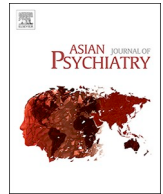




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Addressing psychosocial problems associated with the COVID-19 lockdown

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ABSTRACT

The lockdown imposed by the governments of various countries to contain the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is associated with various psychosocial problems. The complications within the family and time management issues that can occur during this time period are explored. The stigma and anxiety associated with the coronavirus disease are also addressed. It is noted that the problems faced by vulnerable communities including individuals with substance use disorder (SUD) tend to be ignored. These crucial areas that psychologists and mental health professionals should consider before providing intervention are discussed.

The Coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) has currently affected over 200 countries. Containment measures, including lockdown, employed in various countries have led to drastic changes in the day-to-day lives of people. Although these changes are requisite to deal with the spread, it is accompanied by certain unintended negative outcomes. Psychologists and other mental health professionals play an important role to curb the consequences of the lockdown on mental wellbeing. Certain important areas that psychologists need to consider while providing interventions are given below:

1 Challenges within the family

The COVID-19 lockdown is an opportunity for families to strengthen family bonds. However, studies reveal that during this time, there is an upsurge in domestic violence cases (Bradbury-Jones and Isham, 2020), lack of personal space in the family and boredom (Wang et al., 2020). Home-makers might be burdened by shortage of supplies and the sudden need to care for the entire family. Parents might be stressed by the thoughts about the future of their own jobs as well as the education of their children. Spending more time inside the house can lead to physical inactivity and delay in milestones (Glynn et al., 2016) among all family members. Therefore, parents should be educated to encourage their children to engage in more creative activities including board games, gardening and drawing. Parents should find time to play with the children and engage in daily rituals which strengthens the family relationship and helps to pass time (World Health Organization, 2020).

2 Time management problems

The lockdown provided people with more free time. Some people use this time creatively for self-care, picking up new hobbies and acquiring new skills. On the contrary, some people may get bored and frustrated. This leads to unhealthy daily routines. These include unhealthy sleep habits, extended screen time and lack of self-efficacy activities. Not knowing how to utilise the time effectively can also lead to overthinking, ruminating and losing hope. These unhealthy cognitions could turn into habits which might be carried forward even after the containment of the virus. Therefore, it is advised to prepare a timetable by scheduling time for sleep, exercise, leisure, online socialising and relaxation (World Health Organization, 2020).

3 Anxiety and stigma

As the virus infection spreads, the anxiety and stigma associated with it also proliferates. Therefore, it is important that psychologists explore ways in which people react to this stressful situation. Anxiety, sleeplessness, fear of contracting the virus, frustration and irritability are some effects of long-term lockdown during pandemics (Johal, 2009). Misinformation and sharing of fake news through social media are some factors that cause anxiety and stigma among people. In this view, the uncertainty adds to an individual's sense of unease, leading to loss of hope and initiative. People who have active symptoms of the disease hesitate to disclose or seek help as they anticipate stigma from the society (Logie and Turan, 2020). Fear and unawareness about

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health promoting strategies can lead to uncooperativeness towards health workers and governmental instructions. Psychologists should provide awareness about the different stress reactions and provide them with authentic and relevant information about the pandemic. The fear of contracting the pandemic could be more destructive than the virus itself. Therefore, even the uninfected population must be educated about propagation of fake news and should be provided with hope and optimism intervention.

4 Ignoring individuals with substance use disorder (SUD)

Quarantine laws and lockdowns pose threats to certain vulnerable communities. Individuals with substance use disorder (SUD) is one such vulnerable section that often goes unnoticed. In addition to the higher risk for contracting the virus due to poorer health and immunity, these individuals might also experience withdrawal symptoms (Kar et al., 2020). As restrictions made on travel and the market would lead to unavailability of substance, some individuals with SUD might engage in hazardous activities including self-manufacturing of the substance and committing suicide. It is hence important that psychologists ensure that such individuals are provided with the access to de-addiction centres or help lines that can treat and guide the individual in the required manner.

The psychological impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown will continue for an indefinite time. Therefore, it is important that psychologists and mental health professionals closely monitor all these areas to provide specialised intervention. Psychologists should ensure that awareness programmes are integrated with psychological intervention to help not only the infected but also their family and other vulnerable communities.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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