

Research Paper

## Psychosocial Intervention of COVID-19 Pandemic: Challenges and Coping Strategies

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### ABSTRACT

The 2019 coronavirus illness (COVID-19), which originated in China, has spread over the world in the start of 2020. Around the world, there have been a rising number of confirmed cases and deaths. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in significant psychiatric and psychosocial morbidity among the general public as well as health-care workers. Multiple agencies have proposed a variety of standards for dealing with mental health issues. This study looks at some of the mental health issues of vulnerable population with focus on various coping strategies. This paper discusses the application and utility of various coping interventions namely physiological interventions, cognitive interventions, behavioral interventions to cope with psychosocial aspects of COVID-19. The above techniques have been found to be useful if applied by trained mental health professionals.

**Keywords:** *Psychosocial, Intervention, COVID-19, Challenges, Coping*

On 11 March 2020, the WHO officially declared COVID-19 outbreak as pandemic affecting countries all across the globe (World Health Organization, 2020a). This COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented psychosocial stressor characterized by unpredictability, distress, fear, and significantly affecting the daily routine of individual. Additionally, this pandemic is not only threatening the physical health and economic security of people worldwide, but also aggravates mental health symptoms (Pfefferbaum & Carol, 2020). In a survey conducted by the Indian Psychiatry Society it has been revealed that there has been 20 % rise in mental illness cases, with at least one in five Indians suffering from it, after COVID-19 outbreak (India Today, 2020). There has been sufficient research previously as well showing that a global pandemic affecting the psychological well-being of the community at large (Alradhawi et al.). At an individual level, it is important to maintain psychological well-being by keeping our bodies and minds healthy through activities that we like to do on a daily basis and also to avoid repeated viewing of news items on COVID-19. For a better mental well-being it is important to exchange emotions and thoughts because social distancing is said to follow, not to distance ourselves emotionally.

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## **MOST VULNERABLE GROUPS WHO REQUIRE PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTIONS RELATING TO COVID-19:**

The psychological and social problem caused by COVID-19 and some implemented protocol such as social distancing, lockdown, quarantine and self-isolation impacted the psychological wellbeing of every stratum of the society but in terms of vulnerability it is affecting the older adults, person already having any physical or mental disease and corona warriors the most.

- 1. Corona Warriors or Frontline workers:** Corona warriors who are engaged in frontline response; Earlier at the time of SARS outbreak, it has been reported that Corona warriors are feeling the unpredictability of their lives, and facing somatic and cognitive symptoms of anxiety (Chong MY, Wang WC, Hsieh WC, et al.).
- 2. People who themselves or their family members or friends diagnosed with the virus:** Individuals who are contaminated with COVID-19, or losing loved ones due to disease; Infected people may experience some psychological disease such as delirium (Kotfis, K., Williams Roberson, S., Wilson, J.E. et al) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and people are in agony due to the death of their family, friend, and loved ones, also they are not able to even perform the last rituals and cremation of their loved ones which results in agitation, dissatisfaction, psychological trauma and long-term psychiatric consecution (Johnson Kirk, 2020).
- 3. Senior citizens having mental or physical illness:** older people with pre-existing mental health and physical health conditions who are either diagnosed with COVID-19 or those who are experiencing social distancing worsen the existing vulnerabilities. It is observable that older people who are already suffering any chronic physical illness such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, respiratory illness or high blood pressure or any psychotic or neurotic disease need more psychosocial intervention. The pandemic and social distancing has heightened the risk of helplessness and loneliness in them (Rehman P. Azera, 2020).
- 4. Children or kids:** Children who are not able to move anywhere. Ever since children have heard the spread of Covid-19 concern has arisen in their mind for the health of themselves and their loved ones, they get more anxious and afraid so it becomes the responsibility of the parents or caregiver to create awareness regarding the pandemic. Parenthood is a daily challenge and when dealt with actualities of COVID-19 and the protocol of the social distancing it has become a daily struggle now. For parents, it is necessary to take care of themselves first so that children will feel more reassured, relaxed and focused (UNICEF, 2020a).

