

CORONAPHOBIA AS PSYCHODYNAMICS AND COPING MECHANISMS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Introduction – Since first appearing in Wuhan at the end of 2019, the corona virus has caused many losses in various aspects of human life. Starting from the physical-psychological aspect of health and socio-economic. Even now, the new policies adopted by the government also have a huge impact on people's daily habits. One of them is affecting a person's psychology, where the news about COVID-19 has been very developed, causing anxiety and fear among the community. With the many stressors that have emerged in this pandemic era, a person is required to have good coping skills to be able to cope with dangerous stimuli. For someone who has a bad coping skills, he will experience excessive fear and anxiety about the corona virus which is called coronaphobia.

Methods – The author makes a review of 20 journals and 2 books discussing definitions, risk factors, psychodynamics, coping mechanisms and management of new phobias in this pandemic era.

Results – From several literature reviews, the factors identified in this pandemic era were unforeseen reality, unending uncertainties, need of acquiring new practices and avoidance behavior, loss of faith in health infrastructure, contraction of COVID-19 by head of states, cautionary statements from international bodies, and infodemia.

Discuss – Several identified factors are assumed to cause interference with routine life, catastrophizing interpretation of benign symptoms, and social amplification of risk which lead to coronaphobia. This requires a person to have a good coping mechanism to adapt to new habits of coexistence with this virus. If the coping mechanism of a person is bad, then the stressor will experience a psychosocial process causing a phobia against COVID-19 which is called coronaphobia.

Conclusion – Coronaphobia is excessive fear and anxiety due to the various effects of the corona virus, be it related to thoughts, information or the illness it causes. This new phobia is caused by the emergence of several risk factors in this pandemic era, which undergo some psychosocial process. Individuals who use maladaptive coping mechanisms are more likely to engage in risky behavior and experience health problems than those with adaptive mechanisms. Therefore, a good coping strategy is needed to avoid the occurrence of psychological problems such as coronaphobia that often arise during this pandemics.

Keywords: coronaphobia, COVID-19, psychodynamic, coping mechanism, fear.

Article History:

Received: February 19, 2021
Accepted: December 25, 2022
Published: September 30, 2023

Cite this as: Wirawan, M.G. Coronaphobia as Psychodynamics and Coping Mechanisms During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Psychiatry Psychology and Behavioral Research*; 2023.4(2):26-29.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has had devastating effects around the world. The impact of COVID-19 is very broad, consisting not only of physical health problems, but also mental and economic health. Anxiety and worry have become the main psychological consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. This can be seen from the impact of COVID-19, which is one of the most searched for things in the history of Google search.^{1,2} One of the factors that contribute greatly to this is fear. Currently, fear continues to grow especially after there is a new agreement about the new normal, where humans are forced to live with this virus using health protocols.^{3,4,5} Of course this depends on the response of each individual to deal with this

stressful situation, which is called the coping mechanism. This gives rise to a new terminology called "coronaphobia" which has been shown to be associated with functional disorders.^{2,6,7} This article will review the definition, epidemiology, risk factors and psychodynamics associated with coping mechanisms associated with coronaphobia.

METHOD

The author makes a review of several literature consisting of journals and textbook on definitions, risk factors, psychodynamics, coping mechanisms and management of new phobias in this pandemic era.

RESULT

Phobias are anxiety disorders characterized by a persistent, excessive, unrealistic fear of objects, people, animals, activities or situations. A person who has a phobia will avoid the triggers of his fear and when that is not possible it will cause anxiety and distress.⁴ In the present, there are many stressors especially related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. From here it will depend on the response of each person to the stressor, which is called the coping mechanism. The impact of COVID-19 such as increased mortality, unemployment, economic problems, anxiety about being unwell, health problems that may be experienced by close people, loneliness due to quarantine, and increased anxiety that develop as all these factors are defined as "coronaphobia".^{2,3} Several studies have used the Coronavirus Anxiety Scale (CAS) questionnaire to diagnose coronaphobia where the questionnaire shows how often a person has experienced symptoms of fear and anxiety over the coronavirus during the past two weeks using a 4-point scale. The CAS questionnaire distinguished people with and without dysfunctional anxiety with a sensitivity of 90% and a specificity of 85%. These results support CAS as an efficient and valid tool for clinical research and practice.^{5,8,9}

There are many risk factors for this phobia, one of which is the uncertainty about when this pandemic will end. The mutation of the COVID-19 virus that causes several new strains in certain countries is a concern of its own. The terms lockdown, quarantine, and self-isolation, which are now often used usually carry negative connotations among the community, causing them to experience coronaphobia.¹⁰ New normal habits such as social distancing, wearing masks, washing hands regularly and avoiding touching faces and avoiding crowds will trigger the emergence of a circle of discomfort, fear and anxiety. This is because it takes an average person 68-254 days to adapt to these uncomfortable habits to become new habits.¹¹ So that people who are unable to get used to it in a short time will lose control which makes them more vulnerable experiencing coronaphobia.¹² This is exacerbated by statements from the international organization United Nations (UN) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that mention COVID-19 as one of the worst global crises, even though according to WHO the impact caused by COVID-19 has not yet reached its peak. However, nowadays many health facilities are showing signs of collapse.¹³ Another concern is the emergence of unsubstantiated bad news. It shows how social media can become a global public health threat due to conflicting and manipulative misinformation in the form of fake news about possible cures, symptoms and deaths from COVID-19.¹⁴

