

We use cookies to improve your experience on our website. By using our website you consent to all cookies in accordance with our updated [Cookie Notice](#).

I accept



U.N. warns of global mental health crisis due to COVID-19 pandemic



Coronavirus could cause a global mental health crisis, the United Nations warn.

Image: Unsplash/Nik Shuliahin

This article is published in collaboration with
Reuters

14 May 2020

Kate Kelland

Correspondent, Reuters

- The United Nations has warned coronavirus could cause a global mental health crisis.
- The U.N. report highlighted those vulnerable to mental distress, including children and young people, and healthcare workers who see patients dying from COVID-19.

A mental illness crisis is looming as millions of people worldwide are surrounded by death and disease and forced into isolation, poverty and anxiety by the pandemic of COVID-19, United Nations health experts say.



The Peace Monument in front of the U.S. Capitol in Washington

Image: Reuters/Kevin Lamarque

“The isolation, the fear, the uncertainty, the economic turmoil - they all cause or could cause psychological distress,” said Devora Kestel, director of the World Health Organization’s (WHO) mental health department.

Presenting a U.N. report and policy guidance on COVID-19 and mental health, Kestel said an upsurge in the number and severity of mental illnesses is likely, and governments should put the issue “front and centre” of their responses.

“The mental health and wellbeing of whole societies have been severely impacted by this crisis and are a priority to be addressed urgently,” she told reporters at a briefing.

The report highlighted several regions and sections of societies as vulnerable to mental distress - including children and young people isolated from friends and school, healthcare workers who are seeing thousands of patients infected with and dying from the new coronavirus.

Emerging studies and surveys are already showing COVID-19’s impact on mental health globally. Psychologists say children are anxious and increases in cases of depression and anxiety have been recorded in several countries.

An upsurge in the number and severity of mental illnesses is likely.

Image: U.N.

Domestic violence is rising, and health workers are reporting an increased need for psychological support.

Reuters last week reported from interviews with doctors and nurses in the United States who said either they or their colleagues had experienced a combination of panic, anxiety, grief, numbness, irritability, insomnia and nightmares.

Outside of the health sector, the WHO report said many people are distressed by the immediate health impacts and the consequences of physical isolation, while many others are afraid of infection, dying, and losing family members.

Millions of people are facing economic turmoil, having lost or being at risk of losing their income and livelihoods, it added. And frequent misinformation and rumours about the pandemic and deep uncertainty about how long it will last are making people feel anxious and hopeless about the future.

It outlined action points for policy-makers to aim “to reduce immense suffering among hundreds of millions of people and mitigate long-term social and economic costs to society”.

These included redressing historic under-investment in psychological services, providing “emergency mental health” via remote therapies such as tele-counselling for frontline health workers, and working proactively with people known to have depression and anxiety, and with those at high risk of domestic violence and acute impoverishment.

License and Republishing

World Economic Forum articles may be republished in accordance with our [Terms of Use](#).

Written by

[Kate Kelland](#), Correspondent, Reuters

This article is published in collaboration with [Reuters](#)

The views expressed in this article are those of the author alone and not the World Economic Forum.

The World Economic Forum COVID Action Platform

Learn more



Explore context

COVID-19

Explore the latest strategic trends, research and analysis



Subscribe for updates

A weekly update of what's on the Global Agenda

Email	Subscribe
-------	-----------

