

COVID-19: An inevitable emerging challenge across mental illness

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to explore and understand the impacts of Covid-19 on people's mental health, especially people who suffer from different kinds of mental disorders like OCD, GAD, substance abuse, schizophrenia etc. This will illustrate a new dimension for the health officials to come up with the proper service to assist them. This article throws light upon deterioration of health status of the mentally ill patients and obstacles of health professionals. Aggressive insight into the impact the COVID-19 epidemic is having on patients who are suffering from mental disorders, like OCD, substance abuse, bipolar disorder, ADHD, eating disorders etc. This will help us address the issues they face. Further to make a proper guideline on how to help them address their issues. As a mental health professional should try to overcome the challenge as it's an unavoidable circumstance.

Keywords: Covid-19, Mental illness

Viruses are universal but their origins are not very clear. Viruses are considered to be neither alive nor dead, but to be considered inhabiting 'the edge of life'. Coronaviruses are a group among of viruses that are common among animals. It is a very rare case when it gets transmitted from human to animals. These viruses are zoonotic. These set of viruses have the largest genome among all the RNA viruses. The SARS- CoV-2 is a novel strain of coronavirus. This strain was first detected in the city of Wuhan, in the province of Hubei, in China. The outbreak started as a normal pneumonia of an unknown agent in December 2019. The bats were considered to be the reservoir of COVID-19 virus. On January 30th, 2020, WHO declared the outbreak as an emergency. The Covid-19 epidemic has been spreading in all part of the world at a rapid rate, disrupting day to day life and causing deaths. This has also caused unbearable psychological pressure (Bao et al., 2020). As of now according to the World Health organization website there are 3024059 confirmed cases, 208112 deaths all over the world. Because of the continuous spread in the epidemic and very strict isolation measures, closing of schools universities, offices and work places have caused an influence on the mental health of the people all over the globe.

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According to a study which was recently done on weibo users it was seen that negative emotions like anxiety, depression, and indignation and sensitivity to all different kinds of social risk increased when life satisfaction decreased. People showed more concern in their health and family rather than leisure and friends.

An online study was done among the general population of china and the psychological impact was assessed with the help of the scales like Impact of Event Scale and the Depression Anxiety and stress scale. The results were overwhelming giving us an idea of the impact of the disease. It was found that 53.8% of respondents rated the psychological impact of the outbreak as moderate or severe; 16.5% reported moderate to severe depressive symptoms; 28.8% reported moderate to severe anxiety symptoms, and 8.1% reported moderate to severe stress levels.

The uncertainty in the outcomes low prediction of what the virus can do in the future threatens not only physical health but mental health also. According, to the Behavioural Immune System Theory a person for self-protection will develop negative emotions like aversion anxiety and a negative cognitive assessment. Due to threat caused because of a disease people develop avoidant behaviours example: social distancing from people who even show signs of a cough or a fever as in the case of covid-19 and conform to the strict social norms, example staying at home during lockdown. According to the stress theory and the perceived risk theory also says that negative emotions are triggered causing people to stay away from pathogens and causes of the disease. With time these negative emotions can cause a reduction in the immune function of the people and create misbalance in the basic psychological mechanisms. This can also cause blind conformity in the lack of proper direction of rules and authority. The impact of corona can be seen in all the corners of the society from children to old people causing a disruption in daily life but the impact on mental health patients seems to be adverse. This paper we will be discussing the impact of corona virus on people who already suffer from a misbalance in the normal psychological mechanisms.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder:

This disorder is a multi-dimensional disorder. The symptoms that define OCD are diverse. They have a tendency for cleaning and washing compulsions with contamination obsessions; repetitive rituals, obsessions, counting compulsions, ordering/arranging compulsions, hoarding and collecting compulsions. OCD is a chronic disease which compromises the individuals functioning and wellbeing and has a detrimental effect on both the patient and families and the quality of life.

Substance abuse:

It refers to the use of harmful or hazardous substances like alcohol and drugs. These substances can lead to a dependence syndrome which can happen after repeated substance use. The withdrawal symptoms varies with respect to every drug, causes decreased mental sharpness, poor performance, hallucinations, anxiety and depression.

Bipolar disorder: Bipolar disorder is a mix episode of mania and depression which characterized by change in mood, irritability, excessive talking etc.

Schizophrenia: Schizophrenia a psychiatric disorder which alter perception, cognition, thought process, speech. Associated symptoms are delusion, hallucination, disorganized speech, abnormal motor activity, negative and positive symptoms etc.

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ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder): The name only determines its character. People with ADHD show symptom viz. increase in motor activity, decrease attention span, irritability, restlessness etc.

Dealing with various mental illnesses during corona virus outbreak:

Novel corona virus becomes an unavoidable challenge in all over the world. But to the handling the psychiatric patients turns to a supplementary crisis. Mental illnesses are contributing to alternation in the cognitive process of the patients. Fear, anxiety, stress, irritability, isolation are facilitating factor during pandemic situation for mental illness.

