

Psychological Impact in the Time of COVID-19 and its Implications for Sustainable Development

The year 2019 witnessed an outbreak caused by severe respiratory syndrome Coronavirus infection in the Wuhan city of China. As a result of the outbreak, which extended to nearly all parts of the world, social activities and almost all movements were restricted in most countries due to strict quarantine measures. The world experienced thousands of critically ill COVID-19 infected patients and saw many fatalities as a consequence. Not only did the frontline workers (who risk contracting the disease), but the general population too became vulnerable to the emotional and psychosocial impact of COVID-19 which was compounded by economic burden and financial losses.

Psychological problems include stress, anxiety, paranoia, depression, emotional disturbance, irritability and frustration emerging because of fear of infection (Coronaphobia). Moreover, pervasive community anxiety and mass hysteria associated with epidemics and media misinformation made things worse. In addition, psychological reactions to pandemic may vary across gender, age, ethnicity and socio-economic class. In the time of isolation during pandemic period, characterised by abnormally reduced social/ physical contact, minimal social support, separation from loved ones, loss of freedom, uncertainty, boredom, inhibition from routine activities have had detrimental effects on mental well-being.

The psychological impact of COVID-19 needs to be rectified and dealt with as a public health emergency to ease the mental health consequences which are so fundamentally debilitating and disabling billions across the world. A social threat of such magnitude enhances the risk of developing more complicated psychiatric conditions in the future which is a major challenge for sustainable development. Efforts to eradicate poverty, prevent conflicts, promote education cannot be realised if mental health is not prioritised. Promotion of preventive strategies, resilience, minimising risk factors and social support are, thus, rational responses to address mental health in these testing times.

As the World Health Organization warns that there may never be a time where the world is able to eliminate the coronavirus completely, and it will just become a part of our lives in the future. It is, thus, paramount that we think about how the world, especially those parts already facing numerous developmental challenges, will endure the Herculean task of dealing with the immediate effects of COVID-19 and its psychological impacts.

The aim of this panel will be to uncover the effects of coronavirus pandemic on mental health caused by lifestyle changes. Also, to understand how populations affected around the world can cope with such a major public health disaster of international concern with regards to developing resilience and psychosocial support strategies in different target groups during the outbreak in this time of the new normal.

Bibliography

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Panel Organiser

Ms Sana Malik, Research Associate, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: sanamalik@sdpi.org