

Post Pandemic Mental Health and Care Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This article highlights the changes, pandemic COVID-19 brought along with it. In this phase, people have witnessed huge number of deaths, loss of loved ones and risks with physical health. Of even greater significance is the mental health of the individuals. Apart from boredom in social isolation, they underwent serious symptoms of depression and anxiety. There has been an increase in domestic abuse in the families. Recession and unemployment have led to despair in populations. With no sign of an easy life yet and more drastic changes experienced after the pandemic, people are coping by seeking help of mental health professionals. Revenge tourism and revenge shopping has currently dominated the minds of people and people are seeking wider stimulations after experiencing such a prolonged distress. Therefore, this article will highlight the psychological problems experienced during the COVID times and the mental health of the individuals after the pandemic phase.

Keywords: Revenge tourism, travel, mental health, Integrative care

Post Pandemic World: Transformation in the lives of people

The post pandemic world is going to be very different and will have fundamental changes in the lifestyle and mental health of the individuals. The pandemic era is long gone it seems, and many people have survived through many stressors and major upheavals in their personal lives. There have been personal family losses and loved ones have

parted ways. Relationships have suffered gravely. Marriages have fallen apart under the stress of self-isolation and rising of financial hardships. Business culture has changed. People have become bankrupt due to major losses in their business. The pandemic has brought an estimated 10 % of rise in the prevalence of severe psychological problems. Bipolar disorders, anxiety disorders and PTSD have been reported to rise in percentage (Galatzer-Levy et al., 2018). Cases of PTSD have risen because people have suffered isolation and confinement beyond their limits and that has led to lasting psychological problems (Brooks et al., 2020). People had faced quarantine for prolonged periods in small overcrowded rooms and they have felt trapped in their personal relationships because of this situation. They were forced masks in those rooms and hence have suffered physically and mentally. Such people may be especially prone to developing PTSD symptoms.

Certain new syndromes have appeared post this vulnerable period. Research suggests that the people will have a COVID Stress Syndrome, which would be characterized by fear of infection. People will be fearful of touching surfaces or objects thinking that it may be contaminated with virus. Another phobia that would be developed or apparently has developed in many will be xenophobia. People will be scared of meeting other people from different cities or countries. There will also be a widespread of intrusive thoughts and bad dreams or nightmares as eventually the thoughts of this phase will keep resurfacing and new fears or viruses may emerge too.

Another psychological problem that has been observed is the increase in Hikikomori. It is defined as a syndrome that has many characteristics related with agoraphobia. In this problem, people are reluctant to leave homes and visit outdoor places. So, it may be associated with severe social isolation followed by withdrawal which could last for six months or longer (Teo, 2010). Its emergence is related with Japan. But these symptoms are visible in other places too (Bowker, Bowker et al., 2019). The prevalence of Hikikomori has definitely increased, and many anxieties prone individuals have started staying essentially in their safe apartments or homes.

Role of Technology: The role played by media and technology

In 2020, media and technology were considered as the most important tool. The way people had mastered Zoom, Google Meets, Teams and House Party has taught us that people would not have survived without these platforms during the pandemic. From children to elderly, all have learnt technical skills and have utilized them effectively in these unprecedented times. Post pandemic, technology has been considered as a boon. Connectivity in the world has been possible because of these applications. Economy survived because people worked from their homes. Academicians and scholars have faced these traumatic times by continuing with the daily classes and keeping the students busy completely. People were able to maintain connectivity in relationships with the help of mobiles and laptops. Isolation was thus reduced. People opened up and expressed on social applications. It has served as a useful platform for disaster management, emergency prevention and outbreaks during this pandemic phase. It helped in the resolution of community issues and to improve public health. Prevention awareness messages were sent all over the world to save people from this pandemic. Many preventive apps were developed to alert people before they could enter the risk

areas. The intensity of the situation was actually understood by a common man through media. It played a powerful role in making people realize the seriousness of the situation.

