

Cognitive-behavioral therapy and proper management of emotions, the main strategy to combat depression

January 13, 2021

- Specialists recommend professional assessment for families who have suffered a loss due to COVID-19.
- Mental health drugs are only indicated when there is a professional diagnosis of major depressive disorder.
- Round-the-clock feelings of sadness are not part of a natural state of mind.

Recent times have been overwhelming to the citizens of the world. The pandemic, confinement, and the loss of loved ones due to coronavirus have generated an increase in stress, which derives in emotional crises in people of all ages.

In light of the World Day against Depression, Doctor Rodrigo Durán Muñiz, specialist in sleep disorders and Medical Manager of Psychiatry and Central Nervous System at Grupo PISA, mentioned that given the world-wide situation, it is normal that children, teenagers, young adults and the elderly present changes in behavior associated to the COVID-19 pandemic; which is why it is very important to promote a positive environment among the members of a household, as well as paying attention to alert signs that could indicate symptoms of depression.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), depression is one of the main causes for world-wide disease and incapacity among teenagers and adults. It is also estimated that up to 4% of the world population lives with depression, which is defined as an emotional disorder that causes constant sadness, loss of interest or pleasure in activities that used to be enjoyed, feelings of guilt, and lack of self-esteem, which can result in sleep and appetite disorders, tiredness, lack of concentration, and in the most severe of its forms, lead to suicide.

In this context, Doctor Rodrigo Durán Muñiz explained that *“depressive disorders are divided in two sub-categories: major depressive disorder, also known as clinical depression and is characterized by feelings of sadness that prevent the patient of performing daily tasks such as work or school, and specially a loss of interest in life; and minor depression, called distimia, that consists in a kind of less intense –but longer- chronic depression in which the patient experiences lack of self-esteem.”*

The sleep disorders specialists, Rodrigo Durán, assured that some people wrongly believe that being sad or depressed is their “natural” state of mind, and tend to feel fear or shame when expressing their emotions. This is a paradigm that must be brought down, because when it is not diagnosed and tended to, depression can affect performance at work, at school, and also affect interpersonal and family relationships negatively.

In Mexico, the National Psychiatry Institute “Ramón de la Fuente Muñiz”, estimates that at least 9.2% of the population has reported an episode of depression in their lives. It is also estimated that at least 1 in every 5 people will suffer an episode before reaching 75 years.

In spite of this information, estimated of the Mexican Health Ministry indicate that in the country only 2 of every 10 people who experience symptoms of depression, seek professional help; which leads to a delay of up to 14 years in the diagnosis and specialized treatment.

“A lot of people are afraid of addressing their depression, because they believe they are dealing with a fleeting emotion that will go away on its own or that doesn’t require an intensive care. Furthermore, there is a deep unfounded fear regarding the use of antidepressant medication, and it is important to mention that not all depression cases are managed with medication; drugs are only used when the patient suffers of a major depressive disorder. The main strategy to fight depression is behavioral-conductive therapy and the adequate management of emotions,” assured Doctor Rodrigo Durán of Grupo PiSA.

The sleep disorder specialist also mentioned that depression can have a lot of causes, such as unresolved children’s traumas, untreated physical or sexual abuse, and grief over the loss of a job or a loved one. In the specific case of women, pregnancy and post-labor period can be significant triggers for depression.

In Mexico, the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI, for its acronym in Spanish), documented that during 2016, 34.8 million people reported to have or suffer an episode of extreme sadness or depression, of which 14.4 million were men and 20.4 million were women.

Even though depression can be presented in both genders and at all ages, women, people without partners, people with a low education level, constitute the most vulnerable group for this disorder.

Durán Muñiz also pointed those depressive disorders are a mental health issue that does not distinguish age. *“Anybody can suffer depression: small children, teenagers, young adults, and the elder; even more in this time of pandemic, where everyone has suffered changes in their routine and there is a general sense of uncertainty regarding COVID-19”*.

In regard of this situation, Grupo PiSA’s Medical Manager of Psychiatry and Central Nervous System, called on parents to pay attention in any behavioral changes in their children; such as irritability, problems to sleep, separation anxiety, wetting the bed after going to the bathroom, or the inclusion of topics such as disease and death during playtime. In the case of teenagers, the loss of interest in activities they used to enjoy such as sports, messaging with friends, problems with concentration or reason, oversleeping, the use of drugs or alcohol, and conversations about death or suicide can indicate signs of risk.

In this sense, Doctor Durán advised the parents to take care for their own mental health to establish an example at home. *“In some households, family dynamics have changed radically. Working and studying from home, as well as being confined for a long time, can pose moments of stress for all family members; which is why it is of paramount importance to maintain and open communication among all the members of the family to promote a positive and friendly environment”*.

To conclude, the specialist mentioned that families who have suffered the loss a loved one due to COVID-19, are at a greater risk of manifesting depression or mental health issues; which is why in these cases, it is recommended to seek help from a mental health professional to deal with grief in an adequate fashion, and to deal with the emotional process in the best possible way.