

A Review on Psychosocial Distress among General Population of Pakistan During Covid-19 Pandemic

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A REVIEW ON PSYCHOSOCIAL DISTRESS AMONG GENERAL POPULATION OF PAKISTAN DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 crisis in 2019 significantly impacted human life all over the globe. Psychological health of general population has been affected by the unpredictable circumstances and impulsion of living in isolation, if suspected positive for coronavirus. During COVID-19 outbreak, escalation of various types of psychosocial distresses such as anxiety, sleep disorders and depression has been observed in the general population globally. Thus, there is an urgent need to combat these issues through well planned strategies. The focus of this review is to conduct a thorough evaluation of the available research on the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the mental status of the general population of Pakistan. We also focused on the psychosocial impact of lockdown on the general community and the significance of protective and risk variables in the development of mental conditions in susceptible groups of population. The review further evaluates the strategies which can be employed to minimize the negative impact of COVID-19-related stress and improve the mental wellbeing of general community in Pakistan by highlighting the significant repercussions of existing research studies.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19 pandemic, mental well-being, depression, anxiety, Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Clinical cases of unusual pneumonia were emerging and rapidly rising in Wuhan, China, during December of 2019, that were later (11th February 2020) regarded as Coronavirus-19 (COVID-19) by WHO. The etiological agent responsible for this pandemic was identified as SARS-CoV-2 and it was regarded as a novel coronavirus strain with 79% genetic resemblance to SARS-CoV from the 2003 SARS outbreak (Hu et al., 2020). Many countries including Pakistan placed lockdown on their population due to COVID-19 pandemic in an effort to control the outbreak. Globally, this pandemic has created unprecedented mental health concerns as a major viral epidemic in the current century. It's understandable that there's a persistent need to recognize the current epidemic biologically and physically, yet psychological and behavioral needs must still be addressed at all stages of response and administration (Corman et al., 2020). As a result, extensive psychiatric studies have been carried out throughout the world to determine the psychosocial effect of this novel illness among people. According to the qualitative analysis review, psychological science is among the top ten researched areas since the coronavirus pandemic, with the majority of research coming from China, USA and Europe. Therefore, it is a pressing demand to investigate the current phenomenon in low as well as middle income nations like ours to comprehend the prevailing situation (Tran et al., 2020). Despite a handful of surveys that have been conducted in Pakistan, a considerably greater frequency of mental health concerns in Pakistan has been recorded than in European countries (Hashmi and Saleem, 2020). Although healthcare workers and admitted patients receive therapeutic assistance, the general

population has often remained neglected regarding their mental health. Ever since development of COVID-19, several conspiracies and falsehoods regarding the disease have proliferated throughout Pakistan, causing widespread fear and concern among the common populace. Furthermore, these create greater uncertainty and dissatisfaction among the general populace. The aforementioned reasons highlight the importance of researching the psychosocial effects of the pandemic on general populace and back up the necessity for addressing mental health concerns such as the assessment of psychosocial distress and behavioral changes in the general population to be integrated into healthcare system as priority matter of concern. This review seeks to bring together recent literature on effects of COVID-19 pandemic on psychological and social repercussions and adverse outcomes in the overall population of Pakistan, specifically as a government-mandated lockdown has provided psychological and social distress for people, of which young students, healthcare workers and other vulnerable groups make up a significant portion.

Determinants of Psychosocial Distress

i. Depression

Depression is a common response to rapid deterioration in one's living situation, which often involves sadness, loss of interest, low self-worth, isolation and ambiguity, among others. Whenever individuals are subjected to unpredictable situations, they feel helpless and unmotivated, which can lead to depression. In this approach, individuals who are depressed are less likely to pursue care for mental problems. During disease outbreaks, depression might become a hindrance to seeking conventional medical and psychological interventions (Wang et al., 2020). A positive correlation has been reported between depression and COVID-19 among vulnerable populations of Pakistan such as elderly people, pregnant women and patients of other diseases (Shahid et al., 2020; Basit et al., 2021; Mumtaz et al., 2021). Psychological depression has been linked to the transmission of infectious diseases in the past, and COVID-19 is no exception. The fear of getting infected as well as being isolated has caused depression among the people of Pakistan; it could be linked to the factor that Pakistanis are very sociable people and have family gatherings more often as compared to Western World. Majority of the people are not depressed because of the fear of pandemic but are psychological disturbed because they cannot be indulged in such activities which they used as anti-depressant.

