

Traumatic Skepticism of COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The impact of the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) is not just limited to fatalities around the world in the present times. The psychosocial impact is catastrophic and will last much longer than ever anticipated. The stigma attached to the fear of an isolated and lonely death, the trauma of not being close to your loved ones, the societal economic derailment, the loss of campus experiences by freshmen at any level across the globe, and above all the mass hysteria of staying caged behind closed doors until all is well demands the restructuring of both the physical and psychological aspects of the society. Even the stress, and pressure on the medics and scientists across the globe is immense. The lurking fear of uncertainty, the pain of losing jobs, livelihood, businesses, and homes along with exposure to contradicting information has taken its toll on people's peace of mind. The masses are struggling to adapt to the new world in a hope that everything will go back to the usual 'normal' soon. Only long lasting and effective measures for physical and mental well-being, astute direction, and the planned steps can help heal the trauma of skeptical life ahead.

Keywords: catastrophic, economic derailment, fatalities, hysteria, interventions, psychosocial, skepticism

The Calamity

The initial human cases of the deadly virus were first reported by officials in Wuhan City, China, in December 2019. It sounded mysterious and despite the catastrophic emergence of the event, people were skeptical about making any kind of claims. Little did

they know this virus would be declared a pandemic by WHO and their lives will be affected in an unimaginable way. As of September 9, 2020, across the globe a total of 218,149 new cases, 27,486,960 confirmed cases and 894,983 deaths have been reported due to disastrous COVID-19 since the first outbreak (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). With no vaccination or cure in sight, the frustration first led to rebellion by masses and then to depression in various parts of the world. No other group has been more affected by the pandemic and uncertainties revolving around it, than children of all age groups. A recent report titled 'Lives Upended' by the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund has said that "an additional 2,400 children in South Asia could die every day as an indirect consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic" (United Nations Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2020, p. 13). The report adds that the pandemic is undoing decades of progress made on health, education and other areas. Besides children, the older generations that successfully survived world wars and economic depression suddenly seem to be feeling lost and lonely. The initial confusion and casual approach towards this deadly pandemic were soon replaced by panic due to limited to no communication and physical contact with their friends in the community. The response to handle the Coronavirus has been unique in different countries depending on the spread, resources, population, and social structure of the society. However, the social, emotional, mental, and financial factors seem to be overlapping everywhere as everyone is scrambling through unauthenticated sources of information. The void created by forced physical distance in all walks of life has compelled people to go to extremes by either completely shutting down or by rebelling, leading to shocking effects in both scenarios. This essay is a reflective work of a distraught society before and during this pandemic with an end not visible anywhere.

Domino Effect

According to a study conducted by Hawryluck et al. (2020), "quarantine can result in considerable psychological distress in the forms of PTSD and depressive symptoms. Public health officials, infectious diseases physicians, and psychiatrists and psychologists need to be made aware of this issue" (para. 36). As the doctors, researchers, and scientists fight to find some cure of the coronavirus, society is facing a domino effects of this pandemic economically and psychosocially. Lack of funds have led to frustrated

households with increased child abuse, sexual abuse, increased screen time for children of all age group, lack of focus from education, fear of uncertain future and acute depression (Jeffreys, 2020). “About 30% of children or their parents who are subjected to quarantine at home or are isolated, suffer from acute stress disorder, depression and adjustment problems caused as result of such dramatic change in their daily lifestyle” (Madan, 2020).

Spending less time on the road, saving money on gatherings, having the luxury to work from home, and leading a life with a minimalistic approach can be a healthier way of living by accepting the new normal. However, it does not seem to have become normal for the present generation. Especially for the ones who have lost their families and friends to this deadly virus.

The repercussions have led to suicidal tendencies among college students coming from insecure family backgrounds. The alarming aspect is that these stressors are bound to trigger new symptoms and aggravate underlying neurological conditions. Another frightening aspect is the symptoms for any mental or neurological disorder is not initially as evident as in case of any physical ailment. Moreover, the focus has suddenly shifted towards visible symptoms and not much education, training or information is being provided to deal with conditions like depression, post-traumatic stress disorder or mood instability. The confinement has also led to eating disorders due to a lack of routine and structured lifestyle in certain cases (Muhlheim, 2020). The potential use of cyber use in the name of learning and education has shown irrational behavior and unrealistic demands from children. With more focus on only economic and educational aspect, no one seems to be taking the long-term mental imbalance of generations to come which will continue to be a huge red flag.

The Restructuring

As stated by Jones (2020),

Epidemics eventually resolve whether succumbing to societal action or having exhausted the supply of susceptible victims. As [Charles] Rosenberg put it, ‘Epidemics start at a moment in time, proceed on a stage limited in space and duration, follow a plot line of increasing revelatory tension, move to a crisis of individual and collective character, then drift toward closure’ (para. 6).

The 21st century is also the epoch of developing contagion of ever-growing mental illnesses. All stakeholders all over the world must analyze the psychosocial indispositions of this pandemic and assess the burden, fatalities and associated repercussions. According to Dubey et al. (2020), there is no doubt that the stigma attached to this disease has stopped masses to come forward and acknowledge it

openly. This has hampered international trade and relationships leading to hollowness. The utmost sensitive care is needed to erase the humiliation associated with disease, racism, religious publicity and psychosocial impact. The halt on trade and travel among countries has given a setback to the exchange of global culture.

Besides the medical force, the mental ailment experts such as psychologists and trauma specialists need to gear up to form execution teams to enable effective communications between policy makers, front runners, and the affected masses. The officials also need to hit the ground running by setting up mental health organizations specific for future pandemics with branches in many nations and in individual healthcare institutions for research, mental healthcare delivery and arranging awareness program at both personal and community levels. The global agencies and leadership need to come together to provide a concise direction with one aim in mind not just for the present pandemic, but to also revert any such situation in future. Social media can be productive if used effectively in times like this to provide accurate, research-based, and authentic information to masses that can help build confidence and immunity. The generations to come will continue to face the trauma of this pandemic that seemed to have started like a hoax and then grew into an uncontrollably giant monster that gulped down millions of people all over the world. The responsibility to face this skepticism falls on all of us as a society. Providing correct information is a good start and hence, it is important more than ever now to protect social media from deflations and execute strict government laws and legislation regarding inaccurate news, social media rumors, disinformation, and misinformation. At the end of the day, it seems this pandemic is a learning lesson for mankind to realize the biggest treasure of mankind are good health, correct knowledge, compassion, and camaraderie among human beings. Only if we learn to coexist!

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Author Bio

NIDHI SHARMA, PhD, is a freelance author and is currently working as Dean of Academics Affairs in a K-12 STEM institution. With over twenty years in education, she has been analyzing various educational platforms across globe. Her main work has been revolving around adolescents' academic aspirations, the effect of parents' involvement on adolescents' academic growth, and the effect of parental aspirations on adolescents' aspirations. She has developed tools to study the effect of Parental involvement on children's' academic goals. Her work in the related field has been widely cited. She has been closely observing the impact of Coronavirus on the families and future aspirations of these teenagers. She is gathering data regarding self-esteem of adolescents' in the time of uncertain future due to Coronavirus.