

COVID - 19 lockdown: Impact on Mental Health : Ayurvedic view

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Abstract: *The human race is moving on through a crisis reported never before. The outbreak of corona virus exposed the lacunae in health sector of several countries and caused insufficiency of medicines. Several techniques for preventing spread and reducing deaths were adopted which includes lock down and strict quarantine.*

People brought under quarantine or lock down are very likely to develop wide range symptoms of psychological distress and disorder, including low mood, lack of motivation, insomnia, anxiety, anger, irritability, emotional exhaustion, depression, boredom, poor concentration, nightmares, impaired judgement, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), substance abuse, Post-traumatic stress symptoms etc. As per Ayurveda, psychiatric ailments are explained under the speciality branch of bhootavidya. Persons with heena satwa are more prone to develop psychiatric anomalies. It results in alteration in the eight psychological domains such as manas, budhi, samjajnana, smrthi, bhakti, seela, cheshta and achara of a person. Manas is considered as the normal thought process, vibrama (distraction) from this normal thought process considered as mano vibrama (mental infirmity). The deviation from these normal elements results in the causation of the disease.

The possible solution includes preventive measures from developing the manifestations. Once developed into a disorder, appropriate management is being done. Satvavajaya chikitsa (Ayurvedic psychotherapy) and conditional pharmacological combinations such as kwatha, gritha and procedures such as dhoopana, siropichu or abhyanga is having a role in managing the problems aroused by the lockdown or quarantine.

Keywords: COVID 19, Mental health, Lock down, Ayurveda, satvavajaya, Satwa, vibrama..

1. INTRODUCTION :

Human race is facing an extraordinary health crisis which is quite unfamiliar to the current generation. The outbreak of Corona virus, which reported as originated from Wuhan, China, in 2019, has spread almost worldwide. The virus has exposed the lacunae in the health care of so called developed or most advanced countries. The lack of a vaccine against this lethal new virus and inability to endow with apt health support has brought the health sector globally to an almost standstill situation. Hence to restrain the spread of the virus, the criterion adopted was to impose lockdown across states and stringent measures such as quarantine and isolation.

The elevated infectivity rate of the disease conquered almost all over the world within a matter of 2-3 months. The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared this as a pandemic on March 11, 2020. The imposed lockdown had led to shut down of almost all the services except essential services such as grocery and pharmacies. Complete lockdown was adopted to trim down the human mobility and hence limit the spread from person to person. The lock down was long overdue; causing human's day to day activities to derail. Millions of people were trapped in various places or homes, which was quite unfamiliar to the current humanity and lead to valid distress among them. This leads to various levels of physical, psychological, familial, occupational and even social issues among the affected.

The psychological alterations reported are too prominent and persisting as per available literature. It is not unusual to develop psychological problems during a prolonged lockdown. Published studies point to the fact that similar issues existed during the time of SARS and MERS pandemic as well. The lock down and isolation creates extreme nervousness in people. People under quarantine are entrapped with stigma in the initial phase. They gradually develop anxiety about the possible affection of the illness, the media and the news channels will be adding on to it. The separations of the family members will be contributing to the itinerary of stress resulting from loneliness¹. WHO have highlighted the importance of promoting mental and psychological well-being during the COVID - 19 outbreak. People are responding to the crisis differently, but we must acknowledge the impact of this pandemic on people severely affected by mental illness. They need psychological first aid and even conditional management with psychotherapy or even medicines.

2. MAJOR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES DURING LOCK DOWN:

People under quarantine or lock down are too likely to develop wide range of symptoms of psychological stress and disorders, including low mood, lack of motivation, insomnia, anxiety, anger, irritability, emotional exhaustion, depression, boredom, poor concentration, nightmares, impaired judgement, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), substance abuse, post-traumatic stress symptoms, nomophobia etc.

