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## **“Isolation in COVID-19 era”- A major cause for mental illness**

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### **Abstract:**

The COVID-19 pandemic is a major health crisis affecting many countries. Several deaths have been reported so far. Such widespread prevalence is associated with isolation and mental health consequences. With this in mind, the current literature is on the COVID-19 eruption related to mental health. As social distancing, lockdowns, curfews and quarantine are the most common practices during this pandemic. Thus, “isolation” should not get converted to “loneliness” which may affect human beings badly, either directly or indirectly. This study is an effort to look the affects of isolation on mental health along with its solutions. It also gives a brief about psychosomatic intervention and category of people which are at increased risk of facing mental problems. This work is done to find the possible solutions for psychological problems which are majorly seen in youth nowadays.

**Keywords:** Isolation; mental health; COVID-19; coronavirus; psychology; trauma; cognitive behaviour

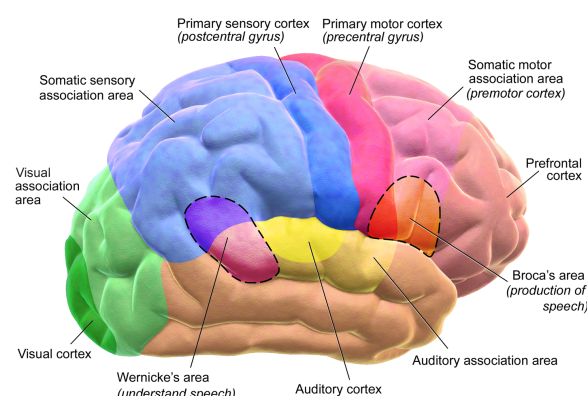
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## INTRODUCTION:

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was diagnosed in December, 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. As of January 31, 2020, the epidemic has spread to 19 countries including 213 deaths. Thus, World Health Organization has declared it a public health emergency. The COVID-19 pandemic is widely believed to affect not only physical health but also mental health and well-being<sup>2</sup>. The current pandemic is not only changing the priorities of the general public, but it is also challenging the agenda of psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. As they are updating their training to ensure care and assistance to those suffering from mental health problems. As well as to the people suffering from mental illness and experiencing the psychosocial effects of the epidemic<sup>3</sup>. The functional regions of brain are shown in Fig 1 to give a valuable insight on the current problem. The loneliness that people now experience is unprecedented, and it is

accompanied by other pressures such as fear of disease and financial difficulties. But more than ever, it is important to be aware of the consequences of social loneliness and the potential for relief. Stress caused by chronic loneliness can lead to a decrease in the size of the hippocampus in the structure of the brain, as well as changes in the expression of genes associated with chemical signalling and neuroplasticity<sup>4</sup>.



**Figure 1-** Functional areas of human brain (The image is free for commercial use, no attribution required)

## NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF ISOLATION:

Home isolation during COVID-19 is found to cause physical inactivity and sedentary behavior in people which in

<sup>2</sup> Wang, C., Horby, P. W., Hayden, F. G., & Gao, G. F. (2020). A novel coronavirus outbreak of global health concern. *The Lancet*, 395(10223), 470-473.

<sup>3</sup> Serafini, G., Parmigiani, B., Amerio, A., Aguglia, A., Sher, L., & Amore, M. (2020). The psychological impact of COVID-19 on the mental health in the

general population. *QJM: An International Journal of Medicine*.

<sup>4</sup> Hiremath, P., Kowshik, C. S., Manjunath, M., & Shettar, M. (2020). COVID 19: impact of lock-down on mental health and tips to overcome. *Asian Journal of Psychiatry*, 51, 102088.

turn increased the risk of cardiovascular diseases<sup>5</sup>. Other than this, it can create new psychological symptoms in people who are not mentally ill. Further worsening the condition of those with pre-existing mental illness and causing pain to those people also who are caring for the affected person. Regardless of exposure, people may experience helplessness or guilt and depression of other people who are ill. Significant mental disorders have been found to be associated with somatic symptoms, heart attack, insomnia, post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, anxiety, depression, fatigue, mental illness, obesity, dementia and suicide at an early age<sup>6</sup>.

