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Ensayo: INVISIBLE PANDEMIC

Alumna: Zara Zamudio Flores

Grado: 5° Grupo: 557

Dirección de correo electrónico: zamudiof.zara.p8@gmail.com

Asesores:

- María De Lourdes Solís Plancarte

Asignatura: Lógica

Dirección de correo electrónico: maria.solis@enp.unam.mx

- Abraham Avedaño Martínez

Asignatura: Lengua Extranjera Inglés

Dirección de correo electrónico: abraham.avendano@enp.unam.mx

INVISIBLE PANDEMIC

The current lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has harmed each field of our lives, and mental health has not been the exception: psychological problems have increased considerably around the world, affecting human populations.

Mental health is a topic of attention that is as important as physical health, but it is usually overlooked since it seems insignificant or people find it hard to accept the fact that we are not very emotionally sound because many of us fear of going to therapy and be considered by society as "crazy" or "outcasts".

Beyond these paradigms, it is important to recognize that the situation we are currently going through was totally unexpected and even more when we could never imagine that seemingly mundane actions we were able to do normally disappeared from one day to the other. We are living in a time in which "the greatest act of love is to stay away from the object of affection" (Slavoj, 2020, pp.2) *. However, it is necessary to be aware that there is really no single aspect that has not been affected by the pandemic.

This is why it is understandable that we may not be that well with ourselves in such a difficult situation, that it not only makes us face the social, economic and political problems of our country, but we must also add the background and circumstances that each individual has to face, such as unemployment, insecurity, poverty, debts, domestic abuse, interfamily violence, isolation, social disconnection, cyber harassment, stress, mourning, loss of family members, among others. It is not surprising to learn that suicidal thoughts, the rupture of relationships, the lack of housing, alcoholism and drug abuse seem to have increased during the current pandemic.

Following this problem, there has been a steady rise of various mental conditions such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, obsessive compulsive disorder, food disorder disorders, which, if not treated on time, they could lead to suicide.

As for these sufferings, in this article I will address 2 of them, which are often confused or in some cases unknown, "obsessive compulsive disorder" and "post-traumatic stress disorder".

The Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, also known as "OCD", is a disease characterized by the presence of such obsessive thoughts that, in turn, are accompanied by compulsions. This disorder has been very common, and specially so during the time of pandemic: it is common all over the world, with a frequent onset in adolescents and young adults.

The OCD affects whoever suffers through ideas, thoughts or images that are presented involuntarily, so for many patients this pathology can mean a prison inside their own thoughts, since they appear repetitively generating fears, doubts, anxiety, anguish, despair and insecurities.

It is important to note that previously compulsive obsessive disorder was classified as an anxiety disorder. However, it has now been linked to a group section of anxiety disorders. Since the OCD is very different, this type of thought triggers obsessions that may hinder the daily activities of the patients. They can be obsessed with anything that generates fear and thus develop compulsions, which are uncontrollable, irrational and repetitive impulses.

However, a large part of the patients also tends to have avoidance behaviors, which limits them to live and perform the actions they had previously enjoyed in order to avoid facing their own obsession. For example, some avoidance behaviors can be washing their hands up to 80 times a day, order and symmetry, etc.

Symptoms are developed from dysfunctional cognitive distortions such as the excessive sense of responsibility or overestimation of fears. Its treatment is based on cognitive behavioral therapy and antidepressant drugs that help patients resume doing the things they used to do.

Finally, this disease is usually diagnosed late because it is difficult to identify and can be erroneously diagnosed by the doctor or become worse because the patient did not pay attention to the early symptoms. We should not forget that the current lockdown makes us still more vulnerable to suffer from this disorder for the fear of catching covid19, the fear of dying or the fear of losing the people we love.

On the other hand, there is the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, also known as "PTSD". Everyone, from the young to the elderly, may suffer from PTSD as a direct consequence of having gone through a traumatic episode in life, such as rape, an accident, a catastrophe, a terrorist attack, the death of a loved one or even physical or psychological abuse.

It is normal that after such a situation, people may have a hard time trying to resume their normal life style. However, if people cannot get over it after several months or even years, it is very possible that they may be suffering from the PTSD. Patients may also present symptoms of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder at the same time and, like OCD, avoidance behaviors are common.

As a consequence, those who suffer from PTSD are more vulnerable to present psychiatric disorders and are 8 times more likely to have suicide attempts, so treatments and therapies must be taken and concluded because at least 1 out of 3 of the people who committed suicide had some sort of contact with mental health services for less than 12 months.

For the treatment of this disorder, therapy is required, mainly focusing on the trauma exposure so as to help the patients face the source of their conflicts safely. Patients may be asked to write or even go back to the scene where the trauma took place in order for them to understand and manage their emotions so that the emotional scar may eventually heal and thus the patients may carry on leading healthy lives.

It is very important to try to keep a steady balance of all our emotions to live fully. The current pandemic is a real fear that we are all facing, so it is normal to feel sadness anger or anguish. However, it is our responsibility to make sure that these natural feelings do not exceed a intensity that reaches the point of having negative consequences in our lives.

Another aspect that is worth highlighting is our role as society, sometimes we may judge others without really understanding what is like to live their life and how difficult it is for them. We understand that, at this time, solidarity is a concept that we should not leave aside. A mental condition is as disabling as any other disease and thus it should not be overlooked. "mental illnesses" can be treated. Can your prejudice be treated, too? *

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