

Mental Health for the Elderly Ones by 2020: The Unforeseen Future We Need to See Right Now

Tanay Maiti*

Psychiatrist and Mental Health Expert, AIIMS Bhubaneswar, India

***Corresponding Author:** Tanay Maiti, Psychiatrist and Mental Health Expert, AIIMS Bhubaneswar, India.

Received: September 30, 2020; **Published:** October 31, 2020

Introduction

Erik Erikson have famously explained old age as a psychosocial crisis between integrity and despair, when an aged individual reflects his or her entire life and have a sense of satisfaction or failure. However, in 21st century, old age is not just about looking back but also about living in the current present and look beyond the immediate present. With maximum people living with age 60 or more than ever before, geriatric health and care for geriatric health has turned one of the priorities in many developed countries, though same cannot be claimed for the developing or LAMIC ones. Over this, an ongoing pandemic with severely compromised health care facilities across the globe definitely forces us to revisit into our available resources and check points which needs immediate attention.

Geriatric mental health: Global morbidity

WHO predicts a doubling of world's population from 12 to 22% of the total, for people over 60 years between 2015 to 2050. Which means, nearly 1 in every 4 will be aged 60 or more within next 30 years. Also, currently 15% of the adult aged 60 or over suffer from a mental disorder, which accounts nearly 6% of total disability [1]. Needless to say, this morbidity will increase further in coming years and a global pandemic has worsened it even more.

Elderly population: why at risk?

Aging is inevitable, so are the biological, psychological and socio-environmental vulnerabilities it brings along with. Declining immune system, multiple co morbidities, increasing number of medications with complex drug interactions, all make an individual more prone to frequent infections, repeated and prolonged hospitalizations and poor recovery individually or as a whole. Also, in one of the early studies about COVID 19 from China has itself shown three times higher rate of progression of illness and risk of death from COVID pneumonia among the elderly ones than their young counterpart [2]. This has also been seen by multiple other researches among population with different ethnicities.

Geriatric mental health: Further burden on an already compromised individual

Over this, mental health conditions are often novel and definitely add more stress on the older citizens. Mental health conditions and sufferings from them are very age specific and often been considered as 'behavioural problem' or 'tantrums' even for the elderly ones. This gets more complicated with the poor social support, older ones turn unable to maintain themselves partially or totally with poor decision making and being dependent on other. This itself puts much load psychologically on the individuals, also intervention turns difficult with them because of poor response of the medications with risk of frequent side effects, and also difficulty in delivering or accessing non pharmacological health care supports because of the above mentioned reasons.

Citation: Tanay Maiti. "Mental Health for the Elderly Ones by 2020: The Unforeseen Future We Need to See Right Now". *EC Psychology and Psychiatry* 9.11 (2020): 17-19.

Geriatric mental health: Challenges

Difficulties and obstacles towards a comprehensive geriatric mental health care are many. The heterogeneous clinical presentation for common mental disorders with added burden of (age group specific) dementia yet poor understanding about the same in the community, complex social factors contributing to the degree of morbidity, psychological aspects of the common medical illnesses of old age, poor option and limited access for the rehabilitation services, less concern about the sexual problems in the elderly are the prominent ones among many others [3,4]. Also, for low and middle income countries like India, the altered demography of aging, very poor understanding and presence of community mental health care for the elderly, almost complete absence of care at primary and preliminary health care services, frequent incorporation of religion and spirituality in elderly mental health care along with poor interest among the researchers with minimal support by the policy makers makes it even worse, and worrisome as well [4]. Certainly providing an affordable and accessible Healthcare for this huge population itself is a challenge, which turns event offer when the recognition understanding and acceptance is minimal.

COVID 19 and geriatric mental health

A pandemic always has its profound impact on the psychosocial environment of entire population. Health anxiety, frequent panic attacks, chronic stress, insomnias are common; rumors, uncertainty and misinformation can lead to mass hysteria as well [5].

About elderly living and coping during this pandemic, Artimage R, *et al.* [6] rightly points towards the social isolation in the elderly during this time and have notified it as 'serious public health concern'. Social support and social connectedness, both of which are immensely important and vital for the elderly people, have seen severely compromised state during this time. The needed health measures to follow, strict physical distancing and prolonged lockdown have made the elderly ones even more isolated than before. Also, in a changed health care services, where care, health instruction and awareness about the ongoing pandemic is mostly delivered through smart phones and similar electronic gadgets, which, elderly people have certain difficulties to use properly, for obvious reasons [7].

