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## Mental Health During COVID

When thinking of a challenge from the last five years, surely the COVID pandemic is one of the first to come to many's minds all around the world. Having drastically changed everyone's lives the past 3 years, this pandemic is definitely a significant challenge, although often what's talked about in reference to the COVID pandemic is the danger it has posed on the health, economy, and social events of communities around the world. However, an aspect or repercussion of the COVID pandemic that is discussed much less is the increased mental health issues that arose and continue to arise after the COVID pandemic has begun to reach an end. Because lockdowns are hopefully in the past, it is unlikely that mental health issues will continue to increase past where they were in the height of the pandemic. However, it is impossible to know the permanent psychological effects that the COVID pandemic will have on the mental health of many. The COVID pandemic has certainly heightened the effects of many mental aspects of our lives but there are also many reasons to be hopeful and optimistic, as is true in all circumstances, in regards to mental health in the future.

Lockdowns, canceled events, social isolation, and fear of the unknown produced increased rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide, and those rates continue to remain high as the pandemic seems to come to an end. It is difficult for experts to predict which way mental health will go in the next few years but studies have shown that "during outbreaks, psychological distress can last up to three years after the outbreak" (Nirmita 1). Meaning, just because the physical health concern of the pandemic is coming to end, the mental health crisis that the pandemic created could have lasting effects in the future. All of that being said, although the

frequency of many mental disorders have increased, although the pandemic placed a deep strain and stressor on all of our lives, there are reasons to have hope.

As is the case in all circumstances, there are reasons to be optimistic and hopeful about the future, even in the mental health crisis created by the COVID pandemic. Specifically regarding mental health, the main reason to be optimistic is that every year more light is being shone on mental health, more studies are done to learn about it, and there is more focus from the public eye regarding mental health. Across the globe there are movements pushing for mental health to be regarded as of the same importance as physical health issues. Just last week here at Cardinal Newman, the Hilhinski's Hope Foundation gave a talk regarding mental health and in that talk the speaker made a comment along the lines of, if it is so common to