

Harmful Effects of COVID-19 on Mental Health and Its Social Repercussions

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Abstract

Introduction: The COVID-19 pandemic constitutes a global emergency, with a high impact on public health, including mental health. This situation currently represents a challenge for health professionals in all fields. In the absence of a definitive cure, the most effective measures to reduce the number of infected cases is those that involve social isolation and specifically the establishment of quarantines.

Objective: To determine the psychological disorders most frequently presented during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Methods: A bibliographic and documentary review was carried out on the subject in authorized digital data sources and websites of recognized scientific prestige on psychological and social aspects, linked to the epidemics that occurred historically and in particular to the Covid-19 pandemic. The consultations were made in Scopus, EBSCO Health, PubMed (search engine), SciELO and PsycINFO, with an emphasis on original articles and systematic reviews. For the search, the following keywords were used in English and Spanish: quarantine, social isolation, psychological impact, psychological and social reaction.

Conclusions: Prolonged confinement and social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic has been responsible for the deterioration of mental health in some individuals, due to the post-traumatic stress that these conditions generate, manifesting itself more frequently by anxiety, depression, insomnia and panic. which has led to harmful behaviors and inappropriate social behaviors, explained in a general way by anxiety and panic of deficiencies, mainly food.

Keywords: Quarantine, Social Isolation, Psychological Impact, Psychological and Social Reaction.

Introduction

The human population is at potential risk from a new virus, which due to its rapid spread plunged humanity into a pandemic and an

unprecedented health, economic and social crisis. The virus was named SARS-CoV-2 due to its genetic relationship to SARS-CoV-1. The disease produced by this virus was named by the WHO and

included in the International Classification of Diseases as COVID-19 and from its inception to date it has been and is responsible for dire consequences in all latitudes of the planet, a pandemic that has been considered as one of the most serious and catastrophic diseases faced throughout the history of mankind [1].

Its high rate of contagion and rapid spread led the WHO to carry out an evaluation of it as a health situation with a very high global risk level [2].

Until the completion of this work, the epidemiological situation worldwide was of a cumulative number of notified cases that exceeds 180 million and the number of deaths is almost 4 million. Last week it was reported by the WHO that the incidence of COVID-19 is still very high, closing it with more than 2,6 million new cases and 57 thousand new deaths reported worldwide [3].

In Cuba, the health event to date is 184,943 patients diagnosed with the disease, 13,213 remain hospitalized and 1,253 deaths have accumulated so far [4]. The COVID-19 pandemic is a global emergency, with a high impact on public health, including mental health [5]. This situation currently represents a challenge for health professionals in all fields [6].

In the absence of a definitive cure, the most effective measures to reduce the number of infected cases is those that involve social isolation and specifically the establishment of quarantines, with a higher incidence in those places where local transmission is reported [7].

The term quarantine refers to the separation and restriction of movement of people who have been exposed to contagious diseases, or who are at risk of contagion, in order to reduce the risk of disease transmission [8]. While social isolation depends, in many cases, on people's voluntariness, the establishment of quarantine is strictly enforced and although it may constitute an unavoidable (and effective) measure with the aim of safeguarding lives, the decision entails an important cost from the psychological point of view (in the short, medium and long term), being able to manifest itself through diverse behaviors that are infrequent in normal periods [9].

In Cuba, voluntary home confinement has been called, and to a lesser extent compulsory quarantine has been ordered, however harmful behaviors have been found which have been socially disapproved as they constitute an expression of social indiscipline, antisocial behavior, violations of the socially established order that can typify crimes; but it is worth clarifying that they lack the drama present in similar acts in other parts of the country and also do not go unpunished [2].

According to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), some criteria to determine that an emotional expression is becoming symptomatic are: "experience symptoms for long periods of time, intense suffering, associated complications (for example, suicidal behavior) and significant impairment of social and daily functioning [10].

