

Mental health consequences of the pandemic: An overlooked challenge

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Dear Editor,

I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on the profound impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on mental health care and psychiatric practice, as highlighted in several articles published in *Psychiatria Danubina*. These studies not only underscore the mental health consequences of the pandemic but also present important insights into how the psychiatric community has adapted to meet new challenges.

Bojdani et al. (2020) provided a timely analysis of how the pandemic exacerbated existing mental health disorders, while simultaneously creating new psychiatric conditions due to widespread anxiety, isolation, and the stress of illness. The unprecedented nature of the pandemic revealed the limitations of mental health systems in managing such a large-scale crisis. The authors emphasized that more flexible, resilient psychiatric services are needed to better respond to future global health crises.

In their study, Anjum et al. (2020) brought attention to the global rise in mental health issues during the pandemic, including heightened rates of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Their work highlighted the disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations, including those with pre-existing mental health conditions, socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, and those affected by the virus directly. The authors call for a comprehensive, global mental health response that includes widespread public health campaigns, community-based mental health support, and improved access to mental health services.

Waris Nawaz et al. (2020) discussed the heavy toll the pandemic has had on frontline healthcare workers, noting that self-care strategies became essential for maintaining their mental well-being. The authors argue that addressing healthcare workers' mental health is critical not only for their personal well-being but also for maintaining a functional and efficient healthcare system during crises. This study's findings should inform future policy changes aimed at supporting healthcare workers through psychological services, peer support programs, and stress management training.

Jakovljevic (2021) highlighted the importance of empathy, coherence, and global ethics in psychiatric care during the

pandemic. His work emphasizes that a patient-centered, holistic approach is essential in dealing with large-scale traumatic events like the pandemic. He argues that psychiatry's role is not only to treat the individual patient but also to contribute to global mental health strategies that address societal stress, fear, and uncertainty.

The shift to telepsychiatry, as explored by Sinha et al. (2024), provided a lifeline for many patients during lockdowns. While telepsychiatry proved effective in maintaining access to care, the authors point out that it cannot fully replace in-person consultations, particularly for more complex diagnoses and treatment plans. The integration of both telepsychiatry and traditional in-person care may be the way forward, ensuring that mental health services remain accessible in the face of future disruptions.

Srinivasan et al. (2023) examined the correlations between anxiety symptoms, sleep, and memory during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study highlights the need for balanced, accurate reporting to prevent unnecessary anxiety and panic. These results emphasize the importance of incorporating mental health assessments and addressing an effective treatment for anxiety.

Finally, Srinivasan et al. (2021) emphasized the psychological toll on morningness-eveningness personality among adult college students during the pandemic. The findings of their study showed that this population experienced elevated levels of stress, hopelessness, and burnout. These findings highlight the eveningness personality have high risk of developing mental illness, thus it's important to avoid serious complications in later age.

Taken together, these articles provide a comprehensive view of how the COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped psychiatric care and mental health strategies worldwide. As the global community continues to recover from the pandemic, it is crucial that we incorporate these lessons into long-term policies to protect both patients and healthcare providers. A proactive, flexible, and empathetic approach to mental health care is needed to build resilience and improve outcomes in the face of future public health emergencies.

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A spiritual view to the fate of people who died in earthquakes

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In the last 40 years, there has been a 6-fold increase in the number of earthquakes worldwide (Kušević et al., 2021). Worldwide, more than one million earthquakes occur each year, or an average of two a minute. Case fatality rates are high in major earthquakes (Pan American Health Organization, 2024). A massive earthquake struck Southern Türkiye and Syria with a magnitude of Mw 7.7 on 6 February 2023 causing more than fifty thousand of deaths. Most people in many cultures around the world wonder about the afterlife of their family members, relatives, and friends who died in the earthquakes. Moreover, losing of a family member in an earthquake is one of the important predictors of mental health problems. Herein, we discuss the fate of people who died in earthquakes to draw attention to the life after death of those people.

After the earthquake, more than one out of four individuals reported severe symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, one out of three reported severe symptoms of depression, and

one out of five reported severe symptoms of anxiety (Cenat et al., 2020). Following the earthquake, the level of exposure to the traumatic event (i.e., destruction of environment and home, witnessing death, sustaining injury, losing their job or a family member, etc.) is one of the most important predictor of posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety symptoms, for children, adolescents, and adults (Cenat et al., 2020).

In the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), the dead go to a specific place (e.g. Paradise or Hell) after death, as determined by Allah, based on their actions and beliefs during life. However, the fates of people who died in the earthquake are different. There are many hadiths that those who died in earthquake became martyrs and that martyrs will go to Paradise. The Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam) said "There are seven types of martyrdom apart from being killed in Allah's path. Those who die of plague, those who are drowned, those who die of pleurisy, those who die of an internal