

Effects of Covid-19 on Society

(Mitigating wider Psychological Effects of Covid - 19 Pandemic)

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ABSTRACT:

Physiologically and psychologically the most affected people by the COVID 19 Pandemic are those who suffer/ have suffered from this Pandemic. The affected people face psychological conditions like post-traumatic stress, mental disorder, anxiety, depression, distress, fear, anger and fear of being tagged with low self- esteem. Considering the effects of Pandemics on the groups of people living in the community, it can be seen that it affects directly patients and their relatives, health care staff and all other people who are at risk of this disease though the psychological reaction of each person in the face of intense stress and fear caused by the Pandemic is seen to be different. In this context some measures are required to minimize its negative psychological effects.

Keywords: Pandemic, Psychological, anxiety, disorder, trauma, physiology, community, health, mental, cognitive, trauma, diseases, virus, behavior.

Introduction

Pandemics are diseases that occur from time to time throughout human history, causing millions of people to die and negatively affecting public mental health, also further, having devastating and negative effects on the psychological health of not only those who are suffering but even the psychology of future people. Currently humanity is in the middle of a process that must be rigorously managed. The emergence of novel Corona Virus called Severe Respiratory Syndrome Corona Virus -2 (SARS-2) caused a deadly pneumonia outbreak in Wuhan (China). Corona virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) originated in the city of Wuhan , China , on December 31st , 2019. (The first case of COVID - 19 in India was reported on January 30th 2020) .It is thought to be the continuation of serious of epidemics caused by Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Corona Virus (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in Guangdong, China (2002) and in the Middle East (2009) respectively.

The COVID 19 infection soon after its emergence not only caused a number of deaths in China has

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rapidly spread to other countries as well. The emergence of SARS-CoV -2 and other menace of imminent epidemics have brought into forefront the urgent need to prepare for the consequences of associated epidemics. Like the traumatic experiences that have caused many psychological problems on humans throughout history COVID- 19 is of great importance. It is necessary to identify health abnormalities and to properly analyze effective therapies. In this scenario of continued viral outbreaks around the world that affects millions of people, it is important to evaluate and develop strategies to address psychological health and psychiatry aberrations caused by direct or indirect exposure to the situation,. The aftermath of such outbreaks, not only harms physical but mental health as well. It is seen that there are negative psychological effects or conditions such as post traumatic stress, loss of confidence, disorder, anxiety, depression, distress, fear, anger, discrimination, and danger of being tagged.¹

This pandemic has affected people psychologically because the spread of it is still continuing, death rate is increasing day by day, life has come to a halt and its control time is unpredictable. A situation of socio-economic crisis and psychological distress rapidly occurred worldwide. Although social activities have been restricted in most countries, almost all not essential individual movements were prohibited due to quarantine, while the local hospitals received suddenly thousands of critically ill COVID-19 patients and were forced to implement their emergency protocols.. Common psychological reactions related to the mass quarantine which was imposed in order to attenuate the COVID-19 spread are generalized fear and pervasive community anxiety which are typically associated with disease outbreaks and increased with the escalation of new cases together with inadequate, anxiety-provoking information which was provided by media. The psychological reactions to COVID-19 pandemic may vary from a panic behavior or collective hysteria to pervasive feelings of hopelessness and desperation which are associated with negative outcomes including suicidal behavior. Importantly, other health measures may be compromised by abnormally elevated anxiety.

As the general population is becoming increasingly exposed, anxiety related to this emergence of the health and socio-economic crisis, need to be rapidly identified. There is an early need to detect dysfunctional processes and maladaptive lifestyle that may lead to the onset of psychiatric conditions.

Psychological Effects on various Strata of Society

In a broad spectrum of this viral pandemic, it is impossible to predict the extent of mortality and morbidity that will be caused by this newly emerged pathogenic virus. Considering the current situation of the world environment, viral outbreak could drastically affect humans. Their psychological impacts can be serious and can affect mentally the entire range of population around the globe thereby affecting millions of people to induce anxiety, panic behavior and related psychiatric disorders. Considering the effects of pandemics on the groups of people living in the community, it can be seen that it affects directly patients, their relatives, healthcare staff, and all other people who are at risk of disease ². The psychological reaction of each person in the face of intense

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stress are caused by pandemics are different.

