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**Death, grief and stigma amidst COVID-19 pandemic****Abdul Majid<sup>1</sup>, Aijaz A Suhaff<sup>1</sup>**<sup>1</sup>SKIMS Medical College, Srinagar, India

The emergence of corona virus (SARS-Cov-2) all over the world was declared pandemic and an international public health emergency by World Health Organization on March 11, 2020. Humanity faced one of the biggest challenges of the century during COVID-19 pandemic. Due to increased cases of COVID-19 across the globe there was drastic change in day-to-day life and routine activities. COVID-19 pandemic affected individuals, society and caused severe psychological manifestations such as anxiety, stress, depression, stigma, and xenophobia. There was complete change/ shift in daily routines and in social interactions, chaos and fear everywhere. Covid-19 pandemic affected everyone all over the world. To curb the spread of this infection, the lockdown orders, and social distancing was imposed all over the world. In view of huge number of patient's, hospitals, nursing homes, health centers, hotels and even marriage halls were used as quarantine, isolation, as well as treatment centers. Millions of people across the globe experienced the death of their loved ones due to this deadly virus. Due to the restrictions, social distancing and lockdown during pandemic, most of these individuals did not get a chance to say final goodbye to their loved ones properly. New guidelines and policies were formulated and implemented to contain the spread of infection for the management of the dead bodies, funerals and burials. It is very important to note that burden of not being with a dying loved one is very difficult and resulted in unprecedented disruption of cultural and religious rituals in this part of world. Although in some cases making video or audio calls with the family members by the medical staff during this pandemic period facilitated the grief in some cases. Religious as well as cultural practices such as embalming, washing the body of the deceased, and open casket viewing were prohibited. Even close family members were not allowed to attend the funerals of their loved ones as they were asked to stay at home. Relatives were not allowed to visit the family of the deceased. These guidelines and restrictions halted the grieving process and affected the mental health. People who lost their loved ones during this pandemic, reported, emptiness, avoidant behavior, negative emotions and the survivor's guilt. Most of the family members of the deceased complained of disturbances in sleep, appetite and mood swings. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the family and close friends of a person who died of COVID-19 also experienced stigma, such as social avoidance and rejection. Stigma attached to COVID-19 was another problem and hurt everyone and threat to the lives of healthcare workers, patients, and survivors of the disease who refrained from getting tested and treated for fear of stigma. Stigma was so serious that even close family members were avoiding each other. Due to the fear of covid-19 and the stigma associated with this even now people were hiding their illness, never wanted to get screened for the same. Those who were admitted or kept in isolation or quarantine were discriminated, which created negative meaning for the people and fuel stigmatizing attitudes. Stigmatizing behaviour itself can lead to mental health issues, depression and may even lead to self-harm. In the long term, stigma also has a dramatic and probably under recognised effect on the issues such as employment, housing, and access to medical care.

**Biography**

Abdul Majid has completed his MD at the age of 20 years from Govt Medical College Srinagar (University of Kashmir). He is the Professor & Head, postgraduate Department of Psychiatry SKIMS Medical College Srinagar. He has published more than 50 papers in reputed journals and has been serving as an editorial board member of repute for many journals. He is currently serving as Hony. Secretary, Indian Psychiatric Society- North Zone and Indian Association of Geriatric Mental health