

Research Article

ON THE VERGE OF ECONOMIC DEPRESSION: WHAT EXPERTS ARE FORECASTING ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH IN 2023

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Abstract

A worldwide economic recession is forecasted at the beginning of 2023. As society is still recovering from the aftermath of pandemic, this pessimistic forecast poses significant challenges for health experts to address the emerging global mental health crisis. This research conducted a qualitative analysis followed by cross national interviews from medical professionals involved in treating psychological traumas. Thirty five medical professionals experienced, each having more than 10 years of experience in treating mental traumas from various countries, were selected for the interviews. This study features an in depth exploration of global mental health conditions. The results showed citizens from around the world are expected to experience a variety of mental traumas such as anxiety, hypertension, and stress in 2023. Open discussions were organized to perceive the global mental health scenario holistically. *ASEAN Journal of Psychiatry, Vol. 24 (3) March, 2023; 1-6.*

Keywords: Economic Depression, Forecast, Mental Health, 2023, Mental Traumas

Introduction

The global pandemic has shaken the whole world since the beginning of 2020 [1]. Society was introduced to the novel concept of self-isolation [2]. Which mentally traumatized the populace, and the regular functioning of the society was severely affected. Millions of people died and committed suicide during the isolation phase, and global mental health was adversely impacted [3-5]. The United Nations formulated a policy to address this global mental concern but failed to constructively intervene [6,7]. Marginal communities were neglected and had to go through this disastrous context without public provision [8].

However, many believe the worse is yet to come. After a passing an eventful year the economy is looking uncertain. A looming economic recession is on the verge of modern society [9]. According to a published research report,

financial experts are predicting this is economic depression is inevitable. It is not unexpected considering how the industrial sectors have to sit idle during the outbreaks. This is a potentially alarming context for the global community which is still trying to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic aftermath. Financial experts are advising us to emphasize savings as we are heading toward a potential economic disaster. Although the populace has gone through significant changes such as online schooling and the introduction of novel technologies, it did not reduce global mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression [10,11]. In this scenario, experts are worried about the emerging context of this financial depression that will impact the mental health of the emotionally vulnerable and fragile population due to the pandemic.

Materials and Methods

This research conducted a qualitative analysis followed by a cross national interview of medical professionals. To perceive the global context, 35 leading health experts from multiple continents, each having more than 10 years of practical experience in treating mental health traumas, were purposively selected. Many participants were directly involved in spearheading medical campaigns during the pandemic crisis at national levels in various countries including the United

States, India, and Nepal. Interviews were conducted virtually *via* Zoom software and two live interviews took place in the United States. Four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted to explore this phenomenon in depth. As the study progressed, participants began to share valuable information regarding the global mental health context along with their prior experience and expertise which assisted the researcher to analyse the context for determining the results (Figure 1).

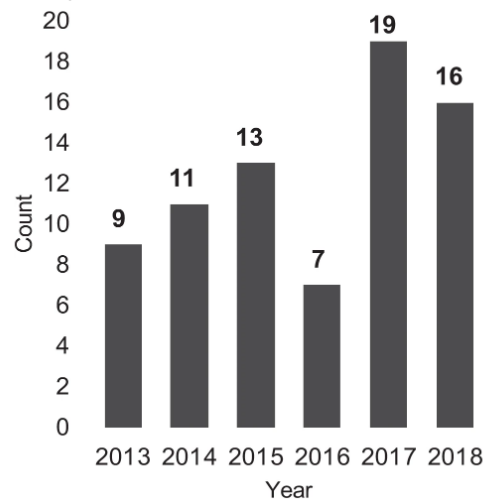


Figure1. Publication counts by year.

Findings

Human psychology is fragile that cannot be accurately assessed with conventional standards. While many solutions can be proposed, the effectiveness will only be achieved if the intended population reaps the benefits. In our discussion, health experts focused on diverse mental concerns which may prevail in 2023.