ii. Anxiety

Natural disasters such as wildfires, hurricanes, flooding, and storms, as well as human-caused catastrophes such as bridge collapses, aviation catastrophes, technological mishaps, and fires, produce abrupt, unforeseen, and transitory emergencies. Such threats elicit defensive reactions comparable to those elicited in unpredictable everyday circumstances (Zsido et al., 2020). Defensive responses are instantaneous reactions generated by activation in survival pathways that identify dangers and result in the sensory perception of anxiety. However, this specific danger that is coronavirus is perplexing in inducing anxiety as well as fear. Incidence of anxiety has been reported to increase in the general population of Pakistan and this rise is attributable towards the fear associated with COVID-19 (Shahid et al., 2020; Waqas et al., 2020; Baloch et al., 2021). In other words, the citizens of Pakistan have previously faced many natural as well as political disasters which were probably far worse than the current situation. The recently documented increased rate of anxiety among population of Pakistan could be linked to false information provided by social media and belief in it because of lack

of medical knowledge. Though Government has started awareness campaigns to let people know the medical and all other necessary information but ironically, people of Pakistan, in general, tend to believe folklore than the Government or medical professionals.

iii. Stress

COVID-19-related psychological distress is expected to have a significant role in the rise in devastating mental state. Stress perception has been linked to a variety of negative psychosocial effects. Judging by the current pandemic's unpredictability, disconnection, and additional duties, COVID-19-specific psychological stress might be significant to investigate in the context of long-term mental health effect. While the experience of coronavirus is likely to create severe stress in itself, the condition of chronic stress related to this epidemic may worsen these psychological issues. Reportedly, the general population of Pakistan without any prior history of psychological morbidity has been experiencing stress during COVID-19 pandemic (Riaz et al., 2020). An alarmingly high prevalence rate for stress has been described among students of dental institutes across different provinces of Pakistan (Raja et al., 2020). Further survey-based research is needed in Pakistan to study the prevalence of stress among different populations of Pakistan and its predictors and modulators which must be specifically based on differences arising due to demographic and socio-economic factors like age, gender, occupation, social class etc.

iv. Insomnia

Although sleep disorders and psychological discomfort are to be expected in consequence to psychological distress, the long drawn social restriction and alienation experienced during this pandemic adds new aspects to the situation, which may account for the higher frequency of sleep disorders. Having good sleep is a very important contributor towards the mental well-being of individuals during COVID-19 (Khan et al., 2020). Undoubtedly, the social seclusion has disrupted habitual behaviors that normally regulate our sleep wake cycle. By the peak of the epidemic, young individuals went to bed late and woke up late, according to a research, which most likely contributed to a phase delay kind of insomnia (Morin and Carrier, 2021). Disturbances in sleep quality have been particularly stated among Pakistani individuals who are spending substantial time using social media in the pandemic era (Anzar et al., 2020). These indicators might be utilized to identify groups at high risk of psychological suffering so that personalized remote and in-person therapies could be provided. Insomnia may or may not be linked to COVID-19, directly. It is possible that sleep wake cycle of people has been disturbed due to restricted timings for opening of public places and online work schedules which, in turn, is making people emotionally agitated and psychologically disturbed.

