


Chapter 1

An Overview of the Impact of COVID-19 on Grief

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 worldwide pandemic shed light on gender disparities for mothers who had to work from home, anxiety from use of dating applications, compounded racial disparities, and counselor burn-out. This chapter presents the multifaceted impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health of individuals as well as the counseling profession which will be presented in detail throughout this book. Recommendations are also shared to support the mental health of clients impacted by grief from the COVID-19 pandemic. The recommendations are not only beneficial for practicing counselors and clinicians, but also for students in counselor education related programs, so discussion questions are included at the end of the chapter.

INTRODUCTION

In May 2019, the world had a common enemy...COVID-19. People panicked and not only was there a scarcity of face masks which left many people surfing the web to learn how to construct do-it-yourself masks, but there were also shortages of toilet paper and paper towels, as people hoarded supplies in fear of running out of them. Individuals tried to make themselves comfortable at home during mandated stay-at-home orders. Such panic had never been witnessed at such a magnitude by the generation who experienced the worldwide pandemic. Over 100,000 lives were

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lost due to COVID-19. Not only did people suffer the loss of family and friends due to COVID-19 infections, but some lost loved ones during the pandemic to other medical conditions and diseases because they could not access adequate medical attention. Grief was suffered during the monumental COVID-19 pandemic, and lives would be forever changed.

The COVID 19 pandemic was not expected, therefore mental health clinicians were not prepared for the psychological impact on individuals. The pandemic fractured the normalcy most people were accustomed to at home. With COVID-19 stay-at-home orders, families had to quickly shift to working from home, and because schools and colleges were closed, students learned remotely. There was an increase in the incidences of depression, anxiety, stress, panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, somatic symptoms, sleep disorders, insecurity about the future, fear of contracting the disease, fear of the negative economic effects due to the pandemic, and uptick of suicide reports (Costa et al., 2022).

Due to social distancing restrictions during the pandemic, dating was transformed and there was an increase in use of dating applications. The COVID-19 pandemic fueled the use of online dating through dating applications as people sought companionship, which has continued to be a popular form of meeting people. As long as the popularity of online dating continues to rise, it is expected that the number of clients seeking mental health counseling who utilize online dating will continue to increase as well (Gibson, 2021; Ali & Bloom, 2019). Dating application users have reported anxiety from factors such as changes in routines, virtual education, and financial insecurity. According to the National Institute of Health (NIH), some users have reported self-esteem issues due to rejection that occurs on dating applications in high numbers (NIH, 2022; Konings et al., 2023; Ali & Bloom, 2019).

Mental health needs have increased due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic which has led to a shortage of mental health professionals. During the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person mental health services were provided by phone or virtually the rough video conferencing platforms known as telemental health which has now become a more commonly used approach to providing services (Lee et al., 2023). The shortage is not only due to the demand, but for other reasons such as lack of funding and the number of mental health professionals retiring (Phillips, 2023). According to the American Psychological Association (APA), baby boomers are retiring during a time when the public has an increase in mental health needs. It is possible more clinicians will leave the profession from exhaustion or fatigue. The demand for mental health services can also cause counselor burnout (APA, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound effect on individuals including mental health professionals, and those who provide support must also be supported. Some clinicians may have also suffered from grief after losing loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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