

Telecounseling Hotlines to Counter Mental Health Issues over Covid -19 Pandemic.

“The Curious Paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change”.
Carl Rogers.

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ABSTRACT: The Purpose of this paper was to provide mental health counseling during the COVID-19 pandemic to the general population of the State of Tamil Nadu under The Tamil Nadu Dr. MGR Medical University. It also aimed at identifying the determinants issues and accordingly the counselors have to provide counseling. Fear, Worry and psychological stress are normal responses to perceived/ real threats, when the public is faced with uncertainty. Hence it is normal that people are experiencing fear in the context of the COVID-19^[1]. During this Lockdown, India has adopted a serious measures to reduce human interaction and encouraging social distancing which brought the majority of the Indian population lost their hope, unable to cope up with this pandemic situation, faced a lot of economic constraints, domestic violence, majority were suffering with psychiatric problems and caretakers do not know what should be do. Therefore the telephonic mental health counseling was introduced by the University to provide support to the needed population. This Counseling helps the affected population to find out the solution of the problems by themselves or provide information to bring down their stressful situation. The case studies have clearly shown the psychological issues faced by the individuals who are already in psychiatric treatment/ general population and also their caretakers. The intervention given by the counselor is a temporary resolution, but they need regular treatment/ counseling to bring down their symptoms. In the Conclusion, The government should train their own citizens on how to mitigate this stressful pandemic situation so that the people can understand and help the nation in order to bring down the epidemiology of the disease.

Key Words: General issues, Psychological issues, Case Studies, Counseling, Intervention

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I. INTRODUCTION:

The rapid spread of COVID -19 has become an international public health crisis. Within five months, the disease had affected more than 210 countries and its bringing devastating consequences in all aspects. Every country has adopted a serious measure to reduce human interaction which includes enforcing strict quarantines, control and prohibiting large-scale of private and public gatherings, shutdowns all public and private firms / company, stopped all private and public transportation, restricting time for buying groceries for the public needs, encouraging social distancing, imposing a curfew and even locking down entire cities. Vast majority of the people in India have lost their livelihood option and forced to live in poverty and expecting help from others of their single need, and also lost their hope as they will survive with their families or not. The lower economic groups have not other means to earn money. Hence, they were forced to live in poverty. Individuals with chronic medical health issues; mental health disorders were also facing a lot of difficulties in getting regular medicine for their betterment of health.

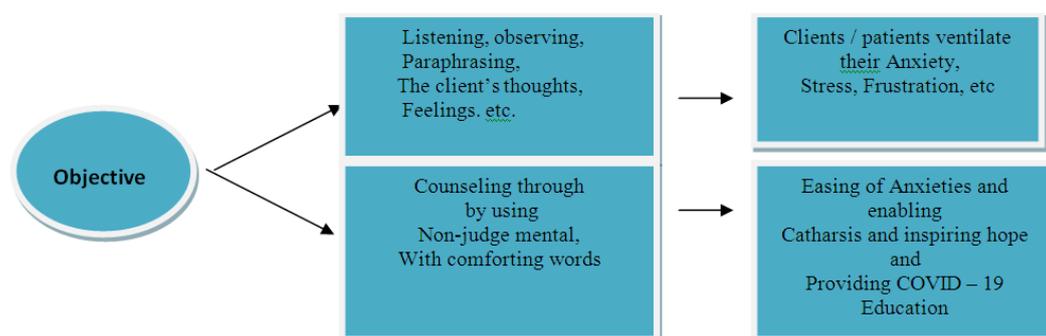
The Lock - downs around the world have also led to an increased loneliness, anxiety, depression, insomnia, harmful alcohol or drug use and self-harm or suicidal behavior (WHO2020). Stigma and Discrimination against persons who have tested Positive for COVID – 19 is another major source of distress for them, in addition to the already existing physical and mental health issues^[2]. A recent survey of the Indian Psychiatric society indicated a 20% increase in mental illness in the country since the corona virus outbreak. It is understandable that at times like this, people may be feeling afraid, worried and overwhelmed with the constancy changing alerts and media coverage regarding the spread of the virus.^[3] Psycho-social interventions are therefore significant to keep the people informed and help them in following mental health guidelines and strategies to look after themselves as well as others in the community^[4]. The caretakers of the such patients

