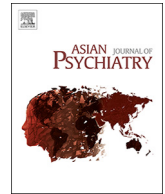




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Letter to the Editor

Theoretical orientation of a range of psychological approaches to address mental health concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic



Dear Sir,

The current pandemic as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak has not only played havoc by affecting the physical health of people worldwide, but has also caused a negative impact on mental health too. With the upsurge in the number of daily COVID-19 cases, mental health professionals have a challenging role to play in order to address psychological concerns which are probably affecting more persons than those experiencing physical issues. During this phase of the pandemic and also, in the post pandemic era, psychological approaches need to be executed for the mental wellbeing of people, few of which we have discussed concisely here.

The psychodynamic approach would focus on attachment and childhood experiences, and how people use various defense mechanisms to avoid interpersonal conflicts. By bringing awareness of the unconscious factors that are at play, the therapist may help affected persons towards positive psychological growth (Marčinko et al., 2020). In case of a person-centered approach, the therapist's unconditional positive regard and the process of self-actualization, would be of help in curbing the loneliness that have arisen due to the pandemic. Through strength, resilience and creativity, an individual can face these tough times (Inchausti et al., 2020). On a separate note, the existentialists would view this crisis due to COVID-19 as an opportunity for growth. As existentialists put it, isolation is to be accepted instead of being avoided because we all are alone. Friends, family, partners, and lovers cannot mask the fact that every human is truly alone to experience this world. Therefore, building intimacy need not be discouraged, but its limitations need to be accepted too. This pandemic has also caused many to question the meaning of life in general. Many people derive their meaning from the work they do. With the rise of unemployment and loneliness, life now seems to be meaningless. It has been explained that if an individual search for the meaning of life, he will not find it (Hillmann, 2004). Meaning emerges as one starts caring for others. If we focus too much on ourselves, we lose the true essence of life. Existentialism teaches us not to wait for the COVID-19 pandemic to go, instead, it teaches us to live in the uncertainties. By helping others through donating funds, delivering food and necessities, or by giving a friendly call, one can find a purpose of life in the times of crisis.

Persons who are susceptible to emotional problems and those who encounter extreme levels of stress may find it difficult to address their cognitive errors, which could become a part of them due to the present situation. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is one approach where the therapist can help the patients identify their cognitive errors, automatic thoughts and maladaptive behaviours, and, eventually help them modify such thoughts and behaviours. CBT is a therapy with no time limit, but it works well with a short duration. In this approach, it is presumed that emotions and behaviors of persons are induced by their perception of events (Fenn and Byrne, 2013). Intervention processes

during the COVID-19 pandemic based on CBT should focus on minimizing the impact of perceptions and information overload on the individual's mental health. Apart from these, tactics such as engaging in helpful behaviours, engaging in self-care, participating in pleasant events, problem solving, relaxation exercises, meditation and mindfulness could also be supportive to deal with psychological concerns during the pandemic and, in the post-pandemic era. With the advent of technology in mental health care, tele-psychotherapy methods can play a crucial role and support persons in need to reach out to their therapists even during restrictions such as lockdown and social distancing. The comfort and assurance a patient senses by linking with the persona of the therapist via tele psychotherapeutic practices would be undeniably much more than that gotten through the sheer eyes of the psychiatrist having to examine through the personal protective equipment (PPE) gear (Wind et al., 2020). Psychological preparedness must include various approaches to cater the needs of people suffering from mental health issues currently and post-COVID-19 pandemic. As the COVID-19 scenario unfolds, there is a need for mental health professionals to be adequately prepared. The range of psychological approaches discussed here could be applied to develop strategies for mental health support in the current phase as well as for the protracted enduring psychological effects of the pandemic.

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