Mental Health during COVID-19: The Role of Knowledge and Information Sources

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The COVID-19 pandemic may lead to traumatized experiences and have a significant impact on mental health. With new knowledge emerging to understand and fight against the pandemic, people's knowledge level and knowledge sources could play a role in mental health outcomes. This project attempts to examine how the knowledge people had of COVID-19 (e.g., COVID characteristics and its protective measures) and their information sources (e.g., interpersonal, online, traditional media) affected mental health, while exploring age and gender differences. Hierarchical regression analysis was performed using national data on COVID-19 Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (DiClemente, 2020) to predict mental health symptoms with the level of COVID-19 knowledge and its sources. Participants included 5,046 adults with mental health data. Results show that the level of COVID-related knowledge as well as the number of knowledge sources used positively predicted anxiety/depression and PTSD symptoms. The number of sources also predicted knowledge levels. Additionally, females and older age groups showed higher anxiety/depression and PTSD levels. Females used more knowledge sources than males but had less COVID protective knowledge. As age increased, fewer sources were used while COVID protective knowledge decreased. The use of interpersonal sources generally alleviated mental health symptoms, but for older males, using more interpersonal sources exacerbated mental health symptoms. The study suggests the significant role of pandemic-related knowledge and its sources in mental health, implying the importance of public/patient education on evidence-based facts. Further, mental health intervention and prevention efforts would need individualized approaches for specific age and gender groups.

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