

Anxiety and its Variants in an age of COVID-19

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Short Article

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Abstract

While there are several acknowledged forms of anxiety, the COVID pandemic has caused much consternation, stress and anxiety among the population worldwide. This paper will discuss anxiety and the main types in general and then discuss some new forms of anxiety which have emanated from the pandemic and the consternation it has caused. Shaughnessy and Johnson (2019) have cursorily reviewed the realm of anxiety and its components and treatment. Their published article appeared just prior to the COVID crisis.

There are many acknowledged types of “anxiety disorders”. The DSM-V contains many of the acknowledged types that have been around for years. One of the main ones is “Panic Disorder” which refers to a sudden panic attack. Counseling, psychotherapy and medication are the main treatments of choice. There is something called “Social anxiety disorder” which refers to the fact that some individuals are apprehensive, fearful and tense around other people. This could be a positive occasion, a negative occasion or a simple neutral occasion. There are many specific phobias- a few are listed here: agoraphobia, claustrophobia, phasmophobia, phengophobia, pharmacophobia and phobophobia.

Children have “separation anxiety disorder” referring to the difficulties that children have leaving a caregiver, or mother or father or care giving individual. Soldiers often return from combat with something called “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder” but this condition could result from the individual being exposed to some event which is outside the realm of normal experience- flooding, an earthquake, a tornado, a school or church shooting or any instance where some individual enters an establishment and shoots people. The term “going postal” refers to individuals who have entered a post office with a gun and have begun to shoot others. There have been massive events, such as the one in Las Vegas Nevada where many individuals were killed or wounded.

Obsessive-compulsive disorder is linked to anxiety- as the client/patient performs repetitive actions or behaviors in order to allay their anxiety.

At the present time, we are confronted with a number of “anxiety” conditions, which could be labeled as stress, but which emanate from this pandemic and COVID-19.

1. There is an anxiety about COVID in that many people have free floating pervasive anxiety about their futures and how long this COVID thing is going to last. Initially there was a hope that this would last a few weeks, a few months at most, but unfortunately, as of the writing of this paper, we still seem to be mired in this quagmire of COVID face masking, handwashing, and social distancing. People are apprehensive, nay, anxious about just how long we are going to be confronted with this seemingly endless preoccupation with masks and hand washing and social distancing.
2. Fear/Anxiety about contamination. There are individuals who have to eat, purchase groceries for their families and themselves, and are anxious about venturing out into a grocery store to purchase basic essentials. They are anxious about touching door- knobs or using the ATM at their local bank as these could be a repository of germs, bacteria and yes, viruses.
3. Mask Anxiety- In some states, a mask must be worn to work, and obviously they are imperative in hospitals and clinics and the like. In some states, the rules and regulations have changed from month to month and week to week- and one never knows what the expectations are going to be in one's local church or restaurant or grocery store. Should I wear the mask? Did I forget my mask? Will they allow me in this restaurant? What is the policy of this establishment ? These pervasive thoughts swirl around in one's head, as people make their way from car to supermarket to coffee shop.
4. Variant Anxiety----Just when it seemed safe to go back out into the streets, there appeared certain “variants” of COVID-thus triggering an entire new set of concerns- particularly among those who are immunocompromised- with hay fever, allergies, or a missing lung or someone

recovering from lung cancer or COPD.

5. **Symptom Anxiety-** One can refer to them as hypochondriacs, but for many people a slight case of hyperpyrexia or a slight fever can send one into a tizzy regarding their health. Some symptoms will send some individuals to the Internet to review the signs and symptoms of COPD or COVID or any other disease- (SARS for example- the precursor of COVID), thus some individuals are overwhelmed with anxiety- call it participatory anxiety- they may even be anxious about going to a doctor's office for a check- up. Some individuals become anxious because they know that something negative may happen in the future and that will cause anxiety and thus they are about to become anxious about a feared future event.
6. **Death Anxiety-** As we all know, some individuals have in fact died from COVID- putting aside the issue of vaccination, people hear about death, and the death of friends, relatives, and loved ones and thoughts begin to ruminate about their funeral, their last will and testament and other details such as the type of casket, who will do the eulogy, will there be cremation or some other approach.
7. **Anxiety about Information-** The news media has been inundated with much information about COVID- some of it good, some bad, some erroneous. After one hears about one bit of information, one becomes concerned as to the accuracy of the information. Out there on the Internet for a certain period of time, people were advocating IVERMECTIN for the treatment of COVID. Now, educated people can go to the Internet and discern that IVERMECTIN is used for animals- dogs in specific to treat worms. If a person was given IVERMECTIN and recovered, the recovery was simply due to a well-developed respiratory system, and overall good health and excellent vitals.
8. **Anxiety Regarding Relationship Loss.** Prior to the Covid crisis, a person may have met another attractive or handsome individual at some event or party-and then COVID hit and we were separated from most human contact. They may have had very high hopes for a future relationship- but due to COVID- they have lost touch with that interesting other. There is probably some anger, frustration and exasperation that they may not see the person again that they encountered on some enchanted evening a few months ago.
9. **Anxiety regarding Relatives.** We have all heard about individuals in nursing homes who could not be visited by a son/daughter or grandchild or cousin or relative. There is this free-floating fear that a loved one will pass, and one will not be able to say their goodbyes or conduct end of life discussions.
10. **In the realm of religion,** there is some anxiety about lack of response to prayer. People have been praying for this to end, yet it drags on. People want to return to normal and hope that the Good Lord will intervene. Apparently, prayers have gone unanswered causing some consternation among the religious zealots.
11. **There are probably other realms of anxiety that have been**

caused by the COVID pandemic. It is not known if any of these "anxiety provoking" events will result in a new diagnosis.

Certainly, we have all been going thru a very stressful period in our lives and we have had to make major changes in the way in which we live, work and interact with each other. There have been certainly certain groups that have been most impacted- restaurant workers, movie theatres, and of course physicians, nurses and all those involved in the caring for the ill and those who have contracted COVID.

Recovery may be difficult for some and certainly a re-adjustment. Financial issues for some remain paramount. Concern about learning loss is pervasive in the educational realm. Further, many individuals have resigned and have decided to seek a different type of employment and certainly marriages and relationships have suffered.

All of the above could be considered as a "transient situational disorder" or given some global terms that is innocuous.

References

1. Shaughnessy, M.F. & Johnson, A. (2018) Anxiety and its components as we approach 2020. *Journal of Anxiety and Depression* Vol 1, no 2.

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