Physiologically and psychologically the most affected people by COVID -19 Pandemic are the Patients themselves or those who suffer from this pandemic .In the studies examining the psychological effects of COVID-19 on **Patients**, as seen in other epidemics that most of the patients face negative psychological conditions such as post traumatic stress, disorder, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, sleep disorders, loneliness, distress, fear of disease, anger and fear of being tagged.³ The most relevant and profound psychological impact of the outbreak of the pandemic on the patients suffering from COVID-19 infection is - aspecific and uncontrolled fears related to infection, pervasive anxiety, frustration, boredom and loneliness that have been hypothesized to impair subjective wellbeing and quality of life The continuous exposure of people to information, news, and videos about the disease also directly affects the patients and after them their near ones. In such a situation all of them are likely to succumb to Hypochondriasis too that is detrimental to their mental health.⁴ Several existing studies demonstrated that those who have been exposed to the risk of infection may develop pervasive fears about their health, worries to infect others and fear infecting family members. Individuals are more vulnerable than others to manifest worries if they experienced physical symptoms potentially linked to the infection and fear that symptoms are directly associated to actively having the infection even several months after the exposure.

The group affected by pandemic is **Young people**. It may be thought that young people will be less affected by COVID-19 due to the ability to easily overcome the physiological symptoms caused by virus. However it is predicted that young people will be negatively affected by this pandemic process and will experience psychological problem. In a study ⁵ it was concluded that psychological problems was associated with being young. Young people feel more stressed, anxious, irritable sad, intolerant and depressed. Due to the rapid spread of this pandemic their education process has faced a severe blow. They are staying at home consequently their social relations have been disrupted and there has been an increase in the likelihood of loneliness and depression. Although they can continue their social relations through internet and social media applications, it is obvious that they will not be as healthy and high quality, as social relations that are established face to face. This situation can be claimed to decrease the relationships and life satisfaction.

At the same time due to the development of technology, compared to other age groups, young people can be exposed to negative flows caused by COVID-19 around the world through internet and social media. This situation can be claimed to make young people psychologically more risky than other age groups. Although variables such as life styles , physical strength , development characteristics and less possibility of being affected by the virus, may provide them a protective role against the COVID-19 pandemic, just the opposite, they may also become risk factors.. Therefore due to the restriction in their social life and uncertainty about when this isolation process will end, young people are thought to have psychological consequences as loneliness, anger, depression, pessimism and hopelessness.

Another group affected by COVID 19 is **Middle Aged and Elderly People**. It is anticipated that the

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elderly people who are most probable group with COVID-19 deaths, will experience high level of stress and fear against the virus. It was determined that psychological problems such as anxiety and psychological distress were observed in the elderly people ⁶. In this study it is claimed that the cognitive and emotional disorders of elderly people may increase because of COVID-19 and existing psychological disorders can be triggered. In this regard the high risk of death of elderly people because of COVID-19 makes them psychologically more vulnerable.

The **Health Care Staff** can be regarded as the most psychologically affected occupational group in the COVID-19 pandemic. They are thought to be the most affected group because they try to provide one-to-one assistance to the patients exposed to virus. In this context, the general population as well as most of the front-line healthcare workers became vulnerable to the emotional impact of COVID-19 infection due to both the pandemic and its consequences worldwide. After examining it was found that the level of psychological effects of healthcare staff was much higher as compared to other group of people. They had psychological problems such as post traumatic stress disorder, and psychological distress like fear of infecting their own people, insomnia, nervousness sadness depression. etc. The healthcare workers' risk of infecting COVID-19 at any time and a number of other difficulties imposed by their professional responsibilities, deepen the psychological damage they experience. As a consequence of the pandemic, the health professionals who were overworked suffered high level of psychophysical stress and traumatic conditions viz stress disorder.