The major psychiatric issues that were observed throughout are neurotic-stress related disorders, which include anxiety disorders, OCD, reaction to severe stress and adjustment disorders². Profuse fears that he/she might get the sick, and fright of the possibility of getting the exact treatment is the main reason for developing anxiety. The circulation of fake and biased information is another major reason that may add on to existing anxiety. Excessive concern about hygiene and the resultant possible infection leads to presentation of obsession and compulsion. The thought of being infected with the virus leads to washing hands, flooring and cloths repeatedly and out of control.

Prolonged lock down, absenteeism, financial crisis or lack of proper food creates extraordinary stress situations that have an effect on people in several ways. The lockdown provided the common man of an earlier unavailable free time. This free time made young adults and teenagers glued to their screens and exploring the internet of all its possibilities. Though most of us have made proper use of the internet and social media, online abuse and pornography escalated during this period. The rise in domestic abuse is also being reported across the countries. The impact of such a kind of social evils is most often under reported.

3. AYURVEDIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROBLEM:

The psychological issues have been dealt with due consideration in the Ayurvedic parlance. Any acute or chronic ailment will have an influence on the mind; the severity varies as per the condition. The detailed management is also being explained with a lot of pharmacological and non-pharmacological interventions. This approach can be incorporated with ease, in the psychological conditions reported associated with COVID - 19.

According to Charaka any psychiatric ailments results in the alteration of the functions of the following domains, such as manas, budhi, samjnanana, smrithi, bhakti, sheela, cheshta and achara, either partial or in full. These are the stepladder of psychiatric examination as per Ayurveda. The deviation from these normal elements leads to the manifestation in any psychological illness, the extent varies as per the condition.

Persons with heena satwa or weak mental strength are more prone to develop any psychiatric anomalies, if any causative factor is contributing in nature. Manas is considered as normal thought process, vibrama (distraction) from this normal thought process considered as manovibrama (mental illness). In condition such as OCD, possession of thought may get altered and will be out of control. Excessive concern about hygiene comes into the mind as impulse, image, phobia or fear. Buddhi is considered as the ability to distinguish which one is forever or not. The alteration from normal buddhi affects the content of thought, which results in delusional ideas, impairment of thought, intelligence and even judgement.

Proper perception and knowledge of preceding memory is the samjnanana. Impairment in the perception is the samjna vibrama which include disorientation to time, place and person. Appropriate functioning of the memory mechanism is considered as the smrithi. Distortion in smrithi causes disorders of memory observed in condition such as amnesia etc. In Bhakti vibrama, the attachment or fondness towards the things, habits or situations transform in the individual. Seela refers to customary activities of a person and expression of incorrect emotions at inappropriate times is considered as Seela vibrama.

Increased anger, obsessions of cleanliness etc classifies under seela vibrama. Inappropriate psychomotor activity can be considered as cheshta vibrama. Hyperactivity, hypo activity or abnormal motor activities during lock down or quarantine may come under this vibrama. Achara are mentioned as the rules and regulations one must follow for the physical as well as social wellbeing. Violating such regulations such as improper food habit, abnormal sleep wakes up pattern etc may come under this vibrama³. These are capable of explaining all the manifestation in almost all psychiatric conditions.

4. MANAGEMENT OF THE CONDITION:

The solutions for the mental health issues arising during the lockdown period include creating awareness, enhancement of mental health with non-pharmacological to pharmacological interventions, as per the demand from the condition. Educate the people about the expected psychological impact and reactions are so crucial. A well-planned daily routine activity calendar helps in adapting to the situation quickly. The available time will be shared clearly as work and non-work times so as to stay connected with family members and friends. A control has to be maintained on screen time and social media in a positive manner. One has to keep a distance from the information hyper load from the media. Avoid frequently checking the latest COVID statistics and only use authentic sites such as those of health

authorities for reference. Involve in activities of interest such as games, dance, movies, gardening, participating in house hold activities, farming etc and creativity is to be tried.

