



Mental health issues in Pakistan and COVID-19 pandemic

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Outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic surfaced new challenges to the global community. Trembling global economy, blown up of healthcare systems and new social challenges lugged the attention of think tanks to these new challenges resulting from pandemic. To date, this pandemic has claimed 1444596 lives globally till November 30, 2020 at 00:10 am Pakistan Standard Time (PST) and in Pakistan 7942 deaths have been reported at the time cited before [1]. The end of this pandemic is not certain till now although first case of COVID-19 was reported on February 2, 2020. Due to serious steps of the Government of Pakistan in different tiers slowed down the spread of this disease nationwide firstly on May 26, 2020 and then rose again. A second decline was observed on August 03, 2020 and from that date it is rising continuously. It seems that this is second wave of outbreak now engulfing more lives and spreading exponentially to all areas of Pakistan. Government steps related to quarantine, self-isolation, physical and social distance compulsion, smart and general lockdown played a key role in slowing down of the spread. Mental health problems are being reported from all over the world. General lockdown creates many problems related to both individual and community. In individuals, loss of job, anger, panic, fear, and stress prevails and aggravates with each passing day. In community economic losses worsen the social system anomalies. Economy of the country has inverse relationship with the crime rate of that country [2]. Preponderance of fear in majority of the public in Pakistan has already been reported [3]. Mental health issues may arise in pandemics and their effect may be worsened in the vulnerable majority [4]. Pakistan being a developing country with poor economy has its maximum population on or below poverty line. Current pandemic has increased the mental challenges in its first episode. It is expected now that second

hike of this COVID-19 will be more critical in terms of aggravation of mental health issues. Modern world has a blessed infrastructure of healthcare system where mental health issues are reported and handled routinely. Role of psychologists and psychiatrists has been fully endorsed and appreciated in these parts of the world. Pakistan has loose sides in economy, healthcare system footings, recognition role of psychologists and psychiatrists and their availability throughout the country, preparedness for epidemics and pandemics and literacy situation. COVID-19 pandemic has shaken the economy of Pakistan in its first episode. Mental health issues have arisen, observed and has already been reported before the start of this second hike of pandemic. Although government of Pakistan has issued a 29 paged document for addressing mental health issues, but it is not sufficient only to issue a document without adopting various methodologies for dealing this pandemic effectively. Various Non-government Organizations have joined hands with the government, for the sake of humanity, and are working with the government in many areas left by the government in rehabilitation of the residents. But more efforts and actions are needed.

There is dire need to institute mental health rehabilitation centers across the state which should provide 24 hours services to general population. Government initiatives about the setting up of new rehabilitation centers is confined to big cities although some existing healthcare institutions have also been designated as rehabilitation centers in remote settings. All these setups are incapable of fulfilling the need of much of the population residing in rural areas as well as away from big cities. Big steps are needed for expanding these facilities to remote rural areas which are already provided with limited health care facilities. These areas have low literacy level, poor economy, miserable living standards, limited access to modern cities and facilities,

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destroyed roads, demolished mass communication systems and ignorance has made exceptionally highly vulnerable in developing mental health issues. It should be noted that majority of the population of Pakistan is the resident of rural areas. Rehabilitation centers extension to these rural areas will play a role in reduction of mental health problems of these areas. Parallel, integrated and coordinated programs on electronic, social, and print media can prove a powerful tool in dealing the mental health issues effectively by these folks. They will not feel hopeless and helpless by these comprehensive measures. Media may manage counselling sessions by renowned psychologists and psychiatrists of the country. Psychiatrists and psychologists can give the awareness to the common people about pandemic, preventing mental health problems, how to deal with mental issues, stress minimizing strategies, preventing the outcomes of stress during pandemic

and keeping one courage mustered up in the time of pandemic. Government should utilize all its resources and strategies to preserve the mental health of its nation so that people could be able to deal with this pandemic effectively.

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