

Healthy Mental Health Guide in a period of Socio-Political and Economic Uncertainty.

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Abstract

The political and social climate of recent years has brought new challenges to mental health professionals. More people are experiencing mental illness, stress, depression, anxiety, and other symptoms. Socio-political uncertainty could be one of the factors that could bring an imbalance to one's mental health state. Intolerance to socio-political uncertainty could be linked with stress, anxiety, depression, panic attacks or disorder, and compulsions. Mental health conditions include mental disorders and psychosocial disabilities as well as other mental states associated with significant distress, impairment in functioning, or risk of self-harm. People with mental health conditions are more likely to experience lower levels of mental well-being. socio-political uncertainty could affect people in any way bring in stress, anxiety and depression into people's daily lives. Everyone has challenges in life. People who have good mental health are more likely to be able to cope with the ups and downs of daily life; one could guide their mental health by eating well, getting enough sleep in a period of socio-political uncertainty and many more. It was recommended that if one feels distressed by what is in the media, limit your consumption of Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sources; also Basic acts of self-care can make a real difference during times of stress: take breaks while studying, connect more often with family and friends, take on fewer commitments, engage in spiritual or religious practices, or go for a walk and find what make one feel good; all this would make one develop positive mental health state in a period of socio-economic uncertainty.

Keyword: (Mental Health, Socio, political, Economic Uncertainty)

Introduction

The political and social climate of recent years has brought new challenges to mental health. More people are experiencing mental illness, stress, depression, anxiety, and other symptoms as they struggle to cope with the influx of information in the news, the political divide in their own relationships, and worry for the future. Life is often fraught with uncertainty, as we cannot predict the future; constructing a framework to draw from, helps us in having a grounded idea of what our next steps might look like. Uncertainty could be as a result of having limited knowledge about an occurrence or event, making it difficult to control, plan, or predict a future outcome, which can often be distressing.

Most people are creatures of habit and prefer to have a plan or routine in place. When things deviate from our plans it can feel like losing control, contributing to increases in anxiety or stress (Counseling and Psychological Services University of Michigan, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic created a lot of change that is sudden and quickly evolving, leading to a perpetual state of uncertainty for many also socio-political

sector of the country (Nigeria) current presents so many uncertainties. Sometimes, we are hard on ourselves for struggling when things do not go as planned. During these challenging times, it is important to remember to practice self-compassion, patience, acceptance, warmth, and kindness towards ourselves. Remember, uncertainty impacts us all differently and can bring up conflicting emotional responses. Uncertainty affects ones mental health because such period, requires a lot of mental activities and when not properly addressed could lead to mental health problems.

Socio- political uncertainty could be one of the factors that could bring an imbalance to one's mental health state. Intolerance to socio- political uncertainty could be linked with stress, anxiety, depression, panic attacks or disorder, and compulsions. Socio-political uncertainty could be seen as a combination of social and political uncertainties in security, poverty, national wealth, income inequality, social integration and political conflicts, which determines population health. It has led to significant declines in economic activity, a rise in unemployment, depressed housing markets and an increasing number of people living in poverty. Political uncertainty could affect the determinants of health through poor environmental conditions, inadequate transportation, unsafe neighbourhoods, and lack of healthy food options which affect all other dynamics of health including mental health (More House School of Medicine, 2023)

Mental health is all about how people think, feel, and behave. Factors in people's lives, interpersonal connections, and physical factors can determine ones mental health. Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community (Medical News Today, 2023). World Health Organization (2023), states that mental health is "more than just the absence of mental disorders or disabilities." Peak mental health is not only about managing active conditions but also looking after ongoing wellness and happiness. It also emphasizes that preserving and restoring mental health is crucial individually and at a community and society level. According to World Health Organization (WHO) (2023), mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right; and it is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development. Mental health conditions include mental disorders and psychosocial disabilities as well as other mental states associated with significant distress, impairment in functioning, or risk of self-harm. People with mental health conditions are more likely to experience lower levels of mental well-being. Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood (Centers for disease Control and Prevention, 2023).

