

The Psychological Impact of COVID 19

In January 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of a previously unknown new illness, coronavirus disease (COVID 19), this was deemed to be an International Public Health emergency and was to be of “International concern”. WHO also stated that there was a “high risk of COVID19 spreading to other countries around the world” By March WHO made an assessment that COVID 19 could be “characterised as a pandemic”.

This announcement changed not just the behaviour of many, but also the thought processes that we all have. There was “panic” buying with people bulk buying what were deemed as “essential supplies”. This led to a shortage of certain items in the shops. This “panic” type behaviour caused anxiety in many and increased the feelings of those who were already living with an anxiety disorder.

In terms of mental health therefore, we see that the main psychological impact of the pandemic is raised levels of stress, anxiety and sadness. We know that the effects of the lockdown may have affected many people as our normal lives have changed. We see that the instances of loneliness, depression, anger (with the situation and with people), domestic violence/abuse, harmful alcohol and drug use, self-harm and suicidal behaviour have risen.

Another psychological impact has been around loss. This may have come from a close bereavement and with that, the feeling of powerlessness, as it has not been possible for people to be by their loved ones side at the end. Other losses have been more common including; loss of contact with friends and family, loss of financial income, loss of a work place and of relationships both personal and work related. For our children and young people, the losses have been around their normal time in school, college or university and the physical loss of their teachers and friends.

Whether or not it is COVID19 that has exacerbated the feelings and thoughts around loss, anxiety, stress or other conditions, there is a sense of ongoing uncertainty around keeping well and healthy as none of us can be sure we won't become ill as a result of this virus. This “new” recent past, present and future can cause ongoing worry and fear, which in itself can become traumatic for many.

With all that's been experienced, it is sensible to remind ourselves that anger, panic, sadness and fear are completely "normal" and appropriate reactions to uncertainty and any threat we may feel, or actually be exposed to. They are helpful emotions when recognised as part of the fight and flight response. We use and develop them to escape danger.

All of these feelings are likely to be around for some time to come as we move forward and as we gradually adjust to our "new normal, or new world." Our focus has changed, and, continues to change as we move around more freely and see what life is like now.

This is a global issue, not just a local one and every organisation, and every routine that we have in the past relied on, has been affected. Although we may feel we are all the same and all affected equally, this **not** necessarily the case, it does mean though, that no one person, service or area has escaped the psychological implications of this pandemic

At Care first we have seen significant themes and trends emerge throughout the weeks of lockdown. Initially the main trends presented were

- Information calls. These calls were to the team of Information Specialists and focussed on issues associated with finance, furlough, travel, benefits, employment rights, legal and specific information re the COVID 19 situation. These were to support with the more practical advice callers were seeking. As we know, it is often more straightforward to deal with the practical issues the "what can I do about...." questions to make us feel more in control of a situation, before we give recognition to any emotional issues we may be experiencing.
- Counselling calls. These calls came later and are still coming, tending to focus on feelings about the situation, emotional health, family concerns, relationships and the issues of loss and sadness.

We have also provided critical incident support where organisations have sadly lost colleagues to the Corona virus.

To understand the challenges to our psychological wellbeing during COVID-19, we need to look at things that keep us mentally healthy and so, moving forward, we can be;

- Kind to ourselves in terms of time and space to make the adjustments needed to cope better.

- Keep perspective around what has happened, acknowledging the massive and ongoing change we are all living through. Think about how resilient we are becoming and give ourselves credit for that. Getting frustrated with ourselves for sometimes struggling will not help!
- Create a new routine and try to keep to it, whilst remembering this may well be a very different routine to what you have previously been used to.
- Look after both your physical and mental health and aim to do the things you know may help such as; eating regular and sensible meals, exercise when you can and in a way that suits you. Think of the positive things you have achieved whilst in lockdown.
- Consider who supports you and how? This includes work colleagues and friends and family

Finally, remember if you need someone to talk to, to help you to begin to make sense of all this then call us at Care first and discuss your concerns with a qualified and accredited counsellor in confidence. All employees are eligible to use Care first, our services include; telephone counselling, information services and online support. You can contact Care first on the Freephone number provided by your organisation.

If you would like to view the Webinar on **'The psychological impact of COVID-19'** this is being delivered live on Wednesday 24th June at 2pm-2.45pm, please use the below link to register for this session -

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/2409261281555082255>

If you are unable to join the webinar live, a recording of the session can be accessed using the same link above after the webinar has taken place.