

# The Review of the Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health

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## Abstract:

All individuals worldwide have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to such a global health crisis, public health measures such as lockdowns have been implemented in order to reduce the spreading of viral infection. However, these regulations are known to associate with psychological distress, thus can lead to negative mental health outcomes. Moreover, vulnerable populations, such as the elderly and healthcare workers, are at a higher risk of developing mental health conditions during the COVID-19 era. This literature review aims to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on various at-risk populations, as well as addressing future perspectives regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Keywords** —Covid-19, mental health, vulnerable people

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The spread of COVID-19 around the world has had a massive impact on our lives (1, 2). Many of us are confronted with difficulties that can be frustrating, stressful, and trigger negative emotions in individuals across all age groups (3-5). Therefore, public health regulations such as quarantine and social restrictions must be implemented to control the spread of the infection (6). However, the restriction of social interaction can result in a rise in the level of anxiety, stress, and depression amongst the population (7). As countries continue to cope with problems of disruption and death caused by the virus, evidence suggests the coming of another equally concerning issue: a rise in the rates of mental health and the use of the substance (8). It is unavoidable for communities as well as healthcare professionals to face further problems due to the impending mental health crisis, which includes deaths from suicide (9-12). As indicated by the evidence, Black and Hispanic people, the elderly, lower-income individuals of all races, and health care workers are those who are most likely to be

affected by mental health issues (13-16). Therefore, increased support for mental health is needed. In addition, there must be greater availability of screening to diagnose individuals with high suicide risk and availability of physicians to deal with individuals with depression, anxiety, and stress. Also, a shared focus from each member of the society to restore the positive wellbeing of the community is necessary (17-19). Existed evidence has proved that it is possible to recover from such damage if every individual is united (20, 21). The purpose of this review is to underline the importance of taking care of each other's mental state and well-being. Moreover, this review can serve as guidance for the improvement of individuals' mental health and public health measures.

## II. COVID-19-INDUCED MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IN GENERAL

Although COVID-19 is the third large coronavirus outbreak to have had a significant socioeconomic impact in the last two decades, this is the first in the twenty-first century to impact

nations across all continents apart from Antarctica (22). Emotional distress, unpredictability, and uncertainty associated with the absence of an endpoint for the pandemic, combined with treatment delays for serious chronic diseases, have resulted in the arrival of mental health problems, which include such as anxiety, depression, and panic, which then brought about the activation of somatic symptoms and worsening of prevalent illnesses (23-26). Additionally, recurrent media pictures portraying sick individuals, dead bodies, and coffins, as well as the thought that we may be unable to say their final goodbyes to dying loved persons, have exacerbated social distress (27). Besides, the unrelatedness with strict self-isolation instructions, which violate personal liberties and the growing economic issues and unemployment, which primarily affect informal and daily wage-employees and accounts in low-income countries, has led to a variety of deleterious methods for tackling daily stressors, such as loss of appetite, feeling guilt or worthlessness, anhedonia, loss of concentration, sleeping problems, worsening mental health symptoms, and increase in consumptions of alcohol and drugs (8, 24, 28-30).

### **III. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON VULNERABLE PEOPLE**

#### *A. Elderly population*

The Elderly is one of the most vulnerable groups of individuals to be impacted by mental health conditions such as depression (31, 32). During the COVID-19 era, the elderly's limited ability to use internet services for seeking social support from their friends and family, and the quarantine measures that prevent them from getting their monthly treatment, might have intensified the pre-existing psychological symptoms (33). For older adults, their age group is at the most risk for hospitalisation and death from COVID-19 (34). The mental health of older inpatients is likely to be worsened as the majority of the hospitals in the affected areas do not permit visitors (34). Moreover, elderly individuals with underlying medical conditions, although do not have mental health problems, are still extremely vulnerable to develop

mental health issues (35, 36). As COVID-19 has been depicted in the media as a disease of the older adults, this leads to age discrimination against the elderly with consequences such as increased isolation and health rights violations which creates further distress both to themselves and their caregivers (37, 38). Furthermore, hospitalisation in the elderly who have been discharged from the COVID-19 intensive care unit (ICU) is linked with poor mental health outcomes and cognitive impairment (39, 40). Similarly, patient's relatives, particularly older adults, seem to suffer serious psychological percussions (41, 42).