Also, elderly whose children or primary caregivers either got stuck elsewhere in the lockdown or lives in different city or country due to livelihood, other than their own anxiety for the elderly members of their family, the specific population also missed the 'loving touch' or affectionate personal care which can never be replaced by video calls or virtual modes.

Future worries

Following COVID 19 pandemic, the world wouldn't remain the very same. Other than unavoidable changes in global socio economic scenarios, the health care system will take its own time to get reorganized and deliver their services with full competence. Therefore, the needy ones but not the very vocal ones will be at highest risk to be overlooked or neglected. Also, following the pandemic all the psychiatric morbidities surely going to increase soon, and will hit the elderlies even harder. Moreover, loosing multiple close family members and friends with living in constant fear of painful death definitely will generate complicated grief reaction in most of them, which will need extra attention in near future. For this, not just only the mental health care professionals, but all the health care professionals up to the primary care level need to stay aware and prepared as well.

Possible solutions

Digital geriatric mental health care has been extensively analysed and supported by enthusiastic researches but real life application still seems to be distant and needs to cross many stages [8]. Social connectedness and providing direct in person emotional support is very important for the elderly people who lives alone. Special care and concern need to be provided for the people who lives in old age homes or day cares. Currently or just following the pandemic, avoiding over crowding or close group meetings needs to be kept under halt, also

proper and healthy use of masks and following other health advices needs to be monitored closely by the caregivers. This might lead to exhaustion and occasional irritability in the caregivers but they need to be sensitive and prepared as well for the impending increased care needed by this population following such a severe and prolonged pandemic [9].

Off course, mere individual service or support definitely won't be able to address this upcoming crisis Easily. a proper policy making community level intervention and social awareness is definitely much needed to begin with at least. Above all, autonomy, dignity and respect needs to be well preserved too, for everyone, while assisted care and shared decision making not only will empower the elderly ones, but also increase their self confidence, sense of importance and more integrated both in the family and health care system.

Towards age friendly world

Healthy aging is not a myth. Aging can turn enjoyable and productive too. If we move towards our age friendly world Where ability to meet the basic needs Like housing personal and financial security and maintenance of good diet and ability to seek Medical Health and medicines. Along with this, independence in mobility, ability to build and maintain relationships and ability to contribute significantly and age-appropriately both for the family and society will add meaning to their lives [10].

In a COVID 19 free but deeply hit world, their well being along with self dependency is going to be pivotal not only for their own health, but it will also decrease the overall burden on the entire health care system; hence better functioning of the same for the rest of the population.

Bibliography

1. Mental health of older adults.
2. Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia Emergency Response Epidemiology. "The epidemiological characteristics of an outbreak of 2019 novel coronavirus diseases (COVID-19) in China". *Zhonghua Liu Xing Bing Xue Za Zhi* 41.2 (2020): 145.
3. Reeta Verma Katiyar, *et al.* "Geriatric Mental Health Challenges in India- A Review". *Journal of Evolution of Medical and Dental Sciences* (2020).
4. Lodha and De Sousa. "Challenges for geriatric mental". *Health Journal of Geriatric Mental Health* (2018).
5. Coping with Stress.
6. Armitage R and Nellums LB. "COVID-19 and the consequences of isolating the elderly". *Lancet Public Health* 5.5 (2020): 296.
7. Banerjee D. "Age and ageism in COVID-19: Elderly mental health-care vulnerabilities and needs". *Asian Journal of Psychiatry* 51 (2020): 102154.
8. Karen Fortuna, *et al.* "A Future Research Agenda for Digital Geriatric Mental Health Care America". *Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* (2019).
9. Banerjee D. "Age and ageism in COVID-19: Elderly mental health-care vulnerabilities and needs". *Asian Journal of Psychiatry* 51 (2020): 102154.
10. World Report on Ageing and Health: WHO (2015).

Volume 9 Issue 11 November 2020

© All rights reserved by Tanay Maiti.