



Mental health after Covid19 pandemic: a perspective

Abstract

This review article highlights the mental health scenario in Mexico following Covid19 pandemic.

Keywords: Psychosocial health, Compulsive behaviours, Suicidal ideation.

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It is a great honour to be asked to write a few lines about mental health situation. As we all know Covid19 pandemic has affected worldwide not only physical health but also psychosocial health.

Across 18 months after the official declaration of the World Health Organization (WHO), global population has been affected in several ways, many people have lost their jobs, others sadly have lost the ones they loved, and others have been affected in a direct way get contagious of the virus.

If that would not been enough, quarantine restrictions that has been established in order to avoid the spreading of Covid19 have had a profound impact in our society. Not only anxiety and depression have been reached up to 50% of population but also loneliness, despair, and suffering.

This virus has had the power to touch us at different levels and in the most unsuspected ways. For most of us, this situation is entirely new and no one seems prepared to that. While some people have been developed their skills to cope with it, others have not had the same privilege. For those who have a previous mental disorder such as anxiety or depression, pandemic has worsened these previous conditions.

Even for those who have not suffered any of these, the fear of contagion put them at risk to develop compulsive behaviours such as washing their hands, disinfect anything, and reacting aggressively to human contact. Negative thoughts and rumination have also taken a toll on mental health. For some, the idea of an ending world put them also at risk to suicidal ideation and committed to.

The third actor in this scenario has been sleep disorders. Insomnia and “light sleep” have affected most people from youth to middle age – according to some studies older people has not been affected in their sleep as much as the younger

– with the consequences of that: as we know, lack of sleep have a profound impact in health, making them more vulnerable to disease because the relationship between nervous and immune system, but also as a factor that contributes to mental health disorders.

The change in our daily routines, the lack of exposure to sunlight, and non-discriminating media exposure as well as fear, have been targeted as causes for what has been called “covidomnia”.

It has been estimated that 50% of population have suffered from severe mental disturbances during this time while up to 80% have had mild disturbances. As we can see we have a scenario that is not easy, also considering that there are few professionals in the field that can attend those cases.

While in Spain, in the celebration of Mental Health Day, the President has called for a mental health campaign investing 100 million of Euros to create a suicide hotline – the first cause of non-natural death in that country, in countries like Mexico things have not developed equal.

In Spain, one to ten teenagers have been diagnosed with some mental health issue, up to a million have a severe mental disorder and just a half of them receive attention. It is also known that is one of the countries with the largest consumption of anxiolytic medication and sedatives, and comparing with other countries of European Union have less psychiatrists and psychologists in the primary care.

In the other hand, the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS) has estimated that anxiety disorders have been increasing during pandemic – with no available data – and there are just three hospitals in Mexico City that provide psychiatric attention to attend up to ten million of people. In their website, they report that the most prevalent problem is

the generalized anxiety disorder followed by panic attacks and phobias; affective disorders in general have also been increased as well as posttraumatic stress and acute stress. IMSS also have hotline service – there is no available data of users either – and called to population to identify and prevent any behaviour that would be inappropriate or suspicious.

Some private institutions and universities have developed hotlines and programmes to attend population, but the efforts have not reached the number of people affected by the pandemic.

Vaccination has been contributed to people in Mexico to get back to work and social activities but for many people who are afraid of the new variants of the virus, returning to their activities have been complex.

Poverty is one of the key factors that drive many people in Mexico to get back to work. As your country, India, a large number of people in Mexico are poor. It has been estimated that 56 million (44%) of Mexicans are below the poverty line. If virus does not touch them, poverty do. We have also a main problem with violence at home that affect women but also children. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have made a call to get back to school also.

At work, psychosocial risks have been increasing during pandemic. Workloads, long hours in front of the computer, and negative leadership have affected many employees. In particular, health industry workers have also suffered attacks from people.

In our culture, social expressions of love and friendship are common and restrictions have not been well accepted. Lack of education and awareness as well as some difficulties with the use of masks have also created differences among those who support their use and those who do not. Even from government, there is no clear signal of what population must do.

Along with Covid19 we are also facing another important challenge in health related to lifestyle. It has been established that people with previous conditions are more vulnerable to the disease and in Mexico, diabetes and obesity have increased significantly in the last decades. Because the fear to get outside, because they do not have the habit or because of their job, most people do not exercise enough. Although government has created a campaign focused to create awareness about the products we consume, it has not been enough to promote change habits. It is cheaper to get a soda and snack even in the smallest town than to have an organic/healthy meal.

As I hope could explain, the situation in Mexico is complicated considering all of these aspects. But in particular, mental health demands attention. We need to develop much more professionals in the field that can attend more population and the public resources are insufficient. Our government need to invest on that. We also need to create awareness about the importance of mental health that is often dismissed. Although the focus during pandemic has been how to avoid contagion, we should care in the same proportion about how to keep relationships, self-care, and promote resilient factors.

I would like to conclude saying that we also need to support those individuals who has been affected by the virus, having sequels of the disease, and even those who are dealing with trauma because the loss of their loved ones.

We have a lot to do.

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