

Psychological Effects Due To Corona Virus

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Abstract- *The novel coronavirus disease that emerged at the end of 2019 began threatening the health and lives of millions of people after a few weeks. Highly contagious with the possibility of causing severe respiratory disease, it has quickly impacted governments and public health systems. These have responded by declaring a public health emergency of national and international concern, as well as by adopting extraordinary measures to prevent the contagion and limit the outbreak. Millions of lives have been significantly altered, and a global, multi-level, and demanding stress-coping-adjustment process is ongoing.*

The COVID-19 disease has now achieved pandemic status. The World Health Organization has issued guidelines for managing the problem from both biomedical and psychological points of view. While preventive and medical action is the most important at this stage, emergency psychological crisis interventions for people affected by COVID-19 are also critical. This includes direct interventions for patients, and indirect for relatives, caregivers, and health care professionals.

I. INTRODUCTION

As the coronavirus pandemic rapidly sweeps across the world, it is inducing a considerable degree of fear, worry and concern in the population at large and among certain groups in particular, such as older adults, care providers and people with underlying health conditions.

In public mental health terms, the main psychological impact to date is elevated rates of stress or anxiety. But as new measures and impacts are introduced – especially quarantine and its effects on many people’s usual activities, routines or livelihoods – levels of loneliness, depression, harmful alcohol and drug use, and self-harm or suicidal behaviour are also expected to rise.

In populations already heavily affected, such as Lombardy in Italy, issues of service access and continuity for people with developing or existing mental health conditions are also now a major concern, along with the mental health and well-being of frontline workers.

As part of its public health response, WHO has worked with partners to develop a set of new materials on the mental health and psychosocial support aspects of COVID-19.(1,2)

As others have already reported, this constant bombardment can result in heightened anxiety, with immediate effects on our mental health. But the constant feeling of threat may have other, more insidious, effects on our psychology. Due to some deeply evolved responses to disease, fears of contagion lead us to become more conformist and tribalistic, and less accepting of eccentricity. Our moral judgements become harsher and our social attitudes more conservative when considering issues such as immigration or sexual freedom and equality. Daily reminders of disease may even sway our political affiliations.

II. DISCUSSION

Like much of human psychology, these responses to disease need to be understood in the context of prehistory. Before the birth of modern medicine, infectious disease would have been one of the biggest threats to our survival. The immune system has some amazing mechanisms to hunt and kill those pathogenic invaders. Unfortunately, these reactions leave us feeling sleepy and lethargic – meaning that our sickly ancestors would have been unable to undertake essential activities, like hunting, gathering or childrearing.

Being ill is also physiologically expensive. The rise in body temperature during a fever, for instance, is essential for an effective immune response – but this results in a 13% increase in the body’s energy consumption. When food was scarce, that would have been a serious burden. “Getting sick, and allowing this wonderful immune system to actually work, is really costly,” says Mark Schaller at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. “It’s kind of like medical insurance – it’s great to have, but it really sucks when you have to use it.”(3)

Anything that reduces the risk of infection in the first place should therefore have offered a distinct survival advantage. For this reason, we evolved a set of unconscious psychological responses – which Schaller has termed the

“behavioural immune system” – to act as a first line of defence to reduce our contact with potential pathogens.

The disgust response is one of the most obvious components of the behavioural immune system. When we avoid things that smell bad or food that we believe to be unclean, we are instinctively trying to steer clear of potential contagion. Just the merest suggestion that we have already eaten something rotten can lead us to vomit, expelling the food before the infection has had the chance to take root. Research suggests that we also tend to more strongly remember material that triggers disgust, allowing us to remember (and avoid) the situations that could put us at risk of infection later on.

Since humans are a social species that evolved to live in big groups, the behavioural immune system also modified our interactions with people to minimise the spread of disease, leading to a kind of instinctive social distancing.(4)

These responses can be quite crude, since our ancestors would have had no understanding of the specific causes of each disease or the way they were transmitted. “The behavioural immune system operates on a ‘better safe than sorry’ logic,” says Lene Aarøe at Aarhus University in Denmark. This means the responses are often misplaced, and may be triggered by irrelevant information – altering our moral decision making and political opinions on issues that have nothing to do with the current threat.

III. CONCLUSION

Experts say while there is no right or wrong way to cope during self-isolation, one the biggest things you can do for yourself is create or maintain a daily routine that allows for interactions, so that social isolation doesn’t become your default habit.

Gwiasda said as we create new habits because our old ones are disrupted, we have to be mindful of not falling into habits that sacrifice our mental health.(5,6)

“Set up time to have lunch and or dinner together and stick to it. Don’t work through meals or eat at the computer,” said Gwiasda. “Take some time to sit down and talk with those you are isolated with. If you are alone, set up a schedule to talk to a friend via video call.”

Meanwhile, Prof. Shankman advises maintaining a semblance of the routine you had before you were forced to isolate such as still waking up at the same time every day, getting dressed for work like you normally would, and doing some physical activity like going for a walk.

Identifying when you are not behaving like your normal self is also key at a time like this, according to the experts, who say these restrictive measures could exacerbate mental health issues.

If you’re noticing a big difference in your day-to-day functioning like not being able to focus on your work or take care of your children, it might be time to seek some help, said Prof. Shankman. “Just basic daily living like you don’t feel motivated to take a shower, or your sleep is disrupted could be signs.”

The increased availability of mental health therapy provided online or by telephone is essential right now, according to Prof. Brinkley-Rubinstein.

“People should not have to worry about the costs of mental health treatment at this time,” said Prof. Brinkley-Rubinstein. “So, any state or federal legislation should include provisions to pay for this.”(6)

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