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Sleep Quality During Coronavirus-2019 Pandemic

Farzin Bagheri Sheykhangafshe^{1*}, Mostafa Hojjat Shamami²

¹PhD Candidate of Psychology, Faculty of Humanities, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran

²MA in Clinical Psychology, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Psychology, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran

*Correspondence to Farzin Bagheri Sheykhangafshe; Email: farzinbagheri73@gmail.com

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Dear Editor,

Since December 2019 and the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Wuhan, China, it has rapidly spread and attracted the World Health Organization's attention and concern. COVID-19 is a new case of coronavirus that is closely related to severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), with a high transmission rate.¹ The disease is usually accompanied by simple respiratory symptoms such as fever and dry cough, fatigue, and gastrointestinal symptoms. COVID-19 has specific characteristics that has led to increased anxiety in the society. Person-to-person transmission, high prevalence rates, treatment failure, rumors and misinformation about the origins and causes of the disease, emotional and exaggerated images and news, and the possibility of recurrence of the disease are among the factors causing significant anxiety compared with past pandemics.² With the outbreak of COVID-19 and subsequent changes such as unemployment in high-risk jobs, providing an emergency level of public health, and home quarantine, social and occupational relations and people lifestyles were strongly influenced. The number of deaths increased and strict measures were taken to control the disease's spread in different world areas. One of the measures taken to control COVID-19 was home quarantine, which in itself can have a variety of consequences, including increased anxiety, stress and reduced sleep quality for individuals.³ Patients with or suspected of COVID-19 often experience fear and anxiety about the consequences of the deadly virus. People in the quarantine may also experience fatigue, loneliness, depression, and anger. Furthermore, some common symptoms of this disease, such as fever, body aches, loss of taste and smell, hypoxia, cough and dry throat, reduce sleep quality.⁴

The relationship between sleep quality and physical and mental health is evident to all. Sleep quality is a relatively complex and subjective concept that cannot be measured in the laboratory, and factors affecting each person's quality

of sleep can be different. In general, sleep duration, delay in falling asleep, sleep efficiency, sleep disorders, sleeping pills, and impaired daily functioning are significant factors that play a role in sleep quality.⁵ COVID-19 is a global pandemic that can affect the physical and mental health of individuals. Previous studies evaluating pandemic and infectious diseases such as SARS and Ebola virus have shown that pandemic diseases lead to disorders and reduced sleep quality in individuals.⁶ Studies in previous pandemic conditions have shown that the mental health of non-infected individuals was more affected than that of infected individuals so that those who were afraid of developing the disease reported more psychological problems.⁷

Several studies have evaluated health workers and physicians who had been quarantined in hospitals for two weeks during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results showed a reduction in the quality and duration of sleep in these individuals.⁸ Considering the pandemic conditions of COVID-19 and its direct and indirect effects on the physical and mental health of infected and non-infected individuals, it can be expected that the prevalence of COVID-19, similar to previous pandemics, would lead to symptoms of mental distress and anxiety which would in turn negatively affect sleep quality.⁵ Studies of psychological symptoms and COVID-19 have shown that fear of illness can lead to increased anxiety, stress levels, sleep-related problems in patients and non-patients or health workers, and the most detrimental effect is experienced by people who already have a background in psychiatric problems. Moreover, changes in the family organization, working conditions, social separation, and home quarantine can lead to reduced sleep quality.⁹ In other words, during the COVID-19 pandemic, most problems related to sleep deprivation occurred in nurses and health workers, followed by people whose employment status had changed. One study found that 70% of people with COVID-19 anxiety reported at least

one case of sleep problem.⁵⁻¹⁰ As mentioned, sleep quality can be affected by a variety of factors. Evaluating nurses and the health workers' sleep status, researchers found that short sleep duration, delayed sleep, insomnia symptoms, increase depression and anxiety were most closely related to decreased sleep quality during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁻⁶ Studies conducted during home quarantine reported increased attention to sleep and insomnia problems among students and workers, and factors such as changes in sleep patterns, time perception, and increased use of electronic devices and social networks played a role in reducing sleep quality. Another factor associated with decreased sleep quality was that people spent more time in bed without deciding to sleep.¹¹

COVID-19 has caused widespread changes in people's lifestyles and is here to stay for a long time. One of the most significant changes that occurred was a disturbance in the quality of sleep. Many people experience high anxiety and stress during the day due to the fear of getting COVID-19, which makes it difficult for them to fall asleep and subsequently reduces their sleep quality. Eventually, considering the chronicity of the COVID-19 pandemic and the effectiveness of psychological therapies on increasing sleep quality in chronic conditions, it is recommended that people who experience decreased sleep quality for any reason benefit from psychological and relaxation therapies.

Conflict of Interest Disclosures

None declared.

Ethical Statement

Not applicable.

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