The Role of Social Support Networks Could Develop on the Well-Being and Mental Health toward COVID-19 Pandemic: A Brief Review

By Albanella Luena Chávez Turello

Introduction - As Rajkumar¹ proposes, the COVID-19 pandemic is a crisis that affects in many ways the health, wellbeing and society of a large number of countries, with over 11,500,000 cases and 535,453 confirmed deaths reported to date². In fact, one of the majors concerns of the global health organizations community are the mental health and psycho-social effects that the measures that states have been taken such as lockdowns, self-isolation, and social quarantine on several spheres of life such as the social routines, health care, economy, education, global markets, etc.. It speculates that these changes are going to affect acutely on the prevalence of illnesses and disorders like depression, anxiety disorders, or self-harm behavior.

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I. Introduction

As Rajkumar proposes, the COVID-19 pandemic is a crisis that affects in many ways the health, well-being and society of a large number of countries, with over 11,500,000 cases and 535,453 confirmed deaths reported to date. In fact, one of the majors concerns of the global health organizations community are the mental health and psycho-social effects that the measures that states have been taken such as lockdowns, self-isolation, and social quarantine on several spheres of life such as the social routines, health care, economy, education, global markets, etc.. It speculates that these changes are going to affect acutely on the prevalence of illnesses and disorders like depression, anxiety disorders, or self-harm behavior. The World Health Organization has expressed its alarm in a connected consequence: the increase of addictive and maladaptive behaviors, such as children and gender-based violence, and alcohol or illegal drugs consumption, due to the fear and anxiety of being contaminated with the virus or affected by one of its social after-effects. In addition, the isolation which the social distancing suppose can affect the family relationships due to the mass home-confinement directives.

Considering these circumstances, we understand as a priority the review of the existing literature about support networks to apply it in a pertinent way to mental health care.

II. What the Social Support Networks Are

To understand the full significance of social support in the intervention and research on issues related to people's mental health, we must begin from its conceptualization in the scientific literature.

Among the classic definitions of the construct we can talk about House analysis, which understands it as a type of real transaction established between two or more people, for a connection or implication. Social support is understood as the set of resources that, in a person's environment, act in a favorable way to establish and develop social, family, and intimate relationships, the same that take the role of networks. In this way, the most common sources of social support are made up of family, friends, work colleagues, etc., these sources being the basis for the networks that are formed.

The World Health Organization defines a network as the grouping of individuals, organizations, and agencies, organized in a non-hierarchical way around common themes or concerns, which are actively and systematically addressed, based on commitment and trust.

For their part, as Álvarez and García describe, a social support network encompasses both the characteristics of the social field in which a person develops, and the reciprocal relationships that are established between those who form different personal networks.

a) The way it is evaluated is based on elements such as:
   b) The density and size of the network
   c) The frequency in which the group establishes contacts
   d) The reciprocity that exists between the members, regarding the degree to which different elements are exchanged
   e) Kinship, referring to the form of link on which the network is based.
   f) Homogeneity, which considers the similarities or points in common between members regarding elements such as attitudes, beliefs, values, etc.

The objective they fulfill has to do with the fact that the people forming the networks can achieve well-being and satisfaction about their social and personal needs, such as esteem, sense of belonging, security, etc., through exchange and interaction with others.

Social support also fulfills a series of functions, referred to as forms of feedback in the sense of valuing the actions that a person carries out in each environment.

As Weiss points out, social support can be understood as a way that people use to make an evident contribution to the social groups and networks they are included. Therefore, their implications can be through them, the community can fulfill a sense of
achievement, social integration, learning, affirmation of worth and sense of a faithful alliance and orientation.

Specifically, about what are the functions that the interpersonal transaction fulfills, they include:

a) Emotional function is related to the fact that people in support networks provide each other with empathy, understanding, care, trust, and love.
b) Instrumental function refers to the provision of tangible aid and services.
c) Appreciative function, about the provision of compliments and other types of positive evaluations.
d) Information function refers to the provision of recommendations, advice, and knowledge.

