

COVID-19 Pandemic Health Effects

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ABSTRACT: This paper addresses the topic of coronavirus pandemic, an epidemic that has affected almost the entire world, and the consequences that society has faced since its beginning. To better understand what this condition means, we defined the notion of coronavirus and COVID-19, which are the symptoms and how it spreads. We have shown people's perception on the evolution of this disease since the early stages of its spread and also pointed out how the pandemic has created an emotional imbalance, affecting mental health and its effects on memory. Regarding the pandemic effects on nutrition, we showed what its role is during this period and what impact the isolation imposed by the authorities had on the elderly people, as well as on their eating behaviour.

KEYWORDS: Covid-19, scourge, vulnerability, vicissitude, social distancing

Introduction

Since this disease occurred, scientifically called SARS COVID-19, the whole world has been affected in different ways in almost all areas of society. People have become more vulnerable, feeling lost and powerless facing this scourge.

Questions such as: *What changes will Coronavirus bring to our society? What will be the effects of this pandemic on humanity?* These questions have taken possession of the human mind, and what seemed natural to us before, has now become almost impossible. We can say that we have been limited because of this unprecedented pandemic in our lives.

New rules have been established, and accepting them was not easy at all. People had to follow these rules, often tending to circumvent them, thus imposing punishments to correct him. From here, the enclosure of each of us was felt. COVID-19 pandemic came up, producing real blockages and totally changing people's priorities.

The goal of the scientific community is to find a solution to prevent the spread of this pandemic that has covered almost the entire planet and also to be aware of the consequences we feel. Somehow, we need to know our vulnerabilities and reshape our lives so that we are no longer surprised by a new pandemic.

The authorities are also working to fund public health systems so that any of us can receive appropriate treatment in the event of contamination.

Basically, we will have to build, metaphorically, that boat that is solid and resistant to such shocks and, sailing together, we will be able to keep the balance and face the vicissitudes of life. The pandemic seems to have become our main concern today. What we are experiencing now seems to be a defeat. For a few months, time seemed to stand still, and the silence and lack of people on the streets took the place of daily fuss. But, as in every fight we become stronger, more responsible, more balanced.

Most of the time, the defeats give us the opportunity to learn. The occurrence of this pandemic represented a real lesson for humanity and in order to be able to change something, we must take advantage of it, in a positive sense, to analyse and review our behaviour towards our fellow human beings.

During all this time, man became more attentive both to himself and to those around him, he rediscovered certain qualities, talents, values that he had stored somewhere, left in the past, and today he capitalized them.

Every gesture of responsibility, by wearing a mask, for example, has shown care and solidarity towards others, but also towards ourselves. It is up to us to get involved and be able to prevent those consequences which affect the entire population.

Covid-19 pandemic affected not only our country but also foreign policy relations, making international meetings impossible (only online), so that all countries had to lose. In this situation, it is required to rethink the world's economy, more solidarity between people, fighting together for the same goal.

Coronavirus and COVID-19 infection

What is Coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can cause disease in animals or humans. In humans, it causes respiratory infections, from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The latest coronavirus discovered causes COVID-19 coronavirus disease.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were not known before the outbreak in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, fatigue, and dry cough. Some patients may still suffer from headache, nasal congestion, sore throat, or diarrhea. These symptoms are usually mild, with a gradual onset. Some people get infected, but they do not develop any symptoms and do not feel sick. Most people (about 80%) recover without the need for special treatment. About 1 in 6 people with COVID-19 becomes seriously ill and has difficulty in breathing. Older people, as well as those with underlying medical conditions, such as high blood pressure, heart problems or diabetes, are more likely to develop a severe form. About 2% of people suffering from this disease have died. People with fever, cough and difficulty in breathing should seek medical attention.

How does COVID-19 spread?

People can get COVID-19 from others who are infected with the virus. The disease can be transmitted from one person to another through small drops of secretions, which are spread when the infected person coughs or sneezes. These drops are spread on the surrounding objects and surfaces. Other people get COVID-19 by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. People can also get COVID-19 if they breathe directly into the secretions spread by an infected person who coughs or sneezes. (www.cdt-babes.ro/)

Mental and psychosocial health during the COVID-19 pandemic

Our mind and body are in a symbiotic relationship and cannot be separated or treated separately. Therefore, everything that happens on the mental level affects the physical level and vice versa. Thus, our body perceives the thoughts we have and transposes them on a physical level, in the form of emotional feelings, and the way we react, positive or negative, will depend on the nature of the emotions we experience.

While positive emotions give us a good mood, fill us with energy and help us relax, negative emotions lead us to tense states, giving rise to a series of unpleasant physical reactions (Zaharia 2016).

In the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic, there was a lot of uncertainty about the nature of the disease, its spread and extent. This has created strong emotional discomfort even among those who have not been directly exposed to the disease, as a public health

emergency such as the current one can have an impact at different levels on the psychological balance of individuals. Therefore, there was a risk of adverse relapses in the psychopathological field. Specifically, various elements that have been proven to generate anxiety and danger following the COVID-19 epidemic have been identified (Stopani 2020).

