



Suicide in the Era of COVID-19 Pandemic: Is there an Association?

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Abstract

Suicide is the act of intentionally causing one's own death. Loneliness and staying at home for a long time during the quarantine of coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) could definitely be associated with suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Tension, anxiety, worry, and depression accompanied by the COVID-19 information could induce suicidal attacks among healthy persons. In this commentary, we tried to explore the possible association and risk factors of suicide in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19; Suicide; Depression

Introduction

Since December 31st, 2019, the world has been in a continuous war against coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19). On that day, the World Health Organization (WHO) country office in China was informed about the appearance of a new virus attacking humankind and causing pneumonia [1]. Since then, every country, that COVID-19 has entered, has started a curfew till further notice. This curfew forces everyone to stay at home that has its impacts on one's different sides of life. However, does this tiny creature have the power to force someone to sacrifice their life, in other words, commit suicide?

Magnitude of the problem

Suicide is the act of intentionally causing one's own death. According to the WHO researches, there are about 800,000 people die by committing suicide every year, and a person dies every 40 seconds, and for each successful suicide crime, there are about 20 failed suicide attempts. Suicide is prevalent among young people between 15-29 years, where suicide is the second leading cause of death among them, especially in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) more than high-income ones. About 79% of suicide crimes occur in LMICs [2].

Suicide causes are variable, but the most common of them are mentally related problems, especially depression; other causes include failure in romantic relations, financial problems and alcohol abuse. Nowadays, we could add pandemics to the causes that increase suicide rates. On searching for the COVID-19 effects on humans, it's found that there is an increase in suicide rates [3]. Governments aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19 through unprecedented closing of schools, travel, and business; these ways may help decrease the spread of infection. Still, they have pernicious impacts on public health due to the effect of a depressed economy and closed society.

Loneliness and staying at home for a long time are associated with suicidal thoughts and behaviors [4]. Additionally, we should remember that many people lost their jobs due to economic problems following this global pandemic. This could force them to commit suicide. There is a high rise in unemployment due to the large recession worldwide, which in turn leads to reduced income. Reduced income mainly affects lifestyle, and both finally mean that a large number of people die earlier.

Covid-19 considered the opportunity to understand the relationship between viruses that infected the respiratory system with

mental disorders [5]. Suicide is expected in patients who suffer from depression or bipolar disorder. Now, healthy people have the chance to get these diseases with its impacts as a result of the ability of the virus to penetrate the central nervous system, as when it affects the respiratory system it also hurts olfactory neural pathway which facilitates the penetration of the virus into the central nervous system, and this has its bad effects on brain function and mental health [6].

Additionally, depression is considered the most common cause of suicide and prevalent among the poor more than the rich. On taking a look at the current economic situation, we can expect the increased percentage of the poor, thus, in turn, increased level of depression. Also, due to the state of fear that dominates society due to COVID-19 rapid development and events, increased states of tension and anxiety that lead people to depression and some people may resort to suicide or harm themselves [6].

Fearing of losing people we love, or one of our families during this pandemic or even they catch the infection is another cause [7]. It is believed that some individuals who committed suicide due to their feeling of loyalty to their families and villages in order not to spread the infection among them. Misinformation and little knowledge are the principal causes of their depressed mental state and their fear [8].

Discussion and Conclusion

A study in the USA was done to know the effect of COVID-19 on suicidal behavior, and it shows a strong link between them where there is a large number of people committed suicide due to their general distress, fear of physical harm, and also the effect of social distancing policies. Also, there are many individuals who committed suicide by exposing themselves to the virus intentionally to kill themselves, and this is considered as one of the suicidal ways [9].

Suicide due to COVID-19 among medical staff is not uncommon as they may be afraid of being helpless or infecting other patients, or they may be worried about their families and their suffering before death. This pushed two infected Italian nurses to commit suicide. Also, most medical staff workers lack knowledge about mental health care, which leads to an increase in their worry and fear [10].

Eventually, we must do the anti-stigma program to help people become more aware and to deal with the COVID-19, as well as to spread positive and supportive messages. We need to give more attention to people with mental disorders like depression to help them pass this critical period without any harm. It's better to start

studies about the link between outbreaks and mental disorders to get future prevention programs and strategies.

Conflict of Interest

The authors state that there are no conflicts of interest.

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