Emergence of Mental Health: The escalating Progression of mental health disorders during the pandemic.

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic has put a strain on the world's health care system since 2020 when the outbreak took a toll in people's lives. This research mainly focuses on the adverse/ obvious effects of the pandemic on mental health and it aims to study the current level of mental health of the people over the globe ever since the pandemic and the continuous containment measures taken to fight the virus outbreak.

The objective of this paper is 1) To discuss and understand mental health and its significance as a real-world problem 2)To understand and analyze the mental health scenario during the pandemic. 3)To look into the awareness and acceptance of mental health, how it is viewed and perceived by the present-day society. This paper discusses what mental health is and its severity in the real world today. This research was done using descriptive qualitative methods, where the data was obtained through literature review and observations. Articles and previous studies which were in alignment with our objectives were reviewed and analysed in this study.

The result of this study shows that social relationships, access to nature as well as the stress faced due to studies and work from home has had a significant effect on deteriorating mental health.It is evident that the worsening of mental health can lead to alarming levels of stress which can cause death.

Keywords: Covid-19, Mental Health, Pandemic

1. INTRODUCTION

Mental Health for a long time was not given the awareness it needed, and far from that it was viewed as a 'taboo topic', which is not believed in or acknowledged as an actual problem and often even when noticed treatment is not taken for the sake of one's reputation. However, it has been understood that psychological and psychiatric needs of a person during this pandemic have to be managed well and should not be taken lightly. The number of suicide cases reported during this phase has been rising at a drastic state.

The first and foremost is to first identify and accept the mental health condition. Mental health can be identified as a collection of symptoms which together decrease and affect your quality of life. Depression and mood disorders further lead to far dangerous scenarios of suicidal thoughts and self-harm.[1] Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It impacts on the thinking, feelings and action of a person. It plays a crucial role in how a person handles stress and makes healthy choices. Mental health needs to be taken care of in all phases of life, from young to old. [2]

Any age group can succumb to Mental health problems but studies show that a majority of the problems start at a young age. In the world today about 20% of the children and adolescents have been noted to have a mental health condition. Suicide has been noted to be the second leading cause of death among 15-29-year-olds. Various studies conducted have concluded that 20% of adolescents experience mental health issues in any given year. Up to 50% of mental health problems have been concluded to have been established by the age of 14 itself and 75% by the age of 24. [3]

Concerns regarding Mental health isn't a single person's problem but rather a global problem and one that has a major effect on society. Mental health disorders have a significant effect on all areas of life of a person, such as school and the bonding with family and friends. Improving mental health would eventually lead to an improved physical health and increased productivity. But if Mental health problems are not addressed and treated upon it will lead to increased crime rates, unemployment, violence and even death [4]. Depression and anxiety which are two of the most common mental health conditions in the world today, cost the global economy US$ 1 trillion each year.

Mental health issues have covered one of the important sources of the world's economic aspect, with an estimated cost of £1.6 trillion per annum which is greater than cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease, cancer and even diabetes. [3] Regardless of these huge numbers, the global average of the total health expenditure spend by the government to treat mental health is lesser than 2%. [4]

In the year 2019, the World Health Organization began the WHO Special Initiative for Mental Health (2019-2023). It s objective is to get Universal Health Coverage for Mental Health so as to ensure access to great quality and enough care for patients with mental health issues in 12 priority countries ND to reach 100 million more people. [5]

Mental health is inclusive of a person's emotional, psychological and social-well being which is reflected by an individual's perception towards life and their capability in decision making. The epidemiology data published by Malaysian Ministry Of Health this year has noted a threefold increase in the trend of prevalence rate of mental disorder compared to 2018. Hence, it is evident that the burden of mental health issues in Malaysia especially during the pandemic has increased at an alarming rate where one of the common disorders among the patients are schizophrenia and depression. [6]

2. METHOD

This research was done using the descriptive qualitative method, where the data was obtained through literature review and observations.

Qualitative research is a research method that involves identifying, gathering and analyzing

non-numerical data such as texts, videos and audios to help understand the concepts and opinions better. It is generally used to gather in-depth insights into a problem and to help to give rise to new ideas for research.

A literature review is a critical evaluation of the gathered material which builds a clear understanding and overview of the research which has been done in a particular area. The objective of a the review of literature is done so as to sum up and examine previous research and theories to help identify areas of controversy and opposing claims and highlight any gaps that may exist in research to date, which will in turn show the possibilities and further research scopes in that area.[7]

The research will analyze the seriousness and the impact of the pandemic on people's mental health and wellbeing and would be focused on the population all around the globe affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in order to utilize the resources referred fully.

