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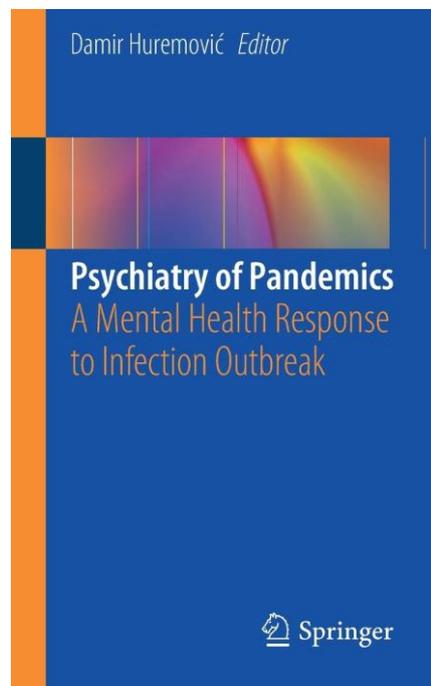
*Book Review*

**The Mental Health Guide to a Pandemic?  
 A Review of *Psychiatry of Pandemics***

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**Huremović, Damir (Ed.). *Psychiatry of Pandemics: A Mental Health Response to Infection Outbreak*. 2019. Springer**

*Psychiatry of Pandemics: A Mental Health Response to Infection Outbreak* is a recent anthology of essays published by Springer in 2019. The volume, edited by Dr. Damir Huremović, brings together several medical professionals under the field of psychiatry, providing the reader with a coherent, in-depth understanding of the psychological issues that become operative during pandemics. Mental health is an

issue which has long remained in the shadows within the social sphere, and is often neglected and trivialised in comparison to physical health.

Along with the physical threat to human well-being occasioned by the pandemic, the threat to individual and social mental health is equally alarming. Despite the world going through several pandemics over centuries, there is a scarcity of significant texts regarding its impact on mental health, thereby highlighting the ignorance about the issue. Dr. Huremović also notes in the Preface that the book could have been written centuries ago when pandemics were taking over the world, and psychiatry was not confined to insane asylums like it is today.

The book aims to develop a manual which traces the public's mental response to an infection outbreak. The preface observes:

As the public anxieties about infection disease outbreaks rose in recent years with the advent of SARS, N1H1 flu, Ebola, and ZIKA, we observed in awe how the public would react to an impending outbreak in their midst and how those public fears would emerge and spread, well, like an epidemic. (v)

The observations made in the book can also be applied to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and its unprecedented global impact. It can be argued that first there is a development and swell of public fear and its associated elements of anxiety, panic etc., which is followed by an understanding and evaluation of the situation where, with time, things get 'normalised'. Eventually resolution follows. The time-line of the pandemic, and the ensuing public fear and anxiety, follow an almost similar graph everywhere.

The book opens by providing an insight into the features of mental health responses during a pandemic. The impact on an individual and society's mental health vis-à-vis certain methodologies of classification is explored. The psychological responses of healthcare workers, victims of contagion, and survivors differ from each other and each develops a unique response to the situation. Meanwhile, the requirement of quarantining and isolation affect every category differently, alongside the presence of a common 'human' response to an infection outbreak.

The most captivating chapter of the book is the third chapter titled ‘Psychology of the Pandemic.’ It asserts that the mental health of pandemics contains two different parallel processes. The first consists of the “mirroring of the pandemic epidemiological process in the realm of psychology- reflecting in thoughts, behaviour, and emotional responses.” (37) The dissemination of misinformation begets doubts and elevates fear, and subsequently individual or mass panic. The process is revealed to be a parallel “between an infectious disease as an actual contagion and mental illness as a symbolic contagion.” (38) The psychological response can be summed up with the claim that “the burdensome stigma and isolation of both mental illness and infectious disease, stem from ‘fear of contagion.’” The chapter further analyses and draws parallels between mental health responses by discussing ‘zombification’.

The book goes on to present very understandable and practical information about the psychological impact of pandemics. There is a level of acceptance of one’s fate at the hands of a pandemic, and also of the loss caused due to such contagion. The role played by ‘mass’ communication and contact in developing an individual’s attitude towards something has been discussed in the book via ‘contagion theory’ (which is subdivided further into emotional and behavioural contagions). Meanwhile, humans do not live in isolation, and are part of community/communities. Factors like religion, viewpoints, socio-political and economic conditions also affect the outlook towards such breakouts. These aspects, in turn, affect mental health gravely - either directly or indirectly.

*Psychiatry of Pandemics* is a valuable handbook to understand mental health in relation to an infection outbreak. The language used is very accessible and avoids jargon, thus not limiting readership to the medical field alone. The book which has been written after evaluating several outbreaks in the past draws fairly accurate claims which can be easily implemented in the ongoing COVID-19 situation. It not only helps us understand and assess our own mental health conditions but also of those around us. Any curious reader can pick it up for a quick and informative read, which will also prepare the reader’s mind to cope and be better prepared for a pandemic outbreak.

With growing awareness of the importance of mental health in the past few years, and publication of such books around the subject, a much-needed discourse has started to find place in everyday life.

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