

Mental Issue and Corona Pandemic (Women)

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Abstract

In India, as the cases of COVID-19 increase, the mental disorder cases also rise in number. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, people have become more stressful, but we should try to be mentally fit and healthy. Mental illness is a disorder that is more dangerous than physical illness. Men and women both are generally equally affected by this illness, but there are a few types of illnesses that are found more in women as compared to men. In the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation is more critical, there is lots of stress, frustration, fear of having the infection, and more concern for preventive measures to protect themselves and the family from this coronavirus. Stress, fear, anxiety, and social isolation act as trigger factors of mental illness or disorder. In this research paper, some common disorders are explained which are commonly occurring in this 2020 pandemic all over the world. Anxiety, depression, phobic disorder, eating disorder, and obsessive compulsive disorder cases are more elevated in this pandemic. Risk factors due to biological, environmental, and psychosocial factors are pointed out in this paper. Women are more prone to a mental disorder because it has been observed that they take things extremely seriously and keep thinking about them, due to which they are generally under stress. Negative thoughts, or surrounding stressful environment, and daily increase in COVID patients also contribute to increasing the mental illness easily and many researchers also believe that hormones are also a contributing factor for a mental disorder. The treatment is also explained in this article. It is commonly performed by psychiatric doctors. The treatment includes medication and therapy. The therapy consists of individual therapy, family therapy, group therapy, music therapy, etc. and is performed by the professionals.

Introduction

Mental health is a wide topic to discuss. It is a basic component of good health. Mental health refers to the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional well-being. When a person suffers from mental illness, their daily living activities, their physical health, and their relationship can get affected. Mental illness also refers to the people who can't adjust in their surrounding

environment, are not able to express their feelings, are not able to handle the situation, and are unable to take their own decisions.

During this COVID-19 pandemic, the possibility of mental illness problems is increasing faster than other illnesses (like physical illness). In women, the percentage of mental illness problems during this situation has increased more rapidly due to stressful situations, depressed environment, family abuse, intimate partner, and lastly the physical violence which are all common among women.

According to the World Health Organization, health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being and not merely the absence of any disease or infirmity.

In the recent years, the problem of mental health has contributed more numbers of disorders and disability. This increases the burden of the world because due to the pressure of family, increased workload, and a more stressful environment contribute to a new problem in the world. The main problem in this mental illness is that it can't easily be diagnosed because the symptoms vary with people. They develop mental health problems in varying ways (as we know, all individuals are unique and their ways to respond to any situation are also different). As we know the healthy people are those who are physically healthy (body organs are free of any disease), mentally healthy (mind is free of any type of tension and stress since a long time, and they handle and manage their problems), socially healthy (means the person easily accepts the society and adjusts in the situation of the society and is happily involve in social work), and last but not the least, spiritually healthy (person should believe in God and should also be afraid of doing anything which is wrong, and which would harm anybody's feelings, and should always believe in humanity).

Mental illness can equally affect both males and females irrespective of age (in childhood or adulthood or older period of life), gender, income, or ethnicity. For example, in childhood, a higher prevalence of aggressive and antisocial behavior is seen among boys. Among adolescent girls, depression and eating disorder are common, while among boys, anger, and tendency to engage in a high risk behavior can be easily seen. In adulthood, anxiety and depression are much higher in women, and substance use disorder is higher in men. In older age group, Alzheimer's disease and amnesia are very common.

Mental Illness/ Problem/ Disorder in Women

There are many types of mental illnesses. Some problems which are commonly present in women are anxiety and depression. During the pandemic, some other disorders that are common in women are schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, eating disorder, and obsessive compulsive disorder.

Some other mental disorders experienced by women when hormonal changes occur are perinatal depression, premenstrual dysphoric disorder, and perimenopause related depression.

Factors of Mental Illness

➤ Biological Factors

Anything physical stress causes an adverse effect on a person's mental health.

1. **Genetic factors**-The risk of a mental disorder increases when one has a close relative/family member with a mental disorder. In simple words, if a manic depression person has 20% penetrance (frequency of a gene to produce its effect in a specific group of people), it means the family members are at a 20% risk of developing the disorder. Monozygotic twins have a higher risk of developing Mental problems than normal siblings.
2. **Neurotransmitter**-Any sort of chemical imbalance in the body can cause a mental disorder. The common neurotransmitters are serotonin, dopamine, monoamine, norepinephrine, epinephrine (adrenalin), acetylcholine, GABA, glutamate, etc., for example, low level of serotonin causes depression, serotonin is also responsible for mental disorders like major depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, phobia etc.
3. **Trauma and Brain defect**-As we know that the brain is a vital organ of the human body. It regulates all the body functions. When it gets injured or damaged, it causes mental problems like schizophrenia, dementia, and perceptual disorder etc. When head trauma occurs (open or close-in both conditions), the symptoms may persist overtime or disappear. It has been seen that typically longer the length of unconsciousness, worse is the prognosis of individual. Deficit abstract reasoning ability, judgement, and memory are the symptoms of close head injury and visual-spatial disorder is an example of open head injury.

