「Covid-19 Might Lead to A “Mental Disorder Pandemic”」

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On August 21, the head of the World Health Organization (WHO) said that he hopes the coronavirus pandemic will be over in under two years. Speaking in Geneva, Tedros said the Spanish flu of 1918 had taken two years to overcome and current advances in technology could enable the world to halt the Covid-19 epidemic in a shorter time. [1] However, studies have shown that mental problems are also on the rise, both between patients and non-patients. In other word, there might be another “mental disorder pandemic” awaiting to be solved. [2, 3]

According to a new study by Mario Mazza and colleagues in the journal Brain, Behavior, and Immunity, more than half of people who received hospital treatment for Covid-19 were found to be suffering from a psychiatric disorder a month later. The results, based on clinical interviews and self-assessment questionnaires, showed that out of 402 patients, 55% were found to have at least one psychiatric disorder, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in 28%, Depression in 31%, Anxiety in 42%, Insomnia in 40%, and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder in 20 %. [4] Actually, this finding is not surprising because there has been emerging research showing the virus has “direct effects on the central nervous system” and that if someone had preexisting psychiatric conditions, a new Covid-19 infection might be able to trigger a mood or anxiety episode. [5]

On the other, a study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that even among non-patients, anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts are skyrocketing amid the COVID-19 pandemic. [6] The study researchers analyzed information from more than 5,400 U.S. adults ages 18 and older who completed an online survey in late June. The percentage of Americans reporting symptoms of anxiety disorder increased about threefold and the percentage reporting symptoms of depressive disorder increased about fourfold, compared with levels seen in a survey conducted around the same period in 2019, the study found.

Overall, in the 2020 survey, about 41% of participants reported symptoms of at least one mental health condition; with 31% experiencing symptoms of anxiety or depression, 13% initiating or increasing use of substances (including alcohol or marijuana) to cope with stress tied to the pandemic, and nearly 11% reporting that they had seriously considered suicide in the past 30 days. The toll was particularly striking among adults ages 18 to 24. The new findings "highlight the broad impact of the pandemic and the need to prevent and treat these conditions," the authors wrote in their study. The study could not determine the reason for the rise in mental health conditions, but factors relating to the pandemic, such as social isolation, school and university closures, unemployment and other financial worries, as well as the threat of the disease itself, may play a role.

Why young adults seem particularly affected by the pandemic is not known. After all, studies have found that young people are less likely to experience serious illness from COVID-19 compared with old adults. One idea is that people's ability to accept uncertainty may be tied to their mental health response, according to The New York Times. "Now there are so many questions, especially for young people, about relative risk, duration of the pandemic and what their futures will look like," study lead author Mark Czeisler, a psychology researcher at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, told the Times. A longer life experienced may help older adults better tolerate these uncertain times. [7]

Taken together, obviously, Covid-19 has caused both physically and psychologically pandemic. The impact of mental illness may be more far-reaching and broader. People should consider, for example, increasing the use of resources for the diagnosis and treatment of mental health conditions and expanding the use of telemedicine to address the consequences of this epidemic on mental heal

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