

COVID-19 impact on mental health in Somalia

The COVID-19 pandemic has sparked a disturbing negative impact on physical and mental health across the world, and Somalia is not excluded from the list. Not only is the virus causing health havoc in the Horn of Africa nation, but it has also inflicted a greater negative effect on mental health and social well-being.

Somalia has already been grappling with the serious effects inherited from the myriad of unfortunate calamities the country had faced, primarily civil conflicts, which came with public mental health problems such as Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

According to the World Health Organisation statistics, one in every three persons in Somalia has been mentally affected by the conflict and the tormenting and complex situations the society has gone through.

Mental Health is still viewed in Somali as a taboo, with the majority of the public yet incognizant about its weight. People with mental disorders are vilified and ostracised from the rest of society, resulting in the deprivation of vital support and care for such people, even from close relatives and family members. Persons with life difficulties, family problems, depression and mental disorders are unsurprisingly referred to as an 'insane person'.

As a result, COVID-19 is yet another disturbing threat unfavourably affecting the well-being and mental health of the people, hence the urgent need for our combined efforts to deal with it.

As part of its efforts to contribute to the efforts aimed at addressing the negative effects occasioned by the Coronavirus, Daryeelsan, a non-governmental organisation that promotes psychosocial and mental health, recently embarked on a sustained awareness campaign on the wellbeing of members of the public, mental health and ways to deal with stress resulting from COVID-19.

In the course of the drive, Daryeelsan came to the realisation that the mental impact of the disease, which includes fear, denial of its existence and stigma related to the disease, creates social instability and severe mental health complications.

Many people consider quarantine as a social stigma, with isolation and testing positive for the virus also generating similar actions. Journalists report the existence of members of the society claiming to exhibit COVID-19-like symptoms but down-grading the risk of the virus, ignoring the symptoms and labelling it as common cold, without diagnosis.

The Federal Government has intensified its efforts to curb the spread of the virus, through sustained awareness campaigns and providing essential healthcare services to patients of the virus. However, this alone is not enough. Extra effort should be invested in conducting awareness campaigns on mental health, mental support for the society and mitigation of the COVID-19 mental health effects.

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