Because the individual is considered a biopsychosocial entity, it is to be expected that social phenomena will have an impact on their behaviors and behaviors. According to Dialectical Materialism, man is a social being, a product of society, which needs it to develop

and that within the wide group of needs that it assiduously satisfies, there are social needs that constitute an important group, hence the resistance to live in a confinement regime; therefore, we must try to make people understand that they are not being asked to return to the caves, but rather to protect their lives from the aggressiveness of a virus that has been the cause of the largest known pandemic in the history of mankind [2].

Objectives

General:

- Determine the psychological disorders most frequently presented during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Specific:

- Evaluate behaviors and social behaviors as a consequence of the pandemic in the world and in Cuba.
- Determine proposals carried out to avoid the harmful effects of prolonged social isolation as prevention of the contagion of Covid-19.

Methods

A bibliographic and documentary review was carried out on the subject in authorized digital data sources and websites of recognized scientific prestige on psychological and social aspects, linked to the epidemics that occurred historically and in particular to the Covid-19 pandemic. The consultations were made in Scopus, EBS-CO Health, PubMed (search engine), SciELO and PsycINFO, with an emphasis on original articles and systematic reviews. For the search, the following keywords were used in English and Spanish: quarantine, social isolation, psychological impact, psychological and social reaction.

Development

From the health and epidemiological point of view, the pandemic is defined as the affectation of humans by an infectious disease throughout a geographically extensive area [11].

For the pandemic status to be declared, two criteria must be met: that the epidemic outbreak affects more than one continent and that the cases in each country are no longer imported but caused by community transmission [12].

The WHO indicates that for a viral pandemic to appear, it is necessary: that a new virus appears, it has not previously circulated and there is no population immune to it; that is capable of producing severe cases of disease and has the ability to be transmitted from person to person effectively [13].

This is the case of SARS-CoV-2 and the current COVID-19 epidemic that, with the rapid spread of the disease throughout the world, made it declared by the World Health Organization as a pandemic since March 2020. It is felt not only for the economy and health, for the loss of human lives but also from the psychological and social point of view [14].

To prevent its expansion, travel restrictions, quarantines, confinements, distancing, cancellation of events and closure of establishments have been imposed. It's having a disruptive socio-economic effect, and fear of supply shortages has led to panic buying [14].

The action with urgency, allows to attack it more quickly, to achieve an early confinement of the people which achieves that the damages are less. You have to be aware that anyone is vulnerable [15].

Within these sanitary measures, the inevitable restriction of movements (quarantines) and prolonged social distancing are responsible for negative effects on the mental health of individuals, as described by Broche Pérez in his research on the subject and where the most frequently reported manifestations in the studies consulted were emotional disorders, depression, stress, apathy, irritability, insomnia, post-traumatic stress disorder, anger, and emotional exhaustion [16-22].

Quarantined children and adolescents, during the application of tests to check the presence of symptoms of post-traumatic stress, usually show scores three times higher (on average) compared to children who have not experienced seclusion [20].

Studies in this field suggest that children are more likely to develop acute stress disorder, adjustment disorders, and approximately 30% of them subsequently develop post-traumatic stress disorder. Reactions tend to be aggravated when, for epidemiological reasons, the treatment protocol leads to the separation of the child from their caregivers [23,24].

Older adults are among the most vulnerable groups during the COVID-19 pandemic and also among the most segregated [24]. There have even been reports of campaigns specifically aimed at stimulating discrimination against the elderly through the elaboration of memes, going so far as to explicitly suggest that the life of an older adult is worth less than that of a young person [25].

Older adults are especially vulnerable to quarantine and social isolation measures, taking into account that at this stage social support networks are reduced and participation in social activities decreases [26, 27].

Recent studies confirm that the effect of confinement in older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a profound deterioration of mental health in these people [28]. In some studies, the existence of recurrent fear of death, fear of separation from the family, insomnia, nightmares, symptoms of generalized anxiety, depressive symptoms, the appearance of obsessive symptoms (washing hands and frequent cleaning of objects of use are reported personal), post-traumatic stress symptoms and also increased use of substances, especially alcohol [28].