Positive mental health is a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and can contribute to his or her community. Unsurprisingly, substantial research has revealed that people who experience unemployment, impoverishment and family disruptions have a significantly greater risk of mental health problems,

such as depression, alcohol use disorders and suicide, than their unaffected counterparts Especially men are at increased risk of mental health problems and death due to suicide or alcohol use during times of economic adversity.

Unemployment contributes to depression and suicide and young unemployed people have a higher risk of getting mental health problems than young people who remain employed. Evidence indicates that debt, financial difficulties and housing payment problems lead to mental health; the more debt people have, the more likely they are to have mental disorders overall (Matrix Mag,2022). People struggling with excessive financial difficulties are prone to mental health issues such as depression, substance abuse, especially alcohol abuse, and suicidal tendency .The more debt they struggle with, the higher the likelihood of mental disorders in a finding after the rise of unemployment, there was a 28 percent increase in suicide rates. A holistic approach to the mental health challenges of the current socio and political crisis calls for interventions across several sectors.

In addition to broad social welfare measures that go beyond mental health issues alone, the provision of mental health services in primary care, active labour market programmes, family support and parenting programmes, guidance and counseling, alcohol control, promotion of social capital and debt relief programmes constitute the cornerstones of successful policies and gaining the trust of youth through political awareness can prevent mental health problems in the population. Leaders are required to intervene with strategically, devised mental and social protection programmes for risky hypersensitive population. One of such programmes could be the implementation mental health education in order to create awareness and enlighten the populace.

How Socio-Political Uncertainty Manifests and Impacts Mental Health

Political strife can affect individual well-being in a variety of ways. It can damage relationships, disrupt self-care, and even lead to physical symptoms. More than 25 percent felt depressed when their candidate lost an election; 1 in 5 had lost sleep over politics; 20 percent reported feeling fatigued because of political news; 29 percent reported losing their temper over politics; One quarter said they felt hateful toward those with opposing political views; More than 20 percent have had political disagreements damage their friendships (Newport Institute, 2024). More people are experiencing mental illness, stress, depression, anxiety, and other symptoms. They struggle to cope with the influx of information in the news, the political divide in their own relationships, and worry for the future. The stress associated with political disagreements has the add-on effect on psychosocial well-being of people holding diverse political views leading to deleterious effect on mental and physical health. The harming effects of political uncertainty is a known perpetuating stressor, cluttering society and traversing daily life through media, various internet platforms and persisting news feed (Abdul, 2022). According to Counseling and Psychological Services University of Michigan (2023), identified some of the ways socio-political uncertainties could impact ones mental health state;

Stress: Stress is a common response to uncertainty. Symptoms of stress can include racing thoughts, forgetfulness, inability to focus, increased heart rate, appetite changes, sweating, restlessness, nausea, physical pain in the body, irritability, fatigue, feeling overwhelmed or out of control, procrastination.

Anxiety: Another common response to uncertainty is anxiety. Symptoms of anxiety can include racing thoughts, increased heart rate, sweating, restlessness, nausea, hyper vigilance, irritability, inability to focus, fatigue, feeling fear, lack of sleep. Symptoms of a panic attack include accelerated heart rate, sweating, shaking, and shortness of breath, discomfort in the body, nausea, lightheadedness, depersonalization and fear of dying or losing control.

Cognitive Distortions: Cognitive distortions are a common response in times of uncertainty. Cognitive distortions are inaccurate thoughts that contribute to negative thinking patterns and emotions. Cognitive distortions one may experience in times of uncertainty are catastrophizing; assuming the worst possible outcome, underestimating coping ability: belief that one does not have the ability to cope with difficult events, and jumping to conclusions: assuming outcomes without having sufficient data.

