COVID-19 pandemic and the mental health consequences

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) emerged from Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, in late December 2019 and spread rapidly affecting 213 countries and territories around the world. Since then, the main strategy used to reduce the chances and the number of the infection was social distancing or social isolation per quarantine. However, the separation from loved ones, the loss of freedom, uncertainty over disease status, and boredom are quarantine-derived stressors that may contribute to emotional distress and increased risk for psychiatric illness associated with Covid-19. Indeed, individuals with preexisting psychiatric or substance use problems are more likely to experience an increased risk for adverse psychological outcomes.

Following the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) pandemic was reported higher rates of psychiatric disorders and psychological distress. Recently, an online survey that investigated the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the general population showed that half of responders experienced psychological distress or anxiety and depressive symptoms in a moderate-to-severe degree suggesting the importance of addressing the pandemic's consequences on mental health. The psychological sequelae derived from COVID-19 may be translated into a range of physiological reactions such as alterations in reactivity to stress and abnormalities on neurochemical, physiological, anatomical systems. Therefore, there is a well-known neurobiological basis to understand the relationship between social isolation and CNS disorders.

On the other hand, people with psychiatric disorders are at great risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 due to number of illness factors. Bipolar disorder, for instance, is a chronic and episodic mental disorder characterized by mood instability, high rates of substance use comorbidity and cognitive impairment, illness's characteristics that can limit the adherence to the protective measures recommended to prevent infection. Therefore, providing psychological first aid is an essential care component for individuals that have been victims of outbreaks like COVID-19, in particular for those with preexisting psychiatric disorders.