



Pandemic and Mental Health

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Abstract-

We are going through a harsh state of Covid-19, which has its effects on many aspects of our life. It's not the thing that this world has not witnessed epidemics or pandemics. But in case of 21st century, in our age, we have come across the Novel Corona Virus known as Covid-19. And literally from the end of 2019 till date, this virus has changed the perspective of people to see life. Life was not so important before nor was mental issues. But now life has got value and so the issues like mental health. The present paper is an attempt to see how Covid-19 has worsen the issue of mental illness.

Key Words: Pandemic, Mental Health, Covid-19, Isolation.

Introduction

According to medical conditions, Covid has direct affinity towards Angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 receptor (ACR -2R). From there it enters your cell, replicates the RNA and then the host cells are released. This suppresses the T-cell, lowering the immunity. The virus can move to any part of the body now. Further it directly impacts on HPA axis. Covid virus directly affects the sympathetic activity and decreases the serotone level. This increases vulnerability towards stress related conditions. The study shows the stress and the covid viruses directly affects to the pituitary glands. From there, release of cortisol release of hormone and also ACTH, further increases the cortisol and again the vulnerability of stressful situation increases.

As per the studies, there will be various waves having different levels of intensity. Generally, pandemic takes a long time to get all things under control. And studies show that, longer the duration of covid, higher will be the mental health morbidity.

Actually, we know that our generation is always in stress, and stress is always not a new thing for us. We should study the pre-covid situation before we go to see the mental vulnerability in covid and post-covid phase. First understand the National Mental Health Survey conducted in between 2014 – 2016 (Pre-pandemic phase). In 2014 and 2016, there was a study conducted by The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. This study was executed by Nimhans (The National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences), Bangalore. This was the largest study about mental health across the country. This study claims that, 10 % of population is suffering from mental illness at any given point that means, if we have 140 crores of population, we have 14.0 crores cases of psychiatric morbidity. There is one more study i.e., National Survey on Extent and Pattern of Substance Use in India (2019) commissioned by The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE), Govt. of India and this study was done by All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS), New Delhi. This is one of the largest studies in the world. The result of the study has shown many reasons of stress:

1. Alcohol use (2.9 crore is dependent on Alcohol)
2. Cannabis use (25 lac dependent on Cannabis)
3. Opioid use (28 lac is dependent on Opioid)
4. Inhalant use (8.5 lac inhalant users)

The study done in 2014 on Prevalence of child and adolescent psychiatric disorders in India: a systematic review and meta-analysis by Savita Malhotra and Bichitra Patra clearly states that 6.46 % of the children are suffering from one or the other mental illness. If we see the Geriatric population (population of above 60 years), 10% of the geriatric population have depression and anxiety commonly, according National Mental Health Study.

If we got through the above data, we can easily understand that the pre-covid condition was not good too. One another issue is of suicides. India has a larger number of suicides. National Crime Report Bureau published a report in 2020. It clearly suggests that, a total of 1,39, 123 suicides were reported in the country in 2019. The average of suicide is 381 suicides per day.

In this pandemic period of Covid-19, people have gone through many challenges:

1. Financial loss
2. Job loss/ livelihood loss
3. Domestic violence/ sexual abuse
4. Relationship issues
5. Children and adolescents – halted
6. Female children school/ college dropout
7. Death of a family member (grief)
8. Relapse of symptoms in pre-existing illness
9. Precipitating of psychiatric illness in vulnerable population

At present, we do not know the long-term impact of covid on our brain. A hundred years back, we have seen "Influenza Pandemic" (1918). At that time, the rough estimate said that, five times of the mental health morbidity occurred within five



years of Influenza Pandemic. Imagine, we already have 105 of population who had pre-covid mental illness. If even the percentage doubles, the actual number is horrible. And this is the rough estimate. We do not know how our population is going to deal with this.

There are some solutions too. National Human Rights Commission has come out with 2.0 advisory with regard to mental issue named as "Human Rights Advisory on Right to Mental Health in view of the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic (31 May, 2021). This advisory plays a very important role across the country and it needs to be implemented earliest. The clear ten points in this advisory are given below:

1. Access to Mental Health Care
 - a. Accessibility and affordability
 - b. Availability of services
 - c. Availability of in-patient treatment
 - d. Availability of psychotropics medication
 - e. Universal availability of mental health
 - f. Trained Human Resources
 - g. Access to vaccination
 - h. Provisions of Funds
2. Dissemination of information
 - a. Awareness of Covid to PWMI
 - b. 24*7 Helpdesk
 - c. Sharing of health statue with caregivers
3. Awareness
 - a. Display of list of authorized MHPs (Mental Health Professionals)
 - b. Preventive and curative measures
 - c. Sensitization of frontline workers
 - d. Automated messages
4. Grievance Redressal and Review Board
 - a. Grievance Redressal Mechanism
 - b. Functioning of Review Board
5. Extending Outreach of Mental Health Support
 - a. Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) and Psychological First Aid (PFA) Training
 - b. Telepsychiatry and tele psychotherapy
 - c. Substance abuse prevention and intervention
 - d. Counselling for patients recovered from Covid
6. Support for Special Groups
 - a. Mental Health Support for Frontline Workers
 - b. Homeless Persons with Mental Illness- covid testing, ration, pensions and other welfare
 - c. Child Care Institutions
7. Suicide Preventions
 - a. Steps for prevention of suicide
 - b. Presumption of stress
8. Health Insurance
9. Media Sensitivity in reporting about the pandemic and greater attention to mental health
10. Promoting Research

