

Challenges and opportunities to rise for psychologists in COVID-19 pandemic scenario

Shyam H. R.^{1*}, Govindaswamy C.², Deepa S. M.³

ABSTRACT

In the present scenario of novel COVID-19 pandemic due to its ability to spread rapidly each and every profession in the globe is facing an invincible challenge and the profession of psychology is also one of such field which is the sheer essential service in this global pandemic scenario but worstly affected due to various challenges posed. Review of existing scientific literature, telephonic interview with practising psychologists and clients who are in close contact with authors was done to collect the information about their experience in the time of COVID-19 outburst and their opinion about psychologist's role in future. The information collected through various Webinars and Zoom meetings attended by the authors in the COVID-19 lockdown period were also inculcated. The outcome of the present study is offered the perspectives of clients, institutions, psychologists suggesting brief interventions, multidisciplinary research community level management and awareness about the public health emergency is the need of the hour.

Keywords: COVID-19 Pandemic, Psychologists, Challenges, Opportunities, Mental Health

India is a country of diversity from the day of its evolution from ancient days of history. It has been always a world's hope in management of the global diseases like polio, cholera, plague and small pox were greater health related challenges in front of India in previous decades. Delivering the lifesaving vaccines to infected patients was efficiently carried out by India. The Expanded Programme of Immunization (EPI) (1978) and then Universal Immunization Programme (UIP) (1985) were historical programmes which are preventive measures practiced by the Government of India were historical in the field of health services in the country. Though reluctance, opposition and a slow acceptance rate of the vaccine were challenges posed in the past were effectively faced by the health professionals (Chandrakanth, 2014). In the present scenario of novel COVID-19 pandemic due to its ability to spread rapidly each and every profession in the globe is facing an invincible challenge and the profession of psychology is also one of such field which is the sheer essential service in this global pandemic scenario but worstly affected due to various challenges posed. Present article is an attempt to understand the challenges posed by the

¹Assistant Professor of Psychology, GFGCW Krishnaraja Pete, Affiliated to University of Mysore, Mysore, Karnataka, India

²Psychologist, Department of Psychiatry, Krishnaraja Hospital, MMCRI, Mysore, Karnataka, India

³Psychologist, Samanvaya- Symphony youth trust, Mysore, Karnataka, India

*Responding Author

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novel COVID-19 pandemic and the opportunity it can provide psychologists to wide spread their services and rise against the challenge.

Novel Corona virus disease – 2019 (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). It was initially identified in the Wuhan city of China and gradually spread throughout the world on date it is infected to more than 6 million people and already caused the life of 3,80,000 people globally. Novel corona virus pandemic not only posing health related challenges throughout the world it is bringing various novel challenges for the modern human society.

Psychological services

The role of psychologist in modern society is versatile from the micro level to macro level of human life applications of Psychology are so vital. Especially Psychologists plays a vital role in treating the mental health problem and improving the quality of life. The field of psychology has since witnessed major strides. Today Psychologists face multiple challenges and criticise for within and outside the field of medical in general and threaten the practice of psychologist. The amount of psychologist in India is dreadful in terms of population and also found the deficiency of licensed psychologist in India. Psychologists are facing enormous difficulties in treating the patient during the COVID 19 pandemic. The outbreak of the pandemic is severely affecting the mental health of the people worldwide. Individual responses to the pandemic may vary depending on background, specific features of the individual like temperament, attachment styles and stress responsivity (Lorenzo et al, 2020). Healthcare workers are also got affected by this pandemic as they reported the physical symptoms such a headache, throat pain and lethargy and those who reported physical symptoms also reported higher rates of stress, depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. (Nicholas et al, 2020).

In this situation psychological services are also got impacted as there was the situation of lockdown of the nation for more than 45 days caused mixed impact on the citizens of the country where as proportionately people felt good and bad about the outburst of the pandemic in different aspects which impacted on their mental health posing a new and different challenge in front of psychologists to handle. Mental health was a stigmatized subject in the past but from the last few years an unprecedented development has seen in importance to global mental health. 194 countries have included mental health and well-being in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 and the Government of India took the initiative and passed the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017. In such a scenario COVID-19 outburst throughout the world has upraised a greater challenge to the society and mental health professionals.

