Nussbaumer-Streit, 2020). One advantage is bringing families together to spend more time with each other. Another advantage is that some people have been learning new skills during the quarantine period such as cooking, baking, cutting hair, painting, etc. Additionally those who may have been overwhelmed prior to the pandemic by work or school schedules may have had the opportunity to rest. Conversely, there are numerous challenges associated with the quarantine (Elston, 2020). These include, not being able to participate in normal activities and having to wear a face mask in public. Cases of anxiety, depression, and domestic violence have increased because of people being together all the time. A major challenge associated with quarantine is the resulting anxiety and depression

from people not being able to provide for themselves or their families.

Treatment of COVID-19

There is currently no vaccine for COVID-19 but researchers are racing to create one (Liu et al, 2020). There are many challenges that may be faced when developing vaccines. The safety and efficacy of the vaccine is one of these. Catalyst (2020), also noted that “Researchers are working around the clock amidst the global pandemic to develop safe, effective and affordable vaccines that will prevent both individual infection and the continued spread of the virus”. Several methods can be used to develop a coronavirus vaccine including, live vaccines, inactivated vaccines, and genetically engineered vaccines (Liu et al, 2020). Researchers are working to develop the most effective vaccine that will be suitable for everyone. According to the Mayo Clinic (2020) “Because of the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccine regulators might fast-track some of these steps. But it's unlikely that a COVID-19 vaccine will become available sooner than six months after clinical trials start.” In the meantime, governments are encouraging people to continue taking necessary precautions described previously. Some medical professionals have suggested certain vitamins and supplements, resting, drinking plenty of fluids, and eating healthy foods to boost the immune system. Some of the recommended vitamins and supplements include vitamin C and zinc. Since COVID-19 is a serious threat to human health, people are urged to listen to the government and healthcare professionals to help ensure that we are all safe together. As suggested by doctors, people should self-quarantine if feeling unwell. Persons that test positive should stay away from people, including family members. To help prevent the spread of the virus, wash your hands regularly for at least twenty seconds, avoid touching your face, and cover your mouth and nose if you sneeze or cough. If experiencing severe symptoms, seek medical attention to receive additional care.

Conclusion

The current pandemic has led to drastic life changes. Schools and colleges have been shut down, leading to online learning. If visiting a store, one has to wear a mask, some stores have placed stickers on the floor to indicate where one should stand to adhere to the six feet apart rule, and employees' have to clean surfaces frequently. The majority of non-essential businesses such as dry cleaners, salons, and movie theaters have closed to stop the spread of the virus. Therefore, COVID 19 and quarantine has put everyone in a bad state of mind, and things are no longer done normally. For example, going to the supermarket with your mask on and living in worry of contracting the virus. Adding to the fear of contracting the virus, are the significant changes in people's daily lives in a bid to contain and reduce the infection rates. Besides, there are new realities of life including lack of physical contact even

with close family members and friends, unemployment, having to work from home, and even homeschooling. With all these developments, it is therefore important that people look out their mental health, besides physical health as we continue hoping that scientists will soon develop a vaccine.

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SELF-CARE TECHNIQUES DURING COVID 19

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Corona virus is the new reality the world is adjusting to. It has impacted global population in unprecedented ways. Changed living, social distancing, economic meltdown and the uncertainty about future are stress causing factors to all and sundry. Severe contagious nature of the COVID-19 is causing high mortality rates. The nature of this virus is still a mystery. There are mixed reports about how it impacts an individual. To some it causes debilitating symptoms and a threat to life while others remain asymptomatic carriers. The threat to reinfection exists as have been reported in China and the symptoms are fatal in the second reinfection. In the face of such uncertainty and threat to life, global mental health indicators are showing downward trend (Kumar & Nayar, 2020).

Corona started impacted Pakistani population since February, 2020 (Saqlain et al., 2020). The initial impression was that the virus might not spread much as compared to China, Italy, Iran and United States, because we had less infected cases at that time. The threat of wide spread infection was down played by a large segment population which refused to adhere to the standard operating procedures that had been introduced by the government as protective measures (Shams, 2020). Hence today we are amongst the highly infected nation, with broken economy and no space in hospitals for corona patients. Lots of precious lives from all segments of society have been lost. Also we do not know how long it will take Pakistan to become corona free. In the face of such uncertainty, disruption in family life has been reported (Brooks et al., 2020) which has further magnified daily stress experience.

