Navigating COVID-related trauma during lockdown enforcement period

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

In the face of the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, this article thoroughly explores the intricate landscape of COVID-related trauma and psychological distress experienced during lockdown enforcement, analyzing its origins and repercussions. By delving into individuals’ experiences throughout the lockdown period, the study investigates how lockdown measures contributed to heightened trauma and psychological distress, particularly focusing on triggers such as illness fear, disrupted routines, and social isolation. The profound impact of isolation and restrictions on mental health and well-being is scrutinized, revealing disparities among various demographic groups in enduring COVID-related trauma. The article underscores adaptive coping mechanisms, like virtual connections and creative outlets, while emphasizing the crucial role of mental health support in mitigating trauma effects. It also elucidates the amplified trauma resulting from pandemic uncertainty and lockdowns, highlighting technology’s role in alleviating distress. Cultural factors are examined, and the article concludes by offering recommendations for policymakers to integrate mental health services into crisis response plans, foster community resilience, and enhance public education on coping strategies to promote overall well-being during crises.

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Introduction

Amidst an unparalleled global upheaval, the profound complexities of trauma stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic are delved into by this article, as individuals were thrust into uncharted realms of uncertainty by the outbreak, compelling them to grapple with fear, seclusion, and disrupted routines (Wu et al., 2021). The research aims to uncover the elements that lead to increased psychological distress. These factors encompass the persistent worry about illness, disruption of daily routines, and prolonged lack of social interaction (Xiong et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the study intends to delve into the unique encounters of various individuals, with the objective of revealing the complex components intertwined in the trauma associated with COVID. The impact of isolation and restrictions on mental health across different demographic groups were examined, revealing disparities that emphasize the critical need for tailored interventions (Bojdani et al., 2020). Instances of resilience and adaptive strategies emerge amidst the darkness, as virtual connections bridge physical gaps and creative outlets offer solace amid turmoil.

The significance of these mechanisms, coupled with essential mental health support, takes center stage as strategies to mitigate the lasting effects of trauma are probed in the article. However, against the backdrop of pandemic-induced uncertainty, the echoes of trauma resound more intensely, highlighting the heightened trauma resulting from the interplay between the unpredictable virus and ever-evolving lockdown measures (Ren et al., 2020). Within this context, the paradoxical role of technology becomes apparent, simultaneously amplifying distress and offering avenues for relief, viewed through the lens of cultural influences (Zhang et al., 2023; Garfin et al., 2020). Constructing a collective understanding of trauma that transcends individual narratives, this work unravels how cultural nuances intersect with psychological distress, paving the way for a more comprehensive approach to trauma alleviation. This

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article unravels the threads of COVID-related trauma and offers pragmatic suggestions for policymakers and crisis responders. It emphasizes the need to integrate mental health services into crisis response plans and highlights the importance of fostering community resilience and disseminating coping strategies through widespread public education (Mazza et al., 2020; Qiu et al., 2020). As the world navigates the enduring uncertainties of the post-pandemic era, it becomes clear that healing and recovery demand not only medical intervention but also a comprehensive grasp of the intricacies of trauma and the pathways towards its alleviation (Ali et al., 2022).

The key questions examined in this article include:

i. How did the lockdown enforcement period during the COVID-19 pandemic contribute to increased trauma and psychological distress?

ii. What were the most common sources of trauma experienced by individuals during the lockdown period?

iii. How did the isolation and restrictions of lockdowns affect people’s mental health and well-being?

iv. Were there any specific demographic groups that were disproportionately affected by COVID-related trauma during lockdowns?

v. What coping mechanisms or strategies did individuals employ to navigate trauma during the lockdown enforcement period?

vi. Did the availability of mental health resources and support play a significant role in mitigating the impact of COVID-related trauma?

vii. How did the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic and lockdowns contribute to feelings of trauma and distress?

viii. What role did technology and virtual communication play in helping people cope with trauma during lockdowns?

ix. Were there any cultural or societal factors that influenced how individuals experienced and coped with COVID-related trauma during lockdowns?

x. How can healthcare systems and policymakers better prepare to address mental health and trauma-related challenges during future lockdowns or similar crisis situations?