As history had revealed that greater challenges opens the ways to greater inventions and opportunities to development post COVID-19 outbreak Psychologists will face a greater challenge. On the same time if the Psychology professionals look at this situation positively it will also provide opportunities for making positive impression in the society about the profession of Psychologists and demonstrate the impact of psychological interventions on mental health even in the greater challenging situations. Present article discusses about the various challenges has been faced by the psychologists on the situation of initial days of COVID-19 outburst, challenges are going to come in next 6-12 months and long-term challenges for coming 5 years as well as how it can help psychologists to rise there bars and think innovatively to promote the profession.

METHODOLOGY

Present article was written by reviewing the existing scientific literature. More than 120 articles from online sources such as Google scholar, EBSCO, PubMed, Science direct, Elsevier and Acaemia.edu were critically reviewed and specifically 40 journal articles and 8 web blogs write ups were used extensively to write the present article. The articles were free of cost on the online platform author was able to access full papers published in this difficult situation. Telephonic interview with practising psychologists and clients who are in close contact with authors was done to collect the information about their experience in the time of COVID-19 outburst and their opinion about psychologist's role in future. The information collected through the various Webinars and Zoom meetings attended by the authors in the COVID-19 lockdown period were also inculcated while preparing the article framework.

Outcome

Method which has been followed by the author was initially showed the inverse impact of COVID-19 outburst on the Psychologist profession as the number of clients inquired for the psychological services in the period of lockdown 1.0 was zero it was the most distressful situation throughout the country and it was not different for the authors too. As the time move ahead and the duration from lockdown 2.0 to 5.0 improvement in condition has been observed with the challenges in front of the profession. The outcome or result of the present study is presented in the perspectives of clients, mental health institutions, psychologists.

Clients' perspectives

Clients with mental health difficulty are the major stake holders of the psychologist profession. In the perspective of the clients major challenges came across in the COVID-19 lockdown period was not different but the intensity of the difficulty. Clients have reported that the mental health were moderate to severe depression and anxiety. Clients will have to face the challenges from community related risks for mental health as there will be major shift in their life as most of the institutional services will be facing difficulty to deliver services as previous days leading clients to get stressed up or frustrated and worried for essential services. Challenges within the family will be a greater challenge as it provides both positive and negative opportunities, as schools shutdown, parents experiencing increased work pressure to work from home and lots of individuals losing their jobs will cause suffocating situation in the dysfunctional families or these scenarios can itself create dysfunctional situations in the family (Jorg et al, 2019). Increase in self harm, domestic violence and maltreatment of partner was reported by the studies and the National Commission for Women. Increase in the substance use behaviour in the parents will significantly cause the parent children relationship problem leading children prone to mental health difficulties (Swapnajeet et al, 2020). Quarantine related health risks are also associated in this situation majorly Post traumatic stress symptoms and increased level of depression and anxiety were also reported in the individuals who got infected by the virus and the family members. Grief is also most predominantly present in the family members who have lost the loved one due to COVID-19 infection.

Social identity of the individuals job uncertainty and psychological wellbeing of the individuals are inter associated in this situation due to pandemic individual's job uncertainty is increasing and causing social identity disturbance leading to decrease in psychological wellbeing (Danijela, Bojan & Akmal, 2020) which will pose threat to the individuals mental health posing challenge to psychologists in this situation.

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Institutional perspective

Institutions where psychologists deliver their services are the second home for the psychologists. Institutions such as Hospitals, Universities, Educational institutions such as schools and colleges, rehabilitation centres, Psychiatric and neurological care centres, de-addiction centres and wherever psychological services are provided and research and development of human resource through teaching and training will be carried out are facing a major challenge to endure the work. Most of the problems are related to the lockdown crisis majorly related to employment and finance in the private sector and endurance of services to the increase or overflow of cases post lock down period in the government sectors.

