

# How the world's psychologists are tackling COVID-19

Sharing their insights and working together, psychologists are helping the public, health care workers, colleagues, and others cope with the pandemic.

By [Rebecca A. Clay](#)      Date created: July 13, 2020

When APA brought together global psychology leaders in Portugal late last year, their focus was climate change. With COVID-19's arrival, that focus has shifted to mitigating the pandemic's psychological impact.

"These issues highlight the importance of psychological knowledge in addressing the big problems the world is facing and how we need to work together collaboratively to face those challenges," says APA Chief Executive Officer Arthur C. Evans Jr., PhD.

The team is focused on using psychology to mitigate issues seen around the world, not just in a handful of countries. One of the group's first joint products related to COVID-19 is an [information sheet on violence in the home \(PDF, 71KB\)](#)

, which has increased globally during the pandemic. The publication suggests concrete actions psychologists can take no matter what country they live in, including offering support and resources to those at risk, educating communities about the problem, advocating for accessible services, and learning to provide comprehensive care. Almost 60 national, regional and international psychological associations collaborated on the document, which is available in more than a dozen languages, including Kichwa, Macedonian, Ukrainian, and Urdu. Each association has customized the fact sheet with contact information and a local example of possible actions.

The response has been huge, says Amanda Clinton, PhD, senior director of APA's Office of International Affairs. "The Ukrainians had more than 32,000 people access the document," she says. "If you take that number and extrapolate it to the 58 associations that promoted the document, you're talking about potentially 1.8 million people around the world."

Associations are also working on individual initiatives to help people cope with the crisis:

## **Sharing information about coping skills with the public**

The Psychological Society of Ireland's [COVID-19 website](#) offers a curated collection of mental health resources, plus videos on such topics as stress management, relationships, and grief. Other videos offer advice for students, parents of children with chronic illness, and those discussing COVID-19 with adults with developmental disabilities, as well as insights on how COVID-19 may affect people with neurological conditions and those with compulsive anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

## **Helping the public find psychological support**

Associations around the world are creating psychology locators, hotlines, and even pro bono psychotherapy sessions for the public. The Korean Psychological Association (KPA), for example, has installed three dedicated telephone lines for a pro bono teletherapy service and has enlisted the help of more than 350 volunteer psychologists. So far, they have provided almost 900 sessions, most focused on anxiety, conflicts with family members and coworkers, unemployment and economic hardship, and emotional instability. "People who are sick and people who develop psychological problems during self-seclusion are taken care of by the government," explains Jeanyung Chey, PhD, KPA's secretary of external affairs. "But the rest of the public's access to psychological services is minimal."

## **Focusing on high-risk populations**

The British Psychological Society (BPS) has resources on its website focused on people recovering from severe COVID-19, including [guidance \(PDF, 204KB\)](#) and a [webinar offering ways to address this population's psychological needs](#), which may include anxiety, depression, fatigue, and cognitive problems. For David Murphy, PhD, immediate past-president of BPS, two recommendations are especially important: being proactive about getting survivors into rehabilitation, and using an integrated, holistic approach to care. "Since COVID is a new disease with a unique constellation of symptoms, the BPS has worked with the U.K.'s National Health Service to build a new multidisciplinary [rehabilitation package](#) from scratch, drawing on pulmonary rehab, treatment of health anxiety, chronic fatigue management, and neurorehabilitation," says Murphy.

## **Supporting front-line health care workers**

This population faces its own special stressors, including long shifts, fears of infection, and worries about being able to make a difference. To help, the Canadian Psychological Association has launched a [pro bono teletherapy system](#) for front-line health care providers. About 400 psychologists representing every province have volunteered to respond to calls within 24 hours and provide free sessions. "Within the first three weeks, about a third of the psychologists had been contacted and collectively saw about 100 health care providers, some for up to five sessions, many just for one," says Karen Cohen, PhD, the association's chief executive officer. The association has also produced a [webinar on issues to consider when treating health care workers](#).

## Helping psychologists and others adjust to working remotely

Unlike psychologists in the United States or Australia, Europe's psychologists had little experience with online psychotherapy when the pandemic hit in March. In Belgium, for example, over 90% of psychologists relied on online consultations at some during the pandemic. "For over 70% it was the first time they did so," says Tom Van Daele, PhD, convener of the Project Group on eHealth for the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations. To help, the federation created a psychologists' [support hub featuring guidelines, frequently asked questions, and other resources](#). In addition, Van Daele and other group members published recommendations for teletherapy practice and policy in Europe and beyond ([Journal of Psychotherapy Integration](#), Vol. 30, No. 2, 2020).

## Guiding practitioners through new realities

The pandemic has led to situations, such as lockdowns and mass deaths, that many psychologists may not be prepared to deal with. That's especially the case in countries where psychologists have less training, including Brazil. "We have a really huge professional community, with more than 360,000 psychologists working in Brazil, but only a small number of them have graduate degrees," says Ronaldo Pilati, PhD, president of the Sociedade Brasileira de Psicologia. To help provide extra guidance, the society has produced [fact sheets on such topics as stigmatization of health care workers, grief, and sleep disorders](#). More than 70,000 users have accessed the website so far.

To learn more about COVID-related resources from psychologists around the world or to share resources with international colleagues, access APA's [Google Drive compilation](#). Or check the index of resources, which include resources in more than a dozen languages.



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