



Psychosocial and mental health aspects in the face of social distance due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Aspectos psicossociais e de saúde mental frente ao distanciamento social acarretado pela pandemia da COVID-19

Aspectos psicossociales y de salud mental en vista de la distancia social causada por la pandemia de COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: SARS-CoV-2 causes the disease known as COVID-19. One of the most effective ways to control the pandemic is social distancing, which directly affects people's psychosocial and mental health conditions. Thus, the objective of this article was to discuss measures on how to deal with these aspects in the face of social distancing. **Outline:** Reflection article based on scientific literature, as well as documents from the Brazilian Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization, conducted with a time filter of the last 5 years. **Results:** It is common, with social isolation, that people harbor negative feelings and emotions. Talking, reading, and watching are ways of improving the situation. Children spend more time at home, needing measures that can better subsidize these moments; the elderly become more anxious, angry, stressed, agitated, requiring more dialogue; and health professionals are more susceptible to these demands due to being at the frontline of facing the pandemic. **Implications:** Reinforce the importance of distancing and give support to the subjects. Therefore, a remote call center can be created, as well as training professionals to better deal with this personal situation and with other individuals.

DESCRIPTORS

Mental Health; Social Isolation; Pandemics; Coronavirus.

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INTRODUCTION

Prior to 2019, two highly pathogenic and animal-derived coronavirus species (SARS and MERS) were responsible for outbreaks of severe acute respiratory syndromes. In December 2019, there was the first case of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). Most coronavirus infections in humans are caused by low pathogenic species, ranging from asymptomatic infection, mild upper respiratory tract disease, to severe with respiratory failure and/or death.¹⁻²

Regarding the disease by the Novel Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19), the clinic is not fully described, as well as aspects related to the pattern of lethality, mortality, infectivity, and transmissibility.³ Furthermore, it should be noted that there are still no specific drugs available to treat the pathology, for example a vaccine, and currently the treatment is supportive and nonspecific.¹

During the influenza pandemic from 1918 to 1919, in various cities in the United States of America, diverse measures were implemented to combat this situation, among them, quarantine at home for infected people and social distancing.⁴⁻⁵ In the 2009 influenza pandemic, it was found that the domestic quarantine was viable and achieved good acceptance in Australia.⁶

The new COVID-19 pandemic is the greatest public health emergency faced by the international community in decades.⁷ In addition to concerns related to physical health, the disease also brings concerns related to psychological suffering that the general population and health professionals may experience.⁷⁻⁸

Thus, associated with this, studies indicate that, in pandemic situations, it is common for individuals to feel more worried and stressed. Countless people can be directly or indirectly affected and have common reactions, such as: fear of falling ill and dying, loss of sleep, paralyzing fear of the future, about income; moreover, anxiety and

depression can be more worrying. Aside from that, there is also the fact that one feels vulnerable while protecting the people one loves and the fear of losing them due to the virus, as well as the fact that one remains separated from the people one loves.⁹⁻¹⁰

In this perspective, the question is: how to deal with the psychosocial aspects caused by the pandemic of COVID-19? The present study is justified by the influence on the mental health of the subjects that the pandemic situation can cause, requiring from professionals' actions not only to contain the transmission, or the physical aspects of the disease, but also to bring a comprehensive approach that involves mental health of the subjects. Therefore, the aim of this article was to discuss measures on how to deal with psychosocial and mental health aspects in view of the social distancing caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

METHOD

This is a reflection article based on the scientific literature available in libraries (Virtual Health Library and Scielo), as well as documents from the Brazilian Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization. This study was conducted with time filter of the last 5 years.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

GENERAL POPULATION AND ADULTS

In the current pandemic situation of COVID-19, the change in routine, physical distancing, economic, social and political consequences related to a new scenario are factors that can increase or prolong people's emotional discomfort. So, solving these current challenges may not be an easy job for everyone. The literature still understands that it is common the presence of negative feelings and emotions in people, such as fear, sadness, anger, and loneliness, in addition to anxiety and stress.¹¹

In this perspective, the texts point out that it is necessary to seek alternatives to cope with this situation, some of which can be listed, such as the practice of physical activities (for example stretching, dancing), as well as cognitive, relaxation exercises (for example, relaxation, meditation) and reading books, magazines, and newspapers.¹²

Associated with this, a large amount of information is exposed by various media. For this reason, it is important to reduce the time spent viewing images that cause fear, reducing the time to hear rumors related to the search for information about the pandemic, and it is suggested to search in reliable sources (networks or official bulletins), but trying to reduce that time (1-2 times a day).¹¹⁻¹²

Authors postulate that loneliness is associated with decreased quality of sleep and psychiatric diseases, such as depression and anxiety. In addition, there are associations between loneliness and unhealthy lifestyles, such as smoking, alcohol consumption, physical inactivity, and unhealthy diet, as well as with hypertension, metabolic syndrome, and cardiovascular disease.¹³⁻¹⁴