v. Others

The quantitative and attributed hazards of economic recessions during COVID-19 are predicted to have a major impact on everyone's mental wellbeing. According to literature, job loss and unemployment have a major negative impact on psychological health issues which function as facilitators of attempted suicides and accomplishment. The majority of Pakistani instances are clearly tied to the economic slump brought on by the shutdown (Mamun and Ullah, 2020). The recent suicide incidents from Pakistan were causing alarm not just in Pakistan but also in other poor and underprivileged nations throughout the world. The current studies from Pakistan's neighboring states, such as Bangladesh and India, have

suggested that the first COVID-19 suicides were motivated by financial stress, social boycott and frustration caused by fear of contracting infection (Bhuiyan et al., 2020). A non-representative research found that social isolation and alienation, as well as economic distress, are all factors that contribute to suicide (Thakur and Jain, 2020). In order to understand the link connecting epidemics, suicide, and suicidal behavior in Pakistan, further investigation is needed (Mamun and Ullah, 2020). Additional studies with improved analytical aspects, observational research, and a concentration on suicide as the primary result might allow for thorough knowledge and definition of the scale of this problem. Extensive research is required in this area so that provision of psychological help to people of Pakistan may become possible.

Vulnerable Groups of Population

Different groups of populations have encountered several challenges due to the consequences of coronavirus pandemic and some have been particularly vulnerable. For instance, youngsters who were already dealing with mental health concerns have become more vulnerable to the circumstances, and we're already talking about the long-lasting impact on youngsters as a consequence of education cuts, physical separation restrictions and isolation, as well as many other unplanned life changes. Many colleges and other educational institutions all around the world have taken various precautionary measures to prevent the spread of disease among students and teachers, such as closing buildings or laboratories, cancelling courses, adopting online classes as well as examinations etc and some institutes even postponed some trainings (Naser et al., 2020). In general, individuals who are more sensitive to mental problems are more quickly triggered by triggers like social detachment resulting in more frequent problems.

i. Healthcare workers

Clinicians and other frontline healthcare care professionals are at a particular risk of getting infected in comparison to the general population because they are in constant communication with infected patients and experience more mental stress. Healthcare workers must be equipped with personal protective equipment (PPE) to safeguard themselves from infected individuals. But, owing to insufficiency of protective equipment in Pakistan, healthcare workers have been compelled to perform without it, resulting in job-related stress among them (Arshad et al., 2020). Pakistan, being a developing country, lacks basic necessities in the health care sector. From the outset of pandemic, general population of Pakistan was advised to stay home to stay safe, however, the healthcare staff were the frontline workers serving the people. They were as stressed and anxious as the general public but their mental health was completely ignored. Most people expect that healthcare workers provide psychosocial help ignoring the fact that they themselves may need it as well. Therefore, they should be considered as the first ones who deserve to receive psychological help.

ii. Students

Past research has shown that the phenomenology of separation anxiety disorder in adults is comparable to that of children and adolescents. While leaving school, college students who are close to their friends may experience separation anxiety. Potential challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as conflicting household routines, alterations in sleeping and eating routines, isolation from companions and solitude may

negatively impact students (Yang et al., 2021). Psychological disorders are more difficult to identify and manage, especially in an atmosphere where students do not choose to seek social help. It has been reported that particularly due to closure of educational institutes and stressors associated with online learning, students in Pakistan are facing problems regarding their mental well-being (Baloch et al., 2021). Students are generally more prone to developing psychological stress as compared to general population and closure of educational institutions due to COVID-19 has intensified their stress. This could be linked to imposed transition to online learning and associated difficulties. Also, the uncertain situation regarding exams etc has placed a question mark on their future career. Lockdown also forced students to stay at home for more than a year and their mental health during this time period was disregarded. Educational institutions and teaching staff must have been provided awareness to deal with psychological issues of students in such circumstances.

iii. Educators

Unfortunately, most educators experienced potential challenges as a result of COVID-19's sudden emergence such as a scarcity of online-teaching knowledge, a shortage of time to train for distant learning courses, and finding out how to leverage assistance from online education teams (Bao, 2020). When colleges and universities reopened, a large number of instructors showed signs of anxiousness, stress, and depression. Furthermore, female educators were shown to have more signs of psychological distress than male educators (Li et al., 2020). One of the explanations for the fact that instructors have experienced emotional exhaustion with children could be the hard workload mixed with the stress of performing family care tasks. Since having a family might just have contributed to the heightened stress faced during the epidemic, it is important to remember that the learning gained by younger generations during this period of distress will influence the future of the society (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021). Major reason of psychological distress among the educators of Pakistan could be the lack of cooperation by authorities of education institutions. This situation was completely novel for such authorities as well and most of them had no idea of how to deal with it. Hence, they completely ignored the psychological health of educators who were feeling stressed because of the pressure placed on them from authorities as well as their students.

