

Understanding and Containment of Depression during Social Distancing by COVID-19

Comprensión y contención de la depresión durante el distanciamiento social por COVID-19

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Received: Jun 16, 2020 | Accepted: Jun 19, 2020 | Published: Jun 30, 2020

Cite as: Véliz-Sánchez M, Díaz-Águila H. Comprensión y contención de la depresión durante el distanciamiento social por COVID-19. Univ Méd Pinareña [Internet]. 2020 [citado: Fecha de acceso]; 16(3):e559. Disponible en: <http://www.revgaleno.sld.cu/index.php/ump/article/view/559>

Director’s note: this article is an adapted version for this journal of the broadcast of a Special Radio Program related to COVID-19 on June 16, 2020 for CMES Radio Sagua, in Villa Clara. Cuba. Figure 1 shows the broadcast from his home by one of the authors of this manuscript.

COVID-19 pandemic has produced changes in people’s lives, and has released dilemmas, variations in routines, economic problems and social isolation. Concerns arise about getting sick, in relation to the length of time and about the future.

Rumors and misinformation posted on social networks and unreliable sources can make you feel out of control and unclear about what to do. During social isolation, stress, anxiety, fear, sadness, loneliness, and possible mental health problems can arise from, including anxiety and depression⁽¹⁾.

Depression is a mood disorder that causes negative feelings such as sadness, dejection, suffering, helplessness, uncontrollable grief, anger, or frustration. Lack of self-esteem and loss of interest in daily activities are some of the negative consequences of this disease⁽²⁾.

Several signs indicate the presence of depression. Sadness is a symptom that accompanies depression, although some people with depression may not even feel sad. People may have different symptoms. Feelings of sadness and “emptiness”, pessimism, restlessness, irritability and feelings of guilt may occur⁽³⁾.

Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities and loss of energy, fatigue or feeling of slowness are common. You may experience difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions, difficulty sleeping and waking up in the morning, appetite disturbances, and thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts. In addition, headache, cramps and digestive disorders that are difficult to control may be experienced⁽³⁾.

Sadness is often mistaken for depression. Depression is a long-lasting process and disrupts daily activities. It often occurs for a variety of reasons, including being sick with COVID-19 or being isolated in your home.

The current pandemic (COVID-19) may cause a new state of depression, revive a past illness, or increase an existing state of depression. When a person realizes that he or she has suffered loss of interest in activities they enjoyed, personal habits, or the cycle of sleep, eating, or other practices, they will experience sadness and thoughts of death. At this time, immediate attention should be sought from the family physician, who will take the necessary actions to solve or make viable the care of these disorders⁽⁴⁾.

Older people sometimes feel depression, but it is not always evident itself in sadness. Some other symptoms may be observed or they may refuse to express their feelings. The following are some particular ways of expressing depression⁽⁵⁾: feeling “empty” much of the time, loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities, pessimism or lack of hope, feelings of guilt, and lack of self-esteem and powerlessness.

Similarly, the older adult may experience difficulty concentrating, remembering details or making decisions, sleeping disorders, including waking up too early or sleeping too much, changes in appetite or weight, without proposing it. Thoughts of death or suicide or suicide attempts, irritability, etc. are common.

There are groups that are more likely to suffer from depression. Females, those who suffer from a chronic disease (cancer, diabetes, bronchial asthma, cerebrovascular disease or ischemic heart disease) or have some kind of disability; as well as those who suffer from sleeping disorders, those who live alone or remain socially isolated, are most prone to develop depression.

You may also be at increased risk of depression if you have a personal or family history of depression, if you use certain medications (beta-blockers, anticonvulsants, steroids, hypnotics), or if you consume alcoholic beverages or other legal drugs, such as tobacco or practice self-medication.

The following lines summarize some practical tips for the management of depression⁽⁶⁾.

- Get enough sleep: respect the sleep schedule and perform this activity in a suitable, quiet and dimly lit place that allows you to perform your needs at night.
- Participate in regular physical activity: regular physical activity and exercise can help improve mood. Engage in movement activities (walking, dancing), preferably outdoors where you can maintain distance.
- Avoid tobacco, alcohol and drugs: smoking increases the risk of more severe forms of COVID-19. Alcohol does not help improve the symptoms of depression, neither its causes.
- Limit the time you spend in front of electronic devices: these can cause addiction and depression, affect schedules, and isolate the person.
- Read books or magazines you like: this causes a distraction with a positive effect on the person, as well as causing a relaxing effect.
- Listen to music, check out a photo album that reminds you of happy times, do whatever helps you feel happy.
- Divide large tasks into small ones, set priorities, and do what you can when you can.
- Spend time with others and talk to family or friends using the existing communication channels.
- Delay making important decisions in your life until feeling better.
- Discuss your thoughts and concerns about COVID-19 with your partner or a trusted friend. Talking to someone will help you see the things you are worried about differently.
- Always take a bath with warm water and change your clothes according to the occasion, even if it is to be inside your house.
- Limit the exaggerated access to news about the pandemic. You must keep yourself informed daily, but only through reliable sources.
- Create social contacts through the Internet. Don't expect people to call you. Find an old friend you haven't talked to in a long time, call someone and talk about anything except COVID-19.

This paper presents the definitions of depression and sadness, the clinical manifestations frequently presented by people in social isolation as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, and some recommendations for the containment of depression that they may present.

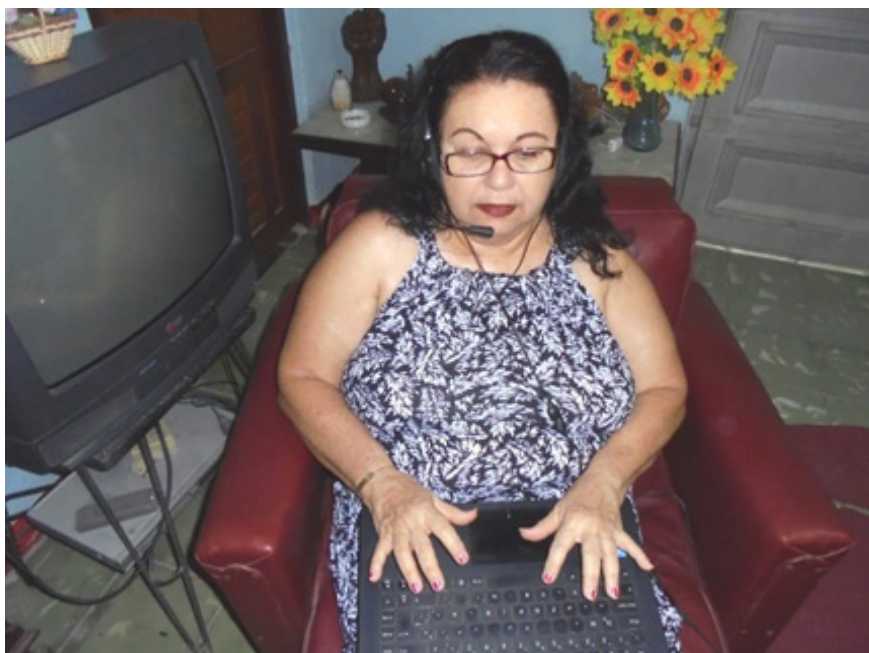


Figure 1. One of the authors of this manuscript broadcasting the radio program from his home.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

Both authors participated equally in the conception, writing, review of the manuscript and its final version.

FUNDING SOURCES

The authors did not receive funding for the development of this article.

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