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Letter to the Editor / Писмо уреднику

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Psychological impacts of COVID-19

Психолошки утицај обољења COVID-19

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Dear Editor,

Since the end of December 2019, the outbreak of a novel viral disease was reported in the city of Wuhan, China, which was caused by a novel coronavirus, and was officially named COVID-19 by the World Health Organization (WHO) [1].

The virus COVID-19 is a highly transmittable and pathogenic viral infection caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), which emerged in Wuhan, China, and spread around the world. Genomic analysis revealed that SARS-CoV-2 is phylogenetically related to severe acute respiratory syndrome-like (SARS-like) bat viruses, therefore bats could be the possible primary reservoir. The intermediate source of origin and transfer to humans is unknown, however, the rapid human to human transmission has been widely confirmed [2].

There is no clinically approved antiviral drug or vaccine available to be used against COVID-19. However, few broad-spectrum antiviral drugs have been evaluated against COVID-19 in clinical trials, resulted in clinical recovery [3].

This disease will not only raise public health concerns but also cause several forms of psychological distress, including anxiety, fear, depression, stigmatization, avoidance behaviors, irritability, insomnia, and posttraumatic stress disorder. In this situation, the maintenance of the mental health of individuals is very important because people in different parts of the society may experience additional stressors during the COVID-19 pandemic. Individuals in different parts of a society may experience the psychological symptoms to COVID-19 during the rising phase of the outbreak, including patients of COVID-19, quarantine individuals, health care workers, and family members of medical staff, children, university students, pregnant women, and families. In this regard, there is strong evidence that the mental health status of these populations is vulnerable to psychological disorders [4].

In addition to public health problems and the financial burden on the people and governments, the coronavirus has forced governments to cancel travel and trade between countries and inflict heavy financial losses on governments. Also, with the closing of these industries, the staff of these centers face unemployment and financial problems, which are a psychological pressure and it puts a lot of stress on the individual and his family, as well as the community. Prolonged stay at home can also lead to depression. Also, there is a lot of stress among students due to the closure of educational centers [5].

From a psychological view, an experience that people perceive under the headings of fear, anxiety, and bad mood, we can consider it as stress and anxiety. These conditions are especially difficult to tolerate for people with mood and anxiety disorders. The following suggestions can be more or less helpful in dealing with this situation.

There are six skills that can help regulate the mental state and reduce boredom, anxiety, panic, obsession, and other psychological problems (critical thinking, use of perspective, precautionary skills, self-regulation, balance skills, and creativity skills) especially when coping with COVID-19 psychological consequences.

Critical thinking skills are ways to prevent disastrous COVID-19 effects for yourself and others. Using this skill, we focus on facts, not intimidating and false stories; those who think critically can look at the issue from different angles, and this can reduce their anxiety and fear.

Using perspective skills means having an overall picture in mind, the prospect does not mean that there is no need to worry, but this skill helps us take a step back and see if something worse could happen to ourselves and those around us.

Precautionary skills for psychological confrontation with COVID-19, in this way, help a person prioritize caution and health standards, staying calm and collected, distinguishing rational and expert solutions in daily life.

In self-regulation skills we follow health regulations, create healthy habits, such as hand washing, but also manage temptations, such as traveling. We refrain from bad options, consider the long-term, and prioritize health.

Another method for psychological coping with COVID-19 is balance skill. Although it is positive to stay informed, receiving too much information can fatigue, intimidate, and overstimulate. It is better to follow the overall news summary, and, in general, one has to dose receiving information and news.

Utilizing creativity as the sixth skill can be helpful in the crisis of the prevalence of COVID-19. If people are bored with staying home, they can use creativity. Playing creative games, performing group activities with family members, developing artistic skills, such as painting or music, and exercising at home are good ways to reduce anxiety, fear, and boredom.

It is recommended that psychologists and psychiatrists be consulted by telephone in situations where the person has been less able to use these skills.

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