In this perspective, some texts point out other reasons that contribute to this confrontation and improvement of this quality of life, such as, for example, talking with people considered reliable.¹²⁻¹⁵ In addition, it is necessary to emphasize the reduction and/or responsible use of alcohol, tobacco, and/or other drugs used to face these sensations. On top of that, it should be noted that it may be necessary to search for professionals who can better act on these issues, such as psychologists, specialist nurses in mental health, and social workers. Furthermore, it is understandable that the negative effects in terms of well-being and physical, psychological and social health, bring the need for this development of interventions that reduce the impacts of this social distancing/loneliness.¹²⁻¹⁶

CHILDREN

People's lives and their relationship with society have important impacts on the development of daily activities when distancing measures are taken. Apart from that, this decrease and/or restriction of social relationship in physical form can consequently affect the mental and physical health of these people, especially children, for example, children stop going to school, compromising their studies; and also have feelings more intensely, such as more anxiety, loss of sleep, stress, fear.¹⁷⁻¹⁸

With regard to children, there is an importance in encouraging a more open, frank and supportive conversation with them, since it is one of the best ways to deal with the moment. In addition, some authors bring that children have their particularities when expressing their emotions, and in this way sometimes, engaging in a proactive activity such as playing and drawing are ways of facilitating this process. Some authors postulate that helping to find positive ways to express disturbing feelings, such as anger, fear, and sadness, contribute to this. Notwithstanding this, another aspect that stands out is the importance of filtering information that is exposed, and that it is also extremely important to provide guidance to these children on preventive measures.¹¹⁻¹²

THE ELDERLY

As for this group, since they are among the groups most vulnerable to COVID-19, and which are proven to have more comorbidities and greater cardiovascular risk, a closer look should be taken. The literature also states that the elderly, especially those in isolation and with some decline in mental and/or physical aspects, may be more scared, apprehensive, stressed, anxious, withdrawn during the pandemic.¹⁹

Some notes were observed, among them the ways of coping with this situation, in which the importance of avoiding visits was highlighted, since it is important to avoid physical contact, as people with mild symptoms can infect these elderly people.

Despite this, it is important to note that isolation does not require severing relationships, thus, it is emphasized that the best way to maintain these relationships is through the landline and/or cell phone, so it is important to encourage family or friends to call them, as well as if possible, teach how to use these devices.^{12,19}

Furthermore, it is necessary to provide information about what is happening in an easy way, that is, in a clear and common language and from reliable sources so that stopping behaviors that may make the situation worse, and as postulated in the literature, attitudes such as the storage of ineffective medicinal herbs, as a way of trying to use as a medicine, or some other purpose, without scientific proof.¹¹⁻¹²

WOMEN

In the midst of a pandemic, social risks come to the fore, and when reporting social distancing, authors note that it is possible to identify risks to the physical and psychological integrity of women, caused by domestic violence and overload of household chores. Among these axes, it is possible to find a vulnerable group: women living in peripheral areas or slums.²⁰

During the distancing, family interaction increased, promoting social problems or friction, and thus, the likelihood of violence, whether physical, verbal or social, and it is also associated with sadness, pain, and psychological torture, feelings caused by individuals close to the victim, who has affective bonds with the aggressor.²¹ This is framed as domestic violence, in which aggressive behavior frequently predominates, and it is practiced by any individual who resides with the victim, who is usually the woman.²²

Given the situation, it is clear that Law 11,340, known as “Maria da Penha Law”, has not yet ceased cases of violence against women. The World Health Organization (WHO), in the current pandemic situation, perceived an increase in the rates of

domestic violence and instructed countries to pay attention to the cause, as female mortality may increase as a result.²³

HEALTH WORKERS

With regard to workers in general, some authors understand that the flow of travel to their work locations can be interrupted, thus needing, in many cases, to change their customs to carry out work activities remotely, or in some cases, lose their jobs and/or their income. Moreover, another important aspect highlighted by them is associated with health workers at the frontline in the fight against COVID-19, thus needing a special look at outlining alternatives so that they can better deal with the situations they are exposed to.¹⁷⁻¹⁸

Thus, it was observed that some alternatives contribute to this confrontation, to which the care for basic needs and the use of useful strategies by them are highlighted, such as ensuring home rest as well as rest during work or between shifts. Another vital aspect is the need to eat foods according to their needs, and that they are healthy and can also be associated with the practice of physical activity.¹¹