iv. Elderly people

In young people, dependence on social media may serve as a resource to combat depression and boredom, but older people's needs for psychological interaction, creativity, and everyday functionality remained unsatisfied. Digital technologies and online platforms are now being used to establish an online social support network and a feeling of connection, however the differences in accessibility and comprehension of these contemporary technologies are making the elderly populace more vulnerable (Rana et al., 2020). The mass confinement and transportation restrictions have undoubtedly limited older adults' activities such as regular walk-and-talk inside the playground, old friend meetings, volunteer facility and socioeconomic care as well as congregational meetings. Pandemic-related fear has shown positive association with depression among elderly individuals of Pakistan (Mumtaz et al., 2021). In consideration of consistent and efficient psychosocial crisis response, the psychological state of the older population has received inadequate and insufficient concern. In contrast to Western countries, the most common leisure activity practiced by elderly people of Pakistan is socializing, which was the first thing banned by the Government of Pakistan during this pandemic. The pandemic restricted elderly people to their homes which

could be the reason for increased psychosocial distress among them. However, further survey-based research is needed to ascertain this speculation.

v. *Infected Individuals*

People who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 are likely to be scared and worried, for obvious reasons. Despite a stated mortality rate of around 15% in certain nations, the common public seems clearly frightened of acquiring the infection (Baud et al., 2020). Whenever individuals have been diagnosed with infection, their fear level might escalate as their emphasis switches to self-preservation. Some hospitalized individuals seem to have minor or no symptoms however, they were only hospitalized because they tested positive. In such patients, admittance might have been a source of anxiety. Debilitating symptoms may also cause individuals to be anxious. Furthermore, they must contend with the possibility of a shift in doctors' as well as other healthcare workers' attitudes towards the manner they are evaluated and examined. Patients seeking assistance may experience rejection from healthcare workers who are intending to safeguard themselves against contamination by restricting contact and screening (Ma et al., 2020). All these factors have been studied to trigger anxiety and depression among the infected patients admitted to hospitals.

vi. *Others*

Most of the research in psychological distress and illness has indicated that females are more likely to report mental illness as compared to males. A recent study, however, described an unusual finding that males reported greater rates of anxiety which can possibly be explained based on certain factors (Majeed et al., 2021). In Pakistan, males have greater interaction with social community outside of the home which can increase psychological distress in two ways. Firstly, the probability of developing infection is greater for those going outside and interacting with other individuals due to greater exposure. Secondly, the requirement to go out reminds about the situation where it no longer remains possible to make-believe that all is normal. In addition, research has indicated that males have greater probability of experiencing severe symptoms and mortality rate in them is greater than in females (Salman et al., 2020). Additionally, during the COVID-19 epidemic, many studies identified symptoms of psychological distress among the normal population, especially among those who come into contact with infected patients (Arshad et al 2020). People who have had family members and friends diagnosed with the infection and have experienced the trauma with them are likely to experience depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. As the people of Pakistan rely on their families in almost every aspect of their life, so the fear of not being able to look after and connect with their family members, if they got infected, could have added to their concerns.