Also, the constant fear of contagion leads to obsessive thoughts, increase in the progressive closure of the person and reducing social relationships. HCWs are at risk to develop symptoms common in catastrophic situations, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, burnout syndrome, physical and emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and dissociation. However, an epidemic presents different peculiarities compared to a catastrophic event, for instance, the stigmatizing attitudes in particular toward health professionals, who are in daily contact with the risk of infection suffered from acute psychological stress, exhaustion, and post-traumatic stress, caused by the fear of contagion of their family members and the prolonged social isolation.

It is also seen and suggested that **Females** suffer greater psychological distress of outbreak as well as higher level of stress, anxiety, and depression.⁷ It is also likely that genetic, biological, chemical, hormonal, environmental, psychological and social factors all intersect to contribute to mental disorders in women. Also, women are more likely to be affect by anxiety, depression, and distress. Indeed, the female medical staff reports higher self-rated depression scores and more concern about infecting their families due to patient's death, prolonged work hours and the lack of personal protective equipment. Also found that nurses felt more nervous compared to doctors.

Like most of the traumatic experiences that have caused many psychological problems on humans throughout history, COVID-19 is seen to be having more negative psychological effects on **Children** because of the difficulty of making sense of all these COVID 19 experiences and lack of self-expression skills. In view of this pandemic's psychological effect on children Tsang, Scudds and Chan ⁸

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stated that the Children in families who have pandemic in their family members show excessive crying behavior, have difficulty in sleeping and feel exhausted. They also face the fear of getting infected, frustration and troubles because of shortage of social interaction.

Various Affected Aspects

COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the **Educational Process** at the utmost. Billions of students and millions of educators have been affected by school closures and other restrictions. Social distancing and other limitations due to COVID-19 has caused negative psychological conditions such as anxiety and fear and these have affected the well being of the students and parents.⁹ Most governments around the world have temporarily closed Educational Institutions in an attempt to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. These nationwide closures have had a negative impact on students round the world. Several countries have implemented localized closures impacting millions of additional learners. Millions of students have not been able to continue learning in schools, universities, vocational training institutions and adult training programmes. Many governments responded to the pressing need to provide school children with learning possibilities via online process have been negatively affected. Students, who have been stripped of their freedom due to this factor, are deeply concerned about when face to face education will happen.

Education has been hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 pandemic with more than 1.60 billion learners out of school and 186 country wide school closures impacting 88.8% of the world's total enrolled learners.¹⁰ Though school closures seem unavoidable in the scenario, their long duration of closure affects negatively their learning and social relationships. School provides face to face learning. As opposed to this, distance and online education harbours the problem. As online education requires excellent infrastructure, every student is not accessible to this pattern. Access to internet is not available everywhere and to every student depending upon their economic status and their place of habitat. Even if the infrastructure problems are resolved in some way, the constant exposure of students to distance education or online modes of learning would be tedious and hazardous for them. During school closures children's routine changes and healthy behaviours such as physical activities, adequate diet, good sleep patterns and habits are less probable to happen ¹¹. Also it is concluded that the limited social interaction increases loneliness, which is associated with mental health problems in children. In this scenario the motivation for students towards learning decreases and thus learning goals are not achieved. Not only students but also the entire teaching fraternity and even families are being affected by these negative effects of COVID -19 pandemic on educational scenario..Even families may not have enough support for their children to learn at home. The reason may be low economic levels of families as well as low educational level of family members. Further even teachers may lack pedagogical competence about how to manage the online educational process.

There have been serious harms of advising people or compelling them for **Self-Isolation** at home. **Quarantine** of people exposed to an infectious disease is associated with negative psychological effects, including post-traumatic stress- symptoms which may be long lasting. The effects are

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exacerbated by prolonged isolation, fear of the infection, frustration, boredom, inadequate supplies and information, financial loss and stigma. Prolonged periods of social distancing have effects such as fear of death, loneliness and anger, When they lose face-to-face connections and traditional social interventions they are likely to face severe stressful phase Though confinement is a necessary phenomenon to break the pandemic, the interruption of all social contact and the prohibition from going outside home can have immediate effects on people who are quarantined, as it is observed that they were more restless, irritable, uneasy, anxious and sometimes there were even suicidal tendencies and attempts.

