

Psychological Impact of COVID - 19 Pandemic

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The planet has been facing an unprecedented condition visible under the name of COVID-19 since December 2019. This viral infection was first documented in the domestically and globally spreading city of Wuhan¹. Pakistan has had a series of survivors and this lethal virus has infected many patients. Since then the pandemic has spread all over the country. Sadly, the number of infected people and deaths caused by the disease is increasing constantly.

According to data released by the Government of Pakistan, since May 16, 2020, the number of reported cases in Pakistan has increased to 38799 and confirmed cases in other countries are more than 4.5 million². It has high infectivity and spreads from an infected individual or a carrier through contaminated droplets or aerosols.

The typical disease may spread by coughing or sneezing, or by contact with infected hands. There are currently no standard treatments available, and no vaccines that protect against Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19).

Although the World Health Organization has considered the measures taken by the Chinese government effective and positive, there is still a great need for making sustained and serious efforts to tackle such diseases in the future. By quarantine measures, the world has witnessed control of

an outbreak of SARS as a communicable infectious disease spread in 2003.

Various measures taken to control the spread of the disease have been taken. Around the globe, frequent hand washing, protection of the eyes, hands, and nose through face shields, gloves, and face masks is exercised. In controlling the spread social distancing and lockdown strategies by the government agencies were the gems³.

Pakistanis have faced partial lockdown since 26th February 2020 which might have led to severe psychological consequences. Lockdown for a long time can intensify people's anxiety, depression and feeling of helplessness.

It may also have other serious consequences such as unemployment, restricting access to everyday activities, lack of contact with people. It may trigger numerous issues such as guilt over past financial errors, fear of potential financial restrictions, life instability resulting in mental health problems and other social issues. It can debilitate the physical health of those who struggle to maintain good health and wellbeing⁴.

People are experiencing severe negative effects due to hunger, an increase in crime, closure of schools and their business resulting in depression, negative emotions and a state of panic which can result in rioting.

Wang et al, in a cross-sectional study, evaluated psychological impacts including depression, stress, and anxiety at the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak. In this study, 1210 participants from 194 different cities of China were evaluated by an online questionnaire. The results show 53.8% of these people experienced severe psychological im-

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pacts of the outbreak. Moreover, 16.5%, 28.8%, and 8.1% of the respondents reported moderate to severe levels of depression, anxiety, and stress⁵. It has been reported that people have committed suicide because of Corona's fear. A study conducted by Kazmi et al, revealed prevailing anxiety, depression, and stress among different individuals⁶. The role of media is still questionable since the spread of COVID-19. As some media is communicating this disease as it is some evil source wanting to control human beings by injecting a chip in the name of vaccine for this virus causing huge mental stress.

Since the spread of disease, some media have been using the term "Depopulating the world" as a conspiracy for the arrival of Dajjal leading to irresponsible behavior and lack of understanding of the emergency.

A study conducted by Rubin et al. on the impacts of communication and media at the time of the Influenza A (H1N1; swine flu) outbreak in the UK and concluded that being exposed to media and publicity related to the disease increased the purchase of disinfectants, and boosted concerns about and avoidance of public transport⁷.

In addition, as compared to the general public the health care staff are more at risk of infection, the rate of distress among them is higher. McAlonan et al. examined the effects of emerging infectious diseases on healthcare staff and found that people who were directly at risk for SARS reported high rates of depression and anxiety in addition to chronic stress⁸.

It is recommended that the government should also pay special attention to establishment of guidelines for managing these psychological issues of the community occurring due to this global crisis⁸.

In this time of uncertainty and panic, arrangements should be made on government level to conduct some psychological sessions on fear reduction by a team of trained psychologists and counselors in order to lower the anxiety levels among the people. Moreover, the production and distribution of food should be controlled by government represen-

tatives and each family must receive enough food according to their needs. This will not only increase the knowledge of a people but will also reduce their anxiety levels and create a positive change in their attitudes.

Individually, we need to synchronize, communicate, and assist each other to fight with psychological, financial, and moral issues while at the same time masking, maintaining social distances and following standard operational procedures.

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