

REVIEW ARTICLE

COVID-19 IMPACT: NEW TENDENCIES AND TRENDS IN MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

The aim: To provide an analysis of contemporary investigations in the area of Mental Health Care for the individual \ population; to define the main trends, tendencies, key concepts of these investigations during \ after Covid -19 pandemic and established restrictions.

Materials and methods: A literary review (163 research publications totally) of relevant articles was performed (a scoping review method) based on the followings criteria: publication year (2020–2021), publication source (only PubMed and Open Access), mental health issues in regards of individual \ population. We used “mental health,” “covid19 mental health,” “impact of covid 19 on mental health,” and “covid 19 mental health impact” keywords for searching related research papers in the Pubmed database. Additionally, the clinical case of social restrictions’ impact on a patient’ mental health is described.

Conclusions: The main trends of modern research are determined by: the search for more modern scientific terms and categories (E – Mental Health, digital Mental Health, Tele-Mental Health, etc.); study of risks and benefits of widespread use of virtual and information technologies in the field of Mental Health Care; diagnosis and treatment of new mental health disorders; reassessment of traditional values, active search for new meanings in the field of interpersonal and intergroup relationships; development of health-responsive economy and health-responsive society

KEY WORDS: mental health; COVID-19 mental health impact; restrictions; Mental Health research; health-responsive economy; health-responsive society

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INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic affected not only the physical health of the population/individual. Significant changes have occurred in intergroup relations, social and political life (changes in the usual interpersonal/social/political constructions of interaction). The relevant questions are: “How long will the pandemic last and the restrictions imposed?”, “What will the world be like after the pandemic?”

The answers to these questions are crucial to forecasting and developing strategies for the further development of global society, large national societies, and individual communities. Also, an important component for these forecasts is undoubtedly the mental health and well-being of the population/individual. After all, the mental health of the population/individual is traditionally seen as an integrated indicator of the population/individual’s experience of physical and emotional well-being and perception/reflection of various aspects of social life (WHO) [1]. Analysis of current research on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health of individuals/populations, highlighting the main criteria for this impact and the factors that determine it, identifying the latest challenges, etc., is essential information for policymaking in the field of mental health. After all, the results of scientific research are quickly integrated into the qualitative basis for the development of practical recommendations in various areas of society.

THE AIM

The purpose and objective of this study are to clarify the specifics of reflection by modern scientists on mental health issues by analyzing current research in the field of mental health of different populations and highlighting the main directions, trends, key research concepts after the Covid-19 pandemic.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

STUDY SELECTION

Research papers were found by searching the PubMed database (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>) using the keywords “mental health.” In addition, we used related “covid19 mental health,” “impact of covid 19 on mental health,” and “covid 19 mental health impact” keywords to ensure the inclusion of all relevant studies fitting our criteria (publication year (2020–2021), publication source (only PubMed and Open Access), mental health issues).

STUDY “SAMPLE”

A total of 163 selected publications were analyzed based on our criteria.

STUDY METHOD

We used a scoping review research method to provide an overview of the available research evidence. This method allows us to define particular topics and key concepts in current Mental Health research. In the review part of this paper, we cited possible related articles. From the relevant literature, we excluded reports of highly specific studies of mental health issues (e.g., keywords: “covid 19 mental health healthcare”, “covid 19 mental health students”, “covid 19 mental health children”, “covid 19 mental health health-care workers”, “covid 19 and mental health and healthcare workers”, “covid 19 mental health medical”, “covid 19 mental health college” and “covid 19 mental health nurses” etc.).

CASE STUDY

Additionally, the clinical case of social restrictions' impact on a patient' mental health is described.

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of scientific articles on mental health issues, published for the period 2020 – 2021, showed that the subject of the authors' research revolves around four phenomena:

- 1) the effect of social media on the human psyche [2; 3]
- 2) the interdependent: Mental Health of individual/population and social development [4-6]
- 3) the effect of social restrictions on inter- and intra- groups relations (especially for women, LGBT communities, children etc) [7-9]
- 4) the effect of factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic on the human psyche [10 – 22].

At the same time, the interest in studying the impact of social media on human mental health is due to observations of a sharp increase in the incidence of depression, suicide among young people during the active spread of social networks [2] and understanding of mental health as associated with the use of information and communication technologies [3]. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed have changed the territorial context of Mental Health research. Instead of the different geographical and socio-cultural dimensions and “territories” in which the mental life of the modern individual unfolds in different parts of the world, the “territory” is just a small group: family, friends, and so forth. Despite the processes of segmentation of society, there is a trend of globalization in cyberspace. In this regard, along with the term “mental health,” the authors use the concepts: electronic mental health (E – Mental Health), mobile mental health, tele-mental health, and digital mental health [3,4].

At the same time, the impact of the pandemic on mental health is being studied by researchers both in a generalized form and in relation to specific social groups and cohorts of the population. The authors single out the following changes that occur in the human psyche under the influence of various factors related to the

pandemic (isolation, lifestyle changes, etc.): symptoms corresponding to “moderate” or “severe” generalized anxiety disorder, recourse to psychoactive substances [5; 8; 10], stress, fear [11; 17], experiencing violence [11], exacerbation of pre-existing mental disorders [13], increased anxiety combined with the development of obesity [13], depression [14], panic, paranoia, obsessive behavior, PTSD [19], decreased life satisfaction [22], etc. In addition, the level of mental health of an individual during a pandemic may be adversely affected by loss [23]. The following vulnerable categories attract the attention of scientists: adolescents [10], students [11], the elderly [13], and nurses [17].