The literature also postulates that erroneous ways of dealing with the situation should be avoided, such as the use of tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs, and inappropriate foods. These conditions will lead to worsening physical and mental well-being. Some challenging situations can become more difficult than the pandemic, for example suffering exclusion by society, as well as the family due to the stigma of COVID-19. In addition, if possible, it is important that these health workers maintain contact with family and friends through social networks; thus, it is a form of prevention for those involved since they are more exposed to the virus.^{12,19}

Some texts point out that care with psychosocial aspects is as important as physical health. Managers can be great allies since they receive direct and updated guidance. Always remember to confirm the information and observe

the guidelines of the Ministry of Health since insecurity can compromise your mental health, paying attention to it is essential. As for communication with people, it needs to be simple, avoiding noises that can cause repetition and excessive messages, as well as accepting emotional support when offered and vice versa, are closely linked to strategies to improve coping with existing demands.¹¹⁻¹²

As a limitation of the present study, the availability of articles in the area and the constant changes of information regarding the disease are pointed out. The article contributes to scientific production in the area, which is still scarce nationwide, and allows health professionals to think about actions to improve the mental health of subjects during the pandemic period due to COVID-19.

CONCLUSION

The objectives proposed by the present work were achieved when a discussion was presented

around measures on how to deal with psychosocial and mental health aspects in view of the social distancing caused by the pandemic of COVID-19. In this context, the elderly, children, women, and health professionals are the main affected people in relation to mental health.

As a result, the study points to the need to reinforce the importance of distancing/quarantine, but in a way that guarantees support to the psychosocial aspects of the subjects. In this way, a remote call center can be created to meet this demand with regard to those involved and what they have, for example concerns, fears, anxiety.

In addition, measures can be taken to improve mental health during this period, such as physical activity, reading, and talking, as well as reducing the number of fake news spread.

Nevertheless, it is of utmost importance that professionals are trained to deal with these personal aspects, as well as helping others to deal with this situation.

RESUMO

Introdução: O vírus SARS-CoV-2 causa a doença conhecida como COVID-19. Uma das maneiras mais eficazes de controlar a pandemia é o distanciamento social, que afeta diretamente as condições psicossociais e de saúde mental das pessoas. Objetiva-se assim, neste artigo, discutir medidas de como lidar com os esses aspectos frente a esse distanciamento social. **Delineamento:** Artigo de reflexão baseado na literatura científica, bem como em documentos do Ministério da Saúde e da Organização Mundial da Saúde, conduzida com filtro de tempo dos últimos 5 anos. **Resultados:** É comum, com o isolamento social, que as pessoas nutram sentimentos e emoções negativas. Conversar, ler e assistir são formas de melhoramento da situação. As crianças passam mais tempo em casa, necessitando de medidas que possam subsidiar melhor esses momentos; idosos ficam mais ansiosos, zangados, estressados, agitados, sendo necessário mais diálogo; e, os profissionais de saúde estão mais susceptíveis a essas demandas devido a estarem na linha de frente ao enfrentamento da pandemia. **Implicações:** Reforçar a importância do distanciamento e dar suporte aos sujeitos. Logo, pode ser criada uma central de atendimento remoto, bem como treinar os profissionais para lidarem melhor com essa situação pessoal e dos demais indivíduos.

DESCRITORES

Saúde Mental; Isolamento Social; Pandemias; Coronavirus.

RESUMEN

Introducción: El virus SARS-CoV-2 causa la enfermedad conocida como COVID-19. Una de las formas más efectivas para controlar la pandemia es el desapego social, que afecta directamente las condiciones psicossociales y la salud mental de las personas. El objetivo es así, en este artículo, es discutir medidas sobre cómo abordar estos aspectos frente a esta distancia social. **Delineación:** Artículo de reflexión basado en literatura científica, así como documentos del Ministerio de Salud y la Organización Mundial de la Salud, realizado con un filtro de tiempo de los últimos 5 años. **Resultados:** Es común, con aislamiento social, que las personas alberguen sentimientos y emociones negativas. Hablar, leer y mirar son formas de mejorar la situación. Los niños pasan más tiempo en casa y necesitan medidas que puedan subsidiar mejor estos momentos; los ancianos están más ansiosos, enojados, estresados, agitados, y requieren más diálogo; y, los profesionales de la salud son más susceptibles a estas demandas porque están a la vanguardia de enfrentar la pandemia. **Implicaciones:** Reforzar la importancia de la distancia y dar apoyo a los sujetos. Por lo tanto, se puede crear un centro de llamadas remoto, así como capacitar a profesionales para enfrentar mejor esta situación personal y la de otras personas.

DESCRIPTORES

Salud Mental; Aislamiento Social; Pandemias; Coronavirus.

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COLLABORATIONS

MMB and LSL: Participate in all stages of the article. JMCR and IVO: Participate in data analysis and interpretation and in writing the article. RJMF: Participate in critical review and in the final version to be published. All the authors agree and take responsibility for the content of this manuscript version to be published.

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