The current advancements in technology have made it easy for people to withdraw. These are the current trends for people based on convenience and availability of resources. It is also convenient to work from home. People are now watching movies at homes and are enjoying it with their families instead of going to the cinemas like they used to. Shopping lifestyle has changed and people prefer to shop online instead of going to malls and other departmental stores. They are using home delivery food services and are avoiding outlets, hotels and restaurants. It can be said that certain amount of laziness has set in the lives of people but this change or transformation is mostly to save time and not be out on the trafficked roads all the time. It is convenient to avoid lines outside the banks and do online banking. It is convenient to buy groceries online which come in better packaging and with assured quality. The attitude toward automated delivery is positive. This has become a boon for the elderly and working women. There are many local initiatives such as tiffin services, farmers markets which have diversified our tastes and choices and have affected what we eat and how we get it. The food system is different now as we are no longer dependent only on the retailers.

Revenge travel

Despite the prevailing pandemic situation, the emergence of revenge travel is reported in numerous countries (e.g., India, USA) (Pasricha, 2021; Whitmore, 2021). Perception of constant fear of missing out owing to the pandemic, development of FOMO, or other reasons have led tourists to become involved in last-chance tourism. Travelers are experiencing restless moods, and it is believed that the revival of leisure tourism is massive. It has touched a new level and people are spending and going out

like never before (Shadel, 2020). Moreover, revenge travel was reported to be dangerous (Sharma, 2021) owing to COVID-19. However, this phenomenon should not be ignored, and exploring the possible reasons behind revenge travel is necessary to plan for future necessities and demands related to tourism. Discussions related to revenge travel and tourism is already initiated. Research studies are needed to understand the causes of revenge travel. There is an amplification of emotion expression. In their study on emotions related to COVID-19, Adhikari et al. (2021) found that anger and disgust is present in people which have increased frustration in them. They want to see the world and put the ticks on their bucket list. The urge to travel is so intense, that no more covid protocols are being followed. The banners are neglected. People are being seen in masses everywhere. In fact, the mask phenomenon is over. No one wants to hold the mask now. There are huge numbers of lines at the airport and people are ready to be in overcrowded places. The ticket prices are the highest right now but there is a willingness to spend and break the saving norms. One reason can also be a feeling of wanting to break free from the boring life of lockdowns. Here we would like to highlight another term that is called as 'lockdown-fatigue'. This term was given by AIIMS Delhi Director Dr Randeep Guleria. The travel life has taken such a halt for two years that it seems people now don't care anymore. For them it's all about travel and posting pictures of their bucket lists and newer destinations they are exploring. Mostly, everyone is intoxicated with wanderlust and is heading to foreign countries.

Revenge Shopping

It has been predicted by The National Retail Federation that sales will increase between 6.5% and 8.2% post pandemic, which would be the fastest growth since 2004. After an intense gloom in the business industry, customers are making up for their lost time and are spending like never before.

Luxury items and brands have seen a huge uptick from customers. The department stores have seen an increase in sales by 21%. If we understand the psyche of people, the desire in spending large amounts is primarily related to a feel good factor and a release of stress (Hama, 2001). What people want is to release depression and anxiety. That can be best done with some shopping therapy (Atalay and Meloy, 2011). This can be supported with the help of the Terror Management Theory (TMT) which clearly states that people will do anything to overcome their fears. They want to compensate and want to survive and this retail therapy is one such mechanism that helps them do so (Yuen et al., 2020). According to TMT, people experienced negative emotions and severe problems and shopping will help them to mitigate these adverse feelings. People want to dress up their best now and want to eat the best. They even want to celebrate occasions in style and like never before. This causes them to spend lavishly and there are no regrets from this kind of money spending. They are spending excessive amount of money on clothes, bags, revamping their rooms, going for facials and spas and basically trying to redo it all.

Pandemic has lasted for a long period of time and it has affected the well-being of individuals. People have experienced fear, anxiety, boredom and anger. They have experienced depression distinctively. So they have tried to alleviate these intense emotions with the help of revenge shopping and have obtained ease and comfort from doing so. There was threat and loss of control earlier and people are now moving to impulsive retail shopping. Perhaps this gives them the control that they were deprived of.

