



Adjustment Process during epidemics of COVID-19 and Mental Health

¹Thseen Nazir
¹Assistant Professor
¹Ibn Haldun University

Abstract

The epidemic COVID-19 had created a havoc all across the globe and this havoc is not deadly only but it is having a huge impact on our lives. It not only takes physical and economical toil around the world but also had created a huge havoc on our mental health. Historically there were number of different natural disasters, calamities and such epidemics which created much more havoc and was much deadlier then present situation but they may not had been created such a panic as it had been felt during the COVID-19 epidemics. In fact, the virus of COVID-19 is spreading very fast but the misinformation on internet is spreading much faster than the real infection. There can be number of reasons for that but here in this article we will try to analyses the various factors such as overload of information's and their credibility's which is created a huge panic among the masses. The role of social media and online information's which are helping to speed up the rumors and mongering faster, deadlier and making our mental health prone to any kind of infection by stressing out our immunities. In addition to this, the article will try to analyses the responses of people at different phases of Virus spread and try to understand the adjustment process of people during these epidemics.

Key Terms: - COVID-19, Virus, Epidemics, Mental Health.

Introduction

Most of us had never heard the name of the place “Wuhan” few months before in our lives and I guess it is just two to three months before this name came into global attention by its viral epidemic and may be none among this generation will forget it in all their lives. The epidemic, which is on the go, had changed our everyday lives drastically and for millions of people it may change their lives permanently. Wuhan is a capital of one of the Chinese’s region called Hubei province. A novel Coronavirus outbreak of pneumonia emerged in the month of December 2019 at Chinese Hubei Province namely Wuhan (Wang, 2020). This epidemic in no time caught the attention globally (Lancet, 2020). During the early phase of the spread of Virus, people not all across the globe had understood its seriousness and gravity but in Wuhan, which was the epicenter, it spread like a wild fire. The period it took medical science to understand this Virus and its gravity it was already too late for China and the rest of the world as it had already gripped the entire world under its siege.

According to the World Health Organization, the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is a new strain that was discovered in 2019 and has not been previously identified in humans (WHO. 2020). The disease is transmitting between animals and humans because of which is called zoonotic. According to the researches, the Coronavirus are large family of viruses, which are capable of causing mild flue or common cold to respiratory diseases such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV). The most common symptoms and signs of infection in this disease includes respiratory symptoms, cough, fever, breath shortness and other breathing difficulties. If the case is more severe, the infection can lead to pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and may lead to the death of the person. The Virus spread slowly and steadily and griped almost entire world and the number doubled every day and the steep rise in the death toll of its victims.

Facing a lockdown is completely new for the present generations and it is taking its own toll by compelling people to lockdown themselves in quarantine. This lockdown can have a huge impact on people. Due to social isolation, people may suffer with their mental health, impact on their immunity and may make them more vulnerable to virus. On another side this lockdown and social isolation can impact their behavior which can make them more compulsive and more stressed by becoming vulnerable to the authentic and unauthentic information’s which they are exposed round the clock through social networking sites.

The news of a new disease, which is deadly and is having potential to kill people, is enough to create fear in anyone of us. Therefore, such epidemic is completely understandable to make anyone worried, concerned about one’s own, and loved one’s health. Having such, concerns are very important for the survival of the humanity and protection of ourselves. Because optimal level of response from our body is important part of our bodies defense mechanism. Our body usually react to any foreign invasion or any kind of stress by activating its defense mechanism, which helps body to cope up with the situation or the system collapse if it is unable to deal with it. Such concerns and activation of defense is important up to level but when such concerns increases beyond our capacities, our body start exhausting its defense

mechanism and lead to excessive anxiety and panic. Anxiety and panic can be counterproductive for staying healthy and may lead to the spark for other illnesses.

