

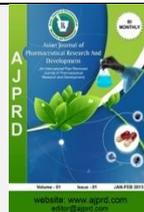
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Review Article

Psychological Issues In Covid 19 Outbreaks - Ayurvedic Approach

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ABSTRACT

Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) is a newly revealed infectious disease declared as pandemic by WHO. Through its fast spreading nature it created an alarming situation throughout the globe. The only possible way to control the spread is to break the chain of transmission by keeping social distancing along with maintaining strict personal hygiene. A complete lockdown was the effective method chosen by the authorities in such a situation. The panic situation created by the disease along with the unfamiliar way of conduct imposed several psychological impacts on human life. Many can't cope up with the situation on their own and are in need of an intervention such as Psychological First Aid. Fear, anxiety, future concerns, interpersonal relationships issues, behavioural issues, domestic abuses, separation anxiety are a few among the psychological issues reported. A well explained modality of psychotherapy mentioned in Ayurveda i.e; Satvavajaya chikitsa can be adopted in such situations. Jnana (knowledge of self), Vijnana (scientific reasoning), Dhairya (determination or patience), Smrithi (application of recollections or memory) and Samadhi (attaining a stable state of mind) are the steps of this management which are applicable in any psychological issues, including that resulting from COVID as well. Considering the severity of the symptoms, medical management can also be recommended. By adopting such measures mentioned in the Ayurvedic science, we can hope to provide relief to the affected and also to help them to attain physical and mental wellbeing.

Key words: COVID-19, Psychological affections, Psychotherapy, Satvavajaya, Ayurveda

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INTRODUCTION

COVID-19, the recent virus outbreak declared as Pandemic by WHO threatened the world by its fast spreading nature and is yet creating an alarmed situation throughout the world. In a short span of time it lead to the people panic by taking the life of lakhs of humans, with a reported spread over more than 200 countries worldwide¹. Comparing to the past outbreaks, this is highly contagious. The only way to get over the crisis is to break the transmission by avoiding strict personal contact, by means of social distancing along with maintaining personal and respiratory hygiene².

Various governing bodies all over the world are adopting a number of measures to convey the things under control. Among them, a complete lockdown or closure is one of the methods found to be effective and slow down the spread of the disease. Offices, other working places, educational institutions are compelled to shut down and travelling, especially public transport, mass gatherings etc are also

being restricted. Even though this is the known effective method for controlling COVID it's a very novel and an unfamiliar way of conduct to the human, being a social animal. However, this time of crisis is generating stress throughout the population.

Psychological affections

The lockdown restricted their freedom and is forced to stay at home without having physical contact with their loved ones and also restricted from joining colleagues and even the relatives. Many have the fear of getting infected at any moment are also worried about an uncertain future. Many have to stay at their workplace or other areas of visit and can't even join the family till the lockdown is over, in a quite unexpected manner. All these situations definitely create several psychological issues among people. It affects throughout the community despite of the social class, age, gender or even cultures.

As per the World Health Organisation, fear, worry and stress are normal responses to perceived or real threats, and

at times when one faces an uncertainty or the unknown³. But when someone can cope up with the situation on their own, and then they are considered as mentally well and needs no intervention. Or else Psychological first aid (PFA) is needed which helps people in distress so that they feel calm and supported and helps them to cope better with their challenges.

The restricted freedom and the panic situation causes fear, anxiety, future concerns resulting from insecure jobs, behavioural issues, domestic abuses, interpersonal relationship issues, financial crisis, separation anxiety, withdrawal symptoms resulting from non-availability of alcohol, increased violence against women etc are also reported throughout. Such conditions are being approached for psychological support and medical management as per the situation.

The issues and their approach vary as per the age groups, the hierarchy of their priorities being varied in the stages of the life. While considering children, they are a vulnerable group and always prior to various infections. Hence they are restricted of their freedom in closed walls, in the vacations especially. Decisions regarding their exams and reopening of academic sessions are unstable, and their screen time definitely increased and is frequently hearing the news about the status of the disease. This creates fear and anxiety among them, also some may have chance to develop obsessions, such as repeatedly washing hands and reluctant to have food, due to the fright of getting infected.

In the middle age group, they have increased future concerns resulting from the job insecurities and almost resultant financial crisis. As they are completely locked down in their homes, many developed adjustment issues as it is quite unfamiliar in their case. Their daily routine such as food timings, daily exercises, sleeping hours etc are altered heavily. Living away from home in such situations create separation anxiety among them and also interpersonal relationship issues as such. There is also chance of withdrawal symptoms from the unavailability of psychoactive drugs leading to increased domestic abuses as well as violence against woman.

The old age, another vulnerable group have also their own psychological issues. Many have increased fear of death or may be overanxious about getting the disease. Separation anxiety may also result from separation of their children, resulting from unexpected lockdown. Those with other chronic diseases have the chances of getting exacerbated due to stress, non availability of medicines and also sleep related issues. Many have the chances to have a real psychological break down as well in such an age. Any prevailing psychiatric condition may exacerbate due to the resultant stress, alteration in medication and also from social isolation.

Considering the various cultures in the society, all are affected in an almost equal manner. Worshipping areas are the places of mass gatherings and are bounded to the lockdown; hence it affects all the religions. Festivals are restricted in houses leading to good sort of frustration in the community. Similar is the case in the restricted conduct of family functions and get together in such situations.

Considering the genders, all are equally affected but in case of abuse, women are more prone to get affected. As per WHO, one among the three women world-wide have

experienced physical and or sexual violence by any perpetrator in their life time and these tends to enhance during such types of emergency situations, negatively affecting the psychological status in women in a significant manner⁴.