These questions lay the groundwork for exploring the trauma that emerged due to the implementation of lockdown measures throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The objective is to attain a more profound comprehension of impactful caregiving strategies and support for individuals should analogous situations arise in the future. Subsequent segments of the article (Sections 2 to 5) comprehensively scrutinize pivotal elements that substantially contributed to intensifying the trauma encountered by individuals during the period of enforcing COVID-19 lockdowns.

**Lockdown Impact: Unveiling Trauma’s Catalyst**

The sudden and widespread enforcement of lockdown measures in response to the global pandemic had profound repercussions on individuals’ lives, reshaping their daily routines and shifting their perceptions of what is normal. Overnight, bustling streets turned eerily quiet, offices remained deserted, and social gatherings became a distant memory. The abrupt interruption of the familiar patterns of life left many individuals struggling with a sense of disorientation and discomfort (Qiu et al., 2020).

**Isolation’s Toll on Social Bonds**

At the core of human existence lies an inherent need for social bonds. Nonetheless, the lockdowns imposed a physical separation that extended beyond the absence of social interaction alone. People were compelled to adjust to a reality where gestures like hugs, handshakes, and casual conversations held potential risks (Hwang et al., 2020). This prolonged isolation not only intensified existing feelings of solitude but also severed the crucial connections that tie individuals to their support systems. While Zoom calls and virtual gatherings provided some comfort, they often fell short in capturing the depth and richness of face-to-face interactions (Oukouomi Noutchie, 2019).

**Unraveling of Mental Well-being**

The shared fear and uncertainty that accompanied the pandemic added an additional layer of complexity to the lockdown experience. Confronted with a constant stream of distressing news and ever-changing guidelines, individuals grappled with elevated levels of anxiety (Xiong, 2020). The inability to foresee or control the trajectory of the virus fueled a sense of helplessness, further corroding mental health. Coping mechanisms that were once effective appeared inadequate in the face of this novel, all-encompassing threat.

**Erosion of Stability: Employment and Financial Stress**

The economic repercussions of the pandemic rippled through every segment of society. The lockdowns led to widespread job losses, furloughs, and reduced work hours, resulting in financial instability for innumerable individuals and families. The sudden termination of employment not only severed the financial lifeline but also eroded the sense of purpose and identity associated with one’s profession. This loss of stability compounded the trauma of lockdown, intensifying stress and anxiety levels (Blustein et al., 2020).
Revealing Trauma

As the lockdown endured, it became evident that for many, the cumulative impact of isolation, fear, and instability was giving rise to a form of collective trauma. This trauma extended beyond those directly affected by the virus, encompassing anyone whose lives were upended by the sudden upheaval. Indications of trauma, such as intrusive thoughts, nightmares, and heightened sensitivity to stressors, became progressively prevalent as individuals grappled with the gravity of their experiences (Li and Zhang, 2020).

Types of COVID-Related Trauma

The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic presented a multitude of difficulties that went beyond mere physical health worries. The extensive effects of the virus, combined with various measures taken to control its spread, gave rise to diverse forms of trauma that had an impact on individuals’ mental and emotional health. These categories of trauma linked to COVID-19 encompass a spectrum of experiences, each leaving its own distinct imprint on people’s lives (Mazza et al., 2020).

Trauma Associated with Health Anxiety

The continuous influx of information, often sensationalized, about the severity and potential consequences of the virus contributed to a phenomenon termed health anxiety trauma. This type of trauma originated from the prevailing fear of contracting the virus and the subsequent heightened vigilance concerning one’s health. Individuals found themselves persistently preoccupied with thoughts of illness, resulting in increased stress levels and a compromised sense of well-being (Liozidou et al., 2023). The apprehension not only about personal infection but also about the health of loved ones added complexity to this trauma. The psychological toll of health anxiety trauma was significant, frequently leading to heightened anxiety disorders and a decreased quality of life (Trnka and Lorencova, 2020).

