COVID-19: impact on mental health

 26th February 2021

**Title:** COVID-19 mental health impact and responses in low-income and middle-income countries: reimagining global mental health

The Lancet Psychiatry | 24th February 2021

Most of the global population live in low-income and middle-income countries (LMICs), which have historically received a small fraction of global resources for mental health. The COVID-19 pandemic has spread rapidly in many of these countries.

This Review examines the mental health implications of the COVID-19 pandemic in LMICs in four parts. First, the authors review the emerging literature on the impact of the pandemic on mental health, which shows high rates of psychological distress and early warning signs of an increase in mental health disorders.

Second, the paper assess the responses in different countries, noting the swift and diverse responses to address mental health in some countries, particularly through the development of national COVID-19 response plans for mental health services, implementation of WHO guidance, and deployment of digital platforms, signifying a welcome recognition of the salience of mental health.

Third, the paper considers the opportunity that the pandemic presents to reimagine global mental health, especially through shifting the balance of power from high-income countries to LMICs and from narrow biomedical approaches to community-oriented psychosocial perspectives, in setting priorities for interventions and research.

Finally, the authors present a vision for the concept of building back better the mental health systems in LMICs with a focus on key strategies; notably, fully integrating mental health in plans for universal health coverage, enhancing access to psychosocial interventions through task sharing, leveraging digital technologies for various mental health tasks, eliminating coercion in mental health care, and addressing the needs of neglected populations, such as children and people with substance use disorders.

The recommendations are relevant for the mental health of populations and functioning of health systems in not only LMICs but also high-income countries impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with wide disparities in quality of and access to mental health care.

Full article: [COVID-19 mental health impact and responses in low-income and middle-income countries: reimagining global mental health](https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2215-0366%2821%2900025-0)

**Title:** Severe mental illness: reassessing COVID-19 vaccine priorities

The Lancet | 20th February 2021

As evidence mounts that patients with severe mental illness are at increased risk of severe COVID-19, some countries are reassessing their vaccine priority strategies as this article reports.

Full article: [Severe mental illness: reassessing COVID-19 vaccine priorities](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736%2821%2900429-3/fulltext)

**Title:** Indirect acute effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on physical and mental health in the UK: a population-based study

The Lancet Digital Health | 18th February 2021

There are concerns that the response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK might have worsened physical and mental health, and reduced use of health services. However, the scale of the problem is unquantified, impeding development of effective mitigations. This paper aimed to ascertain what has happened to general practice contacts for acute physical and mental health outcomes during the pandemic.

The authors found that there were substantial reductions in primary care contacts for acute physical and mental conditions following the introduction of restrictions, with limited recovery by July, 2020. Further research is needed to ascertain whether these reductions reflect changes in disease frequency or missed opportunities for care.

Maintaining health-care access should be a key priority in future public health planning, including further restrictions. The conditions we studied are sufficiently severe that any unmet need will have substantial ramifications for the people with the conditions as well as health-care provision.

Full article: [Indirect acute effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on physical and mental health in the UK: a population-based study](https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2589-7500%2821%2900017-0)

**Title:** NHS expands mental health support for staff after toughest year in health service history

NHS England | 21st February 2021

The NHS is supporting staff who have pushed their minds and bodies to the limit over the last year to look after their mental health, as 40 dedicated support hubs are set to open across the country. As part of the health service response to this pressure, staff will be offered access to evidence-based mental health services at one of 40 hubs.

Staff can access services over the phone with onward referral to online and one-to-one expert help from qualified mental health clinicians, therapists, recovery workers and psychologists.

The hubs are free of charge and offer confidential advice and support to NHS staff. Staff will be encouraged to reach out directly for help, but hubs will proactively contact staff groups who are most at-risk to offer them support so they get the care they need as quickly as possible.

Full detail: [NHS expands mental health support for staff after toughest year in health service history](https://www.england.nhs.uk/2021/02/nhs-expands-mental-health-support-for-staff-after-toughest-year-in-health-service-history/)

**Title:** Unhelpful ‘catch up’ narrative about lost learning during the pandemic places unnecessary psychological pressure on children and young people

British Psychological Society | 22nd February 2021

Telling pupils they need to "catch up" on lost learning creates added pressure on children, educational psychologists have warned.

With extended school days and potential summer schools being floated as potential solutions to address the perceived educational attainment gap created by the pandemic, members of the BPS’s Division of Educational and Child Psychology are instead advocating for a phased return to regular schooling, combined with a quality-over-quantity approach to key learning. Where additional school time is a strategy, it should focus on supporting children through socialisation and play.

The BPS are also highlighting the importance of focusing on what children have learnt and achieved over the past year - thanks to the home-schooling efforts of parents and caregivers and remote-learning provision delivered by teachers and other educational professionals throughout the pandemic.

The impact of the lockdowns on children’s wellbeing and mental health must be considered as part of the decision-making around the return to school plan.

Full detail: [Unhelpful ‘catch up’ narrative about lost learning during the pandemic places unnecessary psychological pressure on children and young people](https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/unhelpful-narrative-lost-learning-during-pandemic)

**Title:** PHE launches new Psychological First Aid training

Public Health England | 21st February 2021

Online training, developed by Public Health England, is now available for those supporting children and young people affected by coronavirus (COVID-19).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on children, with many reporting that it has made them feel more stressed, lonely and worried.

The online course, developed by Public Health England (PHE), offers training on how to provide practical and emotional support to children and young people affected by emergencies or crisis situations. Children and young people can be very resilient, but crises such as COVID-19 can severely impact their mental health. Getting the right support early on can help prevent problems occurring or worsening.

Those completing the training will be equipped to better identify those children that are in distress and provide support to help them feel safe, connected and able to take steps to help themselves during the pandemic or other crisis situations.

It’s available for all frontline workers such as teachers, health and social workers, charity and community volunteers and anyone who cares for or is regularly in contact with children and young people aged up to 25, including parents and caregivers. It takes about 3 hours to complete (split into 3 sessions that the learner can complete at their own pace) and no previous qualifications are required.

Further detail: [PHE launches new Psychological First Aid training](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/phe-launches-new-psychological-first-aid-training)

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