Contributors of Psychosocial Distress

Mental health is so important to overall wellbeing that psychological problems can cause operational limitations lowering people's standard of living, raising healthcare budgets and harming interpersonal connections. Rise in mortality and infection rates are in parallel with psychological stress. Apart from that, whilst true information is scarce, false information remains freely accessible. Considering that several issues about the pandemic remain unsolved, researchers presume that stressful occurrences diminish individuals' sense of safety, reminding them of mortality and negatively influencing mental health. Several factors have contributed in this regard and some of these are discussed below.

i. Self-isolation and lockdown

At the collective stage, the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused self-isolation and pervasive social separation, has posed a threat to all facets of mental hygiene, nutrition, emotional distress, psychosocial and social welfare (Mukhtar, 2020). Domestic violence, bullying, depression, suicidal feelings, dysfunctional marriages and family environments, financial insecurity, ill health and many other problems are the consequences of social isolation. People's sovereignty and environmental mastery may be questioned as a consequence of the lockdown's restricted campaign. Limitations to personal growth threaten the public's emotional well-being in society (Lima et al., 2020). As socialization and social activities are highly valued in Pakistani culture and individuals place a high emphasis on interpersonal connection, various everyday routines were disrupted as a result of the deployment of lockdown raising individual's emotional stress (Majeed et al., 2021). In Pakistan, where people are very cordial, restricting them to their homes is definitely a major factor for the increased psychological distress. When people are not allowed to meet their friends and family members or have social gatherings, this adds to their distress in one way or the other as a lonely person tends to be more depressed. Pakistanis are not used to living isolated life so, surely, this has affected Pakistanis more as compared to the Western world. The Pakistani government tightened border controls and introduced social distancing policies in the aftermath of the outbreak; as the number of cases locally and globally rose, the Pakistani government implemented a partial lockdown in the country in March of 2020 (Mumtaz et al., 2021). When the economy came to a halt, many employees were laid off or furloughed, resulting in employment losses. With lengthy lockdowns, limitations on public life and concerns over work stability, the population has a likelihood of developing psychiatric problems like fear, fatigue and depression.

ii. Social Media

Considering the usefulness of media in disseminating critical information through periods of mass trauma, recent studies have found that catastrophic media coverage might lead to negative mental health effects (Zhao and Zhou, 2020). The usage of social media, as compared to conventional media, was linked to higher levels of detrimental impact in terms of anxiety, depression and stress. Observing heroic deeds, expert talks, and understanding of the viral infection and treatments, on the other hand, were linked to higher beneficial impact and therefore less anxiety. According to the findings, social media usage and increased social media engagement were linked to bad psychosocial consequences whereas conventional media content was linked to favorable psychosocial outcomes (Chao et al., 2020). Social media has become first and foremost source of information for the people of Pakistan and people tend to believe everything that is posted on social media. General public spreads news by social media and people post false information every day without deliberating. It is such a matter about which government can't do anything. During lockdown, whenever people turned on their smartphone, they saw pictures of dead bodies of the people who have died due to COVID-19 on the road in miserable circumstances, many of which were definitely fake but this caused anxiety, distress and depression.

iii. Financial Challenges

Financial limitations and demands also added to the emotional challenges since a substantial proportion of Pakistani community works in private sector or has been employed as a daily wager, with 24 percent of the community struggling to make ends meet and 38.8

percent of the population being unemployed (Mamun and Ullah, 2020). As a consequence of lockdown, the country's economic operations came to a standstill. Many people either ended up losing their jobs or have seen large pay cuts, adding to their already precarious financial situation and leading to an upsurge in suicide attempts (Salman et al., 2020). When Government imposed lockdown, several markets, educational institutions, restaurants and other public places were completely closed. Many daily and monthly wagers as well as people working in private and semi-government sectors faced huge financial challenges and most of them even lost their jobs. Government should have made strict rules for such sectors to ensure job security and payment of wages to such employees but no attention was paid to this matter. A nationwide survey should be done to comprehend and address the sufferings of people of Pakistan working in private sector.

iv. Others

Several other factors have also contributed towards increase in prevalence of symptoms associated with psychosocial distress and these stressors include, but are not restricted to, pregnancy, close contact with affected individuals, feeling of job insecurity, loss of loved ones as well as managing work from home especially for mothers (Boyras and Legros, 2020). If people seek psychological help on time, the outcomes of psychological distress can be prevented. However, in a country like Pakistan, people rarely seek psychological help because they are not aware of the significance of maintaining mental health. Also, speaking on mental health is considered as taboo in Pakistan due to which people find it difficult to receive psychological support.

