

## IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MENTAL HEALTH OF PEOPLE

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### Abstract

*As a result of the emergence of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) a situation of socio-economic crisis and profound psychological distress rapidly occurred worldwide. Various psychological problems and important consequences in terms of mental health including stress, anxiety, depression, frustration, uncertainty during COVID-19 outbreak emerged progressively. This work aimed to review the current literature about the impact of COVID-19 infection on the mental health and psychology in the general population. Feelings of frustration and uncertainty tend to occur in relation with inadequate basic supplies e.g. food, water, clothes etc. during the quarantine period which is a major source of worries, and anxiety/anger. 'No words for mood' was initially identified to describe cognitive and affective features in patients with psychosomatic disorders. Social isolation related to restrictions and lockdown measures are linked to feelings of uncertainty for the future, fear of new and unknown infective agents resulting in abnormally increased anxiety. Anxiety may be directly related to sensorial deprivation and pervasive loneliness, in this case first insomnia but later depression and post-traumatic stress occurred. In addition, anxiety is closely associated with fatigue and reduced performance in healthcare workers while boredom and loneliness are directly related to anger, frustration and sufferings linked to quarantine restrictions. The psychological impact of quarantine related to COVID-19 infection has been additionally documented together with the most relevant psychological reactions in the general population related to COVID-19 outbreak. This paper is based on secondary data. The role of risk and protective factors against the potential to develop psychiatric disorders in vulnerable individuals has been addressed as well.*

**Keywords:** Mental Health, COVID-19, Psychology, Preventive Strategies

### INTRODUCTION :

As a result of the emergence of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) the social activities have been restricted in most countries, almost all not essential individual movements were prohibited due to quarantine, while the local hospitals received suddenly thousands of critically ill COVID-19 patients and were forced to implement their emergency protocols. In this context, the general population as well as most of the front-line healthcare workers became vulnerable to the emotional impact of COVID-19 infection due to both the pandemic and its consequences worldwide. Many psychological problems and important consequences in terms of mental health including stress, anxiety, depression, frustration, uncertainty during COVID-19 outbreak emerged progressively. The psychological reactions to COVID-19 pandemic may vary from a panic behavior or collective hysteria to pervasive feelings of hopelessness and desperation which are associated with negative outcomes including suicidal behavior. As the general population became increasingly exposed, anxiety-provoking topics related to this emergence of the health and socio-economic crisis need to be rapidly identified to early detect dysfunctional processes and maladaptive lifestyle changes potentially leading to the onset of psychiatric conditions.

### The psychological impact of quarantine related to COVID-19 infection:

The modern world in which all individuals are able to rapidly travel and communicate has been rarely forced to the current social isolation and restrictions which are linked to feelings of frustration and uncertainty. Notably, fear, anger, anxiety and insomnia, confusion, grief and numbness have been identified as additional psychological responses to quarantine. Long-term behavioral changes like vigilant hand washing and avoidance of crowds as well as a delayed return to normality even after many months after the quarantine

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were also reported. Thus, the quarantine period seems to have important and dysfunctional psychological consequences on the individual's mental health not only in the short-term but even in the long-term period.

### Most relevant psychological reactions to COVID-19 infection:

#### Uncontrolled fears related to infection

This is commonly one of the most frequent psychological reactions to pandemics. Several existing studies demonstrated that those who have been exposed to the risk of infection may develop pervasive fears about their health, worries to infect others and fear infecting family members. Jeong *et al.* reported that these individuals are more vulnerable than others to manifest worries if they experienced physical symptoms potentially linked to the infection and fear that symptoms are directly associated to actively having the infection even several months after the exposure.

#### Pervasive anxiety

Social isolation related to restrictions and lockdown measures are linked to feelings of uncertainty for the future, fear of new and unknown infective agents resulting in abnormally increased anxiety. Anxiety may be directly related to sensorial deprivation and pervasive loneliness, in this case first insomnia but later depression and post-traumatic stress occurred. In addition, anxiety is closely associated with fatigue and reduced performance in healthcare workers while boredom and loneliness are directly related to anger, frustration and sufferings linked to quarantine restrictions.

#### Frustration and boredom

Distress, boredom, social isolation and frustration are directly related to confinement, abnormally reduced social/physical contact with others, and loss of usual habits. As reported by Jeong *et al.*, frustration and pervasive loneliness seem to derive by the inhibition from daily activities, interruption of social necessities, not taking part in social networking activities.

#### Disabling loneliness

The final effect of social isolation is pervasive loneliness and boredom, which have potential dramatic effects on both physical and mental individual well-being. Pervasive loneliness may be significantly associated with increased depression and suicidal behavior. Overall, it is well known that long periods of social isolation or quarantine for specific illnesses may have detrimental effects on mental well-being.

### Protective factors:

#### Resilience

Psychological resilience may be generally defined as the ability to support or retrieve psychological well-being during or after addressing stressful disabling conditions. Notably, a general message of hope and social protection given by healthcare regulatory authorities and scientists not only about the risk of being infected but even about the existence of containment measurements that may be implemented in the hospitals and in the community as a whole may enhance resilience and individual abilities to successfully react to social threats.

#### Social support

A higher and significant perception of social support is associated with a reduced likelihood to develop psychological distress and psychiatric conditions. Adequate social support for the general population with regard to specific at risk populations (e.g. infected patients, quarantined individuals and medical professionals) should be provided by offering targeted, tailored messages according to the most reliable scientific evidence.

#### Preventive strategies:

Specific preventive strategies at the community level such as (i) implementing effective communication and (ii) providing adequate psychological services should be carried out in order to attenuate the psychological and psychosocial impact of COVID-19 outbreak. Hospitals protocols linked to the early and effective management of health emergency need to be implemented while healthcare professionals need to be supplied by adequate protective facilities. Marginalized populations such as elderly individuals or those with psychological problems should be able to actively consult with clinical psychotherapists to rapidly detect warning signs. Finally, telemedicine should be really implemented especially in areas where mental health services are poorly represented or severely impaired by the rapid spread of pandemic and lockdown restrictions. Importantly, symptoms related to initial psychological crisis together with the need to perform effective interventions using

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personalization and monitoring of adverse drug reactions related to psychoactive medications should be detected by psychiatrists.

### Conclusion:

Implementing community-based strategies to support resilience and psychologically vulnerable individuals during the COVID-19 crisis is fundamental for any community. The psychological impact of fear and anxiety induced by the rapid spread of pandemic needs to be clearly recognized as a public health priority for both authorities and policy makers who should rapidly adopt clear behavioral strategies to reduce the burden of disease and the dramatic mental health consequences of this outbreak.

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