Challenges for private sector in next 6-12 months will be to bare the financial burden which is going to occur due to lockdown and post lockdown crisis of the clients as there is slowdown in economy and decrease in income of the people they might opt for the government institutions for the services or else they will opt out from the psychological services which will worsen the condition of the client and private institutions. In the next 5 years Institutions will face much complex challenges as when clients get adopted to keep away from the psychological services there will be chances of denying psychological services as it is time consuming, expensive and demands higher level involvement from the client. In organizational set up due to financial burden many companies might reduce the pay of the psychologists working in industrial setup and in severe conditions psychologists may also lose their jobs and the recruitment of industrial psychologists such as human resource managers, Counsellors, researchers and relationship officers might not happen leading to stressful situations in the private companies/ institutions.

In the government sectors in the next 6-12 months challenges will be to manage the overflow of the cases as already known India have very less number of psychologists in comparison of its population and number individuals need the psychological services. In such condition government institutions might face the burden of overflow of cases leading to burn out in the professionals causing poor quality of service rendering by the psychologists leading to cause damage to the image of the psychologist profession. In next 5 years challenges are not met or faced strategically general population might feel hesitant to enter government institutions asking psychologist service in worst scenario.

Psychologists' context

Psychologists will have to see more cases as the lockdown period has might have created the stressful situations in the individual's life who have mental health issues and the number of cases arrive for psychological support will increase as lockdown period finish. When the clients number increases most important thing is psychologist having the persistent stress as the profession is to working with the people in distress role and characteristics which makes psychologists prone to burnout from instances like limited resources, high level of involvement with the client's difficulties, limited control over outcome in the intervention, decreased support from other allied professionals. At times with personal stress and demand of work may be correlated when they fail to overcome the difficulty there will be high risk of self harm among male and female Psychologist even it might lead upto suicide (Phillip et al, 2011) and may increase alcohol or nicotine abuse (Jurgrn et al, 2020). During COVID 19 due to stress increase in number of patients and less manpower resources in the hospitals leads to the greater challenges to Psychologists to face the over work and a paucity of leisure, non-work activities, stigma with in the profession for professional who acknowledge distress, unrealistic self-expectation, neglecting one's own needs and personal problem over

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involvement with work environment impacts performance and the job satisfaction of the Psychologists.

As the country have meagre number of licensed Clinical Psychologists It is difficult to find a licensed psychologist during COVID-19 outburst in government and private sectors. Poor plan on being self-employed, private practicing professionals' difficulty to practice due to lockdown, failure to maintain good relationship with other professionals may decrease client to psychologist. Making schedule inflexible and difficulty to have sufficient sessions with clients due to overload in number of client increases the possibility of patient violence in dealing their distress and with the billing issues. Not only during COVID-19 scenario but in general population also have less knowledge about the service of psychologists at different sectors and failure to make difference among mental health professional among public is quiet common. This is the most challenging thing to psychologist to create awareness among the clients who are in the need of psychological services, help or support. Some psychologist perform their clinical role not according to rigorous ethical principles and code of conduct this consists of lack of competence, integrity, professional and scientific responsibility, respect for people's right and dignity, concern for the welfare of others and social responsibilities, specific ethical standards related to their role with their patient and society posing severe throttle to the community of psychology professionals. In the social context neglecting or failure of deliver psychological services to deprived classes of the society especially in Indian context reaching out the psychological services to the rural population being a greatest challenge of all time might hit the new highs in the COVID-19 outburst situation due to variety of reasons including illiteracy lack of awareness, ignorant and superstitious patients and their families (Avinash, Mohandas & Afzal, 2020).

The number of qualified and trained psychologists cannot be increased in short time. COVID-19 infection does have impact on mental health of the infected person his/ her family and healthcare professionals from needy hospitalization and even outpatient healthcare services. During this situation clients are encouraged to get the psychological support and services through telephone communication as much as possible. In the next 6-12 months it is difficult to manage patients in the hospital or at the clinic setup the challenge is referral of cases to psychologists, taking decisions about the psychological services to be delivered to the client (like Psychotherapy, counseling, supportive work, Guidance), and how many sessions is essential for patients in this situation, whether COVID-19 patients will be handled by psychologists if so what are the safety and precautionary measures to be taken. What are the standard measures need to be followed with the COVID-19 infected mentally ill patients even other staff except mental health professionals does know the need of the therapy these are the most specific challenges which will pose immediately in next 6-12 months adding to all other difficulties discussed.

