

Indirect Consequences of Mental Health Problems in Crisis: COVID-19, An Example

Exposure to major public health events such as covid-19 infectious epidemic in any country can be followed by challenges such as epidemiological features, rapid transmission patterns, and insufficient readiness of health authorities to cope with the outbreak among community.^[1,2]

In this incident, mental health care will be crucial for patients and health professionals who have been directly affected by the 2019-nCoV epidemic^[1,2] but nowadays, due to the expanse of cyberspace and the individuals ease of access as well as virtual networks, people are increasingly exposed to numerous and sometimes untrustworthy information about the crisis and the disease epidemic. As information becomes faster and more advanced, it can be a new challenge in social media.^[3]

Therefore, the whole community will be increasingly involved in the direct consequences of mental health issues such as health anxiety and cyberchondria, which in addition to the direct consequences, will also have indirect consequences due to mental problems. This group of people may increase the burden of going to the centers for little and unspecific symptoms because of concerns about the disease or show behaviors such as hoarding of protective and preventive measures such as masks and disinfectants which may reduce the access of needy groups, as seen in the 2019-nCoV crisis in some countries. Another social consequence is excessive consumption of water for washing, due to anxiety of disease, that could intensify challenges in water-stressed countries in the world.^[4]

In developing countries with insufficient infrastructures or countries involved with huge difficulties such as war, immigration or sanctions, these behaviors may be more problematic.

Another indirect and very important consequence of mental problems in infectious disease epidemics is the widespread and uncontrolled use of antibacterial and antiviral medications for prophylaxis in non-infected or asymptomatic individuals due to fear and anxiety that not only put a huge financial burden on the countries' health system but also enhance the risk of drug resistance, which is one of the world's major problems.^[5]

Therefore, it is recommended that in a health crisis, scientific and evidence-based information be released from

a reputable publicly accepted source such as the Ministry of Health or WHO as soon as possible in order to prevent publishing misleading and stressful news.

It is also very important to manage the distribution and delivery of medicines and other required materials as soon as possible before the rush of individuals for procuring and disposing them.

At last, in crises, fast initiation of necessary training for community mental health in addition to interventions for higher risk groups^[1,2] should be considered in order to prevent widespread mental health problems in community and its direct and indirect consequences.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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Letter to Editor

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