



The Role of Counselors in Supporting Clients Cope with Covid-19 Impact

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ABSTRACT

Covid-19 is a threat to humanity; the novel severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 pandemic outbreak, emerged in December 2019 from Wuhan City and has caused over million deaths. Public health institutions shocked, hospitals over stretched with millions in hospitals worldwide fighting for their life. Governments tirelessly struggle for control and solution, preventive measures formulated and medics spend hours in the laboratories in search of vaccine. World economy collapsed, global recession declared and global economy brought to its knees. Mental health challenges like depression and stress related problems emerged worldwide. In this situation, the role of counselors becomes paramount to support clients and suggest solutions to governments, institutions and individuals.

KEYWORDS: Covid-19, pandemic, world economy, stress, depression, clients, role of counsellors, cleanliness, human life, support.

INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 has indeed devastated the world in diverse sectors, including human life, health and economic sectors. The objective of this paper is to explain the role of the counselors during and after Covid-19 in supporting their clients. The pandemic has now gone beyond the expectations of humankind and it continues with unprecedented speed; killing victims and destroying the livelihood of societies worldwide. The paper employs descriptive methodology to understand, explain and suggest the role of counselors in assisting clients who are catastrophically affected by Covid-19. These clients are undergoing unprecedented times and they require help. They are depressed, stressed and laid off; they are in self-isolations, quarantined, lost loved ones, and sick. Counselors therefore have to comprehend these predicaments, come up with distinctive solutions, be creative and provide as well as deliver the needed support accordingly, on time and suitably. The task of counselors is even harder in this pandemic since it is not possible to see clients face-to-face. For this reason, the paper suggests and urge counselors to use all available means and tools to help clients; including religious aspect of cleanliness to fight and eventually defeat the pandemic. Therefore, counselors should relate the cultural and religious aspects and employ the technology in their effort.

2. The Nature of Covid-19 and its Impact on the World Economy

Coronavirus disease 2019 or as it is known in its acronym COVID-19, is, according to medics, an illness mainly caused by a novel coronavirus known as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-V-2. It was temporarily called 2019-nCoV); this disease was first singled out amid an outbreak of respiratory illness cases in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. It is important to note that the initial reporting of the decease to World Health Organization took place on December 31, 2019 (World Health Organization).

It was only a month later, that is, on January 30, 2020, the same organization announced to the world that the decease, now known as COVID-19 was an outbreak and globally dangerous to the health of the entire world; and within the subsequent two months, that is, on March 11, 2020, the

World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic.

Covid-19 is transmitted mainly, but not limited to, through contact with infectious materials, droplets from infected individuals, or contaminated objects and surfaces; and its main symptoms, but not limited to, are fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Nonetheless, according to the experts it may develop to pneumonia and cause the failure of the respiratory system of the patient. At the same time, one must note that the symptoms of Covid-19 may vary from patient to patient. In fact, medical doctors and epidemiologists have identified that other symptoms may include body aches, chills, fatigue, loss of taste or smell, runny nose, headache, sore throat, vomiting, diarrhea and nausea.

The virus therefore is an infectious disease which is deadly that has killed 1.29 million people, as I draft this paper, and continuously to be deadly by the hours and days to worldwide currently, as it is on its second wave.

Apart from the health devastation on the world, Covid-19 has also destroyed the world economy in 2020. In fact, we may not know the negative economic impact, in its entire outlook today or even tomorrow but we do know that the economic damage from Covid-19 pandemic will have severe negative impacts on the global economy. Economists are in agreement that the world economy suffered tremendously and will continue to suffer for the coming three to four years.

The IMF confirms that Covid-19 pandemic has resulted the worst recession since the Great Depression in 1920s, and revisions to the IMF's April forecast now predict global output to fall 4.9% in 2020. IMF also affirmed that recovery is ambiguous and unknown; and with the absence of a medical solution, the strength of the recovery is itself mysterious, as the impact on sectors and countries comes patchy (The International Monetary Fund (IMF)).