Psychologists personal qualities are also might pose challenges during this difficult situation, while in the profession of psychology one must not have necessary skill deficit, attitude problem, and unprofessional behavior, problem at the faculty and system level. Lack of mentorship, reluctance or hesitation to take peer support, regular self-assessment and skills training, hands on training increasing supervision by case discussion, review of the patient, management problems, appropriate documentation of all meetings, taking involvement of family members is essential. Majority of the psychologists will do respond and adjust to new environment. Even if psychologist found during unprofessional behavior they have to face stringent punitive action like warning, issues of memorandum, seeking of written explanations for misbehavior, temporary suspension from hospital, the involvement

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of legal cell will take place not only hospital setup but in the most of the system where psychologist work which will lead to distress and defame.

During COVID-19 outburst psychologists cannot able to do face to face communication for delivering their support or service but in modern technology they can have knowledge of telepsychology. Telepsychology is a service using tele communication technologies. The expanding role of technology in the provision of psychological service and continuous development of new technologies that may be useful in practice of psychology present unique opportunities consideration and challenge to practice. Proper data is not available on how tele counselling or psychotherapy have been successful, outcomes of this process is unclear to evident in the time of COVID-19. Application of telepsychological techniques in practice involves consideration of legal requirements, ethical standards telecommunication technologies, interagency policies and other external constraints with the telecommunication companies as well as demands of the particular context of the profession. It lies on the responsibility of the psychologist to balance all of them appropriately.

In the legal aspects challenge to psychologist providing service from one jurisdiction to a client or patient located in another jurisdiction, law and regulation may differ between two jurisdictions. And also it is responsibility of the psychologist who practices telepsychology to maintain enhance their level of understanding of the concept related to the delivery of service via telecommunication technologies. Psychologists who teaches life skills programme through online training courses, may become less effective when compared to attending classes when staying at home. Challenging for implementation of life skills programme, support infrastructure, formulation objective and strategies for life skills program development, may be likely to be less effective.

According to WHO Mental health and psychosocial considerations during COVID-19 outbreak healthcare professionals experienced avoidance from the family members and loved one and community owing to stigma or fear related infection making an already challenging situation far more difficult and suggested to be connected with the loved ones in the digital methods. Whereas the profession of Psychologists is fighting with the stigma from the long time in future stigma remains bigger challenge in this situation with the fear. The stigma relating to mental health problems might cause reluctance to seek help for both COVID-19 infection and mental health conditions. WHO assisted in this concern and mhGAP Humanitarian Intervention Guide was suggested to be helpful in clinical guidance for addressing priority mental health conditions and is designed for use by general healthcare workers. The messages spread through the television and other social media will add up for the challenges to be faced by the psychologists. Sharing the messages related to COVID-19 to individuals with intellectual, cognitive and psychosocial disabilities will be not only challenge for psychologist and also to the caretakers of such individuals.

CoVID-19 infection itself will be a challenge for Psychologists whereas coming into direct contact with infected person increases the chances of getting infected and fear of this condition might challenge the ability and thought process of the psychologist to work in the containment zones or hospitals where infected person is treated (Marianna, 2020). Psychologists are always been finding the routes to outcome the professional obstacles through procedural and systematic approaches to bring the resolutions for the issues. Present scenario of the challenges brought by COVID-19 is novel and complex but not inevitable what is the need of time is strategies to overcome challenges posed by the situation. Presently profession of psychology is under challenge of COVID-19 but it does not mean

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psychologists cannot come out of this challenge but need to follow the definitive and more appropriate measures to face the challenge and convert it into an opportunity to grow.