Studies have emphasized strong role of immune system in health and ailments (Pariante, 2016). Stress impacts the immune system adversely (Ziemssen, & Kern, 2007; American Psychological Association, 2006). Strong

immunity is robust protective factor against Covid-19 (Amene et al., 2020). Hence the rise in number of people experiencing the symptoms of virus in current times could also be due to stress induced weaker immune system. Therefore, it is important that factors that weaken the immune system should be avoided and those that can strengthen the immune system are adopted for strong resistance against the virus.

Strong immune system can be maintained in number of ways; for instance, through immunization, healthy food, good sleep, avoiding substance and keeping clean. Besides these there are a number of other activities that can contribute to maintain healthy immunity. These activities are stress reduction techniques that can broadly be categorized into cognitive, behavioral, emotional and spiritual stress management practices.

Cognitive techniques for stress management:

Cognitive interventions are used for reducing stress due to negative thoughts, anxious concerns, worries, dreadful anticipation, poor concentration, memory issues depression and other such problems experienced due to stress. The basic tenet of cognitive approach is that our states depend upon the quality of our thoughts. The focus of cognitive strategies is to reduce debilitating psychological symptoms through gaining a new or different perspective on a situation, enabling one to regain control and enhance confidence in finding solutions to problems.

Those who would like to adopt this approach have to start with becoming aware of how do they interpret situations and what meanings are assigned to them. Are their interpretations true? Does evidence exists for it? Hence these self-awareness practices are undertaken for a suitable span of time each day. Self-reflection involves

identifying negative experiences, finding their connections to thoughts that go through mind automatically. This is followed by self-reflecting and challenging the validity of negative thoughts and unrealistic expectations through looking for evidence. Only those cognitions and beliefs are maintained which have evidential support. Assumptions and unrealistic expectations are drop for the peace of mind. Regular journaling is important to maintain a record of progress for those who would like to adopt this approach to manage cognitive stress. This approach works better with intellectual minded people who make sense of the world through logic and reason.

Behavioral techniques for stress management:

These techniques focus on adopting ways and habits that would help individuals in finding relief from stress. Milder stress can be dealt through self-soothing activities such as gardening, listen to music, practicing art, getting body massage, and indulging in hobbies. If the source of stress is overwork, the disorganization and confusion can be dealt through work planning, time management and sticking to routines. Journaling helps in taking things off-mind and dealing with forgetfulness. Regular exercise goes a long in lowering muscle tension, relaxing mind, and maintaining brain and body health. Even regular walks helps in organizing thought and induce states of wellbeing. Other behavior techniques include progressive muscle relaxation. Muscles are tensed and then relaxed progressively so that tautness and tension can be released from the muscles. Deep diaphragmatic breathing is great practice that replenishes the energy in mind and body, brings a state of calmness and reduces stress. People who have stressful daily routines can find relief from stress by incorporating these practices in their routines.

Emotional techniques for stress management:

Stress can effect out emotional states and cause anger, irritability, hyper-aroused, conflicted feelings, tension and disconnection from others. Emotion focusing techniques help in processing emotions and allow us to become less emotionally reactive to stressful situation. These techniques are usually helpful when one is stuck in a situation and the stressor is something that can't be avoided. The way to go by in processing feelings is to stay with them, feel them (rather than avoiding them) till these get resolved. Emotional focusing is another technique in which the attention is directed to the spot in body where feelings are experienced. Listen to the feelings and having a dialogue with them helps one understand them better and release them. A third technique is to drop down attention to the spot where one feels tightness of emotions in the body; then create space around it for the emotion/s to relax in wider space. All these techniques have been found to be effective in managing debilitating emotions.

Spiritual techniques for stress management:

A large segment of population worldwide find solace in spiritual practices in high stress situations. Where human

efforts fail people turn to the divine for solace and comfort. Common among these are praying, meditation, yoga, charity giving, practicing gratitude and altruism, practicing silence, surrendering control, and withdrawal from the world. Research has supported that spiritual practices have contributed to human wellbeing (Amutio et al., 2015). Spiritual approach helps in accepting situations and finding a different meaning and purpose to existence.

Adopting above mentioned practices can go a long way in maintaining mental and physical health particularly during these stressful times of Corona pandemic. Detailed information about the techniques mentioned above is available through books and internet. Before starting anything new it is important that thorough knowledge about the topic is acquired.

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