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Surrey  
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Community Rehabilitation Company



# Mental health during Coronavirus



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JUSTICE

Coronavirus and Crime: Fact File 3  
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# In brief



- Mental health is a public health issue which preceded the coronavirus pandemic. One in four people in the UK suffer from mental health issues (Mind, 2020). This issue is particularly acute for those in the criminal justice system. The Butler Trust reports that 39% of people on probation experience mental health difficulties and one in six had a psychotic illness – which was roughly ten times the national average. The lockdown is likely to exacerbate mental health issues.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has been called the ‘perfect storm’ for mental health problems (The Standard, 2020). People are likely to feel powerless, isolated and fearful but these natural feelings can oftentimes develop into more severe mental health issues (World Health Organisation 2020). Samaritans have already noticed the impact that the lockdown measures are having on people’s mental health, as four out of ten of their calls mention coronavirus. 30% of calls to KSS CRC’s new support line are around isolation and mental health.
- Evidence shows that professionals such as police officers and healthcare workers are at particular risk for PTSD and suicide due to high stress working conditions (Skogstad et al, 2013). There are also early indicators that probation officers are experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety (Phillips, 2020). Probation is an area of work that involves emotional labour which could be exacerbated by having to manage the surge in domestic abuse and child abuse cases (Ellis-Devitt, 2020). The anxiety could be further attributed to the remote supervision of service users (Phillips, 2020); uncertainty in practice going forward and not having the traditional support networks during lockdown. Supervising service users who are experiencing their own mental health crisis is likely to compound the stress.
- Scientists have predicted that there will be higher rate of suicides based on figures from the influenza and SARS epidemic in Hong Kong (Gunnell et al, 2020). The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) anticipate the pandemic will have a long-lasting impact on people, including those who had no pre-existing mental illness.



Although the pandemic is likely to affect everyone's mental health, inevitably there will be some groups that will be disproportionately affected.

The University of Sheffield has classed three particularly vulnerable categories those with pre-existing health conditions; those with dysfunctional family relationships; and those who have been economically affected.



Research from the University of Glasgow has categorised the following as the most vulnerable:

- Children, young people and families (school closures, domestic violence, no free school meals)
- Older adults and those with underlying health issues (isolation, loneliness, bereavement)
- Front line healthcare workers (fear of contamination, work stress)
- People with learning difficulties (changes to routines and support)
- People on low incomes (job and financial insecurity)
- Prisoners, the homeless and refugees (social exclusion)
- People with existing mental-health issues (disruption to services and relapses)



There is further emerging evidence on gender inequalities in mental health. Women's mental health has reportedly been more affected by the virus than that of men, due to economic inequalities and additional caring responsibilities (World Bank, 2020). However, men are at particular risk of suicide, particularly middle aged men. (Samaritans, 2012).



# A global picture: the impact of coronavirus on mental health



## Australia

In Australia, mental health support groups have received record numbers of calls. In March, Lifeline received a record 90,000 calls — 25% more than the same time last year and half of the callers wanted to discuss coronavirus. Demand across the Kids Helpline services, including online, is more than 50% higher (ABC Net, 2020).



## USA

In the USA, there are fears that a 158% increase in gun searches could be linked to an increase in suicidal ideation. 'In Portland, Oregon, suicidal calls to police jumped 23% in the early days of the pandemic, even as call rates dropped overall' (The Guardian, 2020).



## Italy

In Lombardy in Italy, one of the most affected regions, there are concerns regarding service access and continuity for people with developing or existing mental health conditions (World Health Organisation [WHO],2020).



## China

In China, a study documented the effects of coronavirus on 12,517 front line health workers' mental health. At least 72% of workers interviewed reported severe distress due to COVID-19; (50%), reported experiencing depression; (45%) were anxious; (34%) experienced insomnia, and distress (72%) ( Lai et al, 2020).

# A national picture



In the UK, a study conducted by academics from the University of Sheffield and Ulster University, found on that the day after the lockdown announcement – 38% of participants reported increased feelings of depression while 36% said they felt more anxious. This is compared with 16% reporting significant depression and 17% reporting significant anxiety the day before the announcement.



The Institute for Public Policy Research (2020) reported that 50% of the participants in their study felt that their mental health had been adversely affected by coronavirus due to low morale, burnout, stress and trauma.



University of Manchester has published preliminary research which shows that people have reported feelings of depression and anxiety particularly amongst those in lower paid employment. The study found that unclear communication from policy makers exacerbated people's feelings of anxiety.



The Suicide Surveillance Group reports that suicide rates in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly have increased from six reported suicides during this time last year to 13 suicides this year (Pirate FM, 2020).

# Responding to mental health during Coronavirus



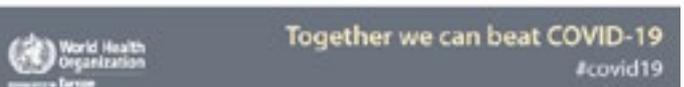
It can be a trying and isolating time for many but worryingly, there is evidence that some people are finding it difficult or feel unable to access mental health support.