The study will provide an overview of the psychosocial intervention governed by the nation during the pandemic, which has helped both the receivers and the providers. It is also important to promote positive thinking, awareness and to change the attitude toward the pandemic among the beneficiaries. It has been observed that timely intervention could prevent psychological emergencies like suicides and aggressive behaviors.

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL IMPACT OF SOCIAL DISTANCING AND LOCKDOWN**

"Staying away from other" is the practice of social distancing and an essential step to control the contiguous spread COVID-19. The deprivation of staying away from family or friends, changes in day-to-day routine, joblessness, financial burden and grief over the death of loved ones has the potential to affect the mental health and well-being of many (Clay A. Rebecca, 2020). It is recommended to seek social alliance and build a communicable relationship with others in this tough time of social distancing and also it is important to be aware of the signs

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of anxiety, panic attacks, depression and suicidal symptoms of your family, friends, neighbors, and for their own too. The world Health Organization WHO also expressed its concern over the pandemic's mental health and psychosocial consequence. Keeping in mind excessive rise in COVID-19 cases, government introduced a strictly regulated lockdown and quarantine to curb the pandemic, but this deviation from routine has led to a sharp rise in levels of anxiety, loneliness, and depression. These symptoms have led to an increase cases of substance abuse, addiction to harmful drugs, alcohol, etc. (World Health Organization, 2020b). Domestic violence and child abuse cases have also increased during the period of COVID-19(Abramson, 2020; world health organization, 2020c) The pandemic has also elongated obsessive compulsive symptoms such as checking temperature and washing or sanitizing hands repeatedly (Banerjee DD, 2020). It has been anticipated by mental health experts and psychologist that the impact of pandemic is going to affect the mental health of people all over the world, which will increase the cases of depression, suicide, and self-harm (World Health Organization, 2020c). Schools, colleges and workplace are leading to disturbance of social support networks and practicing of social distancing will definitely increases stress in the public.

### **NEED FOR PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTION IN CURRENT SCENARIO**

Psychosocial interventions plan designed to control immoderate and unrestricted stress due to Covid-19 pandemic. Mental health professionals like psychologists, counsellors, psychiatrists and social workers may assist the patients and at-risk people to understand the probable effect of the corona virus and to provide transparent and appropriate help to the patients and most vulnerable people. Psychological support services, i.e., telephonic counseling or intervention, webinars and workshop related to the awareness of Covid-19 have been evolved by many local and national mental health institutions and government-based institutions in response to overcome the stress level of COVID-9 pandemic. Certain stress and fear due to Covid -19 will definitely affect directly or indirectly to infected individuals and also families of vulnerable individuals. In which some fears are anticipated and real but unfortunately some fears are unrealistic due to rumors, unawareness and fake news. Hence it becomes mandatory to take steps which will prevent social labelling and disgrace linked with COVID-19. Not only medical actions are critical but also emergency psychological crisis interventions for vulnerable group is prominent which will provide interventions directly or indirectly to the affected people as well as their family members and caregivers. Additionally, next essential step is to create awareness among the family members or caregivers about the Covid -19 protocol so that they can provide psychosocial support to enhance emotional and mental wellbeing in a suitable way. Mental health and psychosocial interventions have been drastically influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many ingenious moves such as social and mental health support system, tele-counselling, digital self-help platforms, covid-19 awareness programs and psychosocial support programs, are being used in many countries to establish care for the at-risk people. In such circumstances, taking part virtually in the program providing information related with mental health and counseling services organized by hospitals, community health care centers, mental health institutions and psychology department of universities could be beneficial for coping up with the pandemic.

