



The importance of psychology in the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract: The concern for the mental health of the population intensifies during a serious social crisis. The Coronavirus Disease 2019 pandemic (COVID-19) can be described as one of these crises, which has been characterized as one of the biggest international public health problems in recent decades, having hit virtually the entire planet. An event like this causes psychological and social disorders that affect the coping capacity of the whole society, at various levels of intensity and propagation. Recently, different international organizations have expressed their concern about the urgency of mental health care in the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is worth mentioning the Brazilian Ministry of Health, which also emphasized the relevance of this issue in the country.

Keywords: Well-being. COVID-19. Pandemic. Mental health.

1. Introduction

The new respiratory syndrome caused by the new coronavirus (COVID-19) was initially detected in 2019 in Wuhan, capital of central China province. Reaching people at different levels of complexity, in more severe cases is affected by acute respiratory failure that requires intensive hospital care- including the use of mechanical ventilation. (CDC, 2020). By mid-April 2020, more than two million reported cases and nearly 150,000 deaths worldwide had been counted, with the United States (USA) leading the number of deaths (more than 25,000). The ease of propagation, the lack of knowledge about the virus and the exponential increase in the number of contagions caused the World Health Organization (WHO) to raise the disease to pandemic status in March 2020 (WHO, 2020a).

Combating situations such as this had already been a matter of debate in the WHO, which, in 2007, published a document highlighting the need for prior planning by countries to deal with unexpected crises and disasters (WHO, 2007). It should also be said that other studies on crises in public health had also emphasized that mental health care should be as paramount as primary health care (Douglas et al., 2009; Park and Park, 2020; Stevenson et al., 2009).

As for mental health, it is important to say that the sequelae of a pandemic are greater than the number of deaths. The health systems of the countries collapse, health professionals are exhausted by the long hours of work and, in addition, the most effective method of control of the disease, which is social distancing, considerably impacts the mental health of the population (Brooks et al., 2020). In addition to the fear of contracting the disease, COVID-19 has caused a

sense of insecurity in all aspects of life, from the collective to the individual perspective, from the daily functioning of society to changes in interpersonal relationships (Lima et al., 2020; Ozili and Arun, 2020).

The rapid change in the usual ways of life can contribute to the triggering of reactions and symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression. Additionally, the fear of being affected by a potentially fatal disease, whose cause and progression are still little known, affects people's psychological well-being. To some extent, when experienced lightly, these reactions can act as protective factors, as they lead to more cautious behaviors with regard to exposure to the risks of contagion. (Barari et al., 2020).

Thus, it is intended in this review, to explore in detail, the evolution of psychology in the pandemic context, where psychosomatic problems were intensely exacerbated, such as depression, anxiety, insecurity, stress, among others. May this work help and develop professionals involved, highlighting psychologists, assisting as a therapeutic basis.

2. Methodology

It is a set of approaches, techniques and processes used by science to formulate and solve problems of objective acquisition of knowledge, in a systematic way. For this approach articles were retrieved in several databases such as the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), British Medical Journal (BMJ), Science Direct, National Library of Medicine (NIH). The integration criteria determined for the selection of articles were: texts available in full, articles in Portuguese and in English from 2007 to 2020; master's dissertations and doctoral theses and articles in the integra that portrayed the advancement of psychology in the pandemic context. The text proposes that the most important thing is to produce a scientific knowledge that, besides being useful, is explicitly guided by an ethical project aimed at solidarity and harmony.

3. Results and Discussion

Psychology stands out in this context by bringing together theoretical-conceptual foundations and scientific evidence that can be applied and generalized, contributing to an understanding of psychological aspects during the severe contemporary crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. Current studies show influences of this situation on people's behavior in everyday life and causing anxiety, fear, depression and panic. (Holmes et al., 2020; Jiao et al., 2020). These major abrupt changes in the way of living everyday life associated with the systemic effects of the pandemic on the body, particularly in the brain and cognition (Holmes et al., 2020), bring the issue of mental health to the top of the concerns. (Holmes et al., 2020). Despite the benefits it brings, due to the containment of the disease, quarantine often implies the experience of unpleasant situations that can have impacts on the mental health of those involved. Some stressors in quarantine are: need for removal of friends and family, uncertainty as to the time of distancing (Brooks et al., 2020).

