

HUMAN IMPACT BRIEFING: APRIL 21, 2020

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LOOMING, HIDDEN HEALTH CRISIS FOLLOWING COVID-19

Health authorities have identified more than 814,587 COVID-19 cases throughout the United States with 43,796 deaths as of April 21, 2020¹.

To mitigate the tremendous cost to American lives, **stay-at-home orders** have been implemented in many states², with people classified as "**non-essential**" losing their jobs as employers have been forced to close their businesses due to lack of income. As a result, a record **26.5 million** Americans filed **first-time jobless claims** since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, **exceeding the nearly 9 million** who lost jobs from 2008 to 2010 amid the "Great Recession"^{3,4}.

The American public are facing multiple threats from the COVID-19 pandemic, including, but not limited to:

- **Unrelenting fear** of catching this highly contagious virus, and possibly of death since no cure exists, leading to mass panic and **PTSD**
- **Increased unemployment**, economic hardship and unrest as businesses remain closed
- **Extreme social isolation** with restaurants and bars closed, and sporting events and religious services cancelled

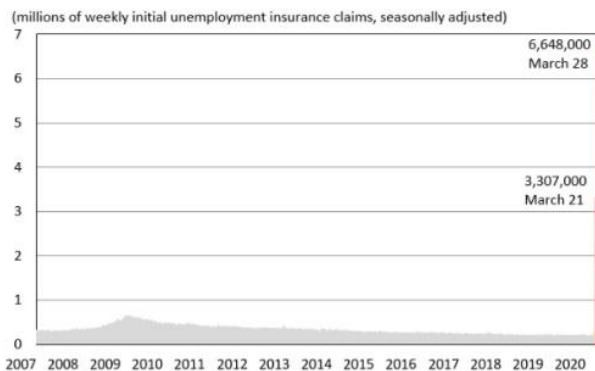
These threats adjacent to COVID-19 will result in increased rates of alcoholism and drug abuse that may not be realized until the pandemic subsides.

What is the basis for this prediction?

- Stress and PTSD are clearly linked to **increased rates of alcoholism and substance use**⁵⁻⁸.
- Not accounting for the COVID-19 pandemic, Louisiana was already ranked as one of the **most "stressed" states** for Americans in 2020⁹
- Exposure to the World Trade Center **disaster of September 11** was associated with increased binge drinking, alcohol dependence^{10,11} cigarette smoking³ and marijuana use^{12,13}.
- **Traumatic events and stressors** related to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita resulted in increased post-disaster alcohol use and abuse¹⁴.

- **Unemployment** was strongly and robustly associated with the problematic use of substances during the economic shock of the Great Recession 2008–2009¹⁵.
 - The **jobless rate in Louisiana** is expected to hit 7.1%¹⁶

New unemployment claims in the United States soared in the second half of March.



Source: US Department of Labor.

- People in recovery often attend **social support groups** such as AA.
- In Louisiana alone there are an estimated 2,426 daily AA meetings, and there are more than thirty types of 12-step style meetings other than AA.
- Thus, millions of people in recovery have been **unable to get the support they need**¹⁷ due to social isolation and stay-at-home orders.

Economic and social recovery will be painfully slow once the COVID-19 pandemic begins to recede. If the United States is unprepared to meet the secondary crisis of **unchecked alcoholism and substance use**, the subsequent **costs to lives and society will be unprecedented.**

NEEDED NOW

- **Robust identification and discussion of, and support and funding for, substance use and mental health disorders.**

Direct all questions, comments and other response to Dr. Nicholas Goeders, Head of Pharmacology, Toxicology & Neuroscience (LSU Health Shreveport) and Executive Director Louisiana Addiction Research Center: NGoede@lsuhsc.edu or 318-675-7850

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