### **Causes Of Direct-Indirect Effects On Psychology:**

Suffering from the outbreak and the sudden loss of a loved one can lead to anger and resentment in certain people. They may feel ashamed, guilty and stigmatized by those who are sick or

may have some chances of illness. Studies show that post-traumatic stress disorder is associated with an increased prevalence of depressive symptoms and an increased risk of chronic damage. At the community level, mistrust may arise regarding government and health services and the spread of the disease to other individuals. As the closure of community services and the collapse of industries negatively affect the economy, many end up in financial loss and unemployment, increasing the negative emotions that individuals experience.

### **IDENTIFICATION OF GROUPS AT HIGH RISK:**

Recent studies proved that isolation is majorly found to affect youth and elder generation. As the teenagers are in their growing age, they face several hormonal changes within them. This, in turn may make them emotionally and mentally weak. Several studies show increased number of child and

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<sup>5</sup> Holmes, E. A., O'Connor, R. C., Perry, V. H., Tracey, I., Wessely, S., Arseneault, L., ... & Ford, T. (2020). Multidisciplinary research priorities for the COVID-19 pandemic: a call for action for mental health science. *The Lancet Psychiatry*.

<sup>6</sup> Copeland, J. R. M., Davidson, I. A., Dewey, M. E., Gilmore, C., Larkin, B. A., McWilliam, C., ... &

Sullivan, C. (1992). Alzheimer's disease, other dementias, depression and pseudo-dementia: prevalence, incidence and three-year outcome in Liverpool. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 161(2), 230-239.

domestic abuse during lockdown period. Hence, they should be primarily seen and supported<sup>7</sup>. While old generations have a habit of interacting people and visiting worship places or community centers. This isolation or separation from outer world may make them feel lonely. Health authorities also identified community and health care groups at high risk for mental illness due to early psychological interventions. Although studies on the clinical aspects of COVID-19 are rapidly accumulating, researches have been done to examine the psychological impact of this disease. The study highlights that students are suffering from high levels of depression. It may be due to the indefinite closure of schools at all levels<sup>8</sup>.

### **Manner and Content of psychosomatic Intervention:**

During this technological age and outbreak, many hospitals have moved to reduce the spread of the virus from

face-to-face treatment through video conferencing platforms such as Zoom, to provide online psychotherapy to mental patients. However, to meet national needs in this epidemic, online or smartphone-based psychological education on the spread of the virus should be promoted, mental health should be promoted and psychological intervention initiated (e.g. Mindfulness Based Therapy [MBT] and Cognitive Behavior Therapy [CBT])<sup>9</sup>. In patients who overstress the risk of dying from the virus, for them cognitive therapy challenges their cognitive bias. In contrast, behavioral therapy teaches relaxation techniques to deal with anxiety and scheduled activities to prevent depression. By increasing stress management, CBT can also reduce coping up of people with others. This includes avoiding people, blaming ourselves and fear to confront others<sup>10</sup>. Support should also include accurate information and, if necessary, appropriate material for items

<sup>7</sup> Urbina-Garcia, A. (2020). Young Children's Mental Health: Impact of Social Isolation During The COVID-19 Lockdown and Effective Strategies.

<sup>8</sup> Sibley, C. G., Greaves, L. M., Satherley, N., Wilson, M. S., Overall, N. C., Lee, C. H., ... & Houkamau, C. A. (2020). Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide lockdown on trust, attitudes toward government, and well-being. *American Psychologist*.

<sup>9</sup> Khoury, B., Lecomte, T., Fortin, G., Masse, M., Therien, P., Bouchard, V., ... & Hofmann, S. G. (2013). Mindfulness-based therapy: a comprehensive meta-analysis. *Clinical psychology review*, 33(6), 763-771.

<sup>10</sup> Brodeur, A., Clark, A., Fleche, S., & Powdthavee, N. (2020). Covid-19, lockdowns and well-being: Evidence from google trends.

including food, clothing and accommodation<sup>11</sup>.

