Pandemic-Related Stress: Understanding Potential Impact on Mental Health & Implementing Effective Coping Strategies

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Agenda

- Impact of previous pandemics on mental health
- Early findings regarding mental health impact of COVID-19
- Chronic pandemic-related stressors and coping suggestions
- Strategies for reducing pandemic-related stress and anxiety
- Review of resources
Psychological Reactions to Pandemics

- Broad spectrum of emotional reactions ranging from indifference to debilitating distress
- Common behavioral responses to threat of infection:
  - Repetitive checking and reassurance seeking
  - Avoidance of infection-related stimuli
  - Attempts to “decontaminate” potential sources of infection
- Pursuit of counterfeit cures or remedies
- Civil unrest or mass panic

TAYLOR, 2020; IMAGE BY GORDON JOHNSON FROM PIXABAY
Personality Traits Associated with Emotional Vulnerability

- Negative emotionality
- Overestimation of threat
- Intolerance of uncertainty
- Monitoring versus blunting
- Unrealistic optimism bias

TAYLOR, 2020; IMAGE BY FREEPIK
Mental Health Impact of COVID-19: Early Findings

- Household Pulse Survey by U.S. Census Bureau (2020)
- Reported symptoms of anxiety or depression (national estimate):
  - 4/23 to 5/5: 35.9%
  - 7/2 to 7/7: 39.0%
- Women, Hispanics and African-Americans, and young adults (ages 18-29) reported more symptoms

NATIONAL CENTER FOR HEALTH STATISTICS, HOUSEHOLD PULSE SURVEY, 2020; IMAGE BY MARY PALKE FROM PIXABAY
Significant increase in stress related to Economy and Work during pandemic

**ECONOMY**

- **May 2020**: 70%
- **August 2019**: 46%

**WORK**

- **May 2020**: 70%
- **August 2019**: 64%

Note: "Work" is among those who are employed

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APA Stress in America: May 2020

Stress about government response crosses party lines

% reporting that the government response to COVID-19 is a significant source of stress

- 73% Democrats
- 67% Independents
- 63% Republicans
### Parental sources of stress as a result of the coronavirus pandemic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stress Source</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A family member getting coronavirus</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government response to coronavirus</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disrupted routines/adjusting to new routines</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting coronavirus</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing distance/online learning for their child(ren)</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic needs (i.e., availability of and access to food, housing)</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-isolation</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to health care services</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing out on major milestones</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chronic Stressor

- **Definition:** Continuous stress that persists for prolonged period of time

- **Psychological impact:**
  - Anxiety or depression
  - Impaired concentration
  - Fatigue

- **Physical impact:**
  - Insomnia
  - Hypertension and heart disease
  - Pain (e.g., headaches, muscle aches)
  - Weakened immune system
COVID-19 Stressors

- Fear of infection
- Overburdened healthcare system
- Work and school-related stress
- Financial hardship
- Social isolation
- Excessive media exposure
- Multiple losses

ESTES & THOMPSON, 2020; TAYLOR, 2020; ILLUSTRATION BY THE WASHINGTON POST
Social Distancing, Quarantine & Isolation

- **Results in decreased**:  
  - Sensory stimuli  
  - Social engagement & interaction  
  - Participation in meaningful activities  
  - Access to usual coping strategies

- **Typical reactions**:  
  - Anxiety and fear  
  - Depression  
  - Loneliness  
  - Boredom  
  - Anger and irritability  
  - Uncertainty and frustration

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, 2020; SAMHSA, 2020; IMAGE BY FREEPIK
Enhancing Social Connection

- Virtually connect with others on a consistent basis
- Be proactive and strategic
- Seek support by sharing negative experiences with trusted contacts
- Offer and provide support for others
Media & Social Media Exposure

- Excessive media exposure about collective crises may amplify distress
- Repeated exposure to graphic images may worsen impact on mental health
- Social media may exacerbate anxiety more than traditional media sources