A report from Goa by mental health professional suggests that increase in number of cases in anxiety, stress, suicidal tendencies, depression, panic attacks after the pandemic situation. Online services have started but the health professionals unable to grapple with these situations. (PTI, 2020). This indicates increase in number of post-traumatic stress disorders cases as result of financial loss during this crisis. Patients with anxiety disorder experiencing fear related to occurrence of COVID-19. Anxiety, fear and isolation during this lock down enhance depressive symptoms among the mentally ill patients.

Here a case study report reflects the seriousness impact of COVID-19 in present scenario. A male patient who were an ambulance driver with polymorphic psychotic disorder (F.23.0) and paranoid psychosis (F.20) since 2011 and on medication; reporting that he is contaminated by the whatsapp messages received from china and he is under the surveillance of camera to monitor his immunity (Fischer, Coogan, Faltraco, & Thome, 2020). Further he was worried for inability to save his parents and neighbours from corona virus and heard voice commanding him. So these hallucinatory and delusional symptoms are presenting during COVID-19. Schizophrenic patients are unable to cope with the change in the daily routine due lockdown which impacting in the perception, dysregulation in medicine and isolation worsening the symptoms.

Professional determines patient with bipolar disorder struggling to manage their anxiety (Lawrence, 2020). Anxiety, fear and stress caused by COVID-19 stimulating the symptoms of depressive episode patients with bipolar disorder. Restricting to be isolate can cause irritability.

Health professionals from psychiatric unit are in trouble to manage the patients. Psychiatric patients are already difficult to handle meanwhile during the corona virus crisis psychiatric unit handling the patients with COVID-19. Staffs are facing problem to provide therapies, maintaining daily routine in different way as they are not allow to watch TV together or seat. Although positive patients has isolated, the circumstance becomes vulnerable as other patients and the staff were already in contact. Further determines the scarcity of staff to replace and residency of the staff who already in contact. It concludes about the crisis in the psychiatric unit which is completely different comparing to the other medical unit (Miller, 2020).

Patients with OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) represent provocation in their symptoms related to contamination by increase in number of handwashing. Because of corona virus infection handwashing is advised by the health professional which creating contrast scenario for OCD patients.

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Patients with Eating disorder (ED) experiencing increase in the amount of food and fear about decrease in the food supply. Suffering with boredom enhances the eating behaviour among eating disorder patients. Further the scarcity of food stimulating anxiety and fear. Patients with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) are unable to stay inside their home as result of that increase in stress and decrease in productivity. The restriction in their activity leads to occurrence of impairment in mental health.

Dealing with substance abuse during corona virus outbreak:

Substance abuse considers as a contributing factor to other mental illness. Not even psychologically but also physical distress cause by the various substances like alcohol, opioid, marijuana etc. During lockdown due to corona virus there can be two conditions either patients can effort to arrange the specific substance and more consumption or otherwise due to unavailability of substance can triggered by withdrawal symptoms. Further alteration in regular standard care like group therapy, medication can be hazardous. There can be more vulnerable who are all in the process to recovery. Several reports suggest climacteric circumstances.

Report illustrates people with substance abuse like smoking, marijuana, opioid are at more risk to infect by corona virus. Patients using methamphetamine which damages to lungs are more vulnerable. Opioid impact on the brain stems which leads to decrease in breathing pattern of the patients. Further it concludes COVID-19 makes vulnerable those patients (Nora, 2020). From the report it can be consider that the target point of corona virus is respiratory system and patients with substance abuse have poor pulmonary condition.

Patients with alcohol abuse encounter fuel during this lockdown. While myth about alcohol as a treatment agent during COVID-19; WHO (World Health Organization) declare to usage restriction in alcohol. Help line for drug abuser received more numbers of calls during lockdown along with increase in number of suicide case (Hamid & Harigovind, 2020). On the other hand it is reported by health professional to advice continuation for alcohol consumption in order to avoid further hazardous symptoms. This is diplomatic condition for the mental health professional in order to maintain the health status of the psychiatric patients.

Mental hospital across the country reports daily increase in numbers of cases of admission of patients with withdrawal symptoms like tremors, sleep deprivation, palpitation, headache, irritability etc. It has been found out allowing of liquor during the time of lockdown across the some area of the country.

Health professional illustrates that patient with alcohol dependence suffering as sudden discontinuation in their drinking habit due to lockdown will be worsening their condition. As the patients are unable to avail standard care this will lead to degradation of the health status. Through online services professional are suggesting the patients to continue drink which is an unfavourable decision.

MEASURE TO OVERCOME

To deal with these conditions there will be poor outcome in case of patients living alone. Loneliness, isolation, irritability, tension elevate the urge for drinking or other substance abuse. Online counselling services can help them to some extend if they are motivated towards recovery. Broadcasting of some motivating program over TV or internet may help.

