

REPORT ON LOOKING AFTER YOUR MENTAL HEALTH DURING COVID 19 DATED
SATURDAY, 25TH APRIL, 2020

The trend of the pandemic has created fear, anxiety, and instability in the minds of individuals in the country and the world at large. With this in mind, and the strong desire to sensitize the country on the ways people can monitor their mental health during and after the pandemic, the Double ST Foundation during her monthly class tagged, Let's Talk, decided to introduce this in the discussion.

Dr. Gbonjubola Abiri, an advocate in mental health, knowledgeable in psychiatry and psychology with other qualifications, facilitated the study with great impact review. A total of 164 participants comprising of members joined the class through the invitation link.

The class began at 7:00 PM after the moderator, Okorie Samuel, handed over to the facilitator, Dr. Gbonjubola Abiri.

Dr. Gbonjubola Abiri pointed out that the year of the double digits: 2020, the year starting a new decade came with much excitement accompanied with hopes, dreams, plans, and aspirations. Then, came the coronavirus.

She said, "The occurrence of this pandemic is indeed a significant stressful life event. And what makes it more stressful is how the trauma is not one that happens at once and goes away (an event trauma). It is an ongoing trauma, a process trauma that has continued to be in our faces especially since the first case in Nigeria was announced on February 27th, 2020."

As part of her introduction, she defined what health is according to World Health Organization that "health is not just the absence of disease or infirmity, but a complete state of physical, mental and social wellbeing". Furthermore, she added that mental health on the other hand is described as the successful performance of thought, mood, emotion, cognition, and other aspects of behavior.

She highlighted the signs that would be identifiable when an individual is mentally healthy, which includes:

1. Having thriving relationships.
2. Coping with the normal stresses of life.
3. Being productive.
4. Contributing to their society.

She added that health is sometimes interchanged with wellness. Wellness is a positive state of mental health, highlighting the 8 (eight) pillars of wellness as follows:

1. Physical
2. Social
3. Emotional
4. Occupational
5. Financial
6. Spiritual
7. Intellectual
8. Environmental

Moving forward, she highlighted factors that can have an impact on our mental health. The factors included:

1. The COVID19 pandemic itself
2. The lockdown/restrictive lifestyle/ boredom
3. The continuous bombardment with the News
4. The uncertainty
5. Lack of appropriate skills to cope, such as resilience
6. Loneliness, lack of human contact and support
7. Pre-existing health conditions
8. Remote working conditions

She proceeded to discuss common mental health conditions likely to happen in this period and they include the following:

1. **Anxiety Disorders-**

According to Dr. Gbonjubola Abiri, anxiety is a normal response to a threat- stating COVID-19 is a threat.

But when an individual starts to overthink the situation, especially about things that are beyond control such as how many people currently have the disease worldwide, how many people have died or are still going to die, or is this how the world will end?

2. **Sleep Disorders-**

She added that some people may find at this time that they can't sleep, have difficulty initiating or maintaining sleep, or maybe even sleep excessively.

3. Substance Use Disorders-

She stressed that while this may have been on before the pandemic, it may worsen in this period. Adding that, research has shown that the need for substances of abuse, the use, and breakdown of patients have increased in this time.

She also stated that substances such as alcohol, pressure medication, marijuana, codeine, and crack cocaine amongst others have increased.

She further listed other common mental health conditions:

4. Disorders of mood: depression or mania
5. Increased rates of suicides
6. Stress-related disorders
7. Eating disorders
8. Psychotic disorders may also occur

She advised the class to follow the tips she tagged "*COVID 19 steps to keep us mentally healthy in these times*" and they are:

1. Control what you can. Focus on what you can control.
2. Observe all precautions (personal and governmental).
3. Verbalize how you feel and reach out for professional help when you need it.
4. Itemize your stressors and adaptive coping mechanisms (such as journaling or talking about your feelings to a loved one).
5. Do take care of yourself (physically and mentally) by eating healthy meals regularly, sleep well, and exercise moderately.
6. One more day at home for the lockdown won't hurt.

9 ways to protect yourself

1. Wash your hands regularly with soap for at least 20 seconds.
2. Sanitize regularly with an alcohol-based sanitizer.
3. Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
4. Practice respiratory hygiene by coughing or sneezing into your elbow.

5. Social distancing isn't advised.
6. Self-isolate, if contact with infected persons or surfaces is suspected.
7. Limit sources of information to credible ones.
8. Normalize the conversation about the pandemic. If you feel sad, anxious, tensed, or stressed, remember you are not alone.
9. If you feel any symptoms, please call the designated NCDC helplines 080097000010.

Dr. Gbonjubola Abiri shared some practical steps to cope with the ongoing stress. Practical de-stressing techniques include:

1. Be at peace with yourself.
2. Practice breathing exercises - the 4-7-8 method. Breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds, hold it for 7 seconds and then let it out for 8 seconds through your mouth with a whoosh sound.
3. Practice affirmations daily.
4. Practice mindfulness- be present in the moment. Take a moment each day to do an activity that fully incorporates many of your senses like taking an intentional bath or eating a meal or breathing intentionally.
5. Have a gratitude journal.
6. Play board games and video games with loved ones.
7. Turn off your phone from time to time.
8. Pray the serenity prayer which says: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference."

She concluded with the following recommendations.

The class should recognize warning signs. These signs include:

1. How you think
 2. How you feel
 3. How you react
- Our thoughts either positively or negatively impact our feelings and eventually our behavior.
 - Feed your faith and your fears will starve to death or feed your fears and your faith will starve to death.

- Identify your stressors.
- Identify your one thing: Your one thing is that one thing that if you sort out or give attention to or put in place, everything else will fall in place.
- Your stressors may be people, places, or situations. Give less energy to them.
- There is no shame in seeking therapy. And there is neither health nor justice without mental health.

At the end of her discussion, questions and feedbacks were taken from some participants and the class ended at 9:00 pm.