Coping Strategies

Through reframing the condition to enhance emotional wellbeing via thoughtfulness, individual development, development of endurance, coping skills, maintaining mental hygiene, nurturing optimistic feelings, and dealing with negative emotions by behavioral change, communities may respond to the negative outcomes in present scenario. Policymakers should create and enforce some important programs to protect and heal people from the debilitating psychological and mental health effects of pandemic as soon as possible. Some suggestions in this regard are discussed now.

i. Online support and psychotherapy

The significant increase in mental health issues during the coronavirus epidemic has had quite a negative impact on the sector of public health as well as on the economy. Innovative ways must be used to substantially enhance mental care delivery capabilities in order to fulfil the massive and growing demand for mental health treatment. Increasing the number of mental health care professionals or their working hours is not a realistic approach in the short term, however, enhancing their efficiency and accuracy may be a realistic alternative. Offering psychotherapy digitally and remotely, that has been proved to be effective and clinically beneficial, could be a smart way to meet this increasing need (Alavi et al., 2020). If this type of healthcare provision is shown to be practical, it has the potential to double the number of people who can be treated as well as to expand access to healthcare without compromising treatment quality. These online mental healthcare services, on the other hand, are not commonly accessible in low as well as middle income areas of underdeveloped countries. The majority of the population are unfamiliar to its use making it a difficult challenge for the administration and healthcare professionals to provide

psychological health assistance to the population (Hopman et al., 2020). Government of Pakistan should develop a portal where people can interact with psychologists hired by the government or providing voluntary services. These psychologists should provide psychological help to people having increased symptoms of stress and anxiety. Alternatively, government can devise a plan where all institutions may independently hire psychologists to provide psychological help to workers, educators as well as students.

ii. Awareness Campaigns

Since all initiatives have been directed at researching the etiology, disease manifestations, propagation mechanisms and treatment of the COVID-19, minimal attention has been paid towards the consequences in terms of individuals' mental wellbeing as well as ways to avoid social stigma. The current scenario necessitates public awareness, which may be useful in dealing with the crisis (Javed et al., 2020). Considering increased social recognition and much needed de stigmatization in recent times, more individuals are accessing care for frequent psychological disorders. Digital awareness campaigns should also be explored as a way to reduce self-medication without consulting a professional (Islam et al., 2021). Social media providing tons of false information every day is having a negative impact on public's mental health and to reduce this effect, government and other non-government associations should spread authentic information and negate the negative messages. The government has been cooperating with WHO in spreading public service messages related to prevention and treatment of COVID-19 but the scope of this information needs to be expanded to include ignored areas.

iii. Mental Support for COVID-19 Patients

Investigating the correlations of depressive episodes as well as how individuals react to COVID-19 is critical considering the possible influence of infection on emotions and probable linkages between how people respond to the infection and recover from it. This type of data could aid in policymaking, prevention, and therapeutic initiatives. Depression is very common among individuals who are suffering from infection, especially those who are recently diagnosed and those who are experiencing severe symptoms, highlighting the importance of periodic monitoring and treatment of psychosocial distress in this community. Virtual psychosocial counselling could be one way to alleviate depression in persons who are separated from their friends and family (Mukhtar, 2020). Mental support is very crucial for COVID-19 patients and selective efforts are required to deal with the psychological issues concerning the mental health of those who have suffered from this disease. All hospitals whether public or private should appoint clinical psychologists to provide psychological help concerning the prevailing conditions. Paramedical staff are putting efforts in taking care of the COVID-19 patients in Pakistan but psychologists are required to assist them in this regard.