Other world financial institutions have also reported loses to world economy. The World Bank

(WB) reported that firms and workers are affected by the Covid-19 economic shockwave. According to WB the global labor income has declined about US\$3.5 trillion in the first three quarters of 2020, and as a result, 150 million people could be on their way into extreme poverty by 2021. It has in addition, generated a widespread drop in sales, as they fell about 84%, and hospitality as well as tourism industries devastated (World Bank).

3. The Effect of Covid-19 on Human Life

Covid-19 does not only affect the physical side of the individuals but it also damages them mentally and psychologically. Covid-19 attacks young, old, male and female, rich, poor, healthy and sick. The pandemic is indeed an epidemiological and psychological crisis in the world.

The psychological upshot of Covid-19 encompasses, but not limited to, withdrawal, irritability and sadness; it also brings worthlessness and guilt. Depending on the patient age and previous health underlying conditions. For many, their lives have changed; they lost loved ones, jobs and they face financial hardships. These and other impacts of Covid-19 brought grief to many people over the death of loved ones and has affected the mental health and well-being of individuals worldwide (Panos Vostanis, 2020).

The mechanism used to contain and control the spread of Covid-19 itself has distressed many. The isolation and social distancing scared many as they have to be in a house or in a hotel room alone for days and weeks. People were and are overwhelmed by emotions, worry about their health and financial predicaments; which in turn brings irritability and restlessness; Being physically distanced from family and friends panic attacks, depression and contemplation of suicide comes along. There are reports of panic attacks; as people in isolation experiences shortness of breath, feeling of choking and trembling.

This experience will change lives as people will be always fearful of panic attack; as they do not know when the next episode of the panic will occur, this make them restrict their normal activities in their daily work and in their general life. Depression is also on the rise during this pandemic.

People have lost interest and pleasure in daily activities as they fear to go out, catchup with friends, travel locally and internationally; and most of the time in lockdowns preventing them to function normal.

Children face the same problems as their parents if not more, when schools are closed for instance, they lose life structure, miss friends and create confusion for them in the way they function mentally and physically. The school environment provides mental well-being, social support and belonging for the children; and with Covid-19 all that are lost.

With Covid-19, the world is also dealing with mental health problems. Under these circumstances, isolation, income loss and increased levels of alcoholism, in many parts of the world, anxiety, insomnia and other health related issues are triggered.

Epidemiologists agree that Covid-19 itself can lead to neurological and mental complications, these include, agitation, delirium, and even mild or full-scale stroke. More vulnerable are indeed, people with pre-existing neurological and mental health issues. Recent study on the negative impact of COVID-19 on mental health found that younger people, women, and those with a poor sleep quality are at high risk of developing mental health issues.

4. The Role of Counselors During and After Covid-19 Pandemic

The role of counselors is always imperative more so during and after Covid-19. Simply because of the negative impact of the pandemic on human life; the result is widespread mental health, stress and depression. In fact, the world is currently experiencing a serious mental health crisis and it may persist for some time as humanity faces social distancing, job loss and self-quarantine; and these issues continue to expand its adverse impact on the human soul, spirit, and essence (Manchelah A/P Natesan, 2016).

Counselors therefore play a dynamic role and they remain essential instrument to tackle the

aforementioned issues and help people affected by the pandemic. Counselling is a vital in response to Covid-19 catastrophe. Therefore, counselors are exceptionally skilled to assist clients devastated by the pandemic.

As professionals, they have a role to play; particularly under these circumstances created by the pandemic. Hence, their obligation is to support clients who are going through critical life changes resulted from the pandemic. With the help of counselors, the clients could be saved, improve their coping mechanism and help them to be positive in life during these rough times.

The strategies used by counselors differ from client to another and environment to environment, instance of this is the cultural issue and if the client is a child or adult; or the health history of the client, but the focus is principally on moving forward in time to develop more effective ways of coping with life.

At the same time, with Covid-19, support for clients is mainly in a form of virtual, this also makes the task more challenging. Nonetheless, clients must be assisted and creativity must prevail. More importantly, counselors should espouse a humanistic approach; this includes understanding the client, advocating empathy and promoting new mechanisms in line with the pandemic circumstance.

