



International Journal of Advanced Psychiatric Nursing

E-ISSN: 2664-1356
P-ISSN: 2664-1348
www.psychiatricjournal.net
IJAPN 2020; 2(1): 30-33
Received: 05-01-2020
Accepted: 23-02-2020

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Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and role of nurse

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Abstract

The outbreak of COVID-19 was sudden and unexpected for the world. The first known case of COVID-19 was identified in late December- 2019. Within the short period of 3-4 months disease was spread to the most countries of the world and WHO declared COVID-19 as a pandemic disease on 11th of March 2020. High infectivity and fatality rate of COVID- 19 has caused universal psychological impact, which has resulted in the mass hysteria, economic burden and financial losses. "Coronaphobia", fear of COVID -19 has resulted into plethora of psychiatric manifestations like depression, anxiety and stress across the different strata of the society. So this review has been undertaken to define the impact of COVID- 19 pandemic on mental health along with role of nurse in reducing the impact on the society.

Keywords: COVID-19, Pandemic, Coronaphobia, Stress, Anxiety, Fear, Infodemic, Racism, Stigmatization, Xenophobia, Lockdown, Social Distancing, Quarantine, Suicidal Death Rate, Health Care Providers, Frontline Workers.

Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic has been much stressful to the people. Fear and anxiety related to the new disease has resulted in strong emotional reactions among the people. Along with stress related to disease, measures introduced by governments of the different countries to restrict the spread of this disease like imposing strict lockdown has resulted into huge change in the daily routine of every individual. Therefore, new reality of the life during the lockdown is feeling of house arrest, temporary unemployment and financial instability, lack of physical contact with other family members, friends and colleagues, social distancing and feeling of social isolation. Adapting to this changed life style along managing the fear of disease and a worry about the people like family members, friends and colleagues getting contacted with disease are the psychological challenges that affects the mental health during COVID-19 pandemic. Lot of attention has been given to the study regarding medical complications of the COVID-19. Yet the unpredictability, uncertainty, seriousness, miss information and social isolation regarding the COVID-19 are contributing to the stress and anxiety of the people. In view of this, there are chances of long term psychological impacts on the mental health. We need good mental health particularly for the vulnerable population and strengthening of social capabilities to reduce the psychological impact of pandemic on the society. Even international organization like WHO advocate the integration of psychological support into basic COVID-19 response action, to reduce the mental health effect. Through this review we aim to systematically review the psychological stressors affecting mental health during this pandemic and learn role of nurse in reducing these stressors and thereby reducing the impact on mental health problem.

Factors affecting the mental health during COVID-19 pandemic, their consequences and role of nurse

Factors affecting

Different surveys has been conducted on general public that shows increase in symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress related to COVID-19 pandemic. The result of these surveys are heterogeneous, probability due to difference in study locations, timing of surveys, phase of pandemic, psycho- social and socio-economic status of population being surveyed. But finding of these surveys helps to list down the factors contributing to the disruption of mental health. Data collected from the primary sources highlights following reasons mainly affecting mental health of the population during pandemic.

1. Fear contacting with a disease
2. Infodemic of COVID- 19 spread via different social media platform
3. Outburst of racism, stigmatization and xenophobia against particular communities
4. Nationwide lockdowns and its consequences
5. Temporary loss of job, resulting into loss of earning
6. Social distancing and Quarantine measures resulting in lack of physical contact with family members, friends and colleagues and feeling of isolated and lonely
7. Increasing suicidal tendency and suicidal death rate.
8. Impact on children, toddlers and adolescent
9. Psychological impact on health care providers and frontline workers

Consequence of COVID -19 on mental health and Role of Nurse

Consequence of each of the factor affecting the mental health has been discussed independently along with what role a nurse can play to contain or reduce the effect on the society:

1. **Fear of the disease:** Fear is not only the major contributing factor affecting mental health, it is also most common and frequent psychological reaction to a pandemic. Studies suggests that a person exposed to any risk of infection, and experience any sort of symptom potentially linked to the infection, develops a pervasive fear of his own health, along with worries of infecting his family members, loved ones and other people in surrounding. This fear forces him to be self-isolated developing a feeling of isolation and loneliness.