The research was conducted with the following steps: 1)The problem was first observed and identified. 2)The research question was developed. 3) It was followed by a review of various articles available. 4) The articles were

summarized and organized and the conclusion was drawn and understood.

Data analysis was done in four stages. by first data collecting, second identifying patterns and connections, third data reduction and compilation, fourth is conclusion.
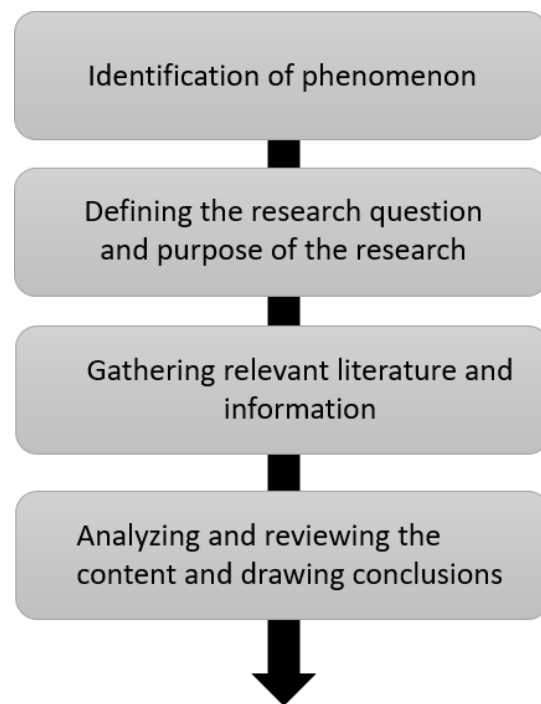

Figure 1. Research Process

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section of the research focuses on analysing the data collected and discussing the findings .
During the pandemic, almost half of adults in the US reported symptoms of anxiety or depression. Almost consistently, 1 in 10 people reported these symptoms from January to June 2019. When looking at France, it was noted that cases of depression had increased by two-fold. Not only in the US or France, these concerns

and increase in mental health problems have been seen growing worldwide. Even people without prior mental health disorders are being affected by it. The imposing of lockdowns has also led to issues of having limited access to mental health services. Especially with the remote working lifestyle we have become accustomed to in the past year, which often triggers a feeling of being disconnected from

colleagues, even if we are connected virtually to them with the use of technology. [8]

Based on the KFF Health Tracking poll data, collected in July 2020, many people were reported with declining mental health and well-being ; 36% of the respondents faced sleeping disorders, 32% with eating disorders, not forgetting the increase in alcohol consumption by 12% in the attempt of overcoming the stress and worry over the coronavirus. The deteriorating mental health has also affected worsening chronic diseases by 12%. Furthermore, the report also evidently states that people experiencing difficult situations during the pandemic such as leaving far away from their families, being retrenched, losing jobs that eventually leads to facing financial crisis is interconnected to the poor mental health. [9]

One of the major factors contributing to this has been social media consumption. The rise of social media in the past decade has given us so much that was previously impossible. But it is also one of the factors that has affected deeply the psychological and mental health of the user. Though it has given people a way and opportunity to connect with those far away, it has also at the same time isolated them from reality hence impacting adverse effects to their mental health,[10] especially during the past year during the pandemic where the media consumption and virtual life has increased to a degree that has been unprecedented before.

Many researches conducted state that there exists a connection between of social media usage and mental health. Social Media has had both positive and negative effects on people's mental health scenario. Positive impact include socialization, enhanced communication,

learning opportunities and ready access and availability to health information. While negative impact which has been caused by social media include depression, online harassment, cyber-bullying, sexting, fatigue, stress, suppression of emotion and even decline of intellectual ability.

Excessive use of social media has been proven to induce stress and anxiety, leading to extreme cases of depression in a person. One of the biggest factor causing mental health disorders is loneliness where it has been proven to be the major problem faced in virtual platforms and interaction. [10]

Apart from social media, just the use of digital screens has been proven to affect ones mental health condition. Most of the research done has indicates a array of harmful effects of excessive screen time on ones neurodevelopment, mental health, memory, learning and potential increased risks of early neurodegeneration. [11]

Another factor which affects mental health positively and which most have been deprived of during the pandemic is 'green spaces'. Greenspace is a term that used to define either maintained or unmaintained environmental areas. It can include nature reserves, wilderness environments, urban parks etc. Green spaces positively impact the mental health of a Person by causing reduction in stress levels, agitation, anger, apathy and depression. It is often even used in a targeted way to provide structured therapeutic interventions for vulnerable groups such as youth at risk, individuals living with dementia or mental ill-health, pro-bationers and stressed employees. [12]

A large portion summing up to 56% of young adults between 18 years to 24 year old's have reported symptoms of anxiety and depressive disorder during the pandemic. Young adults are more likely to report substance and being subjected to suicidal thoughts when compared to adults. [13]

Students are at greater danger of being affected by deteriorating mental health conditions.