During this pandemic, social distancing made us face two fears, namely: fear of loneliness and fear of death. Loneliness leads to a behaviour change, because behind it there is always a permanent fear. Confusion and anxiety occur. The most exposed people are the elderly and those already affected by mental disorders. To understand confusion and anxiety, we must understand care. Care is that state of mind captivated by an object, and this concern unsettles or disturbs even moral suffering.

This concern leaves us neither time, nor rest. Hence its consequence, worry: to be worried means to be anxious (Andre 2009, 135).

In this context of the pandemic arise questions such as: “What are you doing?”, “How long will it last?”, “What will happen?”, Questions that create a vulnerable psycho emotional state that affects people’s health.

Anxiety is a state of mind that belongs to the family of fear, which corresponds to it as a strong emotion that becomes ill. Anxiety attacks are most often associated with the impression of imminent death or depersonalization and loss of judgment, with the impression of feeling insane (Andre 2009, 138-139). In this case, anxiety is manifested as violent emotional moods, with intense participation of the body and a feeling of an imminent catastrophe. Thus, on a strong emotional background, it feels his bodily integrity threatened.

Obsessions occur, those persistent images. The most common obsessions are those related to contamination (the person is obsessed with becoming infected if he touches certain objects or shakes hands with various people).

Also, compulsions, such as hand washing many times per day, although isolated at home, represent repetitive behaviours with an open or masked character (i.e. prayers) (Holdevici 2009, 279). They are always worried that their loved ones may get sick and tend to somatise.

Somatizations are actually the way our body raises the signal and sends us the message that somewhere there is a strong conflict (internal or external). Somatizations are the response that the body gives to very strong emotional blockages. And behind every symptom, the affected area or organ is a message. For example, in the case of heart disease we can list emotional blockages such as: loss, rejection, regret, sadness; and in the case of liver and gallbladder diseases we can talk about anger, rage, repressed feelings (Zaharia 2016).

The distorted interpretation of reality (suspicious origins of the infection, attributing the unidentified entities the will of spreading the virus, conspiracy theories, the feeling of constant threat with persecuting ideas) belongs to an area of psychotic disorders, maintained by various types of false news (Stopani 2020).

Amid all these feelings, caused by this period, there is a general anxiety, expressed through excessive worries (When will the state of emergency end? When will the Coronavirus disappear?) and not justified. In this case, the anxiety amplifies and the individual becomes more and more tense, thinking about what will happen in the future, thus reaching an increased irritability, insomnia, lack of ability to concentrate, panic attacks. Whenever they feel insecure, they imagine the worst-case scenario. Also, for themselves or those close to them, they have developed far too intense and frequent worries, related to the risks of daily life. Physical tension is often excessive (Lelord and Andre 2003, 10-11).

Social, psychological and medical studies have conclusively shown that there is a direct correlation between the levels a person feels connected to others and his or her physical and mental health. There is now clear evidence that social isolation and the associated feeling of loneliness significantly increase the risk of premature death, and this risk is higher than many health markers.

Among the common effects of social isolation on physical and mental health we find, first of all, chronic fatigue and the increased risk of developing chronic diseases.

Middle-aged and elderly people who feel lonely report more chronic stress and feelings of helplessness. Social isolation can also lead to more episodes of illness and a longer recovery time after illness or trauma. It also increases the risk of depression, while the onset of Alzheimer's disease is twice likely to happen in the case of people suffering from loneliness (Mustață 2018). All this time, people have become aware of the inner emptiness caused by sadness and absence of their loved ones.

The elderly, who live alone, express various attitudes, sometimes aggressive. Anger, that negative feeling which dominates the individual due to insecurity to the fact that something might happen, occurs. All of these affect the whole body. For example, I feel a pressure in my chest, the sensation of shortness of breath, a lump in my throat, tense muscles. Therefore, the first episodes of depression occur.

COVID-19 increases the risk of depression, affecting the ability of each of us to solve problems, to be efficient at work, to relate to those around us. The fear of losing our job, in these conditions, arise mental problems that are difficult to control, such as: fear, anxiety, intense emotions, crying episodes, which lead to significant mental disorders, such as reactive depression. People disconnect themselves from the reality, becoming more and more vulnerable, and the state of sadness, fatigue, despair, caused by the current situation, is installed. Moods of despair are often composed of a mixture of moral pain, unpleasant lucidity (it seems to us that we have lost the positive illusions that protected or blinded us) and the inability to act to change the course of existence.