Concerning the specific stresses affecting the population during the quarantine, it has been highlighted that not having adequate information or clear guidelines from authorities becomes a stress booster. The risk of related quarantine distress, may be also due to the presence of **Alexithymic Traits**, which may reduce psychological resilience in some subgroups of individuals Alexithymia may be literally defined as '**no words for mood**' and was initially identified to describe cognitive and affective features in patients with psychosomatic disorders. Alexithymic individuals may show significantly higher levels of anxiety, depression and psychological distress. Importantly, feelings of frustration and uncertainty tend to occur even in relation with inadequate basic supplies (e.g. food, water, clothes etc.) during the quarantine period which is a major source of worries and anxiety/anger even after 4–6 months from quarantine. There are studies demonstrating that supplies provided by public health authorities in order to address the outbreak may be inappropriate or their release may be carried out too late, to successfully address the needs.

A higher prevalence of subjects with psychological symptoms, emotional disturbance, depression, stress, mood alterations and irritability, insomnia, post-traumatic stress symptoms, anger and emotional exhaustion are observed among those who have been quarantined. Social isolation related to restrictions and lockdown measures are linked to feelings of uncertainty for the future, fear of new and unknown infective agents resulting in abnormally increased anxiety. Anxiety may be directly related to sensorial deprivation and pervasive loneliness, in this case, first insomnia but later depression and post-traumatic stress occurred. Notably, fear, anger, anxiety and insomnia, confusion, grief and numbness have been identified as additional psychological responses to quarantine.

Long-term behavioral changes like vigilant hand washing and avoidance of crowds as well as a delayed return to normality even after many months after the quarantine were also reported. Thus, the quarantine period seems to have important and dysfunctional psychological consequences on the individual's mental health, not only in the short-term but even in the long-term period. The final effect of social isolation is pervasive loneliness and boredom, which have potential dramatic effects on both physical and mental individual well-being. Pervasive loneliness may be significantly associated with increased depression and hyper-anxious behavior. Unfortunately, the isolation is progressively enhanced by anxiety, panic or collective hysteria. Cognitive functions and decision making are firstly impaired by hyper arousal and anxiety and later by disabling feelings of loneliness.

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In addition, social isolation and loneliness are also associated with alcohol and drug abuse. Both frustration and pervasive loneliness seem to derive by the inhibition from daily activities, interruption of social necessities, inability to take part in social networking activities enhancing the risk of hopelessness and suicidal behavior in this specific context. Overall, it is well known that long periods of social isolation or quarantine for specific illnesses may have detrimental effects on mental well-being and can cause emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and dissociation.

Another aspect of COVID – 19 that has been acutely affected is the **Economy** of the country that has in turn, severely harmed social relationships. Whether people are working at home or in some kind of private sectors, or they are a group that faces precarious employment and low income, they are severely blown by this pandemic situation. People are experiencing loss of income due to social distancing in various ways. Although some people can work at home, many cannot, especially those in public facing roles, or in service industries. The growth of the several informal, gig economies in some countries has created a large group of people who are especially vulnerable groups. School closures will affect low income families as they would be in search of meeting out the unexpected need of their children, viz, losing the benefits of school meals.

The link between income and health is well established and acts through several mechanisms. Income allows people to buy the necessities of life, access health enhancing resources, avoid harmful exposures and participate in normal activities of the society. Low income also increases psychological stress. The minimum income for healthy living establishes a standard required to maintain health in different settings. To avoid widening health inequalities, social distancing must be accompanied by measures to safeguard the income of the poor people.

Further, this pandemic situation, with lockdowns and social distancing has placed people in close proximity with family member almost all or most of the time which may cause or exacerbate tensions. Concerns have been raised about potential increases in **Family** violence in some studies in America. It has been also viewed that pandemic has changed the lives of most children, adolescent and social relationships and academic routines have been changed by virtual friends and distance learning. Leisure has been restricted to indoors as public places have been closed.

