
Mental Health Disorders During COVID-19, Prolonged Grief Disorder, and Practicing Self-Compassion During Post-Traumatic Growth

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Mental health disorders were associated with an increased risk of COVID-19 related mortality as per literature review and meta-analysis of 16 studies from seven countries [1].

Guillaume Fond, MD, Ph.D. in France, and colleagues found that in these population-based cohort studies from the U.S., South Korea, Israel, and four European countries that patients with mental health disorders were at increased risk of COVID-19 as opposed to those without mental health disorders.

Due to high numbers of COVID-19 deaths, Prolonged grief disorder was added to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). This defines the mental disorders when someone close to the bereaved individual has passed within at least 6 months for children and adolescents, or within at least 12 months for adults. Prolonged grief disorder is the newest disorder to be added to the DSM as to be released in March 2022 [2].

Prolonged grief disorder symptoms are as follows:

- Identity disruption (e.g., feeling as though part of oneself has died).
- A marked sense of disbelief about the death.
- Avoidance of reminders that the person is dead.
- Intense emotional pain (e.g., anger, bitterness, sorrow) related to death.
- Difficulty moving on with life (e.g., problems engaging with friends, pursuing interests, planning for the future).
- Emotional numbness.
- Feeling that life is meaningless.
- Intense loneliness (i.e., feeling alone or detached from others).

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How do we learn to cope during COVID-19 and post-traumatic growth? It's important to practice self-compassion as a way of relating to changes especially when we feel inadequate and as a failure. Self-compassion allows us to share the human condition of imperfection. Research shows that practicing self-compassion is less likely to wallow up in self-pitying. Self-compassionate individuals have stronger mental health and are emotionally stable. When we go through a tough time whether it's prolonged grief disorder or post COVID-19, self-compassion makes all the difference to be resilient and able to thrive. The irony is that being good to yourself helps you be good to others while being bad to yourself only gets in the way [3].

As a behavioral health clinician, I recommend one to find something positive every day about yourself, Don't believe everything in your head, that inner self-critic it's just a thought; freeze your emotions and freeze your thoughts, and let those negative judgments go. Be proud of yourselves and your achievements; find your character strengths and be resilient. Learn to say no assertively when you can't manage more. Find pleasant activities to distract yourself. Be mindful by using your sensory experiences. Live every day to the fullest and meaningful as though it's your very last.

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