➤ Environmental Factors

1. **Poverty**-Mental illness and poverty are directly correlated. According to the World Health Organization, the occurrence of mental illness is about twice among poor people than among the rich. Mental disorders like schizophrenia have a risk factor that is eight times higher among lower socio-economic people than among higher socio-economic people. Due to poverty, depression is more common, which if left untreated, leads to the occurrence of suicidal thoughts, and if ongoing, may even lead to suicide attempts by the affected people. In the COVID-19 pandemic, poverty increases more rapidly, and due to poverty, women suffer and develop depression.
2. **Abuse**-Abuse means intentionally being rude or bad, or causing harm to someone by which they get injured. The common types of abuse are physical abuse, domestic violence, sexual abuse, etc. In a pandemic situation, the cases of physical abuse and

domestic violence in women increase. According to a report by the National Commission for Women, approximately 86% of women experience violence and never seek help, and 77% of women do not even mention the incidence to anyone. There were 1477 domestic violence complaints recorded during the COVID-19 lockdown, which is more than the previous 10 years of record.

3. **Neglect**-Neglect is malpractice or maltreatment of the parents to their children (mainly in childhood), and it is common in women and girl children in rural areas. The family members do not appreciate any work done by them and always behave like they are useless. They intentionally harm the women's and girl's inner feelings which causes low self-esteem, and deteriorated physical and emotional health of the women and girls.

In the COVID-19 pandemic, poverty, abuse, and neglect cases are increasing because men are frustrated, stressed, and angry due to the outside environment and they release their frustration and anger on their female family members especially wife.

Explanation of Common Mental Health Problem

Depression-Depression is a mental health problem that is spread all over the world. Depression is a feeling of dejection and despondency. Depression is a condition that comes under mood disorder. It is a state of low mood, low self-esteem, and loss of interest. It causes a feeling of sadness, and leads to a variety of emotional and physical problems, and decreases productivity at work places.

The common symptoms of mild to severe depression are –

- Feeling sadness
- Low mood
- Decreased activity
- Lack of interest in work
- Feeling of hopelessness, worthlessness
- Guilt feeling
- Difficulty in thinking, concentration, and in decision making
- Loss of appetite
- Loss of energy or increase in fatigue
- Thoughts of death or suicide

The lifetime risk of depression is about 18-12% in men and 20-26% in women. Depression is twice as frequent in women than in men. It can occur at any age but it is common in women in the late 20s and early 30s of their life. Women play roles like mother, wife, friend, sister, caregiver and so on. Some experts believe that due to hormonal change, the chance of depression is high in women. It can affect their ability to work, sleep, and can cause loss of appetite and a negative impact on their social and personal relationships.

Types of Depression mainly found in Women

1. Persistent depressive disorder-In this type, the depression can extend for 2 years or more.
2. Post-partum depression-It is a special form of depression that occurs after the birth of the baby. It is referred to as the baby blues. In this period, the mother feels extreme sadness, change in energy, sleep, and appetite. It is a very distressing and difficult period of life.
3. Premenstrual dysphoric disorder-It is a severe form of the premenstrual syndrome. In this disorder, highly emotional symptoms like anxiety, and irritability are seen before 7 to 10 days of onset of menstruation.

Risk Factors associated with women with depression

Some common risk factors which are mainly associated with women with depression are:

1. Family history of mood disorder
2. History of mood disorder in early reproductive age
3. Physical abuse, sexual abuse, and domestic violence (most common)
4. Loss of social support
5. Psychological and social stress (like loss of job, stressful relationship, divorce or separation etc.)

Anxiety-Anxiety is a normal phenomenon, in which apprehension or uneasiness arises out of an anticipation of danger. Anxiety disorders constitute an abnormal state characterized by a feeling of worry, or fear that is unreasonable, or fear of any specific object or situation. Excessive anxiety and worry from most of the days over a long period of time can also lead to panic disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, social anxiety disorder, separation anxiety disorder, and phobia related disorder (such as fear of flying, height, fear of dark places etc.)