Effects on Mental Health

Women have had a tougher time in their confined areas and assessments report that 45% of women have experienced some form of violence or domestic abuse. This abuse has taken direct or indirect forms and has

taken place mainly during the first year of the pandemic. Apart from that there has been lot of emotional abuse. People have gone many challenges and experienced emotional disturbances. Symptoms like irritability, insomnia, depression has been most common. Behavioural changes are visible everywhere and there has been a rise in the intake of alcohol as well. These psychological symptoms can continue for years. Neurocognitive impairment has also taken place in many patients including impaired attention, concentration, memory, and mental processing speed. A study has reported the psychological symptoms of insomnia and depression in 60 % of physicians, nurses and medical residents during Covid-19 pandemic (Que at al., 2020), which are likely to persist for some time. People who have experienced unemployment are experiencing psychological distress and suicide ideations. The others who have insecure job situations and lower socio-economic situations are also experiencing depressive symptoms. In order to combat such depressive feelings, the role of mental health practitioners becomes crucial. There is a need for enhancement of mental health services including tele- psychiatry, early diagnosis, treatment and social support groups. The stigma of not seeking help is also to be addressed as misconceptions regarding mental health are deeply set in the minds of the people and it is very difficult to challenge these prejudices. There is also limited access to health care facilities and the existing staff may be overburdened which needs to be handled as well. People who need help the most are the ones who have least access to such services. There are many disadvantaged groups who have experienced economic recession and unemployment. Therefore, mental health preparedness could be more challenging in countries that are not in the first world and are still lacking in resources and staff to handle such situations.

Resilience in people in the post pandemic phase

Research on resilience states that many people will be resilient in nature and some of these people will experience a renewal of purpose and meaning in their lives by helping others during the pandemic and post pandemic. Galatzer-Levy et al., 2018 suggest that two-thirds of people will be resilient and will face the stressors. The role of Positive Psychology has become increasingly dominant especially in the current situation. Mental health is a term that has been used for emotional and cognitive well-being. It means that a person is free from mental illnesses and has a control over his thoughts and beliefs. He has a control over his emotions and has a sound psychological well-being. Many people are becoming stronger and resilient post Covid with a sound mental health.

But there is concern that there is insufficient staff to treat the many people and are deprived of counseling services due to unavailability of such resources. Many people with pre-existing mental health conditions suffered because of these drawbacks and scarcity of resources.

Mental Healthcare Delivery

COVID-19 has affected mental health gravely and mental health services need to be provided. There are a few suggestions that can help individuals overcome their feelings of anger and depression and to move forward. They need to be prepared for the post pandemic phase.

a) Tele-psychiatry

Tele-psychiatry is a program that needs to be enhanced through a government-supported service platform. It revolves around community health service centers and its clear purpose is to enable access to resources like psychiatric help, especially among populations of the elderly or other disadvantaged groups. However, the digital divisions cause a limited access to marginalized populations. Poverty is a major barrier for the tele-psychiatry services. But with the help of tele-

psychiatry, help can be provided via video or telephone conferencing facilities. It is considered as a very good alternative to traditional psychiatric services. It is good for group or family therapy as well. Research supports that tele-psychiatry is very effective for the treatment of depression and PTSD. There is enough literature that points out at the effectiveness and advantages of tele-psychiatry in diverse fields of mental health issues mainly, depression, panic disorder, and schizophrenia. It has shown its effectiveness in special subgroups such as adolescents, abused victims, and the elderly. It is cost effective and the attitude of people toward this technique is favorable. Gammon et al. (1996) reported 87% satisfaction rate among the people who utilized tele-psychiatry, most of them reported the service as “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the whole process. In a study conducted by Elford et al. (2000) it was reported that 91% of the people are bent toward technology and it was concluded that “they would prefer to use the VC system than to travel a long distance to see a psychiatrist in person.”

b) Infodemic management

Regulation of social media is needed to reduce the spread of fake news, anti-vaccine campaigns and polarizing information. Countries and their Governments need to continue taking strict steps like Infodemic management by formulating guidelines that can be responsible for media reporting. It is the need of the hour that eHealth literacy should be encouraged there should be refinement in the reporting of knowledge. What is the purpose of doing so? The purpose is to control information that can mislead the minds of the people. There is lot of confusion and risk taking behaviors become widely prevalent. Apart from that it causes mistrust in health authorities and undermines the public health. Situation can be intensified and false information can spread rapidly. Amplification of harmful messages can take place. Thus post

pandemic phase, infodemic management is required which can be possible with risk and evidence based analysis. This will also ensure that resilience is built up for misleading information and there will be a promotion of health expert advice. The community concerns will have to be addressed and they will be engaged and empowered to take positive action. In response to all the misleading information, WHO has launched an initiative for the public which is called EPI- WIN which tracks down myths and misleading information. The strategic plan of this is as follows:

- (i) To identify, collect and assess information that can frame new public health policies
- (ii) To simplify the information obtained into messages which can also lead to behavior changes
- (iii) To reach out to communities with appropriate advice and messages
- (iv) To quantify, monitor and track the information through technological platforms for effective public health measures.

c) Integrative care

Integrative care is an innovative approach to health care delivery with focus on disease prevention and health promotion. It focuses on the whole personality of the person and is concerned with the wellness of the patient. National public health policies should be designed to provide integrated care for mental health in different settings such as hospitals, primary care services, communities, schools, Universities, colleges and workplaces. There is an urgency of developing support groups, screening of at-risk groups, peer counselling services, establishing dedicated crisis helplines, preparation for long-term plans and expanding support services that can facilitate early access to mental health needs. Natural and less invasive approaches should be utilized.

d) Community mental health services

Community mental health services have a huge role to play as they are concerned with consultation and providing of information. In a way, they address the needs of the community like unemployment, housing services and care. They need to identify people who are at risk and need to handle them. Early intervention needs to be provided and teachers and psychiatrists can be part of such services as well. The purpose is to improve functional quality of life of the people. All these services are person centered. It can also provide individual therapy, group therapy sessions, and can work closely with schools and other organizations

e) Human Resources, Education and Training

There is a burnout in the mental health practitioners as they have really worked hard with covid and post covid cases. Hence, the grass roots medical staff has started working from door to door to deal with psychosocial cases and dealing with health care of the people. Many families have been giving grief counseling, trauma management counseling and are being taken care of. More policies need to be formulated so that direct care can be provided and no one is left out. Early screening should be a priority for mentally unhealthy cases.

Psychotherapy is the most important technique that can help individuals after pandemic. People just need to have access to these services. People can overcome anxiety and depression with the help of Cognitive Behavior therapy. Familial relationships need to be strengthened in spite of the losses experienced. Not only that, we have to have an increased social support so that we can have higher resilience. We have to promote self-help resources and coping strategies. Protective factors can be personal or can be in our social environment. It includes our positive interactions with the others, quality of education, safe home environment and neighborhoods and also the cohesiveness in

the community. Therefore these factors can help all alike. These are the factors that can build the psychological wellbeing and can increase good mental health. Apart from that, financial support has to be provided through Governmental and non-Governmental Organizations. Suicide prevention lines should be set up as it is a global issue nowadays. Community can be one big support post pandemic. Community mental health centers can be set up which can provide psychosocial rehabilitation and peer support services and can provide child protection and school health services.

WHO's survey declares that there should be an ongoing continuity of health services and that 90% of countries concerned with providing mental health and psychosocial support to patients and others. Countries have laid a lot of emphasis on the development and strengthening of mental health and psychosocial support services. It is a part of preparedness, response and resilience to future public health emergencies. Governments worldwide spent on average just over 2% of their health budgets on mental health. They have less than 1 mental health worker per 100, 000 people (WHO, 2020, Mental Health Atlas). This makes us understand that there is an urgency to help people in developed and under developed countries. Mental health services have to be provided before it's too late. Early intervention has to be provided by implementing school based social and emotional learning programmes. Mental health care has to be integrated with General Health Care. Digital self-help has to be stabilized and made common for all.

Conclusively, pandemic may have taught us a lesson in our spiritual journey by making us become aware of the extremities but people have now bounced back in a big way. Those who are experiencing mental health disorders need to be taken care of. They need to find ways to handle and combat stress. A collective response is needed for a transformation so that there can be an improvement in the mental health of all. An international collaboration is

required to treat mental health globally. Lastly, people need to seek help. They need to move to normality by following a routine of good diet, exercise and self-care. They need to express themselves and need to practice mindfulness and meditation in order to overcome their fears. It all begins from within us and the efforts we make toward our health care.

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