Mental Health

Mental health can be defined as our overall wellbeing, which includes psychological, emotional and social wellbeing. It had an impact on our overall way of feeling, thinking and acting behavior. Mental health also helps us to determine the handling of stress by an individual, how we related to each other and how an individual make choices. The current epidemic COVID-19 had a huge impact on everyone's mental health, which include fear, and the understanding of people's mental health status is too much needed within our society (Xiang, 2020). In early outbreaks of infection, many researches had revealed a wide and profound psychosocial impact on the people and this impact was wide spread among people across communities and at different levels. People usually feels fear of getting ill or dying themselves, feeling of complete helplessness and a kind of stigma (Hall,2010). A study conducted on the outbreak of influenza found that 10% to 30% of people were worried about being infected by the outbreak virus (Rubin, 2010). During the outbreak due to the shutting down of business institutions and schools, the negative emotions of people get worse and elevate more by such closures (Van, 2016). Many research studies, which was conducted on non-infected people during the outbreak of SARS outbreak, which investigated the impact on psychological health, found that there was a significant mental morbidity, was found associated with younger population, and self-blame increase (Sim, 2010). The current outbreak of COVID-19 had spread so fast and there is not any available research, which can predict the impact of such epidemic on the mental health of people. On the basis of current research on COVID-19 outbreak, much of the research focus is in terms of vaccinations, stopping its wide spread and understand the different challenges which this epidemic will bring in terms of economy, geopolitics, Global Health care and changing the course of human history. However, the in the current literature there is not much research which can examine the magnitude of this epidemic on the psychological front and how people are countering and the stages of such counter. This epidemic is creating a huge wave of fear and this paper is trying to understand the ripples which are created in psychological front and trying to understand how people are assimilating and accommodating themselves with such a huge drift.

Adjustment and Adaptation Process

In terms of Psychology, adjustment is the behavioral process by any organism by which it maintains the equilibrium among his various needs or between his needs and the environmental obstacles. On the other hand, adaptation can be defined as "changing one's cognitive structure or one's environment (or both to some degree) in order to better understand the environment" (Cook, 2005). Any small change in the surroundings push us to adjust it is well explained by Swiss psychologist, Piaget. Assimilation and accommodation are the process by which we are achieving this equilibrium with our surroundings. According to Piaget, this equilibrium is a balance between assimilation and accommodation (Aloqaili, 2011). The adjustment process during current Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) epidemics can be understood by the cognitive process of assimilation and accommodation and what issues information overload can create and how it will hinder the process.

First, let us understand the process of Assimilation and accommodation then we will be able to explain the process in current situation. According to Pritchard and Wollard (2010) assimilation is the collecting and classifying of new information. Essentially, it refers to the influence of a subject on his environment. On the one hand, assimilation produces a positive effect. When a new object is assimilated into an old schema, the schema gets enriched and renewed. Owing to assimilation, a subject is given the opportunity to meet a wide range of objects. These objects, however, can't be absorbed into the same schema. Therefore, the subject is bound to suffer their resistance when the former attempts to over-assimilate the latter. In this case, the old schema is likely to differentiate in order to accommodate the new objects, thus providing preemptive opportunities for the schema to evolve. On the other hand, assimilation may produce a negative effect. Owing to the pre-structure formed in the existing schema and assimilation, the perception of new objects may be distorted or even excluded.

According to Piaget "Accommodation refers to the process of changing internal structures of knowledge in order to have consistency with external reality" (Yang, 2010). In this process we modify old schemes or create new ones to better fit assimilated information. (Cook, 2005). Accommodation refers to the process by which the subject adjusts the old schema or builds a new schema on the basis of the old one in order to accept and accommodate the new object when it fails to conform to the subject's schema. Accommodation indicates the process of how the subject under the influence of the object is modified and transformed, whereas assimilation indicates the conservative process of how the subject modifies and transforms the object. In short, assimilation and accommodation represent the interactions between the subject and the object (Lei, 1987).

Methodology

According to Trochim (2005), research design "provides the glue that holds the research project together. In this research, qualitative research method design is used. Due to the structure of the study, qualitative research design was suitable according to the need of the hour.