There are many types of phobic anxiety disorders, for example, agoraphobia, acrophobia, social phobia, hematophobia, gamophobia, and claustrophobia. Women tend to be twice as likely to develop a phobia as compared to men.

Eating Disorder-Eating disorder is a psychological illness that is characterized by abnormal eating habits, and severe distress or concern about body weight and shape. Eating disturbance may include inadequate or excessive food eating which can damage the individual ultimately. It can affect a female at any stage of life, but it generally appears among teenage girls or young adult women. The women are almost 10 times more likely than men to be affected by an eating disorder. In this pandemic situation, women are more concerned about their weight because their schedule has changed. Before the pandemic, working women/housewife generally used to do jogging, walking, yoga, or exercise with their peer group. Due to the pandemic, they do not follow that healthy routine at home, which results in weight gain.

There are 2 main types of eating disorder:

1. **Anorexia Nervosa**-Women suffering from anorexia nervosa typically develop an obsessive fear of gaining weight, derived from being thin, refuse to maintain a healthy body weight, and have an unrealistic perception of body image. Many women with this disorder limit the quantity of food they consume and imagine or view themselves as being overweight even when they are underweight.

Causes-

- a. Genetic-Among females, siblings of patients have 6% to 10% chance and 1 to 2% in the general population.
- b. Disturbance in the hypothalamus function.
- c. Social factor-The higher prevalence of this disorder in female students and occupation groups like dancers, modelers, beauty contestants, mass media, etc.
- d. Individual psychological factors like negative body image, and poor self-esteem.

The common signs and symptoms of anorexia nervosa are –

- Obsession with calories and fat-containing foods and snacks.
- Bodyweight normal or below 15% from normal body weight.
- Fear of becoming obese even they are thin.
- Hormonal abnormality may also be present because the diet is not accurate.
- Reoccupation in body size distorted body image describes himself as fat.

Complications of the anorexia nervosa are malnutrition, dehydration, electrolyte imbalance due to long starvation, and the body of the affected person is susceptible to infection, infertility, brain damage, and also multiorgan failure.

2. **Bulimia Nervosa**-Bulimia nervosa is characterized by an episode of binge eating (a large amount of food) followed by a feeling of guilt, humiliation, depression, and self-condemnation. Bulimia nervosa is a serious and sometimes life-threatening condition affecting mainly young humans. The person with bulimia known as bulimics consume large amounts of food and try to rid themselves from calories they consume, by fasting or excessive vomiting, and using a laxative. As a result of this disorder excessive concern of their body weight and body image.

Causes-

- More common in 1st degree of biological relatives with bulimia.
- Altered level of serotonin in the brain.
- Low self-esteem
- Sexual abuse

The common signs and symptoms are –

- Persistent sore throat

- Heartburn
- Scarring on the back of hand and knuckles
- Tooth stain, discoloration, loss of dental enamels, and increased dental caries
- Sense of lack of control during eating
- Abnormal epigastric pain
- Feeling of guilt
- Frequent weight loss
- Withdrawal from friends, relatives
- Low tolerance towards frustration
- Distorted body image

If this disorder is not treated and it is present for a long time, it can cause more serious illnesses like gastric rupture due to more eating, tooth problems, gum infection, chronic and irregular bowel movement, constipation from laxative use, and increase in risk of suicide because of guilt or withdrawal from the surrounding (friends and relatives).

Treatment for Mental Illness

There are mainly options for treatment but the symptoms of the disease appear in a varying way in different people because all individuals are different. They are unique and hence the symptoms also appear in a unique way.

1. Pharmacological Treatment/Medical treatment-This is mainly done by a psychiatric doctor after the diagnosis of the patient. Common medicines used for the treatment of mental disorder are:

- Antidepressants (drugs which are used to reduce depression), example- Selective* Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor (SSRI), Fluoxetine, Citalopram, Sertraline, etc
- Tricyclic Antidepressant (TCA), for example-Amitriptyline, Imipramine, Clomipramine, Doxepin.
- Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitor-Phenelzine
- Neuroleptic Drugs
- Appetite Stimulants
- Benzodiazepines, Lorazepam, Diazepam

These are the common drugs that are used in the treatment of depression, anxiety, eating disorder, and many more illnesses.

2. Physical Therapy- In physical therapy, electroconvulsive therapy is performed. In this therapy, a grand mal seizure is artificially induced with the help of an electric current. It is also called the shock therapy. In severe depression with suicidal risk, schizophrenia, and eating disorder, ECT is recommended.