Role of nurse: A nurse can play a very important role in such situation. A nurse is primary health care person coming in contact with affected individual. Nurse being a learned professional can use their skills to reduce the fear among the individual. A nurse can motivate the patient to speak out his fears and can use her communication skill to get rid of the fear and stresses among the affected individuals. Nurse can explain the patient about the effect of disease and the course of his stay in hospital or a quarantine center during the period of treatment. Nurses can also introduce the newly identified infected individual with the others individuals who have completed their stay in hospital or quarantine centers, so that sharing of their experiences can facilitate them to adjust in this new setting.

2. **Infodemic of COVID- 19 spread via different social media platform:** Infodemic can be defined as the excessive amount of information related to any problem that is typically unreliable and spreading rapidly making solution to the problem more difficult to achieve. Wide range of information about COVID- 19 is available on internet and other social media platforms, but no evidence about the factuality and truth regarding the information is available. This misinformation has significant impact of on the mental health of users of web and other social media platform. It has led to spread of fear and panic related to COVID- 19 pandemic resulting into potential negative impact on the mental health and psychological well-being of social media users.

Role of nurse: Whenever such situation arises, nurse should assume the role of educator and educate the people around with the adequate and specific information. Nurses have

been the part of survey teams conducting health surveys and collecting information of the health of individual in the society. A nurse should also provide proper, specific and adequate information to the people in the community about the disease making them aware of the fake information being prevailed in the society and helping people to identify difference between true facts and fake news.

3. **Outburst of racism, stigmatization and xenophobia against particular communities:** Considering a single community, caste race or a religion responsible for spread to pandemic is ethically wrong. But is being practiced in most of the parts of the world. Then that specific cast, race or the community is stigmatized and a trend of xenophobia gets prevailed in the whole community. It develops the feeling of stress, anxiety and fear, resulting into strong emotional reactions like anger, agitation causing social disruption and end of social harmony. It not only affects mental health of an individual like, but of a community as a whole.

Role of nurse: Nurse can play a role of mediator and an advocator, explaining the community in which she works about the sources and modes of transmission of a disease. The nurse should specifically explain that how any disease cannot be linked to of the race or religion or a caste and their practices. Nurse should explain that diseases are caused due to different bacteriological, viral, fungal or parasitological causative agent. Nurse should explain modes of disease transmission and methods to break the transmission chain to prevent further spread of disease.

4. **Nationwide lock down and its consequences:** COVID- 19 pandemic has required many countries around the globe to implement national wide lockdown as a fundamental tool to control the spread of disease and break the chain of disease transmission. Nationwide lockdown has resulted into consequences like mass hysteria, anxiety and distress among the population. This condition is further intensified due to family separation and getting stuck separately at different regions, insufficient supply of basic essentials, financial losses, increased perception of risk due vague information and improper communication. All the factors results into irritability, fear, anger, frustration, loneliness, denial, anxiety, depression, and sometimes intention of suicide.

Role of nurse: Nurses can play important role in such situation by helping individual getting adjusted to the new daily routine. Nurses working in community could easily reach individuals stuck in such stresses and help them to get adjusted to this changed lifestyle. A nurse can help an individual to get proper information from the right sources to reduce the anxiety and fear among them. Nurse should advise the people stuck during lockdown to have word with their loved ones that could help them to release stress among them. Helping affected people by providing information they need to move back to their home town help them to build confidence and generate a feeling of safety among them. All these things would boost the morale of affected individual to get back into his normal life. Nurses can also help people suffering from different health conditions to get the required medical help like medicine they need and consulting is needed through telemedicine practice. This develops the feeling of safety and helps them to fight with the stresses.

5. Temporary loss of job, resulting into loss of earning and medical expenditures: As discussed above, COVID-19 pandemic has forced many countries around the globe to implement national wide lock down. It resulted in many businesses to stand still for months together, leading to situation of temporary job loss and loss of earning. This situation is further worsening by increasing burden of medical expenditure related to pandemic. Thus COVID-19 has led to the economic crises and increase in mental health effects relate to it. The stresses related to economic crises are now forcing people affected by them towards severe depression, alcohol dependency and increase in suicides.