III. Mental Health, Well-Being, and Instability

Mental health, understood as a concept closely related to biopsychosocial well-being, is considered as the ability of people to lead a fully satisfactory life, including the ability to establish relationships, study, work or do recreational activities, as well as taking decisions and making choices on a daily basis.

The WHO has established that mental health is: “(...) a state of well-being in which the individual is aware of his own abilities, can face the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is capable to make a contribution to your community.”

Therefore, it is argued that any modification of the state of mental well-being that negatively affects an individual has an impact on the capacities and choices that he makes, in a way that reduces his level of adaptation, and, in itself, functioning as an individual as well as socially as a family.

IV. Is There a Gap Between Social Support, the Networks that Provide it and Mental Health?

Two different models can be found to understand the relationship between social support and health: the direct effect model and the buffer effect model. The first postulates that social support is connected to health, since the greater the social support, the health is better and this relationship is independent of stress levels.

Second, the buffer or protector model of social support, states that social support takes the role of mediator or buffer in benefit of health since social support allows to redefine a situation so that it is not classified as stressful.

However, as Barron and Sánchez postulate, until now, much of the attention on the social support construct has been focused on its psychological, social and community dimensions, but not on the positive association that can be established with mental health, so the social support can also be understood as one of the factors that affect psychological cognitive decline both individual and collectively.

Thus, it is necessary to understand the relationship between mental health and social support, from the perspective that the former is based on biopsychosocial well-being. In the following diagram we can see the relationship between its elements:

![Figure 1: Social and structural factors that relate mental health to social support](https://example.com/figure1.png)

As Matud et al. understands, there are quite a few studies that show the association between social relationships and health, in the sense that, if a person is isolated or separated from the groups, his or her physical, emotional and psychological state of health declines and increases their ailments and even their probability of dying.

In addition, various studies have related the social position regarding socioeconomic class with the way the disease is faced, having also found a connection between social support and the experience...
of mental illness in relation to the difference between social classes.\textsuperscript{19}

On the other hand, it has been possible to find a relationship between gender variables and the need and / or result of social support\textsuperscript{20}, adding sex and / or gender as another factor to be taken into account when evaluating the interaction and participation of social support networks.

Finally, we can see in the graph the psychological factors: coping styles and self-esteem as psychological factors, which take the role of filters for stressful experiences.

The first element is understood as the different modalities that people assume to appreciate, value, and react to conflicts and life events\textsuperscript{20}, being able to be problem-oriented, emotion-oriented, avoidant, behavioral, cognitive, or emotional.

Finally, self-esteem is understood as one of a dispositional variable in relation to life satisfaction. It implies an attitude towards oneself that is related to beliefs regarding one's abilities, social relationships, and the future\textsuperscript{21}.

For Álvarez and García\textsuperscript{4}, positive social support networks have a direct impact on psychological well-being, since it has a main role, both in the evaluation of experiences and in the state of comprehensive health. When considering the direct effect and buffer models, the empirical evidence in favor of both has been quite\textsuperscript{11}; however, it is possible to understand social support as an important variable (direct or indirect) for health.

V. Conclusions

The main role of social support in the psychological well-being of people can be related to both the individual and the collective and community dimensions, from variables such as social class, race, gender, the existence of physical illnesses and / or mental, etc., to individual issues such as coping styles and levels of self-esteem that each person forms.

For these reasons, it is important to understand social support as a support factor for psychological well-being. The need to focus actions in favor of the mental health of individuals, groups and communities, arises from the scope that mental disorders have currently acquired; However, it is also possible to understand its relevance when talking about physical and psychophysical diseases.

For this reason, if we take into account their level of influence in the life of every person, their environment, etc., it becomes a priority to evaluate and investigate the social support networks that can be seen in everyday life, as well as in health dynamics - disease, crisis or stress situations, crisis, etc.

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