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Living in a Pandemic: Social Isolation and Mental Health

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Abstract: *the novel coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID 2019) has gripped the world with fear, anxiety and confusion, and it is spreading as fast as a virus. In addition to the negative consequences of the infection of COVID-19 for health, the implementation of strict quarantine also affected the world economy. As a result, there is growing concern that the pandemic has harmed the mental health of the general population. Fear, anxiety, and stress are normal responses to perceived or real threats, and when we are faced with uncertainty or something unknown. Thus, it is normal and understandable for people to feel fear in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Together with a fear of being infected with a virus during a pandemic like COVID-19, there are significant changes to our daily lifestyle: our movements somewhere is restricted in support of efforts to contain and slow down the spread of the virus. As the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown measures continue, there is growing interest in the long-term effects on mental health. In this article, we aim to review and summarize the results of various studies that have examined the psycho-sociological consequences of the pandemic and its impact on the mental well-being of population in a general.*

Key words: [COVID-19](#), [pandemics](#), [quarantine](#), [patients](#), [mental health](#).

Introduction

At the end of December 2019, the first case of pneumonia caused by the coronavirus was detected in the Chinese city of Wuhan. The disease is known as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) and the condition is known as coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) according to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020).

Novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, has become a pandemic with increasing cases worldwide. Af-

ter its initial outbreak, the coronavirus disease spread rapidly throughout the world community, affecting countries in Europe, the United States, the United Kingdom, Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa, prompting the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare COVID-19 a global pandemic in March 2020 (WHO, 2020). Countries around the world have implemented disease containment strategies aimed at disrupting the transmission chains of the virus. These strategies are collectively referred to as nonpharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) (Ferguson et al.,

2020). NPIs are mitigation strategies designed to reduce physical contact between individuals in a community in order to reduce the reproduction number, the average number of secondary cases generated by each positive case. The term NPIs is commonly used interchangeably with physical or social distancing protocols. A variety of NPIs are concurrently implemented worldwide, and many countries have implemented strict strategies, including quarantines (e.g., physical closure of schools and universities), social distancing from peers and community activity, quarantine and isolation, to reduce transmission rates in their communities (Ebrahimi et al. 2021). Given the fact that many of these interventions are simultaneously operating worldwide, their potentially harmful association with the health status of the general public has now become a major concern for clinicians, academics, and health policy-makers (Holmes et al. 2020).

Due to the rapid spread of COVID-19, efforts by scientists and clinicians are currently focused on understanding the epidemiology, clinical features, mode of transmission, countering the spread of the virus, while the critically important mental health has been overlooked in these efforts, and providing effective strategies to protect public health. (Legido-Quigley et al. 2020; Shamasunder et al. 2020).

Aim

This article aims to summarize the current information on the factors that contribute to mental distress in isolation, anxiety and despair, and consider the mental health of vulnerable groups such as children and teens, the elderly, and healthcare professionals.

Materials and methods

To carry out this review, we searched the published articles in PubMed and Google Scholar using the keywords “COVID-19”, “SARS-CoV-2” or “coronavirus disease 2019” and “mental health” in the abstract or title, of analyzed articles published in scientific journals. Research included literature reviews, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, randomized controlled trials, cohort studies, case reports, and studies in English. We also look for related articles in the reference lists of the articles we have read.

Review and discussion

A new coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has become a pandemic that has affected health and well-being worldwide. Apart from the consequences of physical health, of economy, and influence on society, the psychological impact of this pandemic is increasingly being reported in the scientific articles (Kalcev et al. 2020; Nicola et al. 2020; Lei et al. 2020). Current information in articles suggests that people suffered from COVID-19 may have a high burden of mental health problems, including depression, anxiety disorders, stress, panic attacks, irrational anger, impulsivity, somatic disorders, sleep disorders, emotional disorders, post-traumatic stress symptoms, and suicidal behavior (Pfefferbaum and North 2020; Wang et al. 2019; Karadağ et al. 2022)