All experts agreed ubiquitously that depression is a certain factor associated with the loss of a monetary asset. Richardson has been treating psychological traumas for 10 years in the United States. During COVID-19, he led the mental awareness campaign to prevent suicides across North America. He believes that depression will be more than ever since people are recovering. Nelson also agreed which collaborated with his statement as a short interval such as this would only worsen the impact. According to Richardson's statement: 2020 was a traumatic experience for the world. We have been exposed to psychological threats while trying to cope without social communication which deteriorated our mental health conditions

gradually. Though various efforts were made, they did not significantly improve the conditions. With the news of an upcoming economic recession, psychological conditions will further destabilize. In my practice recently, more patients are coming showing symptoms of hyper anxiety. It is simple to assume this condition is the indirect result of future economic uncertainty.

Cristopher and Jenna were directly involved with the United Nations program to formulate policies to address the mental challenges for African nations and Asian countries at the beginning of 2021. The duo believes it is not possible to intervene when negative news is circulating in the media. In our interview, the health experts sharply criticized the media outlets and elaborated that hypertension is becoming more common among adults with the spread of adverse information. If there is an economic recession, it can have a lethal effect even if a person prepares adequately. Both agree that hypertension will be common if the economy collapses along with severe depression. As Asian countries neglect the mental healthcare system, it

will pose a challenge if an economic crisis takes place in the society. According to their perspectives, Western people would also be impacted as they lead an isolated life with minimal social interactions. Having a pessimistic period can prolong the recovery in the post-pandemic period. Raghavan and Zhang conducted 30 mental awareness campaigns across Asia including India, Nepal, Myanmar, Thailand, and Bangladesh. From their observation, it has been discovered 2020 has left many individuals homeless. The concept of working from home did not come into effect immediately which left many people without money, especially in Southeast regions. Although studies were conducted globally to assess the mental health impacts, this has not reduced the traumas. The respondents believed if this context arises, this will immediately create a vulnerable community in Asian continents who will experience severe mental anxiety.

Results

From our study, we found experts believe African citizens would be affected the most. It is commonly perceived that children are immune to mental traumas since their cognitive functions are not well developed to assess the trauma. However, COVID-19 has shown that even children can be left with emotional distress [12]. In this regard, all participants of this study said youth are going to be adversely impacted. Many explained that African Healthcare doesn't have the necessary means to render mental assistance. Most of the citizens expected to return to normalcy; however, the looming economic condition may have a profound impact on the parents due to financial uncertainty. This in turn will affect the children as well. The respondents believed it will also affect cognitive development. It is of utmost importance that children socialize to reduce stress and cope with social challenges. However, the repetition of crises may pose a threat to social development, especially in South Africa. The health experts forecasted 2023 is going to be the worst year if the economic predictions turn true. In this aspect, youth will have a difficult period addressing mental challenges in African nations.

In our focus group discussion, it was evident that eating disorders are going to be common at the beginning of 2023 all across the nation. Notably, diseases and psychological disorders are common among obese children. Fontenot has been treating children's obesity due to increased

anxiety and depression since 2006. In her long career, she has come across various medical cases of traumas leading to severe consequences. She explained: People tend to eat more during distress. This has become a normal trend in society to cope with anxiety regardless of culture. However, children are the worst victims. They tend to view adults as a role model and when exposed to such adverse habits, it gradually takes away their goodwill of consumption. I have been treating obese children for a long time but since the beginning of the pandemic, it has gotten worse. I fear that 2023 will be the most difficult year for psychologists to treat mental wounds.

European Union has been dealing with Brexit along with the global pandemic. We talked with 4 psychologists and 1 director of the mental association who explained that Europe is adequately prepared to tackle the concerns. From the discussion, we found they have deployed medical teams at high schools and at university levels to monitor mental health status. The governments are spending considerably to develop online solutions to boost the spirit of the pandemic returns. Should the economy is down; they are also formulating policies to maintain the normalcy of society without affecting mental health or causing panic.