- 3. Psychotherapy-**Many types of therapy are used, but even therapy cannot cure a condition, it can help people develop a healthy coping skill.
- a) **Individual Therapy-**This therapy is conducted on one on one basis, that is the therapist treats one patient at a time. Individual therapy brings about changes in a person's thinking, attitude, feeling, and also in behavior. People learn to handle difficult situations, making decisions for themselves. It also helps in improving self-esteem. In stress-related disorder, sexual disorder, anxiety, anger, and food and eating issues, marital disharmony is a common factor. During individual therapy, first the therapist focuses on gathering information about the patient. It can take a few sessions to understand the situation. When the therapist has gathered all the necessary information about the patient, then they start the therapy according to the problem, for example-if a person has low confidence then the therapist gives him small and easy tasks to solve and while doing them they motivate him, so they easily complete the task and after that the person gets some boost in their confidence. Giving tasks and motivation is a form of tool to improve confidence. The session duration is 45 min or 50 min, and the session can be held once or twice a week.
 - b) **Cognitive Behaviour Therapy-**It is also known as Cognitive therapy. It can help the people to be aware of inaccurate or negative thinking/situation, make a clear and more effective way of thinking and behavior. The aim of this cognition therapy is to stop intrusive thinking through distraction and teach a technique to solve problems. Some steps are-define the problem more clearly and in an easy way, divide the problem into many small parts for better management, try to find the solution for each small problem, determine the merits and demerits of each solution, at last select the most appropriate solution of the problem which is more advantageous for that instant. Mental health disorders that may improve with cognition behavior therapy include depression, phobia, sleep disorder, eating disorder, bipolar disorder, sexual disorder, substance abuse disorder, etc.
 - c) **Family and Marital therapy-**It is a branch of psychiatry therapy that sees an individual's psychiatric symptoms as inseparably related to the family in which they live. Families may be referred for treatment by private physicians, or agencies such as the school system, welfare board, and parole officers. Some families are also referred for therapy for emergency psychiatric services after a visit caused by a crisis in the family, such as drug overdose, a situational crisis like a sudden death of family members, and maturational crisis. This therapy is indicated whenever there is a relational problem with a family or marital or sibling conflict, which can commonly occur in almost all types of psychiatric problems. There are many types of family therapy, some of them are individual family therapy, conjoint family therapy, couple therapy, multiple family group therapy, and network therapy. The main component of this therapy is to teach problem solving skills, and communication skills.
 - d) **Group Therapy-**Group therapy is a treatment in which carefully selected people with the same problems meet and are guided by the therapist, but in the group selection some

points should always be remembered –do not include antisocial patients, severely depressed, or active suicidal attempt patients. In group therapy, mainly 8 to 10 persons can participate and the session is conducted once in a week for 45 minutes to 1 hour. The aim of this therapy to provide positive reinforcement, improve interpersonal relationships, help in socialization, and transference situations used to develop insight into their problem. It also helps in the rehabilitation of mental illness; patients can communicate the problem to each other and can try to solve them by making an appropriate decision. Group therapy is mainly used in depression, eating disorder, phobic anxiety disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, schizophrenia, etc.

Conclusion

It is very important to discuss the topic of mental illness because it is fatal for life when it's untreated. In this pandemic crisis situation, we see news like a person attempted suicide or hanged himself on a fan because their mental strength was weak. They could not fight a crisis and could not attempt to survive, so it is essential to make our mind powerful enough to fight a difficult situation and to try to win in that situation. We should know that if a person is physically ill but their mental health is good and strong, they can easily get well and return to their normal and healthy life. The mental health of women is not considered as weak but they easily get stressed, worry about situation, and develop anxiety. If this condition becomes worse and if they are not treated, then the disease called anxiety disorder develops. Anxiety is commonly associated with phobia. Women play a vital role in our life as a mother, sister, wife, daughter, care taker, and so on many other roles. Due to the corona pandemic, the situation has become more stressful and the cases of depression, anxiety, phobic disorder, eating disorder have increased because the risk factor and causes for the increase like-poverty, neglect, physical and sexual abuse have increased. In some mental disorder, hormonal changes can also cause different types of depression in women, so people should also understand this factor which would help them to deal with the situation.

The main aim of this article is to reduce the risk o the different kinds of mental health disorders and to try to cope up with this pandemic situation. To become completely healthy, mental health is important and people should try to strengthen their mental capacity.

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