



## **Impact of Covid-19 on mental health**

Press Release of the French National Academy of Medicine

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Several surveys report measurable negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on people's mental health, both in the general population and in clinical practice. These effects are observed in patients who showed Covid-19 symptoms. Beyond the infectious episode, at least 20% of them have psychological sequelae: chronic anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, depressive pathology [1]. The neuro-inflammatory disturbances caused by the virus could be one of the determining factors. It could also later on affect the quality of brain ageing. At the forefront of the pandemic, caregivers are recognized at risk of developing psychological disorders [2], in particular anxiety-depressive disorders and post-traumatic stress, which underlines the need to take into account this dimension which could ultimately discourage vocations [3].

In November, a “Santé Publique France survey” found a 20% rate of depressive symptoms in the general population [4]. These data are always difficult to interpret due to the possible influence of seasonal variations and the imperfection of the psychometric instruments used. However, it seems to be proven that people who are inactive or in a precarious financial situation, students, people with a history of psychological disorders or with disabilities are particularly exposed to the risk of depressive disorders.

The Covid-19 pandemic induces a set of negative events involving collective and individual resilience capacities as well as revealing vulnerabilities, particularly psychological ones. It is important to take into account the specific vulnerabilities inherent in some living conditions: professional, social and emotional isolation, disability [5]. These are powerful factors in revealing hitherto unrecognized individual vulnerabilities, leading to acute or long term decompensations.

At the opposite, any expression of psychic suffering should not be considered to be the result of a proven psychiatric disorder. It should therefore be emphasized that no survey reports an increase in the rate of suicide attempts or suicides [6], which can be explained by the collective feeling of belonging to a community facing the same enemy, today the coronavirus.

## **The National Academy of Medicine recommends:**

- to distinguish between worry, sadness and even disarray, such as any life trajectory experiences, particularly during a viral pandemic, and a depressive disease identified by a medical examination justifying the implementation of a specific treatment;
- to pay particular attention to situations of precariousness and isolation capable of undermining resilience capacities and revealing individual fragility. In this context, it is essential to encourage associative support networks for people;
- in strict compliance with health rules, to encourage sports activities and the maintenance of relationships with relatives, whatever their age (including residents in Sheltered Home for Elderly Dependent Persons and people with disabilities):
- to encourage front-line healthcare professionals to be vigilant regarding the mental state of their patients, particularly during the course of a coronavirus infection, in order to identify any disturbances justifying a diagnostic and therapeutic approach;
- to improve the organization of the psychiatric care supply by increasing reception and listening capacities able to strengthen people's resilience, while ensuring the particular vulnerability of patients with a history of mental illness, what requires consideration by the administrative authorities and the commitment of psychiatric professionals.

1- Taquet M et al, Bidirectional associations between Covid-19 and psychiatric disorder: retrospective cohort studies of 62.354 COVID-19 cases in the USA, *Lancet Psychiatry*, 9 Nov 2020 ,[http://doi.org/10.106/S2215-0366\(20\)30383-7](http://doi.org/10.106/S2215-0366(20)30383-7)

2- El Hage W et al. Health professionals and the corona virus pandemic (COVID-19): what are the risks for their mental health? *Encephalon*, 2020, 46(3), S73-S80

3- Press release from the National Academy of Medicine "Follow-up of the caregivers involved in the management of Covid-19", 8 June 2020

4- Santé Publique France: COVID-19: Mise à jour épidémiologique du 1er Novembre 2020

5- Handicap.gouv.fr, October 2020

6- Leske S et al, Real-time suicide mortality data from police reports in Queensland, Australia, during the Covid-19 pandemic: an interrupted time-series analysis, *Lancet Psychiatry*, 16 November 2020 [https://doi.org/10.106/S2215-0366\(20\)30435-1](https://doi.org/10.106/S2215-0366(20)30435-1)