



Psychological Challenges amid the Global Pandemic: the Key Role of Mental Health Literacy

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ABSTRACT

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Dear Editor

In December 2019, a viral disease was reported in Wuhan, China, which was named COVID-19 by the World Health Organization. The rate of the outbreak was so high that it affected all countries in a short time. This disease affected almost all important economic, political, social, and even military aspects of the world, so discussing the psychological effects of this disease on the mental health of people in society is known to be of great importance [1]. Since the COVID-19 crisis potentially imposes long-term emotional damage, it has devastating effects on people's physical and mental health and quality of life in the community. This public health emergency may affect the health, safety, and well-being of individuals (causing insecurity, confusion, anxiety, worry, emotional isolation, increased sensitivity and obsession with cleaning and washing) and communities (due to economic losses, work and school closures, insufficient resources for medical response, and incomplete distribution of needs and problems caused by rumors and weakening of social capital) [2]. These effects can range from emotional reactions (such as stress or mental illness) to unhealthy behaviors (such as substance abuse) and non-compliance with public health guidelines (such as home quarantine and vaccinations) in people with the disease, in turn, becoming common in public [2,3]. Living in a home quarantine also has psychological, social, and economic consequences, and its implementation requires the support, supervision, and adherence from the country's medical staff. According to the studies results, mental disorders in quarantined children are four times as many as those in non-quarantined children, which indicates more attention to children's mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic [4]. Health workers are also at high risk of COVID-19, and preventive behaviors play an important role in reducing this infection's incidence and deaths [4]. In this situation, identifying people prone to psychological disorders at different levels of society whose mental health may be endangered is essential to maintain these people's mental health with appropriate psychological strategies and techniques [5].

The public health response to COVID-19 should provide clear, concise and accurate information on quarantine and contamination rates to reduce uncertainty and aim to increase mental health literacy [6]. Mental health literacy refers to mental

health knowledge and attitudes that help identify, manage, and prevent mental health issues. Mental health literacy is one of the seven characteristics of diagnosing specific disorders, knowing how to access health information, knowledge about risk factors, knowledge about self-medication, available professional knowledge, and attitudes that promote recognition and seek appropriate help. Mental health literacy allows people to play an active role in increasing their health in environmental changes [7]. Therefore, mental health literacy can be considered an important component in preventing, screening, and treating mental disorders. Education, self-care, and family support should be part of mental health prevention strategies, including multi-agency collaboration to support the mental health sectors voluntarily. These agencies should mobilize social support networks and work with local communities to identify stressors and encourage those seeking mental health services. The health system can use appropriate educational tools such as television, social networks, mobile applications, and online and virtual programs to promote people's mental health literacy according to their circumstances. Mental health literacy assessment scales are the at-hand measures that can also be used to screen at-risk individuals.

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