GARFIN ET AL., 2020; WEIR, 2020; IMAGE BY GERD ALTMANN FROM PIXABAY
Tips for Viewing Media Coverage

- Obtain information from one or two reliable sources
- Limit exposure to media
- Limit exposure to recurring media stories
- Discuss news coverage with children in clear, age-appropriate terms
- Share and discuss useful information with friends and family

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, 2020; WEIR, 2020; IMAGE BY FREEPIK
Loss & Grief

- **Ambiguous Loss**: • Most difficult to cope with due to uncertainty and lack of closure

- **Anticipatory Grief**: • Expected losses yet to come

- **Complicated Grief**: • Uncontrollable circumstances compound the loss and make it difficult to accept • Enduring symptoms include disbelief, persistent longing, and rumination that result in impaired functioning

BERTUCCIO & RUNION, 2020; IMAGE BY GERD ALTMANN FROM PIXABAY
Coping with Grief

- Journaling
- Social Support
- Psychotherapy
Effective Implementation of Mental Health Skills

- Intentional choices and engagement in specific behaviors that promote good mental health
- Consistent practice to promote skills acquisition
- Rate intensity of mood (0-10 scale) before and after to assess effectiveness and improvement over time
- Be strategic and determine what skills work best in different situations
- Devotion of time in your daily schedule to implement skills as part of your regular routine
Relaxation Training

- **Purpose**: counteract anxiety by engaging in behaviors that elicit the *relaxation response*, thus changing physiological responses to anxiety

- **Common techniques**:
  - Breathing
  - Progressive muscle relaxation
  - Visualization

- **Common challenge**: “I can’t relax.”

DAVIS, ESHELMAN & MCKAY, 2019; MONTERO-MARIN ET AL., 2019; IMAGE BY SNOWING FROM FREPIK
Mindfulness

- **Definition:** cultivating an awareness and acceptance of the present moment without judgment; living fully in the here and now

- **Common techniques:**
  - Everyday mindfulness
  - Mindfulness meditation
  - Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

- **Common Challenge:** Mind chatter

STAHL & GOLDSTEIN, 2010 AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, 2019; IMAGE BY DANIEL GLAUBER FROM PIXABAY
Resilience

- **Definition**: ability to adapt to adversity
- Continue to function and progress when experiencing difficulty and distress
- Learn skills to build resiliency over time
- **Four ways to increase resiliency**:  
  - Build connections  
  - Practice wellness  
  - Find meaning/purpose  
  - Healthy thinking

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, 2012; PECONGA ET AL., 2020; IMAGE BY KIM THOMAS FROM PIXABAY
Seeking Professional Assistance

- **Potential indicators:**
  - Subjective distress
  - Impaired daily functioning
  - Compromised relationships
  - Excessive symptoms
  - Safety concerns

- *Psychology Today: Find a Therapist*
COVID-19 Survey Links

- National Center for Health Sciences: Household Pulse Survey
  https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/covid19/pulse/mental-health.htm

- American Psychological Association: Stress in America
Online Resources

- American Psychological Association: COVID-19 Information & Resources
  https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/

- National Center for PTSD: COVID-19 Resources for Managing Stress
  https://www.ptsd.va.gov/covid/index.asp

- International Society of Traumatic Stress Studies: COVID-19 Resources
  https://istss.org/public-resources/covid-19-resources

- Center for Traumatic Stress Studies: COVID-19 Pandemic Resource Pages
Mobile Apps

- Headspace
  https://www.headspace.com/

- Calm
  https://www.calm.com/

- COVID Coach
Research Opportunity

Mental Health Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic Study

Training Opportunity

Post-Master’s Certificate Program:
Evidence-Based Assessment & Treatment of PTSD in Adults

Contact

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https://traumaempowered.com/
References


References


• Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies. *Deciding when to seek treatment.* [https://www.abct.org/Information/?m=mInformation&fa=DecidingWhenToSeek](https://www.abct.org/Information/?m=mInformation&fa=DecidingWhenToSeek)


References


References