### PROTOCOLS FOR TREATMENT DURING COVID-19:

We should meet the physical and mental needs of patients and health care providers. Providing psychotherapy and assistance reduces mental health conditions like 'Co morbid' and ensures the well-being of victims<sup>12</sup>. The relation of COVID-19 isolation with psychological problems is shown in Fig 2. Our challenge is to provide mental health services. Providing mental health care (especially through telehealth) can help patients maintain mental well-being and better cope with acute and post-acute health needs<sup>13</sup>.



*Figure 2- COVID-19 isolation causing mental breakdown (The image is free for commercial use, no attribution required)*

### Possible solutions to mental illness:

- Break your loneliness to improve communication with family, friends and loved ones. Video chats or group calls with family members can help reduce loneliness and risk. In the case of inadequate social networks, professional helplines are especially useful if they are run by qualified trained professionals;
- We should minimize the reasons which causes stress;

<sup>11</sup> Zhou, X., Snoswell, C. L., Harding, L. E., Bambling, M., Edirippulige, S., Bai, X., & Smith, A. C. (2020). The role of telehealth in reducing the mental health burden from COVID-19. *Telemedicine and e-Health*, 26(4), 377-379.

<sup>12</sup> Sun, S., Hou, J., Chen, Y., Lu, Y., Brown, L., & Operario, D. (2020). Challenges to HIV care and psychological health during the COVID-19 Pandemic among people living with HIV in China. *AIDS and Behavior*, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Aravena, J. M., Aceituno, C., Nyhan, K., Shi, K., Vermund, S., & Levy, B. R. (2020). 'Drawing on Wisdom to Cope with Adversity: A Systematic Review Protocol of Older Adults' Mental and Psychosocial Health During Acute Respiratory Disease Propagated-Type Epidemics and Pandemics (COVID-19, SARS-CoV, MERS, and Influenza). *medRxiv*.

- Maintain a normal daily routine with a normal sleep rhythm and diet intake. Addictive behaviors are particularly at risk for relapse, so intellectual, physical, and social (even virtual) activities can be useful<sup>14</sup>.
- Focus on the benefits of loneliness. We need to know that this is a fleeting time. We need this isolated time to protect our health and protect others in order to shape our future<sup>15</sup>;
- Seek professional help. If the effects of stress are very aggressive, it is always promising to seek psychological help or consultation, even in a variety of ways. Almost all psychiatric clinics are now equipped to provide support, problem solving strategies,

emotional detoxification and psychological consultation.

- Several apps are being developed for elders to keep them involved or busy. They are magnifying glass with light, Crosswords Classic, skype etc<sup>16</sup>. In case, if the patient is alone, highlighting the role of telehealth (via e-mail, telephone, video conferencing or smartphone applications) can be useful<sup>17</sup>

The epidemic will end, but it will have a long-term impact on mental health and the well-being of the health professionals, general public and vulnerable people. We hope that the mental health community will soon have the opportunity to look after patients in a better way<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Stubbs, B., Wu, Y. T., Prina, A. M., Leng, Y., & Cosco, T. D. (2016). A population study of the association between sleep disturbance and suicidal behaviour in people with mental illness. *Journal of psychiatric research*, 82, 149-154.

<sup>15</sup> Layard, R. (2018). Mental illness destroys happiness and is costless to treat. *Global Happiness*, 63, 19-31.

<sup>16</sup> Kazdin, A. E. (2015). Technology-based interventions and reducing the burdens of mental illness: perspectives and comments on the special

series. *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice*, 22(3), 359-366.

<sup>17</sup> Pincus, L. E. (2020). Telemental Health During a Global Pandemic: Clinical Lessons from Guided Self-Help, Telephone Therapy Case Studies. *Pragmatic Case Studies in Psychotherapy*, 16(1), 118-123.

<sup>18</sup> Lee, J. (2020). Mental health effects of school closures during COVID-19. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, 4(6), 421.

**CONCLUSION:**

Thus, we are more clinically prepared to deal with the COVID-19 eruption with improved manpower, medical technology and infrastructure. However, it is important that we do not ignore the psychological impact of the outbreak on individuals and society, a factor that often limits the country from overcoming the crisis. The psychological effect of isolation may last long even after the infection gets over. The eruption highlighted the weakness of mental resilience and the need for coordinated psychological intervention in the world. We suggest strategies that should be followed to improve the existing intervention system and minimize negative consequences of isolation.