While facing the challenge it is very important to engaging communities and involve the community in making physical and social environment mentally healthy and take care of mental health of each and every one out there in the society. It is also essential to involve people who have experienced mental health difficulty and successfully came out of mental health issues to set meaningful and substantial solutions through peer group networks, including developing practical ways to implement appropriately among the community.

Training of the mental health professionals is another need of time even though increasing number of professionals cannot be done in a limited time plans can be done for long term to increase the number of trainees and quality of training to be provided to trainees and short term courses to manage COVID-19 situation is much needed work and a challenge need to be concentrated at present (Daisy et al, 2017).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Individuals might have faced psychological distress following COVID-19 outbreak due to various reasons. Specific affective temperament and attachment styles predicts the extent of mental health condition of the individuals (Lorenzo et al, 2020). Bi-directional association has been postulated between the prevalence of physical and psychological outcomes among healthcare workers during the COVID-19 outbreak and timely psychological interventions for healthcare professionals with physical symptoms is essential once the COVID-19 outbreak comes to control (Nicholas et al, 2020). Even though television and other online media such as social media and entertainment media causing damage to the image of individuals with mental health issues and psychologists the responsible media houses are also working to reduce the stigma on mental illness (Dan & Murali, 2018, Bilal et al, 2020) and trying to create awareness among the general public too through which psychologists can suggest some good and impactful movies to help the clients and create awareness about the pandemic and related mental health issues. Multidisciplinary research is needed to be given more focus to efficiently handle the COVID-19 condition (Emily, Roxanne & Angela, 2020).

Social and cultural influences on the behaviour of individuals need to be navigated in a proper direction. Communication of science related to COVID-19 with moral decision making and effective leadership is essential to handle the stress and coping (Jay et al, 2020; Kumar et al, 2020). Pandemics are one of the natural disasters the present COVID-19 is also a natural disaster occurring at global scale and it is our new normal. Psychological and spiritual needs of the general population and vulnerable people is need to be taken care with innovative approaches. Promoting hope, focusing on well-being, balancing response to the stressful situations and improving infrastructure of mental health service providing space and equip psychologists with more suitable and applicable skills and techniques are need of hour. Brief reappraisal intervention on emotions during COVID-19 situation to help emotionally burdened individuals (Ke, 2020) Ultra brief psychological interventions depending on symptoms and cultural background of the individual might help the psychologists and the clients to the great extinct (Ping et al 2020). Reshaping of the emergency system of the country increasing in number of health service providing institutions and strengthening the public and community level interventions in response to the public health emergency situation like COVID-19 outbreak helps in the management and

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effectively face the challenges posed to the psychologist in the present scenario (Jia & Zhifeng, 2020).

Even though psychology is century old discipline and profession in India it has not made remarkable development in the country. The professional Psychological associations had played a key role in development and growth of profession in the countries where psychology profession attained prominence. Common objectives can be found among the associations but lack of collaborations between the associations are obstacle to development of the profession. Psychology associations could lead in responding to the issues of the health scenario such as COVID-19 in the health emergency situations in an organized manner. The present situation of health difficulty in the Indian society it will be emerging time for young psychologists and pioneers of psychology in India to come together in the organizational perspective and make the profession more accessible for people and also helping young generation of psychologists to work together for better future ventures (Sam, 2016a, 2016b).

In future increasing quality and number of well-trained psychological professionals is the option we left with for management of mental health difficulties to be managed efficiently. Psychologists need to inspire, encourage and retrain the budding psychologists leaving conspiracies away and think about the vocational and technical training need to be provided to the future psychology professionals to deliver their service with great impact on society. Existential questions need to be posed as spiritual alternative such as meaning, purpose, destiny, control and role of the self at this time need to be searched for the answer. Need to cultivate the resilience and capacity to rebuild the society to help each other and train individuals to live simpler life with enhanced self-reliance with the help of innovative technologies. Psychologists by understanding human emotional response to the disaster can anticipate and potentially avoid psychological lows by preparing society to be more flexible, proactively deal the stress, and honour the strength and accept the weaknesses of one another.

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Conflict of Interest

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