Participants

The current paper interviewed the sample of 50 people from various age groups. The interview is based on the open-ended questions, which are related to the current epidemic and their responses towards it. The study chooses the snowball sampling technique as it was most convenient for the study. Based on snowball sampling technique fifty people was identified who was living under self-quarantine at Istanbul. Among fifty participants 25 was male and 25 was female. The age of the participants ranged between 20 to 60 years old. Some demographic variables were controlled in order to have more representativeness. Due to the limited accesses and availability of participants, the samples was interviewed on mobile phones. Initially the repo was formed with the participants, which helps the in-depth exploration of data collection, which was necessary for this study. The participants were cooperative, friendly and open to share the information. The meeting with participation was held via phone calls.

Data Collection

In order to develop survey questions regarding the COVID-19 the early surveys regarding influenza and SARS were reviewed (Rubin, 2010). In addition to these questions, many other questions were added to the open added survey. The final epidemic response survey was having following statements, which determine how people in general responded to the situation at different phases. These statements are as follows:-

- *When you heard about the spread of corona virus in China and what was your responses (Behavioral, Emotional, Social and Cognitive) to it that time.*
- *Was it already spread in your country that time? What was your responses?*
- *What was your response (Behavioral, Emotional, Social and Cognitive) when you heard it is not yet spread in your country?*
- *What was your responses (Behavioral, Emotional, Social and Cognitive) when you heard first case in your country?*
- *What was your responses (Behavioral, Emotional, Social and Cognitive) when it was wide spread in your country?*
- *What was your response (Behavioral, Emotional, Social and Cognitive) when government declared people have to stay inside their homes?*
- *How you felt during quarantine (Behavioral, Emotional, Social and Cognitive).*
- *What do you think the role of social media play in terms of your responses (Behavioral, Emotional, Social and Cognitive)?*

Data Analysis

During the analysis of survey, a common pattern of assimilation and accommodation patterns had been found among the lockdown quarantine city dwellers by which they were trying to regain the equilibrium in their lives during the epidemics. Based on the survey responses a common pattern of behavior was found followed by common reactions. The process of achieving equilibrium can be discussed in stages and these stages are as follows: -

First Stage is a Dormat Stage:- The first stage is actually when the epidemic was yet to spread in the individuals immediate area and initial cases is being reported. At this stage the people are not aware of the magnitude and intensity of this diseases. At the initial stage of Coronavirus (COVID-19) out break, people was not having any kind of information regarding diseases nor the medical practitioners had any idea what these common set of symptoms all together means in medical terminology. At this moment, there is no change in the equilibrium in the common people environment nor is there any bombardment of information, which might trigger the anxiety and worry among people and effect their mental health. During the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) first week it caught people by surprise and most of the people was unable to think or expect that soon they will be also part of this outbreak as they were unable

to imagine the magnitude of this outbreak. The first few days or weeks had hardly any impact on the daily routine of the people so people do not show psychological response towards the issue.

Second Stage is Surprise Stage: - The second stage of this epidemic begins when the news of the disease spread and the cases started increasing double fold. During this stage, people are caught by a surprise, denial and shock and start freaking out. People around started realizing that the diseases is spreading faster than they expected and Psychological responses start becoming visible. This begins the misbalance of equilibrium and people are not able to understand what is happening around them. Most of them are using our common psychological defense mechanism which says them deep inside “it’s not going to happen to me” or “My immunity is strong enough” or “It’s not deadly for young people” as in the case of Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is common.

Third Stage is Panic Stage: - The stage begins with the real panic and anxiety and in this stage, people start collecting as many information’s as much they can and start sharing the information’s with people via whatever mean of social media they are using. In this stage, people are extremely nervous and start taking enough precautionary measure like wearing masks, cleaning hands etc. In addition, the fear griped most of the people, they start storing huge amount of food items in their homes, and that necessary stuff which they felt is important for their and their family’s survival. During this phase people felt that storing the huge piles of food items is the best defense, which can save them by diseases contamination. Recently we all had observed many such behaviors around the world, which was full of anxiety and without any rational logics for example a fight for toilet papers in the grocery stores. Due to the high anxiety and curiosity, people are exploring social media, newspapers, online media etc. whatever they can access and continuously follow the information’s about the spread without even checking the authenticity and spread the information’s without checking its credibility. One of the common mistakes people do at this stage is spreading the fake news or rumors, which is much deadlier than virus or diseases itself. This behavior can have two-way impact on others. For example, they get aware of such diseases and take precaution or this news only can increase fear among them, or these people will start ignoring whatever news they will receive. Because of information overload, which is much more dangerous, they will start ignoring every information no matter how important or urgent it is. In addition to this, most of people are spreading the fear by spreading such news and information’s to other people. The fear and Anxiety created by such information overload may be more harmful for most of the individuals as such anxiety and stress can affect the person’s immune system and may make him more prone to the incoming diseases. Such bombardment of information’s can act as a repeated trigger for stress, which may push an individual further deep in stress and anxiety.

