COVID-19

Our COVID-19 page contains a list of carefully curated COVID-19 resources related to behavioral health and social justice. In this issue, we highlight the effects of COVID-19 globally.

As the pandemic spreads around the world, it is disproportionately affecting people who historically experience discrimination based on their culture, race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, socioeconomic status, and more. Although the crisis presented by the pandemic is serious enough to warrant restrictions of some rights, such as the imposition of stay-at-home orders, it does not eliminate the obligation of governments to protect other rights of individuals.

Health and Human Rights

Countries worldwide are being differentially affected by COVID-19 and a one-size-fits-all approach is not enough to support all global citizens. It is critical to consider the unique needs of countries all over the world— particularly those with fewer resources where the contexts are often quite different than high resourced countries (such as China or the U.S.). Because of this, social justice and equity that support global health need to be prioritized during COVID-19 throughout all countries.

Worldwide, reports of racism and acts of xenophobia against people of Asian descent (and sometimes other ethnicities) have increased. Governments must consistently and repeatedly condemn hate speech, hate crimes, and all forms of racial and ethnic discrimination. Concerns about human rights violations disguised as protective or necessary measures to deal with the pandemic are cropping up around the world.

Health Disparities

In the United States, the COVID-19 has [disproportionally affected citizens from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups](#). These inequities further reveal [deep-seated health, social, and economic inequities](#) for Black, Latinx, and other minority communities in the U.S. [Similar disparities](#) emerge in the United Kingdom and across the world, as well. For instance, in the U.K., [major inequalities have emerged](#), with strikingly higher mortality risk rates among Black and ethnic minority communities.

A recent [United Nations policy brief](#) suggests widespread global food insecurity as an outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic, in part due to border restrictions and lockdowns as well as already strained food systems. For example, there is a significant concern for [extreme levels of food insecurity](#) for countries in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, given their numbers of displaced peoples, conflict zones, and livelihoods that rely on trade.

Globally, the progress that has been made to improve the health and life expectancy of those living in poverty [could be hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic](#). Additionally, challenges have emerged as a result of the different procedures countries have taken in [response to COVID-19](#), which affect infection rates and can also place strain on healthcare systems. Overall, concerns such as limited access to immunizations and lack of healthcare resources to deal with the pandemic and other health conditions emphasize the need for strengthening of health systems around the world.

Global Mental Health

The Kaiser Family Foundation recommends that widespread, accessible mental healthcare and substance use treatment be a priority in the ongoing response to the pandemic, based on their research in the United States exploring [the implications of COVID-19 on mental health and substance use](#).

The COVID-19 pandemic [exacerbates mental health issues](#) among those particularly vulnerable. The need for better mental health care is not new, but our recent global situation has [highlighted that need](#), creating an opportunity for mental health advocates to speak into policy around the world. For example, the [Human Rights Campaign Foundation](#) highlights the economic and health disparities faced by the LGBTQ+ community during COVID-19. In [Canada](#), relief money and COVID-19 circumstances (social isolation) are proposed by outreach workers as contributing to increases in opioid overdoses.

Throughout the pandemic, weaknesses in systems reveal opportunities for change. One opportunity for countries with widespread internet access is to increase telehealth offerings.

Children, Youth, and Families

The COVID-19 pandemic has upended the lives of children and their families as health systems buckle and borders, schools, and businesses remain closed. The Human Rights Watch outlines [ways that children are negatively impacted](#) by the pandemic – from increased vulnerability

to violence and exploitation to disruptions in healthcare and education – emphasizing the need to prioritize protecting children. UNICEF provides tips for communicating with children about COVID-19.

An estimated 1.21 billion students worldwide are affected by school shut-downs. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) found that the digital education divide is vast, with half of these students lacking access to a computer and more than 40% lacking internet access at home. Disparities widen in low-income countries. Creative efforts are needed to increase access to education and to support teachers. For instance, technical and vocational training is being offered in Jordan, and Senegal is taking strategic steps – such as utilizing radio and television – to mitigate the effects of closed schools.

The American Academy of Pediatrics provides information and suggestions related to a safe and healthy return to school for children and youth.

COVID-19 is also affecting the mental health of post-secondary students.

- Statistics Canada reports the results of an online survey of more than 100,000 students, providing a snapshot of the challenges faced by students.
- Boston University published an article outlining five ways the pandemic may affect young adults' mental health.

In addition, there is a great concern for children who are food insecure, living in poverty, and at risk for or already living with respiratory health problems during the pandemic. Women also face greater risks of domestic violence during times of crisis, and the World Health Organization has put together guidance for the health sector in caring for women and their children.

Migrants and Displaced Persons

With travel restrictions in place due to the pandemic, many migrants have been blocked at borders around the world. Shelter, healthcare, an inability to social distance, and financial hardship are among concerns for these migrants and their families. People living in refugee camps (as with other congregate settings) face particular hardship in light of COVID-19.

As many governments around the world utilize social protection measures (*e.g.*, cash, emergency food supplies, housing, etc.), it is critical that migrants and displaced persons receive access to goods and services, as well. Find out more about social protections from the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Analytical Snapshots that are frequently updated. In addition, Fragomen, a global immigration law firm, is tracking immigration policies and practices by country, updating regularly as the situation evolves.