DISCUSS

Psychodynamics Coronaphobia

Research shows coronaphobia to be a strong predictor of psychopathology during this pandemic. This is indicated by the relationship between coronaphobia and emotional distress such as depression, anxiety, alcohol use and suicide.¹⁵ From a psychodynamic aspect, coronaphobia can arise because the risk factors described above continue to be a psychosocial process in the middle of a person's life. The human brain system is programmed to hold on to certainty and perceives uncertainty as a danger. When there is certainty, then

automatically a picture appears in the brain about what to do every day which creates a habit or "auto pilot" mode. The existence of risk factors, such as uncertainty about the emergence of the virus and when this pandemic will end, will cause irrational and negative emotional outbursts, such as panic and phobias. This is exacerbated by a person's social environment through the process of transferring information and stigma regarding the risks of COVID-19. The many sources of information make a person's perception of risk accumulate, which leads to an increased behavioral response and ultimately leads to coronaphobia.^{1,17}

Furthermore, the anxiety and fear of each individual person can also cause panic. For example, suppose someone with a bad coping mechanism has just experienced mild symptoms similar to the symptoms of a COVID-19 infection, then the person is immediately worried and immediately calls the emergency call line for fear of being infected with this virus. This is called the "catastrophic interpretation". Furthermore, to find out whether he is infected or not, that person will seek help from other people such as discussing with family, reading news, taking body temperature and others which is done continuously for a long period of time. This causes an over-activity which becomes a habit but can give them a sense of satisfaction and protection, which in turn leads to the condition "coronaphobia".¹⁸

Coping Mechanisms: Definition and Conditions during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Definition of Coping Mechanism

Fear is a reactive emotional state to real or perceived threats that is accompanied by a surge in autonomous arousal, thoughts of immediate danger, and escape behavior. Fear will develop into anxiety when someone's coping mechanism does not work.⁴ Coping mechanisms are the means by which individuals solve problems, adjust to change, and respond to threatening situations. Coping plays an important role in efforts to prevent and reduce threats and distress, so that when individuals do inappropriate coping, they will become vulnerable to problematic behavior.^{8,16,17,19} Especially in times of pandemics like this where there are many stressors that increase the possibility of mental problems, including a new phobia called coronaphobia, coping mechanisms have become very important.

The coping mechanism in psychoanalytic terminology is also referred to as the ego defense mechanism. The coping mechanism is broadly divided into 3 major classes, namely seeking social assistance, using cognitive strategies, and involuntary defense mechanisms.²⁰ Currently there are classifications that are often used, namely less adaptive defense, more adaptive defense and most adaptive defense.¹⁹

The Ego Defense Mechanism During the COVID-19 Pandemic

When the virus first spread in Wuhan, China, there was denial from all citizens of the world that this virus was a dangerous life-threatening disease. Denial can be defined as refusal to accept external reality because it is too threatening in order to reduce anxiety. It will be easier for some individuals to refuse to accept the virus as a threat, despite objective evidence to the contrary.²¹

In addition, there is some evidence that a person has hypochondriasis during this pandemic, as seen in the habits of some people who repeatedly report somatic complaints and seek help. Several other efforts include seeing the guidelines regarding COVID-19 repeatedly a day. Even if individuals are

offered help from those they seek, they will still refuse it. In addition, there is a coping mechanism that brings benefits to health services, namely altruism or sublimation, in which health workers spend a lot of time and energy to overcome problems with this virus. In addition, there is also an ego defense mechanism in the form of humor, where health workers sometimes make jokes about themselves in the midst of stressful situations. Altruism, sublimation and humor are examples of mature adaptive mechanisms.²¹ Individuals who use maladaptive coping mechanisms are more likely to engage in risky behavior and experience health problems than those with adaptive mechanisms. Therefore, during the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone must change their coping mechanisms to survive various stressors from outside in order to avoid health problems, both physical and mental.^{1,8}

Management of Coronaphobia

After understanding that coping mechanisms play an important role in this COVID-19 pandemic, it would be better if psychological therapy in the form of psychotherapy related to coronaphobia emphasizes more on a good coping mechanism strategy. The aim is to increase the change from an immature defensive response to a mature defensive response.^{21,22} In addition, given that coronaphobia is a predictor of psychopathology, mental health professionals can use an internet-based cognitive-behavioral (ICBT) approach to overcome this problem. one of the reasons for choosing this method is because of social distancing.³

CONCLUSION

Coronaphobia is excessive fear and anxiety due to the various effects of the corona virus, be it related to thoughts, information or the illness it causes. The occurrence of this new phobia phenomenon is due to the many risk factors that have emerged in this pandemic era which causes a person to adapt to new habits using health protocols. If the coping mechanism of a person is bad, then the stressor will experience a psychosocial process causing a phobia against COVID-19 which is called coronaphobia. Therefore, a good coping strategy is needed to avoid the occurrence of psychological problems such as coronaphobia that often arise during pandemics like now. It is hoped that a little review in a journal about coronaphobia will be of benefit to all readers, including stakeholders, in understanding the causes, formulating a diagnosis, and formulating policies and interventions for the masses to reduce the phenomenon of coronaphobia.

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