iv. Use of Conventional Media

Through the times of national crises, media should assure that crisis information is communicated to wider population in a timely and professional manner and failure to do so will undoubtedly cause uncertainty, dread and worry. Studies show that conventional media contents including self-defense advice might be beneficial to citizens during this epidemic by improving proactive response and preventative strategies, giving individuals more control. Past research has suggested that the conventional media has a constructive influence in

dealing with the aftermath of catastrophes by educating, informing as well as facilitating dialogue among individuals. During epidemic, social networking has emerged as the most integral means for disseminating information with unrivalled pace, reach and persistence, particularly for young individuals (Zhao and Zhou, 2020). However, in Pakistan, social media is doing more harm than good. Instead of spreading positive messages and providing awareness about mental health, it is leaving a very negative impact on the minds of general population of Pakistan. People using social media should play a positive role and instead of spreading false information, they should help the society by spreading hopeful and optimistic information. They should also try to disseminate awareness regarding practices that can be used to maintain mental health. Government should also devise strategies to limit sharing of false information which could provoke psychological distress among general population. Hence, social media can play a variety of positive roles in information exchange which include spreading health-related proposals, facilitating communication and providing psychosocial first aid by displaying social perceptions, insights and perception of the disease.

v. Policies of Government

During 2009, the WHO Assessment tool for Psychological Health Systems presented a report on Pakistan's mental health system, which revealed grave economic, organizational, and operational shortcomings. Mental health received only 0.4 percent of the government's total health-care spending. Since then, no substantial changes in the policy have been undertaken, despite the fact that the prevalence of psychosocial disorders has persisted to increase throughout all genders and age groups (Hashmi and Saleem, 2020). Pakistan should implement a psychiatric crisis management program to reduce the psychosocial distress and adverse mental health effects of COVID-19 pandemic in a timely, reliable, and productive manner (Rana et al., 2020). The government of Pakistan has been dealing with the pandemic based on the experiences of other countries. Government has made policies to restrict the spread of pandemic and has been cooperating with WHO since the very first day. Government also arranged separate wards for the treatment of infected individuals. However, the government has not made any policies to deal with the increasing psychological distress nor has it shed light on the mental issues arising during pandemic particularly with reference to the local culture and environment. The government of Pakistan should make policies to deal with psychosocial outcomes of this pandemic and train counselors and psychologists along with doctors and paramedics to deal with the patients in order to reduce stress among them. Apart from this, government of Pakistan should also use different channels such as media to deal with the psychosocial distress among the general population of Pakistan and provide psychosocial therapies as part of its healthcare system.

vi. Others

Psychotherapists, trained as well as knowledgeable mental health professionals, and psychologists may offer empirical insights on superstitions, rumors, conspiracy theories, misconceptions, fake news and misinformation in order to normalize communities' understanding of mental health problems, to optimize mental hygiene through internet channels and more (Banerjee, 2020). Adopting novel habits such as increasing physical activity, practicing self-observation or meditation, learning new languages, gaining knowledge of books as well as podcasts and expressing appreciation can help the people to cope with depression and anxiety during this period of lockdown (Mukhtar, 2020). People should try to follow the same routine of sleeping and waking as they would follow in regular days as this can reduce the level of psychological disturbance among them. Educational

institutions must appoint qualified advisors or counselors to assess students' psychological state. Mentoring counselling and chat groups, overseen by a psychotherapist and an educational specialist, can also assist students in openly expressing challenges with their mental wellbeing and how it influences their learning (Baloch et al., 2021). There is shortage of survey-based data concerning the mental health of general population of Pakistan. Still remain many concerns and issues which need to be studied and surveyed individually. Firstly, people should be made aware of the ways in which they can assess and comprehend mental health state and secondly, they should be educated regarding how to seek psychological help.

CONCLUSION

The psychiatric professionals, especially in Asian countries, confront both a challenge as well as an opportunity as the number of patients afflicted by the pandemic continues to rise: the challenge of overcoming the numerous obstacles and constrictions outlined in the prior research as well as the opportunity to bring these recommendations or suggestions into action that are possible on a regional and local level. COVID-19's long term mental health effects may take several months to appear, and controlling them necessitates a dedicated approach from the entire health care system. Further studies are needed to estimate the scale of problem and devise strategies for problem-solving, especially in countries like Pakistan where mental health facilities are poorly established.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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A.A.C. and I.A. conceived the idea; A.A.C., I.A. and A.I. wrote the manuscript; A.A.C., I.A. and A.I. edited and reviewed the final version of manuscript.

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