Mitigating Psychological Effects-*Therapeutic / Recovery Strategies*

In order to cope up with such psychological health hazards interventions by several healthcare authorities is a must which can consist of equivocal recommendations for the prevention of this viral infection.

To mitigate the negative outcomes:

The general population must be **Properly and Pre**-informed- especially about the possible impact, individual risks, The modern world in which all individuals are able to rapidly travel and communicate has been rarely forced to the current social isolation and restrictions which are linked to feelings of frustration and uncertainty. This unprecedented situation related to COVID-19 outbreak

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is clearly demonstrating that individuals are largely and emotionally unprepared to the detrimental effects of biological disasters that are directly showing how everyone may be frail and helpless. Although government regulations are necessary to maintain social balance and guarantee the safety of all individuals, a direct strategy aimed to manage the psychosocial issues related to COVID-19 crisis and its consequences in the community is currently lacking.

Resilience and Enhanced Social Support are protective factors that may help with regard to lifestyle changes and re-adaptation mechanisms. Psychological resilience may be generally defined as the ability to support or retrieve psychological well-being during or after addressing stressful disabling conditions. Although the interconnectedness increased dramatically over the past decades, similarly the vulnerability of billions of individuals across the world to existing or novel pathogens tragically increased without a corresponding enhancement in coping abilities. Historically, different indices have been adopted to **measure resilience** and individual ability to react to social, economic and political threats, including public health emergencies. Unfortunately, being less resilient to social threats, such as pandemics, may enhance the risk of developing psychiatric conditions. Notably, a general message of hope and social protection given by healthcare regulatory authorities and scientists not only about the risk of being infected but even about the existence of containment measurements that may be implemented in the hospitals and in the community as a whole may enhance resilience and individual abilities to successfully react to social threats. A higher and significant perception of social support is associated with a reduced likelihood to develop psychological distress and psychiatric conditions. .

Patients should be provided **Targeted, Tailored Messages** according to the most reliable scientific evidence. The term **Infodemic** is rapidly becoming more serious in this pandemic situation. This term is used to specify rapidly spreading misinformation through social media platforms and other outlets. Winning the race of sharing novel details for COVID-19 and gaining fame over social media have accelerated the rate of spreading forged news. This massive Infodemics increases the risk of severe public health consequences. Relevantly, a variety of mental health supporting strategies is required in pandemic areas in order to facilitate lifestyle changes and re-adaptation activities required after the occurrence of invalidating outbreaks.

At the community level (i) **Implementing effective communication** and (ii) **Providing adequate psychological services** should be carried out in order to attenuate the psychological and psychosocial impact of COVID-19 outbreak.

Health Education needs to be enhanced using online platforms, social fear related to COVID-19 needs to be correctly addressed while stigma and discrimination need to be recognized as major challenges, able to reinforce the feelings of uncertainty in a period of social crisis. Hospital protocols linked to the early and effective management of health emergency need to be implemented, while healthcare professionals need to be supplied by adequate protective facilities.

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Scientific community should provide appropriate information to attenuate the impact of anxiety, frustration, and all the negative emotions which represent important barriers to the correct management of social crisis and psychological consequences related to pandemic. Unmet needs should be rapidly identified by **Medical Staff that need to communicate frequently and in a timely manner** with most of patients to understand the risk to develop new symptoms or worsen a preexisting psychological distress.

Telephones Help Lines, Internet access, Active Social Networks, dedicated Blogs and Forums should be implemented in order to **reduce Social Isolation and Loneliness** as well as allow to specific populations (e.g. infected subjects in hospitals or quarantine settings) the successful communication with their loved ones.

Marginalized populations such as elderly individuals or those with psychological problems should be able to actively consult with **Clinical Psychotherapists** to rapidly detect warning signs. Finally, **Telemedicine** should be really implemented especially in areas where mental health services are poorly represented or severely impaired by the rapid spread of pandemic and lockdown restrictions. Importantly, symptoms related to initial psychological crisis together with the need to perform effective interventions using personalization and monitoring of adverse drug reactions related to psychoactive medications should be detected by psychiatrists.

