

# Post-COVID Stress Disorder: An Emerging Upshot of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Globally mental disorders pose a disproportionately raising threat due to the disability and mortality they cause. An introspective insight into the mortality data shows that suicide is the second most common cause of death in the young. As World Health Organization (WHO) very rightly envisaged that mental health plays an integral part in the overall health and well-being as constituted in its definition for health “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. Mental disorders are a major threat to public health and their management is visualized to be of utmost significance and challenge to the medical fraternity<sup>1</sup>. Currently, the sweep of the COVID-19 pandemic has created a significant psychological impact amongst the community. It has thrown a common man into grave distress, displeasure, and uncertainty in turn disrupting their normal living<sup>2</sup>. A recent survey on the Indian population showed a prevalence of 28.2% of people suffering from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) during the peak of the pandemic and probably can be called as Post-COVID Stress Disorder which shows the intensity and depth of the trauma people have underwent during the present day. Historically when looked at, the conditions that prevailed in previous pandemics and other traumatic situations as earthquakes and tsunami, etc., the major public health concern observed as an immediate aftermath of any traumatic event (TE) is PTSD<sup>3,4</sup>.

In the Mental Health Surveys conducted by WHO, the lifetime prevalence of PTSD is estimated to be 3.9% of the

population amongst multiple nations and 5.6% among those who are exposed to trauma. The overall prevalence of PTSD during natural disasters has been estimated to be 12% and 6.5% incidence due to a medical illness. Globally the prevalence of traumatic events found to be common. And in a country like India, the socio-economic and orthodox cultural aspects contribute to the increased risk of lifetime PTSD among the trauma exposed. 50% of the PTSD patients reported persistent symptoms and very minority of them are receiving quality mental health care, thus creating a challenge in the treatment of PTSD. Childhood trauma and other co-morbidities also pose major hurdles in the management of PTSD<sup>5,6,7</sup>. In a study conducted in the youth of China who are home-quarantined immediately after 1 month of the COVID-19 outbreak, 12.8% were diagnosed with PTSD<sup>8</sup>. An online survey of 3500 people in Spain showed a 15.8% prevalence of PTSD. Many other studies showed the same prevalence of PTSD during this pandemic which indicates the significance of PTSD emerging as a global public health emergency<sup>9</sup>. The various reasons for PTSD during COVID-19 times can be summarized as below:

1. Shock due to quarantine/isolation.
2. Mental trauma due to severe illness and hospitalization.
3. Morbid fear of contracting infection and new strains.
4. Visualizing the death of near and dear.
5. Financial burden due to loss of job/income.
6. Stress and shock due to continuous watching daily news updates.

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7. Domestic violence/Sexual abuse due to caught back at unknown places and staying at home.
8. Imaginary fear of adverse reactions from new vaccines.
9. Social isolation stigma from the community.
10. Morbid Fear about future.

## 1. Consequences

People are unaware of their illness and when left untreated even leads to grave consequences of provoking an individual to the verge of committing suicide or falling into extreme depression, bipolar mood disorders, etc. Some of them even if recognized, afraid to seek help from a mental health professional due to the stigma of the community towards getting labeled as a mental patient for life.

## 2. Strategic Planning

It is time to wake up and create awareness among the public regarding PTSD through: -

- i) Community-based health education programmes planned strategically to be implemented widely with the help of mass media campaigning, so that one doesn't hesitate to share their illness with health care professionals and get treated timely to get rid of this PTSD state.
- ii) Essential inclusion of psychological health care in the strategic framework of COVID-19 health care response<sup>10,11,12,13,14</sup>. If neglected, consequences may lead to a high prevalence of mental disorders and increased mental health care burden on our Indian economy soon.

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