All State government and Union Territory should implement MHCA (Mental Health Care Act), 2017. This should occur on priority basis. Investment in mental health should be increased. We should come up with innovative solutions such as task shifting and task sharing (CHC (Community Health Care)/ PHC (Primary Health Care)/ Wellness centres should to be prepared). Innovative solutions like training of all healthcare professionals, leverage digital technology to reach the unreachd.

Psychiatric illness too needs attention rather more than any other illness. Innovative solutions are the need of the hour. We do not know the long-term impact of Covid-19 on brain but we cannot take risks too. Situations like lockdown, social disturbance and many situations can increase the vulnerability of the problem. So, we should be ready to solve it before it becomes difficult to handle.

As we know, "Precaution is always better than cure".

Mental disorders are among the leading causes of the global health-related burden. The Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors Study (GBD) 2019 showed that the two most disabling mental disorders were depressive and anxiety disorders, both ranked among the top 25 leading causes of burden worldwide in 2019. (Global prevalence and burden of depressive and anxiety disorders in 204 countries and territories in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, The Lancet, P. No. 02) (1)

In the period of lockdown, there were some articles published in the newspaper. One article was from "The Hindu" as "Don't let the 'social recession' ruin your mental and physical health" and the second was from "The Indian Express" as



"Why the lockdown has heightened our anxieties". From the articles we come to know about the severity of Covid-19 on mental health of people. WHO had announced Covid-19 situation as public health emergency. The situation got worse when there happened a prolong lockdown. It increased the stress factor by affecting various aspects of one's life. The uncertainty regarding life has increased the tension at such a level that it becomes too difficult to cope up with the situation. The Central University of Orissa had initiated "Bharosa Helpline" for the students who are suffering for mental disturbance. The problem of Isolation has given birth to the problem of "Social Recession".

History has witnessed the fact that it's not just the physical loss that happens when society goes through pandemic or any emergency situation. Covid-19 situation is not the exemption too. In this pandemic situation, mental health is affected by three reasons:

1. The fear of increasing rate of Covid-19 patients.
2. Insecurity regarding jobs/work.
3. Social recession due to lockdown.

According to the analysis of Indian Psychiatric Society (IPS), there is a straight increase of 15-20% in mental patients in lockdown period. Mental health consists of emotional, psychological and social well-being. According to WHO, Depression will be the second most hazardous problem in the world.

Other countries have always thought about 'mental issue' as an important one. But our Indian society is having quiet pessimistic view about mental issues. There is a taboo that we should not discuss about mental health at all. Indian government has put forth some programmes for the same issue.

1. Initiated National Mental Health Programme (NMHP) in 1982
2. Implementation of Mental Health Act, 1987
3. Implementation of District Mental Health Programme (DMHP) in 1996
4. National Mental Health Programme of 2014
5. Implementation of The Mental Healthcare Act, 2017

There are certain obstacles for implementing such programmes from our society itself. We think that mental illness is a situation that is not reversible. They see mental illness as a curse. Even the person who is recovered fully will not get the same respect and care from our society. It is very ironical that our society which gives the message of forgiveness don't accept a mentally ill person throughout his/her life even though he/she is fully cured. There are some cases who hide their mental illness just for the sake of thinking of others. Almost 80% of people don't follow proper medications because of the same issue of what will this society say. Once he/she gets that stamp of mental illness, he/she cannot be accepted by our society in a good manner. Even there is no availability of psychiatrist on local level. Again, everyone cannot afford the medications due to their high costs.

There should be implementation of special help for such mentally challenged persons. Any type of depression should not be ignored easily. The propaganda of counselling, yoga, meditation should be given emphasis. Some of the given points can help us in this vicious situation.

Take care of your body

1. Get enough sleep
2. Participate in regular physical activity
3. Eat healthy
4. Avoid tobacco, alcohol and drugs
5. Limit screen time
6. Relax and recharge

Take care of your mind

1. Keep your regular routine
2. Limit exposure to news media
3. Stay busy
4. Focus on positive thoughts
5. Use your moral compass or spiritual life for support
6. Set priorities

Connect with others

1. Make connections
2. Do something for others
3. Support a family member or friend

Conclusion

Mental health is not a latest issue. Actually, it should be studied on a regular basis. It is implacable till we have civilization. Mental health issue is not an issue that can be seen in pandemic period only definitely, its severity has increased in pandemic period. This was an attempt to show that how mental health is important and the severity of mental health in this pandemic period.



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