Corona Stigmatization Phenomenon

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ABSTRACT

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic can be associated with stigmatization, discrimination, and social isolation in general and in specific communities. On March 3, 2020, Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of Health recorded the first coronavirus case diagnosed in Qatif, eastern province. The Saudi government suspended all movements in and out of the Qatif area. The operation of governmental agencies, schools, and colleges was suspended. The curfew and lockdown then extended to all kingdoms a few weeks later. Stigmatization starts early during the outbreak in specific cities, spreads to particular communities and then touches specific families with known cases of coronavirus. Social media platforms, television, and newspapers play a role in mitigating fear. However, such communication may sometimes enhance fears and discriminations.

This commentary outlines the stigma related to the coronavirus pandemic within Saudi Arabia, observes challenges, and addresses the need for a new mental health plan for future crises.

Keywords
COVID-19, Stigma, Discrimination, Social isolation, Media platform.

New regulations, attitudes, and behaviors observed with the newly emerging disease called COVID-19, including lockdown, social distancing, hand hygiene, face masks, virtual clinics, virtual offices, eMarketing, and social media addiction, lead to social panic and social anxiety [5,6].

Some psychological issues have become apparent, such as fear of missing out or FOMO and cabin fever syndrome or stir-craziness. Moreover, well-known psychiatric disorders have arisen, including depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety and obsessive compulsive disorder [7,8].

A new phenomenon that needs to be studied has emerged, namely, corona stigmatization. Different modalities and approaches are adopted to halt the rapid spread of infection, including newly adapted mobile applications for tracking and tracing COVID-positive patients. The associated stigma is reminiscent of the skin marking used to distinguish and segregate individuals from each other that has been applied among both animals and humans. In humans, it was used to identify different tribes, slaves, strangers, and criminals beginning in the ancient Greek civilization, and the practice still exists in some underdeveloped communities.
While stigma involves a physical mark, it also involves human psychology and causes knowledge, attitude, behavior, and identity problems.

In conclusion, application of the newly introduced technological applications to track and trace COVID-19 patients would aggravate COVID-19 stigmatization, so psychiatry and psychology specialists need to move fast to prevent such stigmatization and call decision-makers to revise this approach even if it is optional. Moreover, there is an urgent need to address future crises.

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