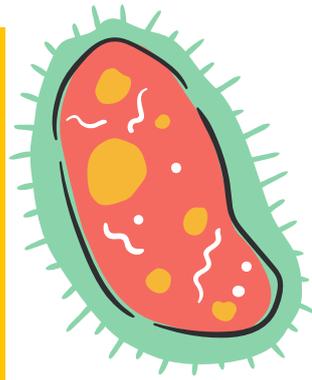
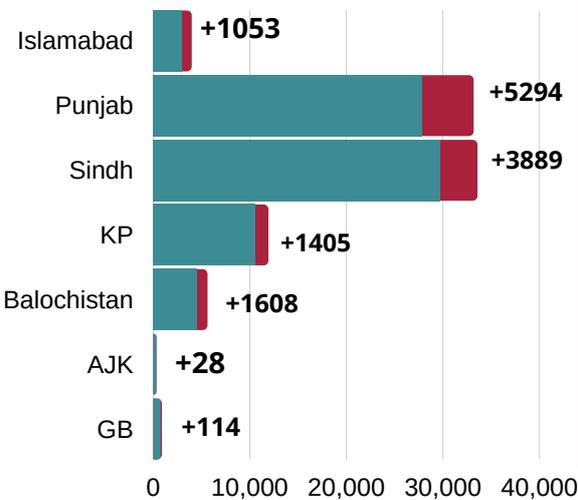


Situations like the coronavirus pandemic can quickly become a catalyst for social conflict due to misinformation, rumors and fake news, as we've seen in the past. Every day we continue to see more false information shared throughout communities, confusing citizens and leaving them unsure as to who can answer their questions.



### Confirmed Cases



The **Pakistan Coronavirus CivicActs Campaign (CCC)** captures rumors and perceptions among communities to eliminate information gaps between the government, media, humanitarian agencies and citizens. By providing the public with facts, these coronavirus bulletins aim to create a better understanding of needs regarding coronavirus and to debunk rumors before they can do more harm.

## Protect Yourself!

Follow these steps to help prevent the spread of coronavirus.

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol) if soap and water aren't available.
- Cover your nose and mouth (with your elbow or a tissue) when sneezing.
- Avoid crowded places and practice social distancing. If you think you have been exposed to someone with coronavirus, quarantine yourself for a minimum of 14 days and monitor any symptoms.
- Do not stockpile supplies.

# Mental Health and COVID-19

## Why is it important to address and maintain mental health?

Mental health is a crucial part of overall health, yet it is often a hushed topic of discussion due to the stigma that has long surrounded mental illnesses. This prevents people suffering from seeking treatment, which can isolate them even more and worsen their conditions by leading them to extreme measures. As a nation we need to unite and remove the taboo existing in our communities regarding mental health issues which is increasing rapidly during this pandemic.

Talking about mental health helps in improving our communities by making it more acceptable for people suffering from mental health to seek help, learn to cope, and creating a collaborative environment that accepts that things are different right now and everyone is adjusting.

## How is mental health being affected by COVID 19?

The uncertainty and unpredictability of infectious coronavirus pandemic outbreak, has considerably high potential for psychological fear. Often results in a prevalent multitude of psychological problems such as fear, anxiety, stigma, prejudice, marginalization towards the disease and its relation to all people ranging from healthy to at-risk individuals to care-workers .

Mass quarantines are leading to heightened risk of depression and anxiety for the general public, it has been predicted that the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to increase rates of substance use, loneliness, domestic violence and child abuse. Substance use may increase for those seeking recreation, thrill-seeking or as a way of self-medicating for stress and anxiety. Domestic violence and child abuse may increase due to isolation and lockdowns whereby abusers and victims will be in close proximity without much possibility of escape.

Because of increased workload, high absenteeism, high mortality rates, lack of personal protective equipment, risk of infection and transmitting infection to loved ones, health care professionals are at risk of severe mental health issues.

Fear of labeling, stigmatization and discrimination potentially impedes people who face mental health challenges intent to seek counselling and psychotherapeutic interventions (health issues).

# Mental Health and COVID-19

## What are some ways through which mental health issues can be reduced?

The COVID-19 pandemic has likely brought many changes to our daily lives, and its impact can be overwhelming. And social distancing has made it even more challenging. Not knowing how long this pandemic is expected to last, it is important to learn different ways to cope and reduce mental health disorders.

Referring to the saying that “even a small act of kindness can make a big difference”, is something that is required during this pandemic more than ever. According to WHO, the term “social distancing” is to be replaced with “physical distancing” to make a difference by letting others know that even though they are physically connected but they are socially connected. Such slight changes can also help in improving distress and anxiety.

Self-care strategies can be adopted, which are good for mental and physical health and can help in taking charge of one’s life. These involve taking care of the mind by reducing stress triggers such as maintaining a regular schedule and sticking with it, limiting exposure to constant news about COVID-19, avoid negative thoughts by distracting yourself or focusing on positive things in your life. Take care of your body and be mindful of your physical health by getting proper sleep, eating healthy and a well-balanced diet, exercising, and setting some time aside for yourself. And most importantly, connect and support others without breaching safety measures.