### **ROLE OF MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS' FOR DEVELOPING PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTION**

As a country, India was already backward in the field of mental health professionals before the pandemic. (Kakuma et al., 2011). Although many mental health professionals and community health care centers came forward and provide tele-counselling services and webinars on mental health (Balaji & Patel, 2020). As well as many governmental, non-

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governmental and private organizations provided gratis services, webinars and helplines (Roy, Singh et al., 2020). The job of Mental health professionals is not only to cure not, but also to be a preventive and promotive, in the pandemic (Wendimagegn & Bezuidenhout, 2019; WHO, 2002)

### ➤ **Preventive role:**

Preventive intervention will help in averting mental health difficulties. Preventive work refers to comprehensive interventions or interventions that are pointed towards people who are at risk of developing mental health problems (WHO, 2002). For example, people who have been affected by the virus have been seen to be at higher risk of developing mental health problem and can be precautionary provided intervention to prevent the same.

### ➤ **Promotive role.**

Promotive supports will lead to positive mental health and well-being of the individual. Mental health promotion strategies are generally more universal than prevention strategies (WHO, 2002). For example, to promoting energetic lifestyles and to replace that disrupt routine with something innovative in the period of lockdown will enhance the well-being and positive mental health.

### ➤ **Curative role.**

Curative role refers to the mental health support given after identifying the mental health. Taking into the account of psychological and social effect of the pandemic, providing adequate psychological counseling is in demand (Serafini et al., 2020). For instance, mental health professionals can provide e- counselling and tele psychotherapy services to those who have some mental health difficulties in the pandemic.

## IDENTIFYING CONCERN IN THE ABSENCE OF VISUAL CUES

The face of people cannot be seen while counseling over the phone yet there are many ways through which client's anxiety can be noticeable. These are:

- Repeatedly asking about the vaccine; will it work or not?
- Questioning about worst-case scenarios like 'What ifs'
- Having psychosomatic symptoms (headaches, stomach aches, inability to sleep)
- Breathlessness and speaking rapidly
- Asking many abrupt questions
- Easily irritated

### *Types of Interventions*

- **Physiological Interventions:** This is the first step of intervention services in which psychologist can identify the problem of the client. Before starting the session, therapist will ask about the consent of the client. Ask them to sit comfortably at their place and take a deep breath in and out slowly. Let them feel the atmosphere and ventilate all negative energy around them. Practicing this will make them feel relaxed and would help them in relieving stress, anxiety out of fear of covid-19.
- **Emotion-focused Interventions:** Providing unconditional positive regard and empathy will help a client to ventilate all his anxiety at once. Using sentences like, "I can understand you or I can hear you" will show trustworthiness in the counseling session. Mental health professionals should give support to clients by actively listening and then using paraphrasing and reflection to make clearer sense of their problems.
- **Cognitive Interventions:** Clients may have made cognitive errors in analyzing a situation, for instance, they will overestimate the situation and think irrationally. It is important to create realist and rational atmosphere around them by providing them

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adequate knowledge. If the clients are overestimating the situation, then it is the duty of mental health professionals to psychoeducate them about the general concept.

- **Behavioral Interventions:** Support clients to practice physical activities that can help to develop sense of power by actively moving the body parts (Van der Kolk, 2020). Exercising and practicing relaxation techniques may enhance the action of happy hormones such as endorphins which will improve immunity naturally. Regular exercises such as aerobic exercise, cycling, or walking may provide more energy to the body and also ameliorate the quality of life.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The current COVID-19 pandemic isn't only affecting physical health but also affecting psychological and social aspect of human-being. The coronavirus pandemic has many crises like economical, epidemiological and psychological. Further, author suggested the psychological and social intervention services may help people who are at risk such as those diagnosed with Covid-19, children, older person and people who are already suffering with other physical and mental problem. During this pandemic and for the future concern, it is of utmost importance that the Government realizes the significance of mental health and the requirement to make it an essential part of public well-being. It is also suggested to include psychological and social aspect into consideration in the treatment and management of COVID-19 health care response so that people can cope up with stress, anxieties, panic attacks and other psychological symptoms arising out of fear of pandemic.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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