Trauma of Mourning and Loss

The pandemic unleashed an overpowering wave of grief and loss on a global scale. The loss of dear ones due to the virus, combined with job losses, missed opportunities, and significant life events, gave rise to a distinct kind of trauma known as grief and loss trauma. The inability to hold traditional funerals or gather for emotional support exacerbated the grieving process, leaving numerous individuals with unresolved sorrow. The abrupt disruption of normalcy further amplified feelings of sadness and distress. Grief and loss trauma materialized as a multifaceted emotional experience, affecting mental health and necessitating novel approaches to navigate grief (Qiu et al., 2020).

Trauma from Social Isolation

Human beings are inherently social beings, reliant on connections and interactions for their emotional well-being. The sudden imposition of social distancing measures and lockdowns led to the emergence of trauma related to social isolation. Individuals underwent a profound sense of loneliness and isolation as face-to-face interactions were replaced by virtual communication. The absence of in-person connections resulted in elevated feelings of depression, anxiety, and a sensation of disconnection from the world (Ali and Kunugi, 2020; Marroquín et al., 2020). Social isolation trauma underscored the significance of human contact in maintaining mental balance and highlighted the challenges of adapting to a socially restricted lifestyle.

Financial and Economic Trauma

The economic aftermath of the pandemic resulted in a distinct form of trauma centered around financial instability and uncertainty. Job losses, reduced incomes, and economic downturn collectively contributed to financial and economic trauma. Individuals faced growing stress as they grappled with the fear of being unable to fulfill basic needs or secure their future financial stability (Simone et al., 2022). This trauma often triggered a cascade of mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and feelings of helplessness. The intertwining of financial concerns with emotional well-being highlighted the extensive impact of the pandemic beyond health considerations.

Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

Amidst the extraordinary difficulties stemming from the prolonged period of lockdown measures, people demonstrated remarkable resilience by adeptly devising coping mechanisms to navigate challenging circumstances (Fluharty et al., 2021).

Virtual Bonds: Fostering Social Connections in the Digital Sphere

The rise of virtual platforms played a crucial role in maintaining and nurturing social relationships during a time of physical separation. Video calls, online gatherings, and virtual communities emerged as indispensable lifelines, bridging the emotional gap created by isolation. These digital avenues became a means for engaging in meaningful conversations, sharing experiences, and finding comfort in the virtual presence of loved ones despite the physical distance.

Establishing Structure: Creating Stability Amidst Uncertainty

Acknowledging the disruption caused by the pandemic, individuals sought comfort in crafting and adhering to daily routines. By infusing their days with predictable patterns and activities, people cultivated a reassuring sense of normalcy. These routines,
encompassing work, exercise, leisure, and personal care, provided a stabilizing force that countered the chaos and unpredictability prevailing in the external environment.

**Mindfulness and Self-Care: Nurturing Inner Resilience**

In response to heightened stress and anxiety, many individuals embraced mindfulness practices and made self-care a priority, recognizing them as crucial tools for nurturing emotional resilience (Gadermann et al., 2021). Meditation, yoga, and engaging in personal hobbies emerged as powerful mechanisms for managing psychological distress. These practices not only offered refuge from turbulent external circumstances but also empowered individuals to deepen their understanding of their emotions and enhance their control over their mental well-being.

**Seeking Professional Assistance: Recognizing the Importance of Support**

Confronting the weight of the challenges they encountered, a substantial number of individuals acknowledged the need to seek professional help. The advent of telehealth services facilitated convenient access to mental health professionals from a distance. Through virtual therapy sessions and online counseling, individuals were able to navigate their trauma with expert guidance. This step not only contributed to destigmatizing mental health support but also underscored individuals’ resilience in actively seeking assistance to overcome adversity.

**Addressing the Long-Term Impact**

The enduring repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic have underscored the crucial roles that governments, institutions, and communities must play in effectively dealing with and mitigating the lasting consequences of the trauma stemming from COVID-19. Taking proactive steps to address these effects is of utmost importance to safeguard the well-being of both individuals and society (Levine, 2022). Presented below are the key strategies that can be put into action.

**Ensuring Accessible Mental Health Services**

Acknowledging the profound psychological impact of the pandemic, it is imperative for governments to give significant priority to establishing and facilitating accessible mental health services. These services should be easily attainable by individuals of all demographic backgrounds, with a focus on affordability, inclusiveness, and culturally sensitive approaches (Ren et al., 2020). By eliminating barriers to mental health care, governments can ensure that those in need can readily obtain the support they require. This not only fosters individual healing but also contributes to the resilience of society at large.

**Promoting Public Awareness Campaigns**

Raising public awareness regarding the enduring effects of trauma from COVID-19 is essential in reducing stigma and making discussions about mental health a societal norm. Well-crafted educational campaigns can disseminate information about the impact of trauma, indicators of distress, and the available resources for seeking assistance. These campaigns should employ various communication platforms, including social media, traditional media outlets, and community gatherings, to ensure broad reach. By encouraging open dialogue, societies can collectively strive to eliminate the stigma surrounding mental health challenges.

**Building Community Support Programs**

Communities play a vital role in providing a sense of belonging and aid. Establishing and nurturing community-based support programs can establish a network of help for individuals grappling with trauma resulting from COVID-19. These initiatives can manifest as support groups, counseling services, and peer-to-peer networks that offer a safe space for individuals to share their emotions and experiences (Stevenson et al., 2021). By fostering connections within neighborhoods and social circles, these programs contribute to a sense of unity and reciprocal support that facilitates the healing process.

**Prioritizing Employment and Financial Assistance**

The economic upheaval brought about by the pandemic has compounded the trauma experienced by many individuals. Governments and organizations should give precedence to creating stable employment opportunities and financial assistance mechanisms. This might encompass initiatives such as job retraining programs, unemployment benefits, and grants aimed at helping individuals regain their financial stability. By alleviating economic stressors, societies can mitigate the enduring impact of financial trauma and provide individuals with a renewed sense of stability and optimism for the future.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the exploration of COVID-related trauma during the lockdown enforcement period sheds light on the multifaceted impact of the pandemic on mental health. This article has unveiled the intricate interplay between lockdown measures and heightened psychological distress, brought about by factors such as illness fear, disrupted routines, and social isolation. The profound toll on individuals’ mental well-being has been undeniable, with disparities among different demographic groups underscoring the urgent need for targeted interventions.
Through the lens of adaptive coping mechanisms, including virtual connections and creative outlets, a glimmer of resilience amidst adversity emerges. The significance of mental health support cannot be overstated, as it stands as a pivotal resource in ameliorating the enduring effects of trauma. Moreover, the amalgamation of pandemic uncertainty and prolonged lockdowns has amplified the trauma experienced, with technology proving to be a double-edged sword – both exacerbating distress and offering avenues for relief.

Cultural considerations have shown that trauma is not universally experienced, and tailoring interventions to specific cultural contexts becomes imperative. As we navigate the aftermath of the pandemic, it is evident that integrating mental health services into crisis response plans, fostering community resilience, and disseminating knowledge about effective coping strategies are paramount steps for policymakers. These measures can serve to bolster overall well-being during crises and pave the way for a more resilient society.

In sum, the COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated the fragility of mental health under crisis conditions. The insights gleaned from this exploration provide a foundation upon which societies can build comprehensive and empathetic responses to future challenges. By prioritizing mental health support, embracing technology judiciously, and promoting inclusive strategies, we can aspire to emerge from crises with strengthened collective well-being and a greater capacity to navigate the complexities of trauma.

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