Ayurvedic Approach

Ayurveda is a comprehensive science which gives ultimate importance to health and longevity as well as prevention, rather than treatment and cure of any illness. These measures are to be undoubtedly followed to bring the things under control, in the case of such a pandemic. Another important element is the equal importance given by the ancient science to the somatic and psychic component in each and every disease⁵. Such a pandemic as COVID 19 is having an inevitable impact on the mind of the people throughout the world in various levels as explained above, rather than the affections of their body. In any human being, if the quality of life is affected after the occurrence of the pandemic, needs a psychological assessment as well as appropriate intervention. This needs medicinal therapy ie. Yuktivyapasaraya chikitsa and Psychosupportive therapy ie. Satvavajaya chikitsa, as per the demand from the condition⁶.

Satvavajaya chikitsa is to be performed in the psychologically affected subjects in a stepwise manner. This includes Jnana (knowledge of self), Vijnana (scientific reasoning), Dhairya (determination or patience), Smrithi (application of recollections or memory) and Samadhi (attaining a stable state of mind)⁷. A trained practitioner in Satvavajaya is capable of deploying the technique in such subjects in a quite effective manner.

In the step Jnana, knowledge of self is provided, i.e., creating awareness of how one has to perform or react in such an unfamiliar situation of pandemic.

- Awareness about one's own health condition, if under any medication without flaws it has to be continued, as per the ongoing instructions.
- If suspecting any features of the Covid 19, inform the authorities at the earliest.
- Maintain a daily routine comprising of regular physical activities and hygiene to maintain one's own health, follow healthy food habits, and maintain a healthy sleep pattern.
- Involve in stress relieving activities such as reading, breathing exercises or any other hobbies according to ones interest.
- Be in touch with friends and relatives over phone or social media and always keep the mind open.
- In the step of Vijnana (scientific knowledge or reasoning) i.e awareness is created about the disease condition in a proper manner.
- Have proper theoretical knowledge about the occurrence of disease and its possible prevention
- Avoid believing myths and fake news
- Depend on Government bulletins, scientific journals or WHO publications for actual data.
- Seek information updates at specific times during the day, once or twice.
- Interact with health professionals including family doctors for the signs and symptoms of COVID and about available management strategies.

In the step of Dhairya (Determination or patience) i.e, develop patience to stick on to the rules for a better future.

- Maintain the patience and have a belief in the system
- Minimize watching, reading or listening to news about COVID-19 that causes one to feel anxious or distressed.
- Have the determination to obey rules such as lock down, social distancing and hygienic measures for the possible prevention.
- Reinforce the coping skills (if not possible by self, have the courage to seek help from concerned competitive authority).
- Have the determination to maintain a positive healthy family atmosphere for self and for others.

In the step of Smrithi (application of recollections or memory) i.e, recollect the previous victories over such pandemics and pertain.

- Recollect the previous own experiences where one had overcome failures and such diseases
- Give attention to those who had similar experiences with a positive ending.
- Find opportunities to amplify positive and hopeful stories and positive images of local people who have experienced COVID-19.

In the step of Samadhi (attaining a stable state of mind) i.e, Steps to have a stable state of mind, which is to be done as per the advice from the experts in this regard.

- Have simple stretching exercises and yogasanas which calms the body as well as mind.
- Do regular pranayamas and other breathing exercises.
- Practise techniques such as DRTs (Deep Relaxation Techniques).
- Practise relaxation postures such as savasana after exercises.
- Chanting of mantras may also be tried to improve concentration.

These are the usual steps of satvavajaya to be adopted which are applicable in any psychological issues, including that of resulting from COVID as well.

As per the resulting psychological conditions and their severity, medical management is also advised. In those subjects whom the satvabala is less than normal, i.e. heena satva and also those with any known psychiatric affections, medicines are also mandatory along with satvavajaya chikitsa. The medicine varies as per the diagnosis of the resultant condition. In those with features of anxiety disorder, considering the status of dosha and severity of the condition, drugs such as drakshadi kwatha⁸, aswagandha⁹ (Withania Somnifera), Jatamansi (Nardostachys jatamansi)¹⁰ etc. is ideal. In cases of Insomnia, tagara (Valeriana wallichii)¹¹, Somalata (Sarcostemma acidum) can be administered; it enhances the sleep quality and has neuro-protective activity.

In the features of Depression, Sankupushi (Convolvulus pluricaulis)¹², vacha (Acorus calamus)¹³, Mahatpanchagavya gritha¹⁴ can be advised.

In Withdrawal symptoms, Ashtanga lavana¹⁵, Kharjooradi mandha¹⁶, dhatriyadi gritha¹⁷ seems ideal. The drugs cannot be generalised in a peculiar condition as it varies as per status of the disease, clinical presentation as well as the

bala of the patient. The drugs listed as medhya rasayanas¹⁸ can be administered on a conditional basis for their neuro enhancing as well as neuro protective action in such psychological situations. Many of the above mentioned drugs are also having immune enhancing action as well as per published studies. Drugs with immunoenhancing action as well as improving the functions of the mind is capable of creating far than expected response in such situations and further researches are the need of the hour in the context of immunopsychiatry.

CONCLUSION

By adopting such preventive as well as curative measures mentioned in the Ayurvedic science, we may be capable of leading a life with a positive physical as well as mental health and may also be able to get rid of the ongoing psychological issues resulting from the COVID pandemic. Gaining a better understanding of the role of immune system could be paradigm changing for the psychiatry.

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