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On other hand patients living with their family it can be an opportunity for family therapy. Online counselling for both family and patient can enhance to help out the patients.

The family members could create healthy behaviour like, yoga, exercise, playing games, household task, working on vegetable garden etc. Core of this process is motivation from both parties. The patients need to engage in some activity in order to gain control over the cravings. So both family and health professional have to work on for fruitful results.

The patients shouldn't expose to the disturbing news over social media or TV.

Health professionals should take care of new admissions. The newly admitted patients should be quarantine for 14 days even if they are not showing symptoms for COVID-19. There should be separate staff to deal with the new admission. Hospital management needs to arrangement for residency of those staff.

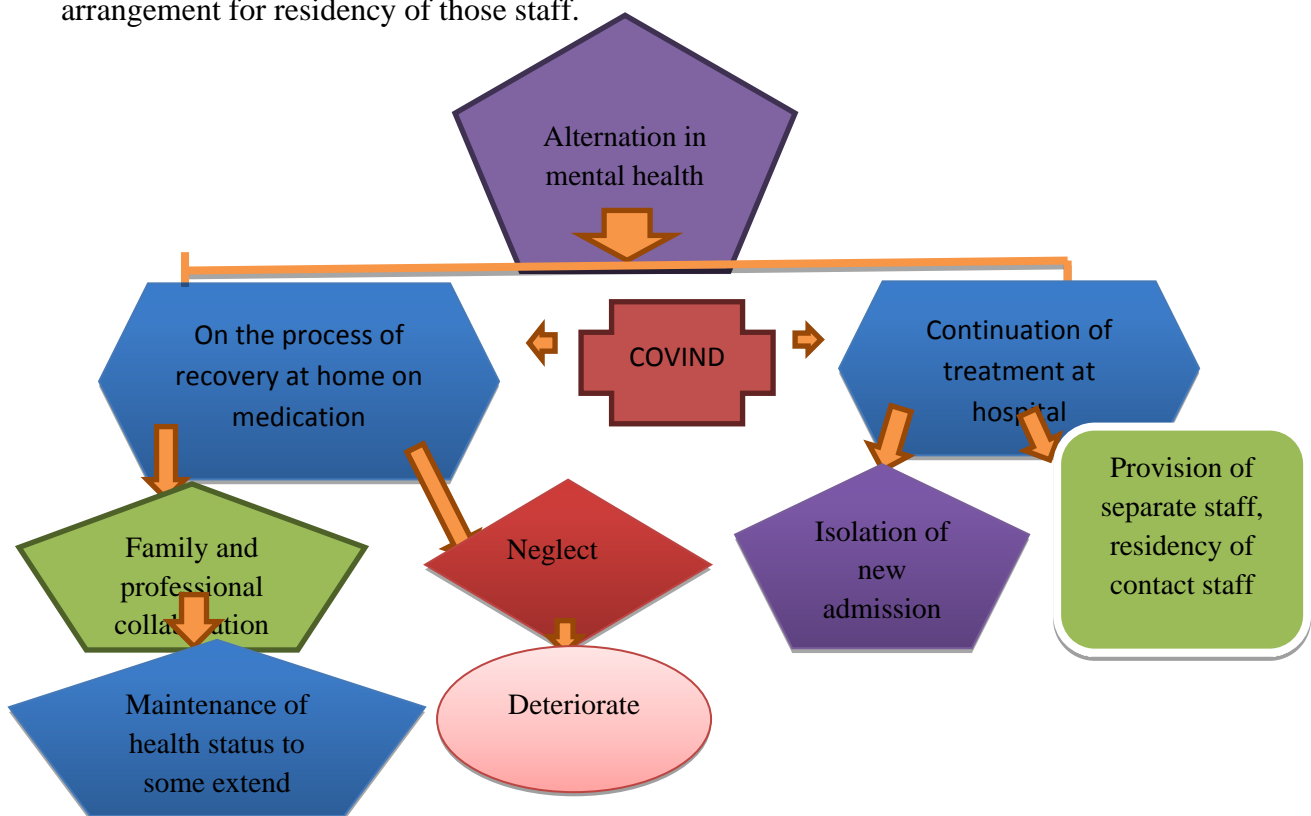


Fig: Circumstance of mental illness during corona virus pandemic situation

CONCLUSION

The reports drawn insight about challenge faced by the psychiatric patients along with the health professionals. This condition is not more than disaster for this group of people. But the family members can be great help to enhance their health collaborating with the health professionals. This can be act as great opportunity for family to take care of the ill one. The health professionals should continue their medications by coordinating with family members. The circumstance is unavoidable for each one of us. As mental health professional people need to deal calm and carefully with this challenge.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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