There are numerous evidence of neurological, cognitive, and emotional disturbances in patients with COVID-19. Acute neurological symptoms such as neuro-inflammation, cognitive impairment, loss of smell, and stroke are common direct sequelae among patients infected with SARS-CoV-2. Work-related stress, quarantine measures, social distancing and quarantine in order to diminish SARS-CoV-2 infection have also affected the mental health of large populations, regardless of age. Health emergencies have affected individuals and communities, causing emotional responses and unhealthy behaviors (Pandey et al. 2021). Social isolation and its impact on mental health is perhaps the most difficult aspect that many people have faced in recent years. Despite the quarantine policy in place effectively reduced the spread of the infection, the social isolation caused by the quarantine caused an increase in negative emotions and psychological consequences, including confusion, anger, anxiety and depression of population in the general (Galea et al. 2020; Brooks et al. 2021; Banerjee and Rai 2020). Social communication is vital to human well-being, and while online media and applications such as Zoom, Skype, WhatsApp and FaceTime can ensure continued social interactions, they do not replace the need for face-to-face human contact. It is possible that people may begin to experience temporary mild to moderate symptoms of depression under current circumstances (Haider et al. 2020).

Psychosocial impact of quarantine and isolation

Enforced mass quarantine, as applied by nationwide quarantine programs, can cause mass hysteria, anxiety, and distress through factors such as feelings of being cornered and loss of control (Rubin et al. 2020).

The psychological impact of quarantine can range from immediate consequences such as irritability, fear of being infected and spreading of the infection to family members, anger, embarrassment, frustration, loneliness, denial, anxiety, depression, insomnia, despair, to extreme consequences including suicide (Brooks et al. 2020; Robertson et al. 2004; Barbisch et al. 2015).

Impact on various layers of society

Children

A child's response to a crisis depends on his physical and mental health, family socioeconomic circumstances, and cultural background (Dalton et al. 2020; Landoni et al. 2022; Radanović et al. 2021). Stress factors such as monotony, frustration, lack of personal contact with classmates, friends, and teachers, lack of sufficient personal space at home, and family financial losses during quarantine can potentially trigger unpleasant and even long-lasting negative psychological consequences in children (Wang et al. 2020 ; Jiao et al. 2020). Likewise, children during COVID-19 may develop phobias, PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), etc. when they found out information about risk of get infected and other disturbing details through audiovisual media, including social media (Landoni et al. 2022).

Children are constantly exposing to news related to the epidemic, so direct conversations with children about these issues can reduce their anxiety and avoid panic. In the case of self-isolation at home, parents are often the closest and best source of help for children. Close and open communication with children is the key to identify any physical and psychological problems and to comfort children in long-term isolation. With the help of the right approach to upbringing, it is possible to strengthen family bonds and satisfy the psychological needs of the child (Chen et al. 2022; Lawson et al. 2020; Griffith et al. 2022 Tang et al. 2021).

Elder people

The perception that the elderly and those with serious co-morbidities are particularly vulnerable to worse outcomes from COVID-19 can cause significant fear among older adults. Other psychological effects can include anxiety, irritability, and feeling overly stressed or angry. Elderly people with cognitive decline can become much more anxious, agitated and socially withdrawn, so their special needs require special attention (Doraiswamy et al. 2020; Lloyd-Sherlock et al. 2020).

Female gender and older age are established demographic risk factors associated with mental health impairment in a pandemic setting (Sepúlveda-Loyola et al. 2020). Risk of infection, risk of poverty, and poor housing conditions are contributing factors for older people.

Medical professionals

Challenges faced by clinicians worldwide include high mortality in the patients they care for, high demands for medical care, and extreme physical and emotional stress (Sorbello et al. 2020).