Normally most of the people assimilate and accommodate in this stage and brings equilibrium in their daily lives but it may not be the case with every one of us. Due to individual differences and our differences in responding to the stressful situation, we either cope up or move ahead or we end up by effecting our mental health. At this stage maybe, it is the onset of mental health issues whether we had contained the virus or not. If a person is having early mental health, history this stage may bring such issues back with more hard times.

Fourth Stage of Equilibrium: - The stage begins with the compromising with the situation and accepting the situation but with continuous measures and precautions towards the diseases. People are fearful and had exhausted all their options and most of their defense mechanism will not work anymore and are looking for solutions either completely turning towards the medical science or towards the religion. During this epidemic Coronavirus, disease (COVID-19) at the peak spread people accepted the helplessness and started assimilating, and accommodating in every aspect, which ensure their survival. During this stage the people struggle with the mental health and at this stage most of the respondents share their psychological issues such as fear, anxiety, depression and many who is having early psychological issues history feel the reoccurrence of those issues with higher intensity and need Professional help.

Discussion and Conclusion

The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) epidemic caught everyone with surprise and its sudden appearance in the global scenario caught everyone with shock. It had created a panic all across the world and had affected every aspect of our lives and for millions maybe it will change their lives forever. It caught most of people by surprise and so was the response of people around the world towards it. All around the world, it takes time to assimilate and accommodate whatever epidemic it is and the fact about this epidemic caught each of us with a big shock which is generating continuous fear and mental issues among the masses and even the question of entire humanities survival. People are struggling with it all across the globe not only physically but mentally also. Those who are not even infected directly by virus but all around the world the news and information's are killing them every second by tremendous fear and stress. Early health epidemic might was much worse than this virus outbreaks but due to lack of communication that might had not taken such a mental toil as it had taken in current technological world. During this interview-based research, it had been found that people follow a similar pattern while encountering the spread of this virus and mostly similar responses patters was followed. In order to counter the imbalance in their environment they responded haphazardly and with time, those random responses narrowed down and the equilibrium was achieved.

This pattern of stages of responses behaviors among people if analyzed properly can give us understanding of human behavior in such kind of epidemic and help us to overcome many mental challenges faced by the people. For example in the first stage when people took it for granted and was unable to understand its gravity unless and until it caught them with surprise once it spread in their own country. Here the important question is why humans ignored it or not took it as seriously as it must be unless and until their own; self of survival was in doubt.

In second stage when it caught people in surprise and even in denial, people reacted haphazardly as they was not expecting it nor they was prepared for it. From the first stage, it is important for the government to provide correct information and prepare the people in advance by spreading the correct information and letting people to understand the gravity and magnitude of impact. As in the initial stage, people do not take it seriously, early studies also agree with that government, and concerned authorities need to provide accurate health information during the epidemic to reduce the impact of rumors (Rubin, 2020).

Third important point to mention is that acceptance of the spread of such epidemic and accepting the mental health and talking about it in a proper way. For most of people, they faced such situations first time in their lives and it can affect our mental health either way. Therefore, people need to understand and talk about their mental health and Government and concerned authorities must not only focus on its physical implications but also its impact on mental health. Such kind of situation is a new experience for every one of us we do not know how worse can be on our mental health and that is why that too must be considered seriously. We humans do adapt and assimilate but the question is how fast and quickly we can do it and how much external and proper support we must need.

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