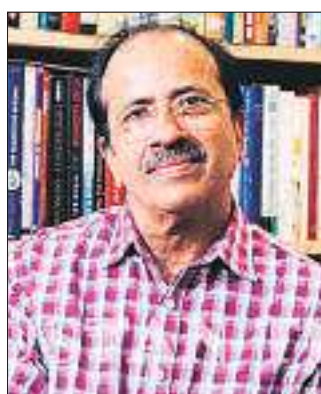




MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

Impact of COVID-19 on mental health and psychological well-being

With people staying at home in the pandemic, away from family and friends, loneliness is negatively impacting mental health of individuals. It is important to reach out now



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THE OLD saying, "Change is the only constant in life," could not have been more relevant than what it is today during the COVID-19 pandemic. The change society is witnessing across the globe has far more wider ramifications than were ever visualized. The way of thinking, working, social behavior and interaction are being transformed across the globe, and we Indians are no exception. The changes are impacting not only India's socio-economic and political life but also psychological and mental well-being of its citizens.

In the absence of any effective known acquired immunity or preventive safeguard such as the anti-SARS COV-2 drug, the only available option for us to handle this pandemic is to keep each individual at a safe distance from one another through social distancing. The advisory for it has been defined by the Centre of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), USA, and recommends that people should stay at least 6 feet apart from each other.

Clearly, social distancing is pivotal to the preventive measures advocated by various academic advisories and regulatory bodies and their experts. However, these measures impact a country's economy, especially in lockdowns. Globally, a large number of people have lost their jobs and livelihoods, and are feeling a sense of deep uncertainty — how long the pandemic will last and its outcome

and the fear of getting infected with coronavirus.

Over and above the economic turmoil, people now have signs of increased psychological distress and suffering. The COVID-18 pandemic is now posing a tremendous challenge to people's mental health and well-being. The emerging crisis has triggered a wide variety of psychological problems, such as anxiety and depression. According to one study, nearly one-third of people surveyed had experienced varying degree of psychological distress due to pandemic.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic struck the world, the rapid industrialization, pollution and fast pace of life were identified as the cause of the widespread problem of mental illnesses including loneliness. These illnesses spread as epidemic across the globe, including India. The Lancet, a well-regarded medical journal published from the UK, put out a report titled "The burden of mental disorders across the states in India: The Global Burden of Disease Study 1990-2017." It was released in February 2020. The authors claim that nearly 197 million Indians were suffering from mental disorders, including 45.7 million reported to have depressive disorders, and 44.9 million were suffering with anxiety disorders. Other nations reported a rise in similar mental disorders, and it is believed that today nearly 264 million of the world's population suffers from depression.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has also warned that mental health problems will be the main cause of disability in the world in 2030. Now people, already suffering from mental health conditions are being adversely affected by the emotional responses elicited by COVID-19 pandemic. This is resulting in further deterioration of their existing mental health conditions due to chronic stress, caused by economic and psychological turmoil. Besides, those people are not getting timely health services like therapy and medication because of disruption in health services across the country.

The feeling of loneliness is another se-



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rious mental health issue, with a rising number of the global population becoming more isolated and lonelier. It is estimated that about 9% of the population of Japan, 22% of the population of the USA, and 23% of the UK population always or often feel lonely. Even in India where the joint family structure is still widely intact, senior citizens are now increasingly left to live alone, and hardly any relatives or anyone close to them visit. In this disintegrating society, the older generation rarely speak to their relatives on the phone and have no one to give them company or to have conversations with them.

Due to fear of being infected and getting others infected, the older generation

is forced stay alone in their homes. The worst hit is those who were largely cared for by social and voluntary services. Clearly, the feeling of loneliness, during the COVID-19 pandemic, is expected to make this vulnerable population highly susceptible to mental disorders. Unfortunately, large per cent of people dying because of COVID-19 belong to elder population already suffering from other serious illnesses like diabetes, cancer and heart ailments. Moreover, government machinery especially medical fraternity is pre-occupied with COVID-19 cases and they have no time and resources to look after the people having mental illness and other 'lonely' elders. They are getting badly neglected.