were helpless and find hazards to cope up with this stress full situation, inability to provide good care and support to the patients, economic crisis, etc., To alleviate such problems and to keep the patients /clients mental health in an active and normalcy, they are in need of Mental Health Professional help to strengthen the clients / patients mental health. The potential impact of the virus in this pandemic situation and help the patients, societies and families deal with the potential threat on Physical and Mental health. Henceforth, the Psychological assistance tool 'Telephone' is widely used for the counseling services in the University in response to COVID – 19. The Tamil Nadu Dr. MGR Medical University, Dr. Sudha Seshayyan M.S Vice Chancellor has given a press meet that the University will be provided a Mental Health Counseling over the Telephone to the individuals who suffer with mental health issues due to COVID-19 Pandemic and the counseling session was started on April 16th with two Social Welfare Officers from this University. The information assimilates in this Chapter are fully based on the Counselors Personal experienced while in providing tele-counseling to the needy people during this pandemic.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE INTERVENTION:

The Main Objective of the Psycho-social Intervention is to help basic Psychological Support for people who have Mental Health issues due to covid - 19, and General Public through telephonic counseling by qualified and experienced counselors.

This Compassionate Dialogue entails specific components of psycho social intervention (PSI) such as (listening, Observing, Paraphrasing, non-judgmental attitude, giving reassurance and general information, motivating self help, solve problem by themselves, and other support strategies).



III. JOURNEY OF COUNSELORS:

We have received calls from the whole State of Tamil Nadu, in which many family's have had a problems are helping the patients to continue with the psychiatric treatment which already been admitted in hospitals and received treatment for major and minor disorders. Individuals' articulated their mysterious grief, anxiety and fear that they could meet unexplained loss due to this Pandemic situation^[5]. The care takers also registered that most of the times the patients' behavior has been changed into a violent behavior which could not able to control and unnecessary quarrels between the family members are at high. Few care takers have expressed that the patients were trying to do homicide, suicide, which forced them to get unwanted fear and tension and played a role on harsh and rude towards the patients to outbursts of their emotions. They have been referred to the nearby Community Health Centre to collect the anti-psychotic drugs.

The people who have themselves ventilate their emotions, frustration, negative feelings and general medical problems to the Counselors over the phone, were received psychosocial supportive counseling on how to lead a positive life in this pandemic situation. Educate them on COVID - 19 (Do's and Don'ts) to strengthen the positive aspects of the client's life. The clients/ people who are in the need of physical / material support were guided them to meet the local supporters to gain the support. The people who required medical help has been referred to the Primary health center for the immediate Medical care and support.

IV. TELE-COUNSELLING AND ITS REQUISITE:

It is an the individuals, or innovative methods refers to any type of Psycho social supportive services performed over telephone with professional therapist to bring down groups stress and anxiety, as many patients are currently experiencing increased levels of stress and anxiety and their psychotherapy and psychiatric treatment must continue to prevent further Decompensation and avoid potential consequences like suicide attempts and emergency department visits and psychiatric hospitalization^[6]. Motivated such individual's to meet psychiatric

profession if their symptoms are persisting. General Motivational Counseling is also offered by those who can find a solution by himself/herself to overcome his/her problems.

