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Impact of COVID-19 (Corona Virus) on Mental Health

The COVID-19 pandemic has induced a considerable degree of fear, worry and concern in the population at large. Noted psychological impacts are elevated levels of stress or anxiety. The World Health Organisation (2020) however, believes that as new measures and impacts of containing COVID-19 are introduced – especially quarantine and its effects on people's lives, leisure activities, routines or livelihoods – levels of loneliness, depression, harmful alcohol and drug use, and self-harm or suicidal behaviour are also expected to rise. (WHO, 2020)

To decrease the epidemic peak, South Africans are required to observe the mandatory three-week nationwide lockdown stipulated by Government. This, however, has left many with heightened feelings of uncertainty, anxiety and loneliness. Priority should, therefore, be given to making the public aware of ways to help cope during this critical event, and how to seek support especially those individuals who may already be feeling more stressed, depressed or anxious than usual (Cipla, 2020).

In his article, Flisher (2020) states that South Africa's official response to COVID-19 makes little or no provision for implications of the pandemic on mental health. He believes that proactive measures to prevent transmission and containment overlook the importance of mental health care and the need for psycho-social support.

In a context in which 16% of South Africans live with a common mental health condition such as depression, anxiety or substance misuse, the anxiety and social isolation brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic can exacerbate these conditions. Also, feeling overwhelmed by anxiety can make it difficult to cope with the new lifestyle changes that are required and may lead to people adopting unhealthy ways of coping, such as substance use. (Flisher, A, J 2020).

Likewise, the IASC states that in the case of an epidemic, people can experience boredom, anxiety and depression due to isolation. Additionally, the fear of being infected not only leads to severe anxiety but also cause individuals to avoid seeking healthcare to prevent being exposed to the virus. (Flisher, A, J 2020)

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Tips from SADAG to reduce stress during the lockdown (Cipla. 2020):

1. Maintain a daily routine.

2. Restrict media and social media coverage to prevent it from becoming too overwhelming. Only obtain information from credible news sources.

3. Acknowledge your feelings and focus on things you can control.

4. Find things to keep you busy (whether it's constructive or creative) to help lift your mood.

5. Stay connected with your loved ones via technology.

6. If you're on medication, remember to take it as prescribed.

To alleviate the impact COVID-19 poses on mental health, Sizakala Wellness Counsellors (SWC) will be offering e-counselling services to those individuals who feel that the public health crisis has triggered intense emotional reactions on their part. Our e-counselling services will include communication via WhatsApp, email, telephone and skype.

We will be also recruiting more counsellors to join our online team. For those interested please forward your CV to admin@wellnesscounsellors.co.za

For more information please visit our website: www.wellnesscounsellors.co.za or check out our social media.