

Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19): Psychological Impact

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Received : March 14, 2020

Published : March 18, 2020

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Pandemics such as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) can be testing times for individuals and communities equally. The international Health Regulations Emergency Committee of the World Health Organization declared the outbreak a “public health emergency of international concern”. Fear of unknown and apprehensions about a new disease can bring about an array of emotional responses. [1].

There is a dearth of information about the levels of psychological impact, anxiety, depression, and stress during the initial stage of the COVID-19 outbreak in communities, partly due to it being a very new entity.

In a recent online survey in China, information on demographic data, physical symptoms in the past 14 days, contact history with COVID-19, knowledge and concerns about COVID-19, precautionary measures against COVID-19, among few other variables, was collected from a sample size of about 1210 respondents from 194 cities in China. Assessment tools used were Impact of Event Scale-Revised (IES-R), and mental health status Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21). The results of this on-line survey show 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. [2]

Another recent study analyzes the possible psychological stress symptoms of patients with different oral diseases. Through literature review, this paper reviewed oral psychosomatic diseases closely related to patients’ psychological state, such as oral mucosal disease, temporomandibular joint disease, and bruxism, periodontal disease etc. It was concluded that such patients may be at risk to the impact of stress events, and dental specialists should pay more attention to them. [3]

Long term psychological impact among survivors of an outbreak can be numerous also. Mental health problems at four to six month after release from isolation were reported in a study during the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) epidemic. The authors concluded that the severity of psychological impact could be prevented by providing mental health support to individuals with vulnerable mental health, and providing accurate information as well as appropriate supplies, including food, clothes, and accommodation. [4]

Another study reported stress in nurses working at a hospital during a Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) epidemic and shed light on the influences of stigma and hardiness on mental health. [5]

Social functioning significantly improved after self-quarantine and off-duty shifts in individuals facing the impact of the SARS outbreak at a Tertiary care referral center in Taipei, Taiwan. [6]

Conclusion

Since this is a rapidly evolving situation, there are ongoing investigations to learn more. The duration and severity of each phase can vary depending on the public health response. Everyone can do their part by familiarizing themselves with guidelines about prevention and supporting each other during these testing times.

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