

The impact of COVID-19 on psychological health

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As a result of the emergence of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) infection in the Chinese city of Wuhan, a situation of socio-economic crisis and profound psychological distress rapidly occurred worldwide. Various psychological problems and important consequences in terms of mental health including stress, anxiety, depression, frustration, uncertainty during COVID-19 outbreak emerged progressively. This work aimed to comprehensively review the current literature about the impact of COVID-19 infection on the mental health in the general population. The psychological impact of quarantine related to COVID-19 infection has been additionally documented together with the most relevant psychological reactions in the general population related to COVID-19 outbreak. The role of risk and protective factors against the potential to develop psychiatric disorders in vulnerable individuals has been addressed as well. The main implications of the present findings have been discussed.

Psychology is the science of mind and behavior. Psychology includes the study of conscious and unconscious phenomena, as well as feeling and thought. It is an academic discipline of immense scope. Psychologists seek an understanding of the emergent properties of brains, and all the variety of phenomena linked to those emergent properties, joining this way the broader neuro-scientific group of researchers. As a social science, it aims to understand individuals and groups by establishing general principles and researching specific cases.

In this field, a professional practitioner or researcher is called a psychologist and can be classified as a social, behavioral, or cognitive scientist. Psychologists attempt to understand the role of mental functions in individual and social behavior, while also exploring the physiological and biological processes that underlie cognitive functions and behaviors.

Psychologists explore behavior and mental processes, including perception, cognition, attention, emotion, intelligence, subjective experiences, motivation, brain functioning, and personality. This extends to interaction between people, such as interpersonal relationships, including psychological resilience, family resilience,

and other areas. Psychologists of diverse orientations also consider the unconscious mind. Psychologists employ empirical methods to infer causal and correlational relationships between psychosocial variables. In addition, or in opposition, to employing empirical and deductive methods, some—especially clinical and counselling psychologists—at times rely upon symbolic interpretation and other inductive techniques. Psychology has been described as a “hub science” in that medicine tends to draw psychological research via neurology and psychiatry, whereas social sciences most commonly draw directly from sub-disciplines within psychology.

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 in certainty. This unprecedented situation related to COVID-19 outbreak 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. Social distancing and important lockdown restrictions have been carried out first in China and later in most European countries where Italy and Spain experienced a tragic growth of the number of positive cases.⁹ 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.

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.²⁵ Anxiety may be directly related to sensorial deprivation and pervasive loneliness, in this case first insomnia but later depression and post-traumatic stress occurred. In addition, anxiety is closely associated with fatigue and reduced performance in healthcare workers while boredom and loneliness are directly related to anger, frustration and sufferings linked to quarantine restrictions.²⁶ Furthermore, additional tragic effects associated with pervasive anxiety in a pandemic period may include the perceived lower social support, separation from loved ones, loss of freedom, uncertainty and boredom.

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