We are all aware that, the job of the counselors during and after Covid-19 is an unprecedented task, this is because unlike the normal situations, in Covid-19, you are not able to personally meet the client. Nonetheless, thanks to the fact that we are in technological era and we should upskill ourselves with the available means and technologies.

Because of the massiveness of the effect of the pandemic, any advice given should also highlight the fact that they, the clients, are not alone in this and there are others who are in a more dire condition; and that we are all in this; the entire humanity is in it. This approach reduces the negative thinking and somehow normalizes the temperature; that is to say, when the suffering is presented

as shared phenomenon the client tends to think positive; this approach is in fact, more applicable to Covid-19.

On a related note, counselors should take Covid-19 challenges positively, and they should be open to new ways of moving forward in their profession; this outlook will help them to be positively stronger and in turn will benefit their clients. In fact, Covid-19 teaches, to some degree, every one something new including the counselors; as they are exposed to Covid-19 related predicaments including self-isolation, death of friend or family member, quarantine, layoff, stress, and other uncertainties; a situation that, in a way, helps the counselors to relate their own experiences while assisting the clients.

Similarly, counselors, to perform better, need to update their knowledge, skills and related information; pandemics like Covid-19 is always possible to appear without anticipation and off guard, and as a result finding ourselves in the unknown. Hence, counselors have huge responsibility to lead during these unprecedented times; and come up with sophisticated theoretical and practical approaches to be employed and applied into the new circumstances such as Covid-19.

This can be done by drawing lessons from the past experiences, as the theories and practices about counselling grow through and within the occurrences of pandemics and related human calamities and disasters.

Meanwhile, counselors have also the responsibility to draw the attention of the clients to the importance of human to human relationships, family, community, culture, religion and beliefs.

5. The Importance of Islamic Counselling Approach for Covid-19

Muslim counsellors are encouraged to employ the principles of Islamic counselling while assisting the affected clients during and after Covid-19. This model of Counselling is a spiritual form of support based on Islamic sources. In fact, Islamic counselling is by nature unique and useful; as

it incorporates not only the spiritual and emotional aspects but also the psychological, the social and the physical (Nawal A. Al Eid, 2020).

It should be noted that, Islamic counselling is an old method but unfortunately scholars have focused as an independent science only recently or decades ago. The uniqueness of this type of counselling is that it sees the individual as a whole, it investigates the environment of the client and it offers specific support to the soul, heart and mind as well as to the physical aspect on the client.

Therefore, the role of Muslim counsellors is to focus on the sanctity of life, its holiness and its inviolability as they support clients. Covid-19 killed over million lives and continue to devastate the sacred lives of mankind. In Islamic counselling, therefore, all forms of lives are preciously important and protected; nonetheless, human life is the most consecrated. It is remarkably important to highlight how Islam protected human, dignity, physique and life.

The at most purpose of Muslim counselors, therefore, is to save life and defeat Covid-19, since saving one life is in fact, as the Qur'an teaches, like saving the lives of whole mankind. The Qur'an on this read: "...and whoever keeps it alive, it is as though he kept alive all men..." (Al-Qu'ran: 5:32).

Muslim counselors are also expected to comprehend and bear in mind human dignity of the client; as a matter of fact, Allah honored man, (Al-Qur'an: 17:70); therefore, like other humans, Muslim counselors have been empowered by the Almighty Allah to help and save others; and this is their responsibility prescribed by Allah. (Al-Qur'an: 2:30); as Allah bestowed upon them with reason ('aql), dignity, (karamah), malleability of nature, (taskhir), and freewill, (iradah), as well as Allah's trust (amanah).

Islamic approach to pandemics, in fact, goes back to the very early period in Islamic history; in other words, Islam as a religion provided an abundance of literature on how to manage pandemics and save lives; hence, Muslim counsellors should have no excuse for not effectively implement the

principles, knowledge and experiences of early Muslims.