#### *B. Young adult and children*

As children are the age group where their brains are constantly developing, their mental health is exceptionally vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic (43, 44). Some possible explanations are that they might experience serious stress conditions as a result of forced social isolation from their peers, stay-at-home law, distress about their health, and financial struggles of their relatives or family (45-47). Isolation is related to mental health problems, for example, social anxiety in boys and depression in girls (48, 49). Furthermore, the duration of the isolation can predict mental health issues later in their life because children who were forced into quarantine or social isolation were five times more likely to experience severe symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, as well as needing mental health support (50-52). This is extremely crucial in the time of COVID-19 pandemic because the duration of school and university closures, and the execution of social distancing rules within institutions are decided by politicians in different countries (53-55). Lastly, disadvantaged children and adolescents, for example, those with intellectual disabilities who have difficulty understanding social cues and might struggle to acknowledge the importance of following current restrictions, have a higher risk of suffering from mental health conditions due to an increase in agitation and anxiety (56-58).

### **C. Individuals with pre-existing mental health symptoms**

Individuals with pre-existing mental health conditions are highly susceptible to relapse during the COVID-19 era because the virus infection can worsen pre-existing psychiatric symptoms such as depression, anxiety, delirium, panic, suicidality, and psychosis (59, 60). During times of increased distress, psychiatric patients face remarkable reductions in care availability (61). Unfortunately, when mentally ill patients are in severe distress, they have limited access to care (61). Specifically for the COVID-19 pandemic, the WHO's recent assessment reveals that the pandemic has caused disruptions in military nursing services, psychotherapy, counselling services, psychosocial interventions, outreach services, and suicide and overdose prevention and management programmes (62). Lastly, premature discharge from psychiatric units can result in relapse of depressive disorder, anxiety disorder, suicidal behaviour, and post-traumatic stress disorder such as insomnia (63). Furthermore, individuals with serious mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia, who are often socioeconomically disadvantaged, are further harmed by the quarantine restrictions that result in limited employment opportunities, thus exacerbating their financial distress (64, 65).

### **D. Psychiatric patients**

The COVID-19 pandemic is shown to disproportionately impact individuals with current mental health illnesses because of many factors. Individuals who suffer from mental disorders have a shorter lifespan, as well as poorer physical health than individuals in the general public (66-68). As a result, psychiatric patients are less likely to seek professional health care, thus increasing the risk of COVID-19 infection (69). Vulnerable individuals, such as people with disabilities or chronic illness, and those who live in institutions, are particularly at risk (68). Individuals in these groups frequently suffer from an accumulation of risk factors, such as impaired mental and physical health, difficulties accessing services, and a lack of control over their everyday life (65). Therefore, it is not surprising that the highest COVID-19 mortality has been

found in long-term care facilities, homeless shelters and pension homes.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The COVID-19 have significantly impacted all individuals despite the colours of skin, ethnic and wealth, has had a drastic effect on the emotional well-being of the general public, especially on the mental well-being of certain individuals such as mentally ill patients, the young, the old and individuals who are socioeconomically disadvantaged. It is crucial to understand these outcomes on the most vulnerable populations, and the great burden on mental health care services, as well as to recognize the weakness of the health system during periods of crisis. Considering the potential spread of COVID-19 in the future and possible pandemics, policymakers must establish clear instructions, effective communication routes and proactive measures in a timely manner to prevent the potential mental health waves in the future; and at the same time, keeping an emphasis on person-centred and empathetic approach to care.

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