Depression: Depression can develop in times of uncertainty. Individuals with depression may find themselves experiencing persistent sadness, loss of interest or pleasure in activities, low mood, irritability, sleep disruptions, fatigue, and changes to appetite, lack of focus or motivation, or thoughts of self-harm.

Obsessions and Compulsions: While the majority of people experience less intense symptoms and distress, obsessions (unwanted intrusive thoughts) and compulsions (repetitive behaviors or thoughts) may manifest or increase as a result of uncertainty about transmission of disease to others or self-contamination.

Pre-existing Mental Health Concerns: For those with pre-existing mental health concerns, uncertainty may cause exacerbation of symptoms, circumstances may disrupt social connections with support systems, or one may find that established coping strategies are less effective. If one finds themselves experiencing any of these symptoms, know that you are not alone and that there are steps you can take to manage stress, alleviate anxiety, and better cope with uncertainty.

Healthy routines to help people stay mentally healthy during socio-economic uncertainty

Everyone has challenges in life. People who have good mental health are more likely to be able to cope with the ups and downs of daily life. Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood. Mental health is equally important components of overall health. For example, depression increases the risk for many types of physical health problems, particularly long-lasting conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. Similarly, the presence of chronic conditions can increase the risk for mental illness (Centers for Disease Prevention and Control, 2024). According to National institute for mental Health, (2023) healthy routine for good mental health in a period of socio-political uncertainty includes;

Get regular exercise: practicing 30 minutes of walking every day can help boost ones mood and improve a person's health especially during uncertainties.

Eat healthy, regular meals and stay hydrated: A balanced diet and plenty of water can improve one's energy and focus throughout the day. Also, limit caffeinated beverages such as soft drinks or coffee. Even the economy is limited look out for low price healthy meals.

Make sleep a priority: Stick to a schedule, and making sure one gets enough sleep. Blue light from devices and screens can make it harder to fall asleep, so reduce blue light exposure to phone or computer before bedtime.

Try a relaxing activity: Explore relaxation or wellness programs or apps, which may incorporate meditation, muscle relaxation, or breathing exercises. Schedule regular times every activity.

Set goals and priorities: Decide what needs to be done now and what can wait. Learn to say "no" to new tasks if you start to feel like you are taking on too much. Try to be mindful of what you have accomplished at the end of the day, not what you have been unable to do.

Practice gratitude: Remind yourself daily of things you are grateful for. Be specific. Write them down at night, or replay them in your mind.

Focus on positivity: Identify and challenge your negative and unhelpful thoughts.

Stay connected: Reach out to your friends or family members who can provide emotional support and practical help during the period of uncertainty.

Conclusion

Life is often fraught with uncertainty, as we cannot predict the future; constructing a framework to draw from, helps us in having a grounded idea of what our next steps might look like. Uncertainty could be as a result of having limited knowledge about an occurrence or event, making it difficult to control, plan, or predict a future outcome, which can often be distressing. The COVID-19 pandemic created a lot of change that is sudden and quickly evolving, leading to a perpetual state of uncertainty for many also socio-political sector of the country (Nigeria) current presents so many uncertainties. Socio-political uncertainty could be seen as a combination of social and political uncertainties in security, poverty, national wealth, income inequality, social integration and political conflicts, which determines population health. It has led to significant declines in economic activity, a rise in unemployment, depressed housing markets and an increasing number of people living in poverty. Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. If one finds themselves experiencing any of the symptoms of mental health as a result of socio-political uncertainty, such person should know that they are not alone and that there are steps they can take to manage stress, alleviate anxiety, and better cope with uncertainty.

Recommendations

Socio-political uncertainty could occur at any time through different means therefore it is recommended that when one feels distressed by what is on the media, such person should limit their consumption of Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sources. Basic acts of self-care can make a real difference during times of stress: take breaks while studying, connect more often with family and friends, take on fewer

commitments, engage in spiritual or religious practices, or go for a walk and find what make one feel good; all this would make one develop positive mental health state in a period of socio-economic uncertainty.

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