Implementing **Community-Based Strategies** to support resilience and psychologically vulnerable individuals during the COVID-19 crisis is fundamental for any community. The psychological impact of fear and anxiety induced by the rapid spread of pandemic needs to be clearly recognized, as a public health priority for both authorities and policy makers ,who should rapidly adopt clear behavioral strategies to reduce the burden of disease and the dramatic mental health consequences of this outbreak.

In order to reduce anxiety and depression symptoms widespread among the population, the **World Health Organization (2019 and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020)** proposed specific guidelines on the **correct use of health protection** with the aim to minimize the distress associated with health-care professions. At the same time, as a consequence of the emerging issues, psychotherapists provided psychological support online, addressing the technological challenge In line with the technological progress, professional organizations promoted specific guidelines and policies related to customer protection, privacy, screening, evaluation, and development of self-help products. Technological development in mental health foreshadows future trends that include “smart” mobile devices, cloud computing, virtual worlds, virtual reality, and electronic games in addition to the traditional psychotherapy tools.

In this perspective, it is important to help future generations of psychologists and patients to collaborate in the potential growth areas, through education and training on the benefits and effectiveness of **Telepsychology**: - Training and Promotion of Psychological Well-Being. Indeed, more awareness of the potentials of the online services is needed, exploring the main differences

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between the devices (chat, video-audio consultation, etc.) in order to use them in relation to the specific purposes identified by the professional. For example, the Italian Service of Online Psychology conducted a study based on a service of helpdesk on Facebook. This service guided people in asking for psychological help, working on their personal motivation. At the same time, another helpdesk on Skype provided some psychological sessions via webcam. In this line, **Tele counseling** is a diffuse online method used by counselors and psychologists during the recent pandemic.

One of the future goals of public and private psychological organizations should be the promotion of specific **training for Psychologists and Psychotherapists**, with the following aims: (1) developing the basic skills in managing the effects of a pandemic and of emergency situations; and (2) sensitizing patients to online therapeutic relationship, providing the main rules and benefits of the process ¹². On this line, a significant example is the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) which proposed PhDs in Telepsychology, with the aim of training future psychologists in managing the psychological effects of the pandemic through an online psychology service. The service provided by the VCU had been effective in reducing anxiety, depression, and hospital recoveries. As shown, telepsychology assumes a key role in the improvement of health care. Online psychological services avoid geographical barriers and are suitable to become a useful integrated tool in addition to traditional psychotherapy.

Online Psychological Services provide several advantages, especially in the current situation of pandemic. First of all, online services help people in a short period of time, reducing the risk of contagion and the strong feeling of anxiety in both psychotherapists and patients, who feel uncomfortable in doing traditional psychotherapy due to the pandemic ¹³. Furthermore, some of the main advantages of telepsychology, are the decrease in waiting for the consultation, because it takes place from home or from the workplace, saving time and expense, less travel and rental costs for the office, for those who provide the service and for those who use it. Online psychological services facilitate access to people who struggle to find support close to their social environment, avoiding difficulties related to mobility. Also, online services help people who have less confidence in psychotherapy. Indeed, mostly online psychotherapy takes place in one's comfort zone, facilitating the expression of problems and feelings.

According to the situations, online services could provide a different medium. For instance, the chat is a useful tool to establish a first assessment of a person who feels uncomfortable in using video. Indeed, the online psychotherapy is perceived as more "acceptable."¹⁴ The term **Online Disinhibition Effect** demonstrating how the web, unlike the real life, leads to the failure of the hierarchical relationship based on dominant-dominated among individuals. This aspect, allows a greater sense of freedom in expressing oneself and less concern related to judgment. Each person has a different experience of the network and several levels of disinhibition. For instance, a mild disinhibition could be a person who chooses to ask for help talking with a psychologist about their problems; while a high disinhibition could be represented by flaming, an expression of online bullying or cyberstalking.

