

Communication

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Communication

COVID-19 Lockdown on Mental Health of Bangladeshi Citizens

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Abstract: The initial emergence of COVID-19 was observed in China on November 17, 2019, marking the likely starting point of the outbreak. It is estimated that a minimum of 266 individuals were infected with COVID-19 in China during 2019. Subsequently, the virus gradually disseminated across the globe. As of now, the global count of COVID-19 infections stands at 704,753,890, with a total of 7,010,681 fatalities. This pandemic has not only posed a threat to public healthcare but has also resulted in psychological complications. This article focuses on the approaches taken by the government of Bangladesh to address such mental health issues.

Keywords: Covid-19; Mental health; Lockdown; Anxiety; Future.

Introduction:

To date, no specific medication has been developed to effectively treat COVID-19. Consequently, various countries, including Bangladesh, have been implementing measures such as lockdowns and vaccination programs in an attempt to control the spread of this disease. The honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh is actively engaged in efforts to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 and aims to contain its impact. The first case of the coronavirus was reported in Bangladesh on March 6, 2020. Subsequently, localized lockdowns were enforced in affected areas, followed by nationwide holidays and a comprehensive lockdown from March 26, 2020. These restrictions were gradually extended until May 30, 2020. The number of confirmed cases rose from 218 on April 6, 2020, to 13,134 on May 8, 2020. As of May 27, 2020, there have been 38,292 confirmed cases, 544 deaths, and a total of 266,509 tests conducted throughout this period. Furthermore, the three districts heavily affected by the virus are Dhaka, with 14,384 cases, Narayanganj with 1,916 cases, and Chittagong with 1,910 cases. The infection rate among males accounts for 71% of the total, while females constitute 29%. Among the age groups, individuals between 21 to 30 years old have an infection rate of 27.7%, followed by 31 to 40-year-olds with a rate of 27.2%, and 41 to 50-year-olds with a rate of 17%. The infection rate among those aged 51 to 60 years is 11%, and among individuals aged 11 to 20 years, it is 7%. During the lockdown situation, people had been advised to refrain from leaving their homes unless absolutely necessary, maintain a safe distance from relatives, friends, and neighbors, practice regular hand hygiene by washing hands for at least 20 seconds, take a bath upon returning home from outside, and wash clothes after soaking them in hot water for 30 minutes. In addition to the implemented lockdown, there were numerous other restrictions in place to combat COVID-19. These measures not only disrupted our daily lives but also had a significant impact on our mental well-being. Currently, many of us were experiencing various mental health challenges to varying degrees. Some of the key issues include a. mental anxiety, b. feelings of loneliness and fear, c. lack of motivation, d. financial hardships, and e. worries about the future [1-6].

Actions Taken by Government:

Anxiety and fear:



The prevalence of misinformation surrounding COVID-19 on social media and various online platforms was significantly contributing to increased levels of mental anxiety among people. Many individuals struggled to differentiate between accurate and false information, causing confusion and distress. To address this issue and provide reliable information about COVID-19, the "Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control, and Research" has presented comprehensive details on their website (www.iedcr.gov.bd). Additionally, the website "www.corona.gov.bd" offers valuable information related to COVID-19. These websites serve as reliable sources for understanding symptoms of COVID-19, appropriate actions to take if infected, and other related details. They also provide up-to-date statistics, including daily infection and recovery rates, total infection and mortality numbers, district-wise infection data, and the total number of tests conducted. By accessing accurate information through these websites, people are better informed, minimizing their fear and anxiety surrounding COVID-19.

Moreover, to prevent the spread of COVID-19, informational leaflets were being distributed across different districts of the country. Public representatives were providing various guidelines, and the government was disseminating public awareness videos through the media. Additionally, in case of emergencies, multiple hotline numbers have been provided for people to seek assistance. These hotline numbers include 10655, +8801944333222, +8801937000011, +8801937110011, +8801927711784, and +8801927711785.

Individuals who suspect they may be infected with COVID-19 or those who are already infected but harbor concerns about receiving treatment in hospitals are experiencing significant mental anxiety. Consequently, the government has implemented additional measures to address these concerns. Many testing centers have been established across various districts of Bangladesh, conducting around 20,000 tests daily for COVID-19. Furthermore, lots of hospitals have been designated to provide treatment for COVID-19 patients. Additionally, the Ministry of Health has issued instructions for all hospitals in Bangladesh to provide treatment for individuals diagnosed with COVID-19.

Loneliness:

As a result of the imposed lockdown, human interaction, and communication had significantly decreased, leading to heightened feelings of loneliness. This sense of isolation can have various detrimental effects on mental health. Recognizing the importance of addressing mental health concerns, the National Institute of Mental Health launched a toll-free helpline number, 16273, to provide free mental health services. This helpline is available round-the-clock, allowing individuals to reach out to mental health specialists whenever they need support or someone to talk to.

Financial problems:

- The lockdown measures had resulted in a significant impact on people's ability to work, particularly affecting those with low incomes and individuals who are needy or impoverished. Recognizing the severity of this financial crisis, the government of Bangladesh has implemented various measures to address and alleviate these challenges. Some of the actions undertaken include:
 - Distribution of free relief in each district to provide essential assistance [7].
 - Provision of one-time cash assistance amounting to BDT 1,250 crore, benefiting approximately 20 million people with a lump sum amount of BDT 2,500 to 5 million impoverished families [8].
 - Selling rice at a subsidized price of BDT 10 per kilogram for all individuals [9].
 - Announcing financial aid packages for various organizations and proposing an expansion of social security programs. To address the financial difficulties faced by garment workers and owners, an incentive of BDT 5,000 crore has been allocated [10].
 - The Prime Minister has introduced a new package worth BDT 72,750 crore in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. This package includes financial assistance of BDT 30,000 crore for affected industries, BDT 20,000 crore for the service sector, small cottage industries, and medium enterprises [11].

Thinking about the future:

Amidst the COVID-19 situation, a nationwide directive has been issued for all educational institutions to remain closed until June 15, 2020. This prolonged closure led to challenging times for students, causing concerns about their future. In response, the government implemented several initiatives to address this situation. Efforts are being made to facilitate educational activities through Parliament TV, enabling children to continue learning remotely. Private universities adopted online classes and examination methods, and the government is actively working to encourage participation from public universities in this initiative [12]. In addition, classes were continued online through the implementation of virtual classes in educational institutions. These measures aimed to ensure that students could pursue their education despite the physical closures of schools and colleges. By utilizing online platforms, students were able to participate in remote learning, access educational resources, and engage with their teachers and peers from the safety of their homes. The adoption of virtual classes provided an alternative means of delivering education during the challenging period of physical closures, allowing for continuity in learning and academic progress.

Conclusions:

In conclusion, the prolonged lockdowns, confinement, and the various challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic had significantly impacted people's mental well-being. The collective experiences of loneliness, economic struggles, and the disruption of daily life had taken a toll on individuals' minds. However, it was crucial to recognize that the government had undertaken numerous measures to combat the crisis and mitigate its effects. It was not solely the government's responsibility to overcome this unprecedented challenge; we also had to play our part and extend a helping hand to support their efforts. Together, through collective action and collaboration, we could overcome the hurdles posed by the pandemic. It was essential for us to stand united, offer support to one another, and work hand in hand with the government to navigate through those difficult times. By fostering a sense of community and empathy, we could contribute to the overall well-being of our society and emerge stronger from that crisis. Let us remember that victory in the battle against COVID-19 could only be achieved through our joint efforts.

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