V. THE CHALLENGES CREATED BY THE COVID -19 PANDEMIC:

The Following lines are the challenges addressed by the individual's during the tele - counseling session. Such as

General Issues:

- Lack of knowledge about testing, and spread of COVID – 19.
- Concern about own health, Welfare of Family
- Anger is regarding the lockdown.
- Worries' concern for what the future holds.
- Anger is regarding to self-quarantine even though Negative in test reports.
- Loss of taste due to viral fever - can I infect corona virus.
- Cough, headache with mild fever, am I have a chance to infect by Coronavirus?
- Covid-19 is a communicable disease or its transmission by another mode.
- If I go outside of my home with protection (wearing mask) will I infect this virus?
- Suffer with respiratory problems with sputum, nasal block – will I have a chance to get infected?
- Confusion /fear in getting Job Opportunities.
- Become a chain smoker, which puts them into mental stress.
- Lockdown that creates food scarcity among Lower economic groups.
- Worries about their child's future.
- Developed unnecessary headache, tension and unwanted quarrels
Between couples that affects the mental health of their loved ones in the family
- This COVID – 19, interlocked the life style of people. When will the Lock Dow release?
And become a normal life?
- Migrant Workers were not able to go to their native place, no food, no safe drinking
Water, unable to receive help from the local government.
- Do not know the ways on how to live in the crisis situation.
- Sudden loss of employment, financial crisis, which lead them to live in a
- Discomfortable lives which could enhance the psychological impact on the working community, showed
symptoms of increased aggressiveness and post-traumatic stress.

Mental Health Issues

- Many have reported that they are unable to travel to mental health institutions for the regular treatment, because of the lack of transport options / no public or private transport, and also a temporary shortage of anti-psychotic drugs. Demanded the University could make necessary arrangements for getting medicine.
- Bank, Corporate finance people, chases them to pay the loan amount with interest on time, this will lead them additional burden and finally they developed negative thoughts of committing suicide.
- Received calls to help the clients to come out of the suicidal tendencies due to the lack of anti-depression Medication.
- Huge number of relapse cases, which required immediate attention (especially chronic and acute Patients).
- Self blame – COVID – 19
- Want to study the technique on how to handle the patients with Schizophrenia and Bipolar Disorders.
- Behavior modification.
- The Private hospital and Health Practionaire are not responding over phone, day by day the patients become violent
- Lonely senior couples felt isolation, financial crisis, sleep disturbances, no one provides care and food for us? Required help for old age home?
- I am on medication for 5 years. My wife is not preparing good food for me, it affects my health, because of this, definitely I will get corona. How could I escape this virus?
- The lower economic groups are literally crying stating that lack of sources to provide good care and support in this pandemic situation.
- Due to hallucination disorders, unmarried patients quit the Job and stay in the family – will marriage help him to come out of the problems?
- Husbands suspect his wife's behavior – domestic violence - what shall I do need guidance?

VI. CASE STUDIES:

The Following Case Studies have shown that on how the different factors are highly influenced the general population health. If an individual's lost his physical health, he/she may regain his/her health, but an individual's who had lost his /her mental balances, it is very difficult to get back into the normalcy level again. The following intervention given by the counselors is temporarily not a permanent solution of their problems. They are advised to meet the respective field specialist for further assistance. Come; let us journey with the case studies.

Case Situation: I

Mr. X aged 40 years, residing in Madurai. He was a daily wage worker and lives with his family. He has two children. Due to this lock down, he was not able to feed their family. His wife is a housewife. He almost spent all his savings. He does not have a Ration Card to buy the Ration things. Hence, he was not a qualified one to receive the support given by the Government of Tamil Nadu. He was crying, while he was talking with a counselor over the phone on narrating his problems. He said, he did not have any stock of food grains, groceries for the next day, no money to buy all essential things for our survival and neighbors' were also having the similar situation. No other means of earning income. The only possible way is to end up our life.

Intervention:

Listening, Unconditional positive regard and open questions are fewer skills^[7] used by the helper to entrust the clients to accept the pandemic situation. The Counselor assisted with the financial concerns by informing him to meet the District Collector to enable him to get the support to start a small business. Motivation has been done to start a bank account for small savings that could be helpful for him during the crisis situation. He was advised to be staying with others, when he felt depressed.