Role of nurse: Nurse does not play any direct role, when it comes to the handling with the economic impact of COVID-19. But rather can play a vital role in compensating with the mental health effect of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. She can provide psychological support and teach coping strategies to help to strengthen the mental health of the affected individuals. When it comes to reducing the stress related to medical expenditure, a nurse can play very important role in it. A nurse can use the accurate, adequate and efficient supplies to minimize the excess medical expenditure. She can also teach methods of prevention of diseases which will reduce the cost treatment and help individual to live a healthy life.

Apart from the role of nurse, lot other things are needed to be done at more greater extent, to handle with the impact of economic crisis on mental health

Measures such as increase in number and expenditure through the social welfare scheme, family support programs, debt relief programs, facilities that would help the unemployed people to maintain their life in short run and regain their jobs in long run. These and lot more has to be done at national and international level to fight the impact of economic crises on mental health.

6. Social distancing and Quarantine measures resulting into lack of physical contact with family members, friends and colleagues: Social distancing and Quarantine measures are advocated and implemented across the globe as one of the best preventive measure to control the pace of spread of infectious diseases like COVID-19. Though being effective in down curving the growth of pandemic, the current scale of social distancing being implemental during lockdown and quarantine time may lead to significant and long lasting negative impact on mental health. According to different survey and reviews collected from the quarantine center across the globe, current level of social distancing and quarantine methods can lead to higher prevalence of anxiety, depression, anger, loneliness, frustration boredom.

Role of nurse: Every nurse during her learning period come across the term as the patients or the clients environment. Same factor do play a major role in this situation. The psychological environment does play a major role in the maintaining the mental health of individual practicing social distancing or in quarantine centers. A nurse should maintain clear communication with the people in the community and clarify the misconception between social distancing and social isolation. It has been observed during study that both of these concepts are misinterpreted and many a time a person is socially isolated rather than maintain a healthy social distance from his. Nurse should promote other to

maintain remote social contact with family, friends and colleagues via social media platforms. She can carry out various group activities in quarantine centers, that allows different people at the center introduce them self to other and reduce the feeling of loneliness. Exchange of word, thoughts and felling with others also helps to reduce the stress, anxiety, loneliness and frustration. It also helps to develop the feeling of availability of support, security and comfort.

7. Increasing suicidal tendency and suicidal death rate: Social isolation, anxiety, fear of contagion, uncertainty, chronic stress and economic difficulties has led to development and exacerbation stress and suicidality in vulnerable population, including individual with pre-existing psychiatric illness, low- resilient person, individual within containment zones, or a person who has lost his family member or friend due to COVID-19. Psychiatric conditions like mood fluctuation, anxiety, sleep disorder, are always found to associate with the suicidal behaviour. Multiple cases of COVI-19 related suicides has been reported in mass media and psychiatric literature of countries like USA, UK, Italy, Germany, Bangladesh, India and other. Thus suicidal tendencies have to be dealt as an independent mental health emergency during pandemic.

Role of nurse: It is found that there is high probability and elevated suicidal risk in COVID-19 survivor, especially who had severe COVID- 19 infections. This increased suicidal risk is mainly due to stressful experiences like learning of new diagnosis of COVID-19, fear of infecting other loved ones, symptoms of illness, hospitalization, admission to intensive care unit, loss of family members and friends in similar situation, loss income leading to development of anxiety, depressive and post-traumatic stress disorder. Therefore to reduce the suicidal rate during COVID- 19 pandemic nurses should work to reduce the stress, anxiety, fear and feeling of loneliness related to the disease. Nurse should encourage people to stay connected with family and friends and maintain relation by phone calls and video calls. Advice patients to take adequate sleep, eat healthy food, and do regular exercise. Patients should be checked and screened regularly, and reported on regular basis. Active outreach is necessary for the people with the history of psychiatric illness. Such people should be advised to continue their regimen of treatment and stay in contact with mental health professionals. Telemedicine techniques should be used if person is under COVID care or in quarantine facility.