They identified that the negative effects of this measure include symptoms of posttraumatic stress, confusion, and anger. Concerns about supply shortages and financial losses also cause damage to psychological well-being (Shojaei and Masoumi, 2020).

Health professionals seem vulnerable to the psychosocial effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Those who act directly in the assistance are in what has been called the front line of the pandemic. As sources of stress and overload, the following conditions are pointed out: nature of the infection itself; insufficient testing; lack of vaccines or effective treatment; severe evolution of some patients; lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical supplies; prolonged workloads; inadequate resting conditions. Accessing the mental health of these professionals and their level of stress perception during the duration of this critical period is essential for the identification of conditions that facilitate the fulfillment of their role and preservation of their health, as well as unfavorable conditions, since little is still known in this sense about COVID-19 (Dong, et al., 2020).

It is understood that the consequences of the mental illness generated by the Coronavirus and the multiple factors that surround it are not restricted only to the current moment, but after the pandemic is extinguished, a period in which many people may still be in mental suffering. This will need to be visualized and understood as it refers to the long-term impacts of the pandemic. However, suffering cannot be neglected, the role of the mental health professional is to receive any verbalization of anguish. Thus, the Coronavirus pandemic may impact individuals in different ways. (Danzmann et al., 2020).

Analyzed together, all these factors refer to the relevance of psychological interventions aligned with emerging needs in the current pandemic context. In recent weeks, studies have been published chronicling successful practices that have been adopted, especially in the Asian continent (Duan & Zhu, 2020; Jiang et al., 2020; Xiao, 2020; Zhou, 2020), guidelines of associations and psychology councils in different countries, such as Brazil (CFP, 2020.), Spain (CGPE, 2020), the United States (American Psychological Association, 2020), as well as recommendations for mental health care by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020b).

The context of the pandemic has required changes in the professional practices of Psychology, in terms of evaluation and interventions. Thus, the places of action and research of the psychologist change, with a predominance of online activities (Marasca, et al., 2020); (McCord, et al., 2020). Additionally, on March 31, 2020, Ordinance No. 639 of the Ministry of Health was published, which provides for the strategic action "O Brasil Conta Comigo – Profissionais da Saúde", on the training and registration of health professionals to cope with COVID-19, including psychologists (Ministry of Health, 2020). Therefore, it is clear that psychology professionals are able to assist in the development of healthier ways of dealing with the current crisis in health, collaborating at their different levels of activity, political management, epidemiological evaluation

and primary care (Wang et al., 2020).

It has also been possible, in this context, for a portion of professionals, to obtain new knowledge both about the area of transit, transportation and mobility itself (e.g., research and trials) and related areas (e.g., epidemiology, statistics and mental health). Several areas of psychology - education, mental health, psychotherapy, hospital, emergencies and disasters - emphasized the care of the population, with health workers, with public and social policies on the use of technology and virtual tools and also on the formation in psychology specifically in this pandemic context (Sá-Serafim, et al., 2020); (WHO, 2020).

4. Conclusions

The importance of psychology in the COVID-19 pandemic is indeed an important theme to be addressed, because as it was clear in this review it is not a case that only affects the physiological, but also the psychological one. This reiterates the finding that, during a pandemic, a high load of negative experiences and emotions is likely to be experienced, raising the need for constant psychological care since the initial period of the problem (Ho et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020). In Brazil, psychologists have made themselves available to provide assistance and reception to those who have been psychologically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the government has called on health professionals to provide volunteer work (MS, 2020). Therefore, it is clear that psychology professionals are able to assist in the development of healthier ways of dealing with the current crisis in health, collaborating at their different levels of activity, political management, epidemiological evaluation and primary care (Wang et al., 2020).

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