With an increase in mental health issues during the pandemic, awareness campaigns and key messages regarding mental health and its importance need to be highlighted so that communities can work together to eradicate this stigma and its negative consequences from persisting.

During these difficult times, we should not forget about the paramedical staff, which are continuously fighting against the virus while balancing themselves and their families, who are also facing mental health issues. Therefore, the introduction of resilience training for healthcare professionals may be beneficial. Resilience training leads to professionals being better able to cope with highly stressful situations. It focuses on 10 steps which include family-work balance, need for reliable information, education and preparation of employees’ families and the community, ethical concerns and fairness, valuing the contributions of frontline staff, and addressing mistrust or fear of health care workers.

## Who can I contact to receive free mental health counseling services?

If you are a victim of distress, or know someone who is going through mental health issues, you can contact the following free counseling helpline numbers in Pakistan.

1. **Rozan** counselling helpline: 0304-111-1741 ( 7 days a week from 10am- 8pm).
2. **Umang** mental health helpline : 0317- 428-8665 (24 hours/ 7 days a week)
3. **Baat Karo** helpline via WhatsApp: 0335-574-3344 (24 hours)
4. **Sindh Mental Health Authority** helpline: 111-117-642 (7 days a week from 8am to 3pm)
5. **Punjab Mental Health Authority** helpline: 0304-111-0063

# Mental Health and COVID-19

## Conversation with an Expert

Dr. Faryal Razzaq is an assistant professor at SZABIST University having her PhD in emotional intelligence at a workplace in Pakistan. She is also the CEO of [“The FEEEL”](#) private limited, an organization committed to improve emotional intelligence through training, awareness campaigns and support programs for vulnerable groups.

Upon discussing mental health challenges, she mentioned mental health was already a big issue in Pakistan. She highlighted that even before the coronavirus pandemic one in four Pakistani (25% men, 35% women) were facing mental health challenges and out of these only one percent were actively seeking help to overcome them. Now the World Bank has also foreseen that COVID 19 will lead to a pandemic of mental health.

The root cause of an increase in anxiety, depression and other emotional challenges, according to Dr. Faryal, was not having healthy familial relations which become more prominent while social distancing. She said maintaining relationships was hard work even before quarantine. We could escape them, but now we have to deal with them.

She elaborated that according to research when a child is born, the mother’s touch and love is the most vital need of theirs for the first three months. Children are emotionally sensitive and we raise them on an autopilot mode, not counting for their emotional needs. Emotional support is usually missing in their education. We feel emotions at every second of our life but rarely we have the tools to encode and manage them. She highlighted two benefits of investing in emotional health:

- i. Increased emotional intelligence has a direct relation with lowered crime rates
- ii. It is proven that one dollar spent by organizations to provide emotional support to their employees brings back 2.7 dollars in profit.

Discussing the way forward she was of the opinion we should embrace this time as an opportunity to work on our relationships individually. At the national level we need to increase the health budget and increase the mental health budget, which is currently 0.4% of the health budget. We also need to incorporate emotional intelligence management tools in our educational institutes being part of the curriculums, train our lady health workers in providing emotional support and have an open dialogue in the society. This will also curb the stigma perceived around seeking help for emotional challenges.

## Resources and Readings

[Ways to protect mental health](#)

[Tips and advice](#)

[A guide to stress management for coping with adversity.](#)

[Coping with stress](#)

[Mental health and coping during COVID-19 crisis- Podcast](#)

[Top 6 mental health Apps](#)

# What do I do if I think I have coronavirus?

## Do you have any symptoms?

- **Fever**
- **Shortness of breath**
- **Dry cough**
- **Tiredness**



**If so, contact your doctor or the coronavirus helpline at 1166.**

## Where can I get tested?

### **Karachi**

#### **Aga Khan University Hospital**

Stadium Road, Karachi

#### **Civil Hospital**

DOW University Campus  
Mission Road, Karachi

#### **Dow Medical Hospital**

Ojha Campus  
Suparco Road, Karachi

#### **Indus Hospital**

Opposite Darussalam Society, Korangi  
Crossing, Karachi

### **Lahore**

#### **Punjab AIDS Lab**

PACP Complex  
6 - Birdwood Road, Lahore

#### **Shaukat Khanum Memorial Hospital**

7A Block R-3 M.A. Johar Town, Lahore

### **Islamabad**

#### **National Institute of Health**

Park Road  
Chak Shahzad, Islamabad

### **Rawalpindi**

#### **Armed Forces Institute of Pathology**

Range Road  
CMH Complex, Rawalpindi

### **Multan**

#### **Nishtar Hospital**

Nishtar Road,  
Justice Hamid Colony, Multan

**For more cities visit the**  
[\*\*COVID-19 Health Advisory Platform\*\*](#)



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