8. Impact on children, toddlers and adolescent: Developmental psychologist has found that environmental factors during early childhood is responsible for shaping the lifetime behaviour of the and plays an important role in development of psychological skills like cognition, emotions etc. pandemic of COVID-19 has led to mitigation programs like closing of school parks and playgrounds leading to disruption of child's usual lifestyle, and promoting to development of distress and confusion. It has resulted in children becoming more demanding, exhibit more impatience, annoyance and hostility, causing them to suffer from physical and mental violence by overly pressurized parents. Especially children whose parents are health care workers taking care of COVID -19 patients are suffering from adjustment difficulties if

their parents are quarantined. In such situations, sustained parent child separation is making child more nervous.

Role of nurse: Nurse either in community or in quarantine center or in paediatric wards or be at their home has to face this situation. Disrupted normal routine life of the children is making them more arrogant, more demanding, impatience. In such condition, nurse should be more caring and loveable than in any other time, as attention and love is only thing that has potential to reverse the impact done. Children should be engaged in to different play activities that would keep them engaged mentally and helps to promote their health physically. All the physiological needs like healthy life style, proper hygiene and good parenting should be provided either at home or at hospital or quarantine center. If at quarantine center or hospital all the parents either mother or father, who ever child wants to be with him. This would allow the child in easy coping; provide cooperation in treatment and faster recovery. Allow child to get in contact with siblings through phone and video calls. This would help to get comfort and faster coping and psychological adjustments.

9. Psychological impact on health care provider and frontline worker: Medical professionals like doctors, nurses and other paramedics are categorized as **health care providers (HCP)**, while others professionals like police, bankers, emergency services like electricity, water supply etc. are considered as **frontline workers (FW)**. Stress fear and anxiety about the poorly known contagious disease outbreak like COVID- 19 is found to be profound among the HCP and FW. Being continuously exposed to the COVID-19 cases in hospital and quarantine centers, increases the self-perception of danger causing negative impact on mental well-being of health workers. In country like India, where health care system is already overburden, increasing COVID-19 cases are now provoking anxiety, irritation and stress among HCP, especially doctors and nurses. Increasing case load and heavy duty patters are pushing the HCW towards mild to moderate depression, fear, anxiety and insomnia. Staying separate from family during quarantine increases intensity of negative emotional responses. Returning to home from duty from dedicated COVID hospital or COVID Care centers increases the fear of transmitting disease to their own family member especially when there are elderly members with pre-existing chronic diseases or comorbid condition in the family. Thus we can say the all health care workers are under severe stress and highly vulnerable to be impacted negative on mental health during pandemic.

Role of nurse: Though nurses are at the center of the impact and are found to be most impacted, they are the one who could hold and control the situation. Nurses always act as shock absorbers that reduce the strain and stress on the active field. They not only act as bridge communicators for patients, but also for co- working nurses, doctors and other staffs. Nurses are best conveyer, and facilitates all around them to convey their emotions in proper way which helps to release stress of on duty colleagues. When it comes for a nurse herself, she should openly communicate with all her colleagues and have exchange of words, expressing her worries, fears, stress and anxiety while working in such situations. There should be series of group discussion organized for nurses and doctors, first separately and then

together. This exchange of idea would help them again in relieve stress and anxiety they face on duty and regain their mental health. Also such group discussion can help to learn different coping ideas applied and used by different people which would further facilitate the coping.

Conclusion

Emergence of COVID-19 pandemic has shown us the sign of emerging pandemic of mental illness. Therefore psychological and social response to this on-going pandemic has a vital role. Time has shown the need for setting up of international organization dedicated for mental health, with its branches across all countries in the globe, setting up institutions for research in mental health, with capability to deliver and arrange awareness program at both personal and community level is a desperately needed. We have seen that nurses have played a vital role in controlling and reducing the impact of COVID-19 not only on general physical health, but also on mental health. But there need to strengthen the nurses furthermore, both physically and mentally. There is need of proper working environment, cooperation and coordination in working place, psychological and family support, and respect in working places for the nurses. After working so hard in this pandemic, I do believe, it is what nurses deserve. Also proper wages and perks while working in such situation will help to boost their motive and help them to continue their work with greater dedication.

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