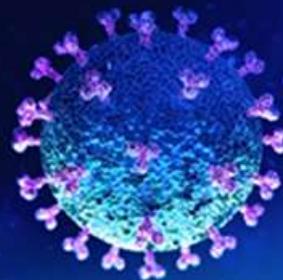


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to COVID-19 on the UCT website



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COVID-19 led to an increase in depressive and anxiety disorders in women, study finds

A study by a team of international researchers found that the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase in depressive and anxiety disorders in women than men.

According to the co-author of the study, Charles Shey Wiysonge, honorary professor of epidemiology and biostatistics at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and director of Cochrane South Africa at the South African Medical Research Council, this was anticipated because women are more likely to be affected by the social and economic consequences of the pandemic.

"Additional carer and household responsibilities due to school closures or family members becoming unwell are more likely to fall on women. Women are more likely to be financially disadvantaged during the pandemic due to lower salaries, less savings, and less secure employment than their male counterparts. They are also more likely to be victims of domestic violence, the prevalence of which increased during periods of lockdown and stay-at-home orders," he said.

This study, published in [*The Lancet*](#), also found that young people were more affected than older age groups for major depressive and anxiety disorders.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared COVID-19 to be the most severe disruption to global education in history, estimating 1.6 billion learners in over 190 countries to be fully or partially out of school in 2020.

With school closures and wider social restrictions in place, Wiysonge said young people have been unable to come together in physical spaces, affecting their ability to learn and for peer interaction.

"Young people are more likely to become unemployed during and following economic crises than older people," he said.

Wiysonge and his colleagues estimated an additional 53.2 million cases of major depressive disorder globally (an increase of 27.6%) due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We also estimated an additional 76.2 million cases of anxiety disorders globally (an increase of 25.6%). Altogether, major depressive disorder caused 49.4 million disability-adjusted life-years (DALYs) and anxiety disorders caused 44.5 million DALYs globally in 2020,” he said.

Wiysonge noted that the increases in the prevalence of major depressive disorder and anxiety disorders during 2020 were both associated with increasing SARS-CoV-2 infection rates and decreasing human mobility.

“These two COVID-19 impact indicators incorporated the combined effects of the spread of the virus, lockdowns, stay-at-home orders, decreased public transport, school and business closures, and decreased social interactions, among other factors. We estimated that countries hit hardest by the pandemic during 2020 had the greatest increases in prevalence of these disorders,” he said.

The researchers conducted a systematic review of data reporting the prevalence of major depressive disorder and anxiety disorders during the pandemic and published between January 1, 2020 and January 29, 2021.

Wiysonge said before the emergence of COVID-19, major depressive disorder and anxiety disorders were leading causes of disease burden, with the mental health-care system in most countries being under-resourced and disorganised in their service delivery.

“Tackling this increased mental health burden will present immediate challenges in most nations, but it is also an opportunity for countries to broadly reconsider their mental health service response,” he said.

“Recommended mitigation strategies should incorporate ways to promote mental wellbeing and target determinants of poor mental health exacerbated by the pandemic, as well as interventions to treat those who develop a mental disorder. Taking no action in the face of the estimated impact of COVID-19 on the prevalence and burden of major depressive disorder and anxiety disorders should not be an option.”

ENDS

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