In addition, Muslim counselors should advise Covid-19 clients based on the Islamic teachings which are indeed helpful for the faithful. Among those principles is the idea that calamities, such as Covid-19, are part of the regular test; based on the Qur'an, the faith of a Muslim is constantly tested; in fact, people in the past had also suffered and witnessed the same catastrophes and there will be more life trials in the future. For that reason, the Qur'an reminds Muslims that Allah loves those who show patience in times of trials and distress. The Qur'an on this read: "Do not dispute and lose courage and your strength would depart; and be patient. Indeed, Allah is with those who keep patience" (Al-Qur'an: 8:46).

To that effect, Muslim counselors should also remind Covid-19 clients to be strong mentally and physically, support each other and be patient. It is in fact, assured by the Qur'an that those who adhere to these Qur'anic guidelines will eventually go through and survive the pandemic. As the Qur'an says: "Only those who are patient shall receive their rewards in full" (Al-Qur'an: 39:10).

In a similar fashion, the hadith of the Prophet also reminded the qualities which could be used by Muslim counselors to support Covid-19 clients. To that point, the Prophet said "whoever persists in being patient, Allah will make him patient and nobody can be given a blessing better and greater than patience" (Sahih Al-Bukhari).

Other aspects on which Muslim counselors should concentrate to save lives during Covid-19 is encouraging and implementing the practice of self-isolation, hygiene and cleanliness. On the self-isolation and quarantine, the Prophet implemented this mechanism in his life time and made it requirement to control pandemics. In an authentic hadith he asked the public: "If you hear about it pandemic in a land, do not go to it; and if pandemic breaks out in your country or where you are staying, do not go out of it" (Sahih Al Bukhari).

In fact, there were various pandemics in Islamic history including Amwas pandemic (638-39 AD), Kufa pandemic (669 AD) and Basrah pandemic (688-89 AD), and evidently, all these pandemics were defeated based on Islamic approach; which includes physical distancing, lockdown and travel ban. In another hadith the Prophet further instructed the caregivers in the hospitals: “Do not place a sick patient with a healthy person” (Sahih al-Bukhari).

Muslim counselors should focus on *taharah* or physical and spiritual cleanliness, as well as ritual hygiene. Since Islam made it mandatory for Muslims to clean themselves in all situations and times; more so during pandemics. It is worth noting though that Islam links cleanliness and self-care to spirituality, one’s faith and religious rituals.

The Islamic approach and literature on health and hygiene could be used by Muslim counselors to help their clients to cope with covid-19 impact. In a hadith the Prophet said on hygiene that: “Purity is half of faith” (Sahih al-Bukhari).

This is to emphasize the importance of hygiene; as it is connected to the ‘aqidah or faith of a Muslim. This also makes hygiene, for a Muslim, part of his/her constant physical and spiritual component to practice and adhere to in all times. In addition, Muslims are required to abide by strict personal hygiene; the Qur’an reads: “Truly, God loves those who turn unto Him in repentance and loves those who purify themselves” (Al-Qur’an 2:222).

Other hygiene related issues are also addressed by the hadith, including circumcision, shaving the pubic region, clipping the nails and cutting the moustaches short, the Prophet said: “Five practices are of natural disposition (*Fitrah*): circumcision, shaving the pubic region, clipping the nails and cutting the moustaches short” (Sahih Al-Bukhari). A practicing Muslim clean himself/herself five times or more a day making for the Viruses, such as Covid-19, impossible to progress. The Qur’an teaches the believers: “O you who believe! When you intend to offer the prayer, wash your faces and your hands, up to the elbows, wipe your head, with water, and wash your feet up to the ankles. If you had a sexual discharge purify yourself; (wash the entire body)” (Al-Qur’an: 5:6).

The point here is, for the Muslim counselors supporting Muslim clients during Covid-19, their job is practically being made easy by the Qur'an and the Prophetic dictums. Therefore, their role on this aspect is to remind and reinforce the importance of those Islamic values such as tahara or comprehensive purification, hygiene and cleanliness which is inherently part of the religion.

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