Technology and social media have brought some relief but it is a double edge weapon. For those who have access to technology and know how to use it, it can to some extent mitigate the impact of social distancing. As for the elder population, the adverse impact of social isolation can be negated by regular phone conversations and messaging by those who are perceived as close relatives. This group of people may be their siblings, children and grandchildren or friends, neighbours and caregivers. Having audiovisual communication through social platforms like Skype and Facetime and being part of a joint interest group can be useful in connecting an isolated group of people

to the rest of the world. The emergence of virtual gatherings, parties or social events is a welcome move. It is desirable and recommended that the older generation should also engage in reading, dancing, yoga and pranayama, taking relaxing baths, and learning music and new skills. Remember, no age is unsuitable for learning and gaining new experiences.

In a country like India, it is not easy for the government to provide a universal solution. However, it should be possible to develop "policy guidelines for elderly and psychological vulnerable people" and timely appropriation of resources to ensure safeguards against mental disorders/illnesses among this section of the national population.

Even till now, we don't know exactly how long the COVID-9 pandemic will last or what will be its spread and impact. It is too early to realize the aftermath of the pandemic as more efforts like coming out with antiviral vaccine or drug are needed by experts. However, one thing appears definitive that the government should enforce physical distancing and not "social distancing/ isolation", especially for highly vulnerable section of the society. If a proactive approach is not brought to address the issue of mental health, a disaster awaits the country. This could be the onset of a COVID-19 pandemic triggered widespread economic devastation and a mental health crisis in the country.



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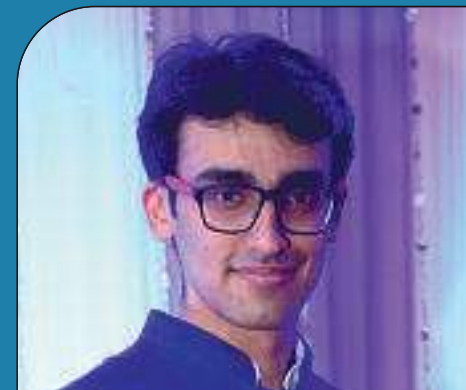
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TALKTOANGEL: TOP ONLINE COUNSELLING & WELLBEING PLATFORM



Dr. R. K. Suri, Mentor - TalkToAngel



Arpit Suri, Co-founder - TalkToAngel

An Indian Start-up venture, TalktoAngel is an online platform where you can seek high-quality professional help and guidance to put your mental worries and anxieties at rest to live life to its fullest.

As people continue to suffer behind closed doors in the midst of global lockouts, the fear and panic arising out of the pandemic has clearly taken a toll on our mental health. Constantly increasing COVID-19 cases and with no end in sight, people are finding it harder to stay put at home amidst the feeling of fury coupled with fatigue and irritability.

With months of extended lockdown, COVID-19 has certainly upended our lives unimaginably. Our regular and usual lifestyle has been sabotaged and replaced by confinement of our homes, sans any physical and social interaction. The pandemic has also brought with itself a bouquet of negativities, including economic slowdown, business closures, loss of jobs, financial insecurity that has greatly impacted our lives.

Clearly, our minds are passing through a very turbulent phase coupled with strong negative emotional impulse. It's so easy to let negative thoughts get to you during these times, however, you're not alone — the entire globe is feeling the same. These tiring days will subside for sure, but until then you have to maintain a positive outlook. Negativity will only make your behaviour morbid filled with trepidation and anxiety. Thus, it is necessary to talk over negativities from your system to stay on the top of your health.

TALKTOANGEL is an online counselling and wellbeing platform wherein you can access quality professional help. The e-platform has many mental health experts, psychologists, therapists, and psychiatrists who are just a click away from you, to unburden your troubled thoughts, feelings and relations with others.

With a futurist approach towards digitalization of services, TALKTOANGEL was conceived by **Mr. Arpit Suri** under the mentorship and guidance of **Dr. R K Suri**, a qualified and well-trained psychologist having an exemplary experience in the field of mental health for more than 36 years. TALKTOANGEL provides one-on-one counselling sessions, using its own inbuilt and embedded system which is HIPPA compliant, through three modes of therapy i.e., audio, video and chat, which a user can avail from any device (laptop, phone, tablet etc) from any corner of the world and at any convenient time, and keenly looks forward for further expansion of its services.

The e-platform also provides 40+ free online, research-driven and evidence-based self-assessments tests to its registered users on different aspects of day-to-day life that are meant to identify inner potential for self-development, organisational development and personal challenges. These self-assessments are primarily aimed at helping users to "introspect". For corporates and educational institutions, the e-platform also provides **Employee Happiness Program** and **School Happiness Program** to help corporates and educational institutes to up-keep their employees and students' mental well-being to ensure better performance in life and at work.

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