

## Psychological Services During the Pandemic and Isolation Period.

Valbona Uka<sup>1\*</sup> and Delvina Beka<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> University College, Prishtine, Kosovo

\*Corresponding author

Valbona Uka, University College, Prishtine, Kosovo

Submitted: 30 Oct 2021; Accepted: 10 Nov 2021; Published: 15 Nov 2021

**Citation:** Valbona Uka and Delvina Beka (2021). Psychological Services During the Pandemic and Isolation Period. *Adv Neur Neuro Sci*, 4(4): 46-47.

### Abstract

*During a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it is common for everyone to experience increased levels of anxiety and worry, especially as a result of social isolation. Physicians and other front-line health care professionals are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of mental health, as they try to balance the task of caring for patients with concerns for their own well-being and that of their family and friends, but by not leaving aside the rest of the population.*

*Mental health care and psychosocial well-being are just as important as physical health management. The effects of pandemics such as COVID-19 have highlighted the need for governments to take measures to curb not only the physical health of individuals but also their mental and psychosocial well-being. In this paper, we review the provision of psychological mental health services in Kosovo during the pandemic and after.*

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Pandemic, Psychological Services, Isolation.

### Introduction

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (COVID-19) which appeared in December 2019 in the city of Wuhan-China, has dominated news headlines everywhere, has spread worldwide, and has resulted in a pandemic [1]. To prevent the transmission of COVID-19 disease, countries responded by restricting movement. Blockages or quarantines have not only affected the global economy and daily life, but have also caused a parallel pandemic of fear in the local and global community [2]. Quarantine, one of the measures taken, defined as “isolating and restricting the movement of people who have been potentially exposed to the virus” has worsened the mental health status of people who have had existing problems, not to mention other people who have not had previously faced problems. Separation from family, loss of freedom, fear of the unknown, fear of death, insecurity about the workplace, insecurity about illness status, loneliness, and boredom can have dramatic consequences for people.

New research from around the world shows that fear can lead to anxiety and depression. To mitigate the risk of adverse psychological outcomes caused by COVID-19, the World Health Organization (WHO) Department of Mental Health and Substance Use published a paper, “Mental Health and Psychosocial Considerations during the COVID-19 Outbreak.” It was a way to support the mental health and psychosocial well-being of different popula-

tion groups during this pandemic. This paper provides information to strengthen preparedness and response plans regarding mental health and psychosocial consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Mental health is one of the most affected dimensions in this pandemic, which is worth noting that even before the pandemic did not receive the necessary attention, investment, and services (WHO, 2020) [3]. In a study conducted by Brooks et al. (2020) on the psychological impact of quarantine, it is noted that stressors during quarantine relate to the duration of quarantine, fear of infection, frustration and boredom, insufficient supplies, as well as truncated information [4].

The latest World Health Organization (2020) study conducted in 130 countries concludes that mental health services have had a large-scale dysfunction, particularly in the provision of basic mental health services. More specifically, over 60% of countries reported dysfunction of mental health services for vulnerable groups, including children and adolescents (72%), adults (70%), and women in need of prenatal and postnatal services (61 %). Counseling service (short-term) and psychotherapy (long-term) are two basic services that normally function as processes and their termination in such circumstances is not at all helpful to the persons involved. The impact of the pandemic has prompted governments to take measures to curb not only the physical health of individuals but also their mental health and psychosocial well-being.

In Kosovo during the pandemic, citizens had access to two lines, one from the Ministry of Health in cooperation with the University of Prishtina by telephone and the other through online sessions created by the University of Prishtina in cooperation with the Assembly of Prizren. The Ministry of Health has made available the psychological helpline, through which all those who need to talk to a psychologist, can do so in the number which is found on the site. This line, which is the result of cooperation between the Ministry of Health and the Department of Psychology has been at the service of citizens who have difficulty in this period of the Covid-19 pandemic to manage their thoughts, feelings and emotions, as well as of those who may experience increased stress, anxiety, panic or even signs and symptoms of depression (Ministry of Health, 2020) [5]. The Department of Psychology of the University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina" (UP), together with the students of the master program "School Psychology and Counseling", within the UP website has launched the health site.uni-pr.edu. The site aims to provide psych-educational videos on mental health and its preservation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The site is conceived with sessions. Each session provides information on specific conditions and recommendations for exercise, how the intensity of these mental health conditions can be mitigated. The implemented project responds to the needs of public mental health. Addressing mental health needs in this period, where every citizen feels outside the comfort zone, is very important (University of Prishtina, 2020) [6].

The situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic has also worsened the situation of children in Kosovo. In the area of child protection, mental health and psychosocial components have not been systematically addressed by child protection workers. That is why UNICEF has launched the project "Improving Access to Mental and Psychosocial Health Services for children and families and assessing the digital ecosystem for continuing online learning" due to capacity building to provide online and offline child protection services including mental health and psychosocial support for children and families during and after COVID-19. The results of the project are intended to be achieved by the end of 2022 [7].

Likewise in Albania UNICEF, 2020 has called on the Government of Albania, as well as all public and non-public sector institutions, to urgently address child protection measures in order to protect the well-being of thousands of children who may be exposed to violence, exploitation, trafficking, and sexual abuse during the emergency situation created by COVID-19 [8]. The situation created by COVID-19 has significantly affected the mental health and general psychological well-being of all, thus bringing other risks. In this context, UNICEF has proposed 5 main areas where it was necessary to intervene immediately. One of those areas was the National

Helpline for children and other psychological counseling services at a distance (online or by phone), intended to operate 24 hours a day 7 days a week without interruption.

## Conclusion

COVID-19 worsened the existing organization and services in every field, but on the other hand, had its advantages in terms of mental health as it brought to light the necessity to invest in this sector. However, the mental health crisis, which results from the impact on many levels of the pandemic, has not gone unnoticed. They have all taken the initiative to turn their attention to investing in this sector; at least it seems to be so. The pandemic and the measures taken shook the existing well-being of people but opened the door to pay attention to mental health and the care that should be shown to it.

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