There is also a strong feeling of fatigue, loss of vitality, that mystery that makes us "living machines" (Paul Valery's words), but which no longer works (Andre 2009, 261). In the case of depressed people, it is known that, in any situation, they only see the dark side of it (i.e. the growing spread of the disease), the possible risks (i.e. contamination even if it does not exist in reality), overestimating the negative aspect and minimizing the positive one. They also have a sad and gloomy mood, even when there are no unpleasant events to justify this mood (Lelord and Andre 2003, 164). For example, they think that their loved ones may have coronavirus, but in reality, they have no problem.

The spread of this virus will leave scars in everyone's memory. After this event, there will be many people who will have lost a loved one, their job or will be forced to close their businesses. The neurological effects of coronavirus are rather indirect, not necessarily caused by infection. There are cases of COVID-19 positive patients who have suffered strokes due to blood clots that have disrupted the flow of blood and oxygen to the brain (Rotaru 2020). It has been found that this disease can have devastating effects on the human body, including the brain, thus affecting memory. The strokes encountered during this period, caused by coronavirus infection, triggered certain deficiencies in vision, language, memory and coordination. The lack of oxygen of the brain due to respiratory problems caused by coronavirus, led to simple migraines to very serious brain damage.

The effects of the pandemic on nutrition

This period of time that we are crossing has drawn our attention to the importance of nutrition and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Nutrition is also an important therapeutic means, well known since antiquity, and the rules related to nutrition and lifestyle have remained valid until today. The isolation imposed by the authorities has led to a change in the habits of the population in terms of nutrition, exercise, socialization, essentially radically changing the lifestyle.

During this period, in the shopping baskets there were mainly ultra-processed foods, poor in nutrients, such as potato chips, ice cream, popcorn, chocolate, etc. There was also a

tendency to spend more time in the kitchen and to cook, to search the internet for different recipes. Eating behaviour changed in the context of the pandemic, people were forced to cope with stress and adapt. People forgot to have an organized, structured behaviour in terms of nutrition, did not keep a food diary or it was no longer a priority (Dumitru 2020).

During this period, many of us suffered, especially the seniors, because they were isolated with their family or maybe they had to go through this event alone, this leaving deep marks on the psyche. Some of their habits (for example, walks in the park, and visits to the loved ones) could no longer continue, leaving traces on the psyche and, thus, they changed their eating behaviour into a defective one.

Deviation of nutrition behaviour occurred due to fear, doing some abusive, unhealthy shopping, which led to overeating. Therefore, inadequate nutrition can be considered an indicator against destabilizing health, often leading to negative effects over a long period of time. Elderly people living alone, who do not have the necessary support to get through this period, have tried to fill their inner void caused by sadness with an inadequate diet. Isolation in one's own home affects everyone's life, including daily habits and eating habits, which are influenced, during this period, by emotional disorders and high levels of stress.

Poor nutrition is associated with both physical condition and mental health. People with severe pathologies tend to grow a negative mind-set, feeling their body integrity threatened. Among these altered emotions, they can project aggressive attitudes. We can talk about a disorderly eating behaviour, mostly developed by compulsive people. Basically, during this period, we had to control our dietary balance, each having a deviation in this respect.

The most affected people were the sedentary ones who, all this time, have not made any physical effort and, consequently, became more depressed, overwhelmed by negative thoughts, which intensified a lot. However, they have become aware of unhealthy eating and knew what it meant to rationalize food, but everyone handles this problem differently. Overeating leads to obesity and the onset of diabetes. Even if the disease is not established, it must be prevented.

Social distancing, implicitly isolation at home, led to a considerable increase in the number of eating disorders because of the consumption of unhealthy foods, and the time devoted to physical effort has completely disappeared. From here, there were manifestations such as stress, panic attacks, and exacerbation of insomnia, anxiety and fear, despair, the thought of never ending.

A healthy diet is very important to prevent the risk of chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, or obesity, or diseases such as depression and anxiety. Therefore, our responsibility is to choose a healthy lifestyle, to follow the advice of specialized doctors and not to listen to those false care messages circulating on social networks on certain protective diets against this condition.

Conclusions

The spread of the new coronavirus infection has led to major changes in our lives. The most affected people were the vulnerable ones who failed to manage the current situation, causing them stress with special consequences on the psyche.

Both the direct confrontation with this pandemic and the actual isolation made people develop certain fears, leading to panic and, implicitly, to increased anxiety. At the end of this pandemic, society will be somehow different from the previous one and will feel the scar of isolation on the psyche.

Personal memories, which have been lived so intensely, will determine our future choices according to the needs of each of us. Feelings such as fear, uncertainty, desolation or danger will remain in our souls for a long time and we will learn how to be more cautious.

All this time, people have learned to defend themselves against the threat of the COVID-19 virus, a defence built in time. It can be said that the pandemic has changed our way of life, thinking and socializing; it caused us the need to adapt quickly to the conditions of social distancing. To overcome the moment of self-isolation, each individual must create and maintain a daily routine that allows them to interact with loved ones online, to rediscover the pleasure of reading, watching a movie; all this representing defence strategies against the possibility of mental health problems.

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