Much importance must be given to positive news such as the rate of recovery of people from COVID - 19. Adopting healthier food habits, maintaining sleep hygiene, proper exercise etc. play an important role in maintaining positivity during such intricate periods. Techniques such as Yogasana and pranayama are capable of refreshing body as well as mind. Immuno-enhancing drugs mentioned in the Ayurvedic parlance are also useful in this regard. Financial advice may be sought regarding the financial adjustments and investment options to reduce such a stress. The common man should be encouraged to seek professional help if any problem exists and seems not to be managed by themselves. Tele medicine consultation and tele counselling services provided by experts in the field have tackled this situation effectively to a certain extend⁴.

5. PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH:

Satvajaya chikitsa (psychotherapies) is mentioned for the psychological ailments in Ayurveda. These are the techniques for making a person capable for facing the issues with a balanced mind and behaviour. It helps the person to control the mind and senses from perceiving the unwholesome area or subjects, which is termed 'manonigraha'⁵. Self-control of mind or manonigraha is one of the most complex tasks and need a perfect combination of desire, determination and dedication. The methods of achieving the same are trained by the process of satvavajaya.

These include regulating the thought process (chintya), analysing the thoughts and ideas (vicharya), channelizing the presumptions with logical reasoning (oohya), polishing the objectives by concentrating on it (dhyeya) and proper guidance and advice for taking right decision (sankalpa). By appropriate application of the same, any psychological issues including those from COVID - 19 can be managed in a quite comfortable manner⁶.

Acharya Vagbhata has stated that the exact awareness of dhi, dhairya and atma is the best remedy for balancing the manodoshas, rajas and tamas whose imbalance results in a manasroga.⁷ Dhi is considered as buddhi, which is the discriminative power, which helps in analysing the good and bad by the person. Dhairya refers to stability of mind. It is the ability to adhere to good or to avoid bad and to withstand difficulties with enhanced mental strength. Once dhairya is impaired, mind is having a tendency to indulge in and unable to restrain from unfavourable objects. The knowledge of self is the atma jnana. It is the knowledge of our self in relation to our native, our society, present situation etc. and knowing the capabilities and weaknesses. Such knowledge reminds of our responsibility and helps us face such situations.

6. PHARMACOLOGICAL MANAGEMENT:

If the psychological condition is more severe or worse, medicines are to be administered along with satvavajaya for better results. However, many patients may not cure by these types of methods. Judicious administration of internal medicines along with external procedures is to be useful in such a situation. Administration of medicines such as Drakshadi kwatha⁸, Ashwagandha, Jadamanchi etc. are effective in the anxiety group of disorders. Panchagavya gritha⁹, vacha, yashti etc. are in use in the depressive group. Somalata, sankupushpi etc. are used internally in those with disturbed sleep. Achara rasayana or the ideal code of conduct is also to be practised to manage the persisting stress.

Procedures such as snehapana, virechana and nasya also will be effective in managing severe manifestations. External application of oil on head is also causing significant relief in clinical practice. Similar is the efficacy of sirodhara or siropichu with suitable tailas such as Chandanadi or Ksheerabala taila. Other procedures such as dhoopana (fumigation) and anjana (collyrium) are also observed to be effective in rectification of the thought disorders.

7. CONCLUSION:

The COVID 19 pandemic and associated psychological disturbances are so prevalent in the present society. Timely tracing out and appropriate correction will be capable of preventing the condition to progress to a psychiatric condition. In this phase, the correction in the diet, deeds and thoughts are so crucial, where the Ayurvedic life style have to be incorporated. If the condition seems to worsen, satvavajaya chikitsa, with or without medicines, are to be adopted. The preventive approach is to be highlighted among the affected. Ayurveda has incessant possibilities to uphold mental health during this pandemic. Ayurveda psychotherapy including satvavajaya, proper use of daily routine, yoga and pranayama is capable to control the mental health issues reported during COVID 19 scenario. Further studies are expected in the area for enhancement of evidence.

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