Healthcare practitioners have been particularly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and are under more stress than many other professional groups. This is due to several factors, including increased risk of infection, fear of infecting others and being isolated from their families, overtime work, difficult working conditions with long shifts, being a direct witness of suffering and death of patients (Manchia et al. 2022; Bozdağ and Ergun 2021). Healthcare workers, who carry the greatest burden today, are at greatest risk of burnout, a state of depleted psychological resources. Burnout is associated with susceptibility to depression and anxiety, sedatives abuse, increased risk of medical errors, and poor clinical decision-making. Indeed, they are exposed to high levels of stress due to long working hours without sufficient rest, as well as the lack of adequate personal protective equipment in most countries that have been heavily affected by COVID-19. In addition, doctors and nurses who are on the front lines of caring for patients with coronavirus are likely to be among the most affected in mental health and psychosocial well-being (Heath et al. 2020; Liang et al. 2020).

Public

The mass fear of COVID-19, rightly called “corona phobia” (Asmundson and Taylor. 2020), is likely caused by the uncertain nature and unpredictable course of the disease, intolerance of uncertainty, perceived risk of infection, etc., and may generate negative psychological reactions, including maladaptive behaviors, emotional distress and avoidance of ordinary people (Usher et al. 2020).

During disease outbreaks, news of the first death, an increase in the number of new cases, and extensive media attention can heighten people’s fears, frustrations, helplessness, and anxiety about the situation. This leads to inappropriate health-promoting and help-seeking behavior in a concerned public, which can lead to conflicts between clinicians and patients. Such situation can be detrimental to epidemic control programs and hinder social stability (Lindert et al. 2020). An over-anxious public may worry about shortages of emergency and essential services related to quarantine, and this unrealistic panic may lead to false feelings about stocking up on daily necessities or resources (such as hand sanitizer, medicine, face masks, or even toilet paper). The level of psychological stress is influenced by the sheer volume of information coming through social media, the availability and provision of basic and medical resources, and the effectiveness of local health care systems (Wang et al. 2021). Prolonged quarantine causes the unavailability of public services and the collapse of many industries, leading to a negative impact on local

and national economic stability (Bueno-Notivol et al. 2021). Thus, a huge number of people are experiencing financial losses or are on the verge of unemployment, which exacerbates the negative emotions of these individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

COVID-19 is a serious and life-threatening disease. During a global pandemic, it is very important for society to continue to advocate for the interests of those who are particularly vulnerable; those dealing with this pandemic, with all the stress and uncertainty surrounding it. Mitigating the dangerous mental health impact of COVID-19 is an international public health priority.

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Conflict of interest

None.

Consent to publication

All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript. All authors agreed publishing of this manuscript.

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A – Research concept and design, B – Collection and/or assembly of data, C – Data analysis and interpretation, D – Writing the article, E – Critical revision of the article, F – Final approval of article

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Життя в умовах пандемії: соціальна ізоляція та психічне здоров'я

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Анотація: нова коронавірусна хвороба 2019 року (COVID-2019) охопила світ страхом, тривогою та збентеженням, і вона поширюється так само швидко, як і вірус. Окрім негативних наслідків зараження COVID-19 для здоров'я, впровадження суворого карантину також вплинуло на світову економіку. Як наслідок, зростає занепокоєння, що пандемія завдала шкоди психічному здоров'ю населення в цілому. Страх, занепокоєння та стрес є нормальною реакцією на уявні чи реальні загрози, а також у час, коли ми стикаємося з невизначеністю чи невідомістю. Тож це нормально та зрозуміло, що люди відчувають страх у контексті пандемії COVID-19. До страху заразитися вірусом під час такої пандемії, як COVID-19, додаються значні зміни в нашому повсякденному житті, оскільки наші пересування обмежені на підтримку зусиль зі стримування та уповільнення поширення вірусу. Оскільки пандемія COVID-19 і карантинні заходи тривають, зростає інтерес до довгострокових наслідків для психічного здоров'я. У цій статті ми прагнемо переглянути та узагальнити результати різноманітних досліджень, які вивчали психосоціологічні наслідки пандемії та її вплив на психічне благополуччя населення в цілому.

Ключові слова: COVID-19, пандемія, карантин, пацієнти, психічне здоров'я.



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