Among the factors that have a positive effect on maintaining the mental health of the individual, the researchers identify the organization of social support, a positive style of coping with stress, time for rest; level of education, psychological flexibility of reactions [15; 16].

The article “The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on mental health of Nurses” (authors: Chidiebere Okechukwu E, Tibaldi L, La Torre G.) [16] rightly suggests the emergence of a new category of diagnosis of specific mental disorders caused by the pandemic COVID- 19 and the imposed restrictions.

Many authors put forward the idea of studying the potential of the positive impact of social networks on the individual in order to use it to strengthen mental health. In particular, Nesi J. [2] recommends its use for screening and interventions in mental health. Drissi N, Ouhbi S, Janati Idrissi MA, Fernandez-Luque L, Ghogho M. [3] note that the use of information and communication technologies can help manage, treat and diagnose mental health problems and help overcome existing barriers in providing mental health care.

Dubey S, Biswas P, Ghosh R, Chatterjee S, Dubey MJ, Chatterjee S, Lahiri D, Lavie CJ. [18] draw attention to the fact that information from the media and social networks should be carefully monitored, as it has a significant impact on the mental health of the individual/population.

Some researchers note the need to study the long-term effects of physical distancing [10; 22], the need to study special social groups of subjects that may need psychological help: for example, parents who have to combine work, homework, and control of school activities and tasks of children [10].

We consider it appropriate to note the availability of articles of a consultative nature – on resources with information on mental health issues [6].

Despite the large number of articles in which mental health is considered to be dependent on pandemic conditions, there have recently been articles justifying the potential economic benefits of investing in mental health policies and programs [4]. The authors note that the widespread dissemination of the ideas of Mental Health Awareness and support for such initiatives at the state level will help maintain the mental health of individuals/populations and have a positive impact on the development of their socio-economic well-being.

CASE

A 30-year-old woman has been experiencing increased agitation, uncertainty, difficulty sleeping, and symptoms of anxiety in recent weeks. “I don’t know what to do,” “I don’t know how to convince my son,” she said during the intake session.

Ms. K is 30 years old, in the process of divorce, and raising a 4-year-old son. Before lockdown, she had an orderly life with a stable job and her child attending school. However, as a result of the Covid-19 lockdown, she is forced to work from home online. Similarly, her son’s JK class was transferred to online learning for the same reason.

According to the client, the child has difficulties concentrating and is experiencing increased fatigue since he must be in front of the laptop screen for 6 hours. In addition, the child often refuses to learn because “he is not interested, and I don’t know how to motivate him,” the client says.

At the same time, the client needs to work, and she does not have the opportunity to be in the lessons with her son. The client notes that concerning her son, she allows him to skip classes. The client’s ex-spouse takes an active part in raising their child and, not even though there is still no court decision, participates in the child’s life as equal custody. The client is afraid that the child, having skipped school, will fall behind in his studies. At the same time, she is worried that prolonged exposure in front of the computer screen will affect the psycho-emotional development of the child.

Furthermore, the client worries that her social life will be destroyed due to the lockdown and her transition to working from home. She is afraid that her employer will not be interested in bringing employees back to the office after the lockdown ends.

The client noted that she has difficulty falling asleep, she is not satisfied with her sleep, does not get enough sleep, and her sleep quality is poor. She has a T-score of 60.4, which is interpreted as Moderate according to the LEVEL 2 — Sleep Disturbance — Adult (PROMIS — Sleep Disturbance — Short Form). In addition, the client stated that she is unable to relax, is unsteady, nervous, and fears losing control. According to the Beck Anxiety Inventory, she has a score of 22, which is interpreted as moderate.

As a result of the completed cognitive behaviour course, the client has improved sleep and stabilization of their emotional state. According to LEVEL 2 — Sleep Disturbance — Adult (PROMIS — Sleep Disturbance — Short Form), she has a T-score, which is interpreted as none to slight. According to Beck Anxiety Inventory, she has a score of 14 which is interpreted as low anxiety.

CONCLUSIONS

- Modern scientists have established tendencies to «virtualize» the mental life of both individuals and social groups. The scientific thesaurus introduces such categories as electronic mental health (E-Mental Health), mobile mental health, telemental health, and digital mental health, etc.

- Traditional territorial and socio-cultural contexts are gradually being replaced by virtual space and virtual “scenes” on which the mental life of modern humanity unfolds. In this regard, the possibilities, potential risks, and benefits of widespread use of information and communication technologies in the field of Mental Health Care are studied.
- Modern scholars note the intensification of the process of reassessment of traditional values, the active search for new meanings in the field of interpersonal and intergroup relationships. The number of in-depth studies of the peculiarities of relationships in small groups (family, friends, etc.) is increasing in order to develop effective mechanisms to ensure the long-term experience of mental well-being by individuals/populations.
- The clinical and psychophysiological effects of COVID-19 on the Mental Health of individuals/populations are still poorly understood. The duration, course, and consequences of the COVID-19 viral disease are still unpredictable. Many current studies describe and analyze clinical cases and discuss the prospects for developing a new category of diagnosis and treatment of specific mental disorders caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed.
- Modern research on individual mental health is based on the idea of the side and long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and suggests that they can be mitigated by adequate and timely intervention. Emphasis is placed on the urgent need for Mental Health Awareness activities and programs. It is noted that psychosocial measures to mitigate the side effects of the pandemic need to be actively implemented, especially in working with the most vulnerable.
- Emphasis is placed on the need to develop appropriate state and social policies to build a health-responsive economy and a health-responsive society at the national and international levels.

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Conflict of interest:

The Authors declare no conflict of interest

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