- More than ever, it is important that people have access to mental health support. This can be especially the case for those working on the front line who might be discretely internalising their feelings and traumas. People can reach out for help by calling the Samaritans 24 hour helpline on **116 123** or emailing: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org).
- Mental health support is also available from [Clic-uk.org](http://Clic-uk.org); Suicide Crisis helpline and Everymind Matters. Furthermore, every NHS trust has now been mandated to set up a dedicated mental health helpline which people can call when experiencing a mental health crisis.
- KSS CRC service users can contact the support line for emotional support during work hours on **0808 196 3535**.
- The WHO also recommends looking after each other and checking in on each other during this crisis. Acts of 'random kindness' have been reported to have a positive impact on people's mental health.

**Keeping each other safe and connected is everyone's responsibility**



**Physical distancing is not social isolation**





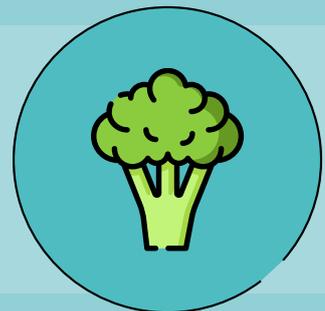
## Coping with stress during the 2019-nCoV outbreak



It is normal to feel sad, stressed, confused, scared or angry during a crisis.

Talking to people you trust can help. Contact your friends and family.

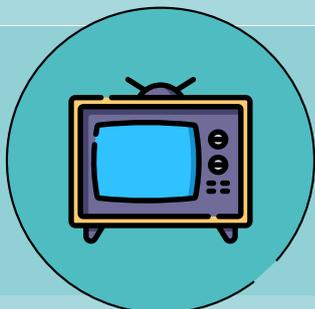
If you must stay at home, maintain a healthy lifestyle - including proper diet, sleep, exercise and social contacts with loved ones at home and by email and phone with other family and friends.



Don't use smoking, alcohol or other drugs to deal with your emotions.

If you feel overwhelmed, talk to a health worker or counsellor. Have a plan, where to go to and how to seek help for physical and mental health needs if required.

Get the facts. Gather information that will help you accurately determine your risk so that you can take reasonable precautions. Find a credible source you can trust such as WHO website or, a local or state public health agency.



Limit worry and agitation by lessening the time you and your family spend watching or listening to media coverage that you perceive as upsetting.

Draw on skills you have used in the past that have helped you to manage previous life's adversities and use those skills to help you manage your emotions during the challenging time of this outbreak.





# Guidance for policy makers and organisations responding to mental health

- Organisations should take the initiative to provide mental health support and resources for their service users as well as staff during this time. Where possible, employers should offer pragmatic supervision models such as online peer support groups and online clinical supervision. This can help people feel less isolated and more connected.
- Increasing reflective supervision for frontline staff, including probation workers, could help staff navigating a challenging landscape. It is important that employers take proactive action to safeguard employees mental health before they reach crisis point. Encouraging 'check ins', and no questions asked mental health days can be small ways in which we do this.
- Institute for Public Health Research (IPHR) also recommends extending access to a specialist NHS mental health service which is currently only available to doctors and dentists to all patient-facing staff – including care workers. This same model could be extended to other front-line services.
- With many finding it difficult to access mental health services during this time, there should be a focus on accessibility for all to mitigate the impact on our mental health. Special attention should be given to the most vulnerable groups. All policies should account for the disproportionate impact of the virus on certain groups' mental health.
- It is important that long term plans and infrastructure for mental health provision are put in place, in anticipation of a mental health crisis that the will outlast the virus.
- As uncertainty can breed anxiety- WHO recommends clear and accessible public health messages which can act as a protective factor for people's mental health.

**It is important that we take care of everyone's mental health during this time, especially the most vulnerable in our society.**

# Moving forward



- Scientists are predicting that the government's relaxation of the lockdown rules, including unlimited exercise, will reduce social isolation and improve people's mental health (The Independent, 2020).
- The government has pledged a £5million coronavirus mental health fund available to organisations providing mental health support (Mind, 2020). This fund should help improve mental health provision across the UK, particularly for those that need it most.
- Special funding has been dedicated for children's psychological well-being in some parts of the UK. The Welsh First Minister has dedicated £3.75 million for mental health provision in schools (The Independent, 2020).
- Many organisations are prioritising their service users and staff wellbeing through employee assistance schemes, mentoring and service user helplines. In response to the national lockdown,

KSS CRC established a support line for their service users and this serves to provide emotional and practical support during the coronavirus pandemic.

- Comradery has developed between a lot of us and it is hoped that these acts of kindness and supportive atmosphere will continue and bring people closer beyond the crisis.

Kindness during the coronavirus outbreak



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