Dartmouth College campus in New Hampshire has witnessed 4 deaths of freshman since the start of the Coronavirus pandemic out of which 3 were because of suicide. In certain cases, mental health care was not given to other state students because of their own state law which did not permit remote counseling. Clusters of suicides referring to the increase in deaths in such a small duration have raised great concerns. Previous research conducted has shown that being exposed to suicide issues around can increase the suicidal behavior in others, especially those who are already at huge risk. Whether it is a big or a small place, it may still influence and affect another person. [13]

University students have been the most exposed group of people, suffering from anxiety, depression as well as eating disorders during the pandemic due to the nature of the extra burdening educational experience which has radically changed from having classes physically to having classes on virtual platforms such as Zooms and Google Meets.[14]

In July 2021, two university students from Malaysia died over the same weekend due to ruptured blood vessels in their brains. Prior to their death, both students had been complaining to their families of having severe headaches due to studying stress and overburdening assignments. [15]

People are finally realizing the reality of this problem and have started accepting and starting to become aware of it. They are finally taking it seriously, taking actions, and spreading awareness on the same.

Many influencers and celebrities are shedding away their stigma on mental health and being open about and spreading awareness on it. Just recently Gymnast Simone Biles pulled out of the two events at the Tokyo Games citing mental health as the reason. Many influencers like Varun Dhawan, Lia, Deepika Padukone, Sebastian Coe, have lauded and supported the athlete and have further spread the message on the importance of taking care of mental health. [17] [16]

The athlete had a huge support from teammates, other Olympians as well as retired athletes. This is a clear sign of how public discussion of issues such as stress and depression have become accepted on social media and more frequent in recent years, particularly since the pandemic. [16]

In the past people and the media were not so open about this topic. An example is what Australian rower Sally Robbins faced in Athens in the year 2004 when she was overcome by anxiety and quit during the Olympic final. Robbins was insulted, vilified and verbally abused by newspapers and teammates alike.

In recent times many celebrities and influencers have opened to the pressure, stress, depressions and other mental health issues they had faced, some names being U.S. Swimmer Michael Phelps, 2017 Miss Asia 3rd runner's up Akanksha Singh, swimmer Erica Sullivan etc. [14].Many such as Former Miss Namibia Selma Kamanya, Model Jonathan Mourice and

Selena Gomez are spreading awareness on the same.

We can see many initiatives being done related to mental-health awareness in recent times. Few examples of which include WHO, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the UK's Royal Family, the Global Self-Care Federation etc. Many including the above stated organizations have made Mental Health problems their priority and have undertaken large-scale public service campaigns to destigmatize symptoms and create awareness of the various solutions available. [8]

UN SDG Target 3.4 aims to reduce premature mortality from the non-communicable diseases by providing sufficient treatment and promoting mental health and well-being by the year 2030. The WHO Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020 has also been extended to 2030. [6]

Medicinal care is not the one solution there. Many other alternatives to medicinal solutions have also been developed. Care using music has been proven to naturally help patients as it has demonstrated to naturally reduce both alertness and the need for sedation. Music care has proven to decrease heart rate and respiratory rate hence, assisting in relaxation and sleep. [8]

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of the study proves that the key element for sustained mental health is greatly associated with one's social relationships as well as their access to green spaces/nature which has been substantially deprived following the occurrence of the pandemic. The paucity in social interaction along with

prolonged screen time and excessive time spent on media usage has inevitably led to an increase in cases and issues related to mental health.

The significant rise in mental issues worldwide as a consequence of the pandemic has undoubtedly played a crucial role in breaking the discrimination and the untold stigma of mental health. As mental health issues are being prevalently discussed, the strongly adherent taboos among the community regarding mental health issues has been conquered creating awareness among the society. Hence, the pandemic has absolutely caused a soaring rise in mental health issues yet the acceptance and perception of community towards mental health has greatly shifted towards a positive note giving rise to a society that understands and appreciates mental stability.

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