



## CHP WEBINAR SERIES: PROMOTING MENTAL WELL-BEING AMID PANDEMIC STRESS

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a cause of mental and emotional stress for several people by completely altering the way of life, having been in strict lockdown for weeks on end in the past few months. In the first of the CHP Webinar Series, we look at “Promoting Mental Well-Being Amid Pandemic Stress” by bringing in speakers who include Dr. Poornima Sharma, Public Health Professional, Ms. Reetika Sharma, Founder of Counselling Mind, Dr. Ash Pachauri, Founder and Director, Center for Human Progress and Ms. Mandisa Makhatini.

The CHP Webinar Series aims to serve as an opportunity to cross-learn, share insights, and contextualize a multitude of experiences while helping build individual and collective strategies for well-being during this pandemic.

### Key Highlights from the Webinar

#### Emotional, Social, and Physical Well-Being (*Dr. Poornima Sharma*)

Good mental health and well-being consist of three main components which include the emotional/psychological component (how we think, feel and act), the social component (our interaction and connection with others) and the physical component (that of a healthy body).

The pandemic has affected our mental health by imposing a constant presence of fear at many levels. When fear starts driving our lives, is when it gets tricky. *“Though fear is a very powerful, natural and primitive emotion – it helps us identify danger”*.

Looking at social component, *“new ways of coexistence within a house is a major challenge.”* Family members subconsciously take one of the three live forms when dealing with conflict. The first role is that of a victim which includes self-pity and never saying no. The second role is that of a rescuer, helping others without being asked, overstepping boundaries. The third role is that of a persecutor, being mean and dominating.

*“Both fear, the emotional component and the challenge of coexistence arises from a sense of powerlessness.”* One way of working around it is by adapting a simple strategy. Whenever confronted by fear, add the phrase “for now”. We are sad “for now.”

<https://youtu.be/w-sqdI763W8>

## **Women and Children (Ms. Reetika Sharma)**

Women are now, especially experiencing mixed emotions, overwhelmed and overburdened by motherhood, their careers and their family's safety. Some people are experiencing positive emotions as they are around their children and find it easier working from home. This shows the difference in perceiving reality and developing resilience.

A study from the University of Cambridge, Oxford and Zurich in March 2020 revealed that the mental health gender gap had increased by 66% in states under lockdown. The factors that are affecting mental health are physiological changes, changed behaviours of family members, gender stereotypes, children, lack of space, time and intimacy. Women are still seen as the main caregivers and the entire burden of the household work falls on them, regardless of them having their own careers. This is one of the major factors why women are more prone to developing mental health issues over time.

*“As women, we are perceived to be sacrificing more than our male counterparts.”*

Children too experience stress due to the change in environment, and it is common for children to feel confused and distressed. There is a decrease in physical activity which results in a decrease in creativity. They can only seek authenticity from parents as there is lack of socialization and a change in the nature of interactions. Many children are also affected by the lack of space and loss of freedom. There is a spike in the cases of domestic violence and children's personalities are shaped around these traumas.

*“We aren't able to control the situation around us.”* This has led to an increase in conflicts and distress. As humans, it is our nature to control everything around us. There is a connection between what we think, how we feel and what action we take about an issue. The techniques in which people manage mental health shapes the way families and children deal with this time.

<https://youtu.be/d71ijs2PqYw>

## **COVID-19 and Mental Health – What we need to know and Do? (Dr. Ash Pachauri)**

We need to look beyond the pandemic. There have existed several pandemics before COVID-19 and there are many pandemics playing out simultaneously such as domestic violence which is on a rise, hunger, joblessness and social unrest.

COVID-19 does not medically, socially, economically or psychologically treat us all the same. Only a fraction of society is able to work from home and it is affecting the poorest and most vulnerable the most.

There has also been an increase in substance abuse as a coping mechanism among people along with a spread of misinformation that has led to an infodemic with information going viral. Many marginalized communities have been exposed to multiple levels of stigma, that even existed before the pandemic.

*“If you think back on any moments in history when things changed, it was when we faced adversity.”* We need to join hands and become active players. COVID-19 is a wakeup call to recognize the vulnerabilities and fault lines, and work together with mindful and thoughtful approaches.

<https://youtu.be/SVqX6Qr33kg>

### **COVID-19 and Mental Health- Experience from Zululand, Africa (Ms. Mandisa Makhatini)**

Many times, mental health is not taken seriously, and society believes that mental health issues either mean something is wrong with you or you are not normal. There exists a stigma around mental health due to lack of awareness.

Many people experience anxiety about jobs and unemployment. Due to the lockdown, people have felt a loss of freedom. Since many households in South Africa are large and there is a lack of privacy among people, there has been an increase in reports of physical abuse.

### **Conclusion**

In the first of the CHP Webinar Series **“Promoting Mental Well-Being Amid Pandemic Stress”** the speakers were able to cover the various angles that looked at mental health during COVID-19 and provided insights on the overall physical, social and emotional well-being, emphasized on the mental health of women and children as well as what we need to know and do regarding this pandemic. A range of themes were covered that called for us to come together to address our mental health.

Full session : <https://youtu.be/KQ89k2YCt4c>