

# Impact of COVID 19 lockdown on mental health of health care professionals.

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## Abstract

**An epidemic is a disease which has a larger population under its influence within a short period of time, pandemic occurs on a large scale crossing international boundaries affecting an even larger population than the epidemic. One of the first recorded histories of any epidemic was influenza by the Indian Sanskrit scholars around 1200 BC. Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is now recognised as global pandemic after its identification in China. The current COVID19 epidemic has induced fear in the community, also made the understanding of mental health status of society necessary. Public health professionals working in the field related to the virus pandemic may also be exposed to stressful conditions along with the fear of exposure to virus. Another group of health workers affected alongside the general health care providers for coronavirus include Dental practitioners. Dentists are the first to get exposed to saliva which can act as vehicles for the transmission of viruses similar to other influenza viruses. Dentists are usually prone to psychological stress and financial pressures from the time they start pursuing education and in clinical practice they are exposed to higher magnitude of stresses related to their physical health as well. Psychological impact of the crisis can be emerging very soon among the health care workers along with those who survived the pandemic. Taking past pandemics as reference, being prepared for the psychological effect of the current pandemic on society can guide us to overcome the future crisis which is waiting.**

**Keywords:** COVID19, Lockdown, Mental health, Health professionals.

## Introduction

An epidemic is a disease which has a larger population under its influence within a short period of time, pandemic occurs on a large scale crossing international boundaries effecting even larger population than epidemic. World has a history of epidemics occurring in various regions across countries from time to time since its origin. Numerous diseases have emerged through time in history posing challenge for the existence and survival of human race. One of the first recorded history of any epidemic was influenza by the Indian Sanskrit scholars around 1200BC. Since then world has observed various epidemics periodically in course of time. Some of the epidemics that occurred in the 21<sup>st</sup> century like NIPHA, SARS, H1N1/09 and EBOLA [1] are few to list. Globalisation aids in the rapid spread of the disease and result in a global pandemic with ease. The difficulty in containment of the disease / pandemic has had impact on global politics, economy and psychosocial impact resulting in general public health and public health policy changes.

Corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is now recognised as global pandemic after its identification in China established itself around the world effecting a large population. It is in a

way similar to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak of 2003 but has covered a large population under its effect in a shorter span of time [2] COVID-19 is currently having effect on aspects of physical health of all the people even who are not affected, due to the global lockdown which in the future may also impact mental health [3]. COVID-19 which began in China established its existence around the world in almost every country across the continents [4]. WHO which was tracking the spread of the virus in China declared it as a global pandemic and as public health emergency immediately after January 2020, when the virus spread to 34 various regions in China [5]. During epidemic or a pandemic, the main focus of the medical professional is mainly to contain the disease soon and limit the extent of damage caused by the disease, so the psychological impact of the disease in course of time on both the people affected and the health care providers usually ignored or is given less importance.

The current COVID19 epidemic which has induced fear in the community has also made the understanding of mental health status of society necessary along with the control of the virus. Though there is fear of the pandemic to increase more and spread the extent to a larger population, management of the disease along with the effects of the lockdown on the mental

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health of all the vulnerable population is also essential. There is a general necessity to identify psychological impact and mental health of those with the infection and general public during the lockdown. There is already a well-known fact supporting low life expectancy of people having pre-existing physical and mental conditions than normal population. People with no pre-existing mental health conditions may also be exposed to stress and experience post-traumatic stress as a result of the lockdown [6].

Public health professionals working in the field related to the virus pandemic may also be exposed to stressful conditions along with the fear of exposure to virus. Previous experience of such epidemics has shown that the psychological effect of the epidemics stay and trouble longer than the epidemic itself. The past SARS epidemic of China in 2003, affected different age groups both physically and psychologically, during which various frontline health care workers at the field level also expressed psychological strain of acquiring the disease themselves [7] Albert Wu in his psychological first aid mentioned about a second victim phenomena which is observed as a suffering by the care giver during an adverse event. There he mentioned about Burnout syndrome experienced by a care provider which is mainly depersonalisation, loss of meaning in ones work, feeling of ineffectiveness, among physicians, nurse and staff turnover decreasing quality of care. This burnout phenomenon was observed both among the physicians and the nurses, which depicted an annual increase in rates. Bodenheimer et al by his Triple

### **Aim**

1. Enhancing patient experience.
2. Improving population health.
3. Reducing costs transformed it to a Quadruple Aim by adding the fourth goal of improving the work life of doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers [8].

Another group of health workers affected alongside the general health care providers for corona virus include Dental practitioners. Dentists are the first to get exposed to saliva which can act as vehicles for the transmission of virus similar to other influenza viruses. Usually any practicing dentist must have the habit of wearing personal protective gear before any procedure even for an asymptomatic patient. As respiratory droplets are found to transmit the virus protective particulate respirators like N-95 masks must be worn for all dental procedures in routine practice. SARS CoV can be detected in salivary gland so saliva can be the major source of infection even in many asymptomatic cases [9]. It can be expected that salivary droplets and aerosols released during dental procedures act as the source of transmission of the virus [10]. Various studies have reported stress of higher level among dentists. Dentists are usually prone to psychological stress and financial pressures from the time they start pursuing education. Once they start clinical practice they are exposed to higher magnitude of stresses related to their physical health as well. The financial pressure starts in the form of clinic establishment

upgrading clinical knowledge and practice and loan payments. The causes of psychological stress includes too little work, trouble related to establishment of practice, dealing with patients, competition with other private practitioners, colleges and multi-speciality health centres [11]. Another stress in practitioners, whether to hike the price of any dental treatment causes the threat of losing patients. Standardisation of cost for various treatment procedures is essential as the costs differ with clinics, locality, cities and states. The closure of clinics in global lockdown due to COVID adds to the currently existing burden of sustaining clinical establishment, payment of rents, salaries of the assistants and auxiliaries.

This corona pandemic is having a debilitating impact on the population of the world. Psychological impact of the crisis can be emerging very soon among the health care workers along with those who survived the pandemic. Taking past pandemics as reference, being prepare for psychological effect of the current pandemic on the society can guide to overcome the future crisis which is waiting.

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