A recently published systematic review analyzed the variables that accentuated stress reactions during quarantines [13]. The authors indicate the duration of quarantine as the first variable. In this regard, they suggest that the increase in quarantine time leads to a greater risk of post-traumatic stress and a reduction in behaviors that imply physical proximity. Hence, they suggest that a quarantine of more than 10 days increases the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. They also refer to the fear of infection as the origin of high levels of anxiety and stress. This fear is manifested both in relation to the contagion itself and to the possibility of infecting family members and loved ones [16,27,28].

Other potentially stressful elements are frustration and boredom. Confinement, loss of daily routines, reduction of social contact are frequent causes of frustration. The existence of a sustained increase in these manifestations is proposed as the duration of the quarantine increases. Another recurring variable in the studies consulted, which generates states of anxiety, anger and stress, is that referred to inadequate and insufficient supplies. This manifestation is among the most frequent in the world, it is the cause of high levels of anxiety that are maintained between 4 and 6 months after the end of the quarantine [16].

Finally, these authors argue that the existence of inadequate information, as well as its presentation in unattractive formats, is a frequent cause of psychological discomfort in people in quarantine. The lack of clarity in the messages, the existence of contradictory messages between different sources, lack of government transparency and difficulties in communicating problems to the authorities during the quarantine, are among the main factors generating stress [16,20,27,28].

As the main stressors after the quarantine period, the authors point to finances and social stigma (rejection). In the case of finances, economic difficulties are reported as the main cause of psychological disturbances in the post-quarantine period, with manifestations of anxiety, anger and depression predominant for this reason [16].

For its part, social stigma was reported by people who suffered from the disease and also by health personnel. Those who reported the existence of rejection of others towards them, avoidance of direct contact, sudden separation of the members of a group when they approached, decreased visits, among other manifestations. These behaviors greatly increased the experiences of anger, frustration, depression, and anxiety [20].

All these manifestations of human groups vary according to the different regions of the planet, taking into account their development indices with their economic and social realities, cultural factors, and of course the political will of governments in the face of the health situation for which is currently being traversed.

According to Lajús in his study on the harmful behaviors of the Cuban population in the face of COVID-19, he considers that the roots of these disagreements have been multiple, existing as a constant in different continents those related to food, such as hoarding of food products, looting of shops, disagreements about the prohibition of food transportation, impossibility of quarantine due to lack of food, not having money to pay for it, cities with shortages of these products, the intention of storing as much food as possible, which could be related to anxiety and fear of not having to eat while the pandemic lasts, to satisfy their food needs [2]. Another group of disagreements expressed in demonstrations and protests in almost the entire world are related to the need to live in isolation and social distancing, an important key to stopping this dangerous disease that has already claimed the lives of millions of people around the world, compared to global statistics that do not reflect any improvement.

In Cuban society, unjustified expressions and flagrant violations have arisen, as an expression of social indiscipline, which have appeared in the face of the protection measures adopted by the

State and the health authorities of the Ministry of Public Health (MINSAP). Among these indiscipline and socially disapproved behaviors are the spread of epidemics, speculation, hoarding, illicit economic activity, with the corresponding legislative measures being taken in all cases [2].

Brooks, in consideration of this issue, propose five fundamental lines of action to mitigate the adverse psychological effects that may appear after periods of quarantine and social isolation [29]:

- Reduce the duration of the measure as much as possible: the duration of quarantines, according to the results, is the greatest predictor of psychological disturbances in the medium and long term. As time goes on quarantine could be observed greater civil disobedience, depression is displaced by anxiety and anger and manifestations of violence increase exponentially.
- Offer as much information as possible and keep feedback channels open: in people in quarantine, misinformed, catastrophic thoughts increase and pseudo-symptoms associated with the disease are triggered. Insisting at all times on the need for quarantine and how its implementation is working is an excellent strategy to reduce anxiety and increase responsibility.
- Facilitate access to supplies: the fear of running out of food and medicine and the uncertainty of how they could be acquired is a factor that leads to civil disobedience, as it increases frustration and maximizes self-preservation. Creating systematic systems of essential supplies is a factor that reduces anxiety and increases feelings of collaboration and social discipline.
- Increase strategies for coping with stress and generating positive social contacts: in addition to offering information about the disease, it is urgent to train skills for active coping with stress, both in the general population and in health personnel.
- Establishing telephone counseling lines, preparing and distributing self-help materials prepared by professionals and based on evidence, are some strategies that can be implemented. Additionally, it can be very useful for people who carry out medical investigations to have a positive communicative approach, transmit encouragement and facilitate coping strategies when you are.
- Health personnel deserve differentiated attention: as explained earlier in this report, health specialists are vulnerable to experiencing maladaptive psychological manifestations due to their own professional activity. Offering specialized care to health personnel is also a way of preserving their well-being and the integrity of the health system in general. To do this, access to research should be facilitated to specify the difficulties that predominate in these professionals, in order to articulate effective and efficient intervention systems accordingly.

Regarding the measures and strategies followed in Cuba in order to face COVID-19, we must highlight the work of the National Health System since the beginning of the pandemic, which has established a line of work in which its priority is constituted by the preservation of citizen health and has made clear the protocols for action in the face of the epidemiological emergency in the country.

The Cuban health authorities efficiently perform advisory functions to the State and Government authorities, as well as to the representatives of the different social factors in the communities, about how the adoption of certain behaviors based on all possible forms

of social distancing together with the strict epidemiological control, are the fundamental weapons that are available at the present time to confront the COVID-19 pandemic.

The issue of information, its veracity, seriousness and accuracy are an important factor and has a great influence on attitudes, emotions, and the decisions that people make when faced with the impact of the pandemic; However, health professionals know that although it is essential to be well informed, it is not the only element that influences decision-making in people, therefore it is necessary to add other alternatives to preserve their physical and mental integrity.

In Cuba, among the resources available to carry out actions to protect mental health and to promote self-care, has been the design of social communication programs with these contents, applied according to the principle of intersectorality and which are disseminated through the mass media who have had the arduous task of disseminating disease prevention measures and increasing health promotion with spots and programs in this regard, providing timely information. Just to cite one example, we can mention the daily transmission of the Press Conference on COVID-19 that is offered to the people, which reports in detail the behavior, in Cuba and the world, of the health indicators related to the disease.

Also, more specific techniques have been added, such as the case of teleconsultations sometimes called remote consultation or telehealth, as has been recommended by PAHO and which refer to the interactions that occur between specialists in psychology, sociology and psychiatrists with all those interested and involved in the aforementioned affectations and that are closely linked to the current health situation [10].

Other examples of intervention in the control of psychological and social damage in these times of pandemic are the different support groups, made up of experienced psychologists in social networks who provide individualized attention to all those who request it. Likewise, the help lines established by telephone and that pursue the same purposes. In them there is a highly qualified staff to give an uninterrupted and free response to emergent situations and prevent helplessness to those affected and to all the people who need guidance to preserve their health at any given time.

Conclusions

The confinement and prolonged social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic has been responsible for the deterioration of mental health in some individuals, due to the post-traumatic stress that these conditions generate, manifesting itself more frequently by anxiety, depression, insomnia and panic which has led to harmful behaviors and inappropriate social behaviors, explained in a general way by anxiety and panic of deficiencies, mainly food.

Unlike other countries, in Cuba there is a health infrastructure privileged by its very essence, which facilitates health actions with the main objective of preserving citizen health, maintaining avenues of psychological and comprehensive support. Although there has been some social indiscipline, these are condemned by the people and in all cases the corresponding legislative measures are taken.

The intervention of specialized personnel in the preservation of

their health is essential in the face of the effects of confinement and social distancing, fundamentally through the use of technologies.

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