

Psychotherapy in the Management of the Upcoming Storm of Post-COVID Spectrum of Psychological Disorders

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1. Introduction

India is a country with rich culture and heritage gifted from its ancestors. India is striving to improvise the public health care delivery framework of the country towards a very eco-friendly and easily accessible manner by integrating its culture and heritage with modern medical science. Many visionary steps are being taken by the Indian Government for its implementation through the integration of Indian systems of medicine (Ayush – Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, Sow-Rigpa, and Homoeopathy) with modern medical science (Allopathy). Although this integration started a decade ago, the actual practical implementation took a rapid swing during the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. Telehealth and virtual consultations have surged during the pandemic as physical consultations were risky^{1,2}. Even after such advancements are vogue yet some cultural myths and taboos ruled people disrupting crucial medical services as psychotherapy away from the usual health care delivery system. The Majority of the people of the country visualize psychotherapy as a taboo and psychological illness as an insulting label for any individual even today and it is a known fact that this pandemic has rooted many psychological illnesses which are to be addressed appropriately. Unlike western countries, even now people

of India never voluntarily reach out for a psychotherapist seeking medical help unless things outbreak and reach a considerably explosive state³.

The prevalence of mental disorders is evolving its wings at a rapid pace for a decade. If we see the prevalence data of 2010, mental, neurological and substance abuse disorders showed 10.4% of global Daily Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) and among them again mental disorders accounted for a large proportion of DALYs (56.7%)⁴. Overall, the lifetime prevalence of mental disorders accounts for 5.03%⁵. As per the 2015-16 National Mental Health Survey of India, the prevalence accounted for 13% (DALYs)⁶ and as per WHO 2019 report, the prevalence of mental disorders was estimated as 22.1%. Among them, the most common mental disorders identified are depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorders, bipolar disorders, and schizophrenia⁷. The sequential rise in mental disorders continued and furthermore became a major public health concern during the current COVID-19 pandemic. As per a few surveys conducted during the first and second waves of the pandemic, the incidence of mental disorders accounted for almost 28.2% and among them, post-traumatic stress disorder was found to be commonly diagnosed⁸⁻¹¹. According to a previous meta-analysis, 17-44% of critical illness survivors especially

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those who required hospitalization/ICU reported clinically significant PTSD symptoms^{12,13}.

2. Major Psychological Manifestations Post-COVID

A wide range of psychological manifestations posing as a major public health concern post-COVID are identified as below:

1. Anxiety disorders^{8,10,15}
2. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)^{9,11,12},
3. Obsessive compulsive disorders (OCD)¹⁴
4. Phobias¹⁵ and
5. Depression¹¹.

And addressing these immediate psychological states is very important as untreated may result in an array of more dangerous long-term psychological illnesses threatening human life.

3. Psychotherapeutic Interventions

Usually, psychotherapy is classified into five broad categories as:

1. Psychoanalysis and psychodynamic therapies.
2. Behavioural therapy.
3. Cognitive therapy.
4. Humanistic therapy.
5. Integrative or holistic therapy.

Among the above all, psychodynamic, cognitive, and behavioural therapies are the best and the most appropriately identified means of managing the above-mentioned post-COVID psychological states as suggested by previous studies¹⁶. These two therapies form the evidence-based recommendations for trauma-related psychological manifestations¹⁷. The psychological manifestations developing during or after a specific horrifying event indicate trauma to the mind. Though the presentation of the symptomatology may vary from person to person, the diagnosis indicates the post-traumatic state of mind most commonly considered as a post-traumatic stress disorder. This state may be visualized as a temporary condition but if not appropriately dealt

may land the individual into chronic states of mind like depression, OCD, and other chronic anxiety disorders later with its threatening impact on physical health even.

4. Futuristic Perspectives

The devastating COVID-19 pandemic has completely changed the scenario of health care at a rapid pace with upcoming challenges¹⁸. In order to serve the needs of the community in regards to their psychological manifestations during the pandemic, the field of psychiatry should raise to the level of advanced technology as video-conferencing and telemedicine for ensuring mental health to make easily accessible to the public^{19,20}. An integration of Tele-psychology and Tele-counselling should be a part of the routine health care services for easy access and must create awareness among people about mental disorders. It further would help to remove the myths and taboos about psychological disorders.

Previously many online-based psychological counselling was taken up through social networking platforms²¹ with positive outcomes. Keeping in view the present need for psychological counselling during the pandemic – authenticated psychological organizations with public-private collaborative partnerships should focus on a global vision by promoting specific training for psychologists and psychotherapists as developing the basic skills in managing the effects of a pandemic and emergency situations and also sensitizing patients to online therapeutic rapport providing standard operating procedures (SOPs)²².

Psychiatrists, psychologists from the public, private sectors, and non-governmental organizations should all associate with each other and start affiliating to community clubs, local societies, etc. to cater to the pandemic mitigation plans as envisaged by WHO and the Health and Family Welfare Ministry of our Government. Thus, the integration of psychotherapy in the essential health services of the pandemic would further strengthen the roots of mental health care delivery of our country and also nurtures an easy accessibility for every citizen enriching the future health care vision of India.²³

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