With the progression of the interviews, the experts elaborated on how the pandemic has affected global demography. Many respondents actively participated in conducted cross national research with professionals from other countries. Interesting information was found from those studies such as adults who have lost employment in the pandemic demonstrated symptoms of PTSD. Inadequate levels of government support hindered national support. It has also been reported especially among Asian countries such as Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Myanmar where mental health is considered a taboo; no assistance was rendered to uplift the spirits during the isolation period. 6 respondents stated that measures undertaken by Western nations included mental crisis as an important factor while the scenario remains unchanged for Eastern countries. It is evident as most campaigns focused on prioritizing the importance of isolation with no focus on the mental crisis. In this regard, global mental health suffered biasedly due to emphasis on the physical well-being of people based on a multitude of factors.

Discussion

Mental health directly impacts the physical well-being of a person. The novel pandemic has forever altered society globally. As people began to spend time indoors without human communication, it has taken a toll on their mental health. Death rates soared and suicides were common, especially among youth. While the officials were expecting normalcy, economic conditions are signalling a recession which has become a concern for medical professionals.

From the interview, we can find the diverse impacts the society is experiencing. The most vulnerable citizens are from low to middle income countries. As these nations have limited resources, addressing mental concerns is often neglected. Individuals from these countries were showing symptoms of hypertension while anxiety was common among adults. The indirect result was eating disorders being common since 2020, especially among children from Southeast Asian regions, notably from India and Malaysia. The South American and North countries have performed significantly better. Mental health diseases were observed in at least several citizens who were also evident from World Health Organization's report. Various campaigns took place to uplift the spirits. However, experts predict increased anxiety will prevail from the beginning of 2023. Many believe the spread of potential recession will worsen the existing mental health conditions. However, improved addressing measures will contain but to some extent, professionals will deal with psychological concerns such as obsessive compulsive disorder and overthinking in the future should uncertainty arise [13,14].

European Union was found to be most prepared. They have addressed this concern and have placed measures to mitigate the mental crisis. They are also prepared for the economic recession. This explains the citizens are feeling safer knowing they are in good care. From our findings, it collaborates when we learn of various awareness campaigns taking place at the national levels. Other nations can learn from their examples and follow their strategies.

Conclusion

Mental health is a critical factor in determining the well-being of society. From our research, it was evident that health experts are forecasting a potential outbreak of a variety of psychological

concerns at the beginning of 2023 considering the current economic predictions. This research identified that not all countries had taken adequate measures to address the mental health challenges for the upcoming situations. Moreover, this study reveals the different symptoms which may prevail in 2023 such as hypertension, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and even mental breakdowns. It is the responsibility of the government to implement strategic actions to promote and maintain the highest level of mental well-being in society. Asian and African countries should undertake the necessary steps to remove the social stigma associated with mental disorders and promote a healthy lifestyle. While North and South American countries have earned respect for addressing the mental crisis, the rest of the globe is yet to follow in their footsteps. Further research is encouraged and followed up intermittently for perceiving the extended global mental health context.

Ethical Consideration

All the interviews conducted in this research have been carried out with informed consent. The participants were informed adequately. All procedures performed in this study involving human participants followed the ethical standards with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to express gratitude towards the health experts who wholeheartedly took part in the interviews regardless of the time zone difference to share their valuable information to conduct this study.

Data Availability Statement

Primary data was gathered by the author. The secondary data that support the findings of this study are openly available in the listed reference/doi of this article.

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Received: 13 December 2022, Manuscript No. AJOPY-22-83257; **Editor assigned:** 15 December 2022, PreQC No. AJOPY-22-83257 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 29 December 2022, QC No AJOPY-22-83257; **Revised:** 06 March 2023, Manuscript No. AJOPY-22-83257 (R); **Published:** 15 March 2023, DOI: 10.54615/2231-7805.47302.