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Online psychological services should be integrated with the various **Territorial Services** in order to provide the patients local references in relation to the specific health and economic needs. Finally, the possibility for the therapist and for the patient to record the sessions *via* chat and in audio/video mode—with the informed consent of the participants provides another useful tool to compare the sessions and to underline the positive outcomes and the effectiveness of the therapeutic process. According to this perspective, online psychological support and psychotherapy become a resource for psychotherapists and patients in a co-build relationship.

In analyzing the psychological impact of the quarantine, the importance for individuals to feel integral part of the society emerged, an aspect often undervalued in psychological well-being. However, although it is not possible to predict the duration of the pandemic, we know very well the serious impact of these measures on the society, on relationships and interactions, in particular, on the Empathic Process. Analyzing this aspect within the recent situation of the pandemic, an increment of antithetical positions and attitudes could be noticed. On the one hand, people identify themselves with those who suffer (neighbors, friends, relatives who are living stressful events), promoting activities such as the so-called “suspended expenses.” For instance, solidarity and humanitarian activities, food, and medicine delivery for people who are unable to go to the supermarket.

On the other hand, there is a part of the population who experiences a feeling of “forced empathy.” This aspect could be also emphasized by the use of technological devices that might lead to a depersonalization of relationships, forcing the sense of closeness, at least virtually. The **hyper connection of feelings** becomes a way to reduce the self-isolation and its consequences, representing the contrary of the idea of **Durkheim** (1858–1917), who considered **Society as a specific entity; built on social facts**.¹⁵ The sensation “**to be forced to feel**” could lead people to distance themselves from others after the emergency situation, incrementing social phobias.

Human Communication is changing. The formal question “**how are you?**” at the beginning of a conversation is no longer just a formality, as before the pandemic. For example, the relationship between employee and the manager is different, leading to more responsibilities in listening and understanding feelings expressed during the video call, generating a forced reciprocity. Hence, the aforementioned “forced empathy” may be common in this period because the social distance and the emergency situation make people want to be heard and appreciated, and the simple question “how are you?” becomes an anchor to express fears and emotions .

Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected the way people live interpersonal relationships. The lockdown has been characterized of a different organization of daily life, with an incrementation of time at home and a reduction of distance through digital devices. This period has also been seen as an evolution in the concept of empathy, producing new perspectives in the study of the phenomenon according to sociological and neurological points of view. Indeed, empathy—defined as the ability to

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understand and share the feelings of another—involves several elements, such as: (a) social context and historical period of the individual, (b) neurological mechanisms, and (c) psychological and behavioral responses to feelings of others. The neuro-sociological perspective analyzes the mechanisms involved in the empathic process, focusing on human communication and interpersonal relationships. Specifically, in this historical period characterized by an increment in the man-machine relationship, **Neurosociology** could become one of the principal sciences for the study of human relations and technology. “We live increasingly in a human-machine world. Anyone who doesn’t understand this, and who is not struggling to adapt to the new environment—whether they like that environment or not—is already being left behind. Adapting to the new, fast-changing, technologically enhanced context is one of the major challenges of our times. And that certainly goes for education”

Countering Pandemic

According to the abovementioned considerations, it is suggested that there are various ways to counter this Pandemic:

Primary Prevention

Studying the impact of the pandemic toward an, at-risk population, to reduce symptoms related to stress and providing specific online psychological counseling based on the target (students, medical staff, parents, and teachers).

Secondary Prevention

Overcoming the limitations of the human interaction based on digital devices: (1) developing new spaces of inter- and intra social communication and new tools of support and psychological treatment, reproducing the multisensory experienced during the face-to-face interaction (Virtual Reality, holograms, serious game etc.); (2) training the next generation of psychotherapists in managing online devices and in implementing their adaptive and personal skills; and (3) sensitizing the general population on telepsychology and its advantages.

Research according to the Neuro - sociological perspective

Studying human interaction mediated by new technologies and the role of empathy, associating neuroscience, sociology, and psychology using qualitative and quantitative research techniques..

Policy at Governmental level

Policy Decisions should be made in such a manner that can shape the future economy in such a way that could either improve health and health inequalities. These should include decisions about which sectors to prioritize for support , whether to direct financial support to business or workers and how to build a more sustainable and inclusive economy.

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