Case Situation: II

Mr. X aged 60 years, was residing at Chennai. He was a retired Government Servant, used his pension for his daily needs. He has two children. He was taken Psychiatric treatment over a period of 8year, and now become alright. After this lock down, he was starting to get panic of seeing a road without running much vehicle, worried about poor people, starving animals, care for sick people in the hospitals and the care of elderly people in this pandemic situation. He was not only worried about MTC Bus Workers but also developed fear about the futuristic India. He was also blamed china for this cause; He received a Commanding voice from heaven stating that all people will die due to this corona.

Intervention:

Counselor used empathy skills by adopting open ended questions in order to encourage him to undergo psychotherapy treatment for the mental health assessment. He was motivated to participate in the rituals and religious activities to get diversion of his mind. He was then advised to do regular exercise to keep his body active.

Case Situation III:

Mr. X aged 63, illiterate, residing in Chennai with his wife. He is a daily wage worker in a Barber Shop (Saloon) and earns little for their livelihood. He had 3 sons and all got married and live separately. No one extended their support, their aged parents. He is a known diabetic Type I patients and take insulin every day. Due to this lockdown, he was comprehended that he was experiencing the symptoms of fear, unrelated anxiety, Developed negative thoughts which disturbed his sleep. He raised a question that "AM I DIE" due to this pandemic situation?

Intervention:

By adopting active listening skills, the clients were motivated to do self – care practices that help him to reduce stress and improve health and well-being to prevent burnout and compassion fatigue which is crucial for his development.

Case Situation IV

Mrs X aged 29 years married woman and was residing at Triunelveli. She is working as a Staff nurse at a Private Hospital and earns good Salary. This lockdown created an unprecedented quarrel between her and mother in-law for cooking. One fine day this quarrel was turned to become an aggressive manner. Kavitha was

slapped, beaten and with charges of abusive words. Her mother in-law was quiet, looking this incidence. At the outburst of this incidence, she left the house with her child and stayed in her mother home.

Intervention:

Listening carefully, concentrating and asking right question are the few skills were used by counsel or two motivated her to have a comprehensive positive, healthy talk with their family members could bring down the family dispute.

Case Situation:v

Mr X aged 60, Married, was residing at Anna Nagar, Chennai, had 2 sons. The elder son got married and lives separately with a girl child. The second son whose age was 32, BE (CS) graduate was developed a psychiatric illness over a period of 5 years and was a regular treatment at a private clinic and now he was unable to spend huge money for treatment, which result relapsed. He further added that due to the illness he was continued changing his job. Due to the COVID-19 he lost the job and there are no worries about his future. He concluded that marriage is the best solution for his son to get back into a normal human being.

Intervention:

He was advised to practice Stress Management tips whenever he was experiencing stress. He was also referred him to take his son to SCARF, an NGO working for the psychiatric patients for regular treatment at minimum cost or otherwise all Government hospitals are having Psychiatric wing. He was advised not to arrange a marriage for his son which is offense according to the Mental Health Act

VII. CONCLUSION:

The general population, especially lower income generation groups were helpless to manage their basic needs. Many of the good hearted people were extended their support, but cannot meet their expectations. The individuals with mental health issues were facing lots of challenges in getting medical treatment and psychotic drugs. Most of them were not aware and panic to visit the PHC (primary health center) to collect drugs as an alternative arrangement done by the Government. The Government should enact a separate policy on disaster Management Programmed so that all students from school to college level will be trained and become a trainer to others. But the same time the Government should introduce the training program through community outreach workers in every zone and make sure that all citizens irrespective of gender have been benefited. This is the only possible way that the public should be aware, precautions and ready to face such crisis situation in the future. This will be very useful for the government to compete with other nation during this type of pandemic situation and become a role model for other nation in the world.

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