

NEWS AND VIEWS

COVID-19 and Mental Health

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The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as the state of perfect (complete) physical, mental and social well-being, and not just the absence of disease¹.

In epidemic and pandemic situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic that we are currently going through, all these spheres, physical, mental, and social, are affected, which threatens the lives of many people and significantly increases the number of sick and deceased people. The general fear of contagion worsens the existing situation and leads to a psychosocial impact that will, at some point, exceed the ability of health personnel to confront and manage the affected population. It is considered that the increase in the incidence of mental disorders and emotional manifestations is directly related to the magnitude of the epidemic and the level of vulnerability of the country affected. However, not all of the mental problems that occur can be classified as a mental health disorder, as many of these are normal reactions to an abnormal situation².

The tremendous psychological impact that the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic has is already being widely discussed, predicting another pandemic; a pandemic of mental disorders, which comes with a wave of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress that is going to affect society after this crisis. The confinement measures are taken to slow down the transmission of the coronavirus, the harsh situation for the sick and health personnel, as well as the loss of loved ones, is testing our mental health, individually and collectively, constituting a tremendous psychological challenge for health professionals and the population in general. This incredible impact is going to occur since our social, work, and daily life has been turned upside down, which in many cases has exposed us to situations of solitude and has changed our way of socializing, working and enjoying life. When this confinement

is over, we will not return to the normality we are used to³.

Common mental disorders (CMD), according to the WHO, comprise depressive and anxiety disorders and are a leading cause of disability worldwide. The WHO also estimates that more than 300 million people suffer from depression (4.4% of the world population), and almost the same number of people are affected by anxiety disorders; furthermore, there is also significant comorbidity between the both of them. Depressive disorders include major depressive disorder and dysthymia, while anxiety disorders include generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), panic disorder, phobias, social anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)^{4,5}.

In 2013, the Mental health action plan 2013-2020⁶, was published by the WHO, whose targets are mentioned in Table 1, which will be affected as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. (Table 1 and figure 1)

In a recent study, conducted in China, the country where the first cases of coronavirus appeared and from which the disease spread to the rest of the world, a nationwide survey was conducted to evaluate mental health. The findings reported a wide variety of psychological problems such as panic disorders, anxiety, and depression. In the case of anxiety and depression, the most affected groups were the female sex and the older population. Additionally, high levels of stress were reported in younger adults⁷. Another study carried out during the outbreak, but on a smaller scale, used a different survey to evaluate mental health in Spain. The results showed that the most affected groups were the youth and patients with chronic diseases, who's discomfort worsened when the confinement began⁸.

In our country, we still don't have official data on the psychological/psychiatric disturbances produced and

Global target 1.1	By 2020, 80% of nations will develop or updated their mental health policies/plans following international and regional human rights instruments.
Global target 1.2	By 2020, 50% of nations will develop or update their mental health legislation by international and regional human rights instruments
Global target 2	By 2020, they should have increased the coverage for services for severe mental disorders by 20% worldwide.
Global target 3.1	By 2020, 80% of nations will have at least two national multisectoral mental health promotion and prevention programs in operation.
Global target 3.2	By 2020, the nation's suicide rate will have been reduced by 10%.
Global target 4	By 2020, 80% of nations will calculate and report a basic set of mental health indicators, every 2 years systematically through their national health and social information system.

Table 1. Targets of the comprehensive mental health action plan 2013-2020 (taken from WHO. Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020, Geneva 2013.)

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Figura 1. Recommendations on how to cope with stress related to the pandemic by the World Health Organization

worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, all the social problems that are triggered by confinement, mobility restrictions, loss of jobs, business closures, among others, are factors that have affected all countries worldwide and will continue to do so for as long as this painful situation lasts.

In conclusion, we can then emphasize that maintaining adequate Mental Health is an essential aspect for the excellent individual and collective performance of all people, in their different activities. It remains for the state of each country, in addition to ensuring the biological well-being of the population, to create programs that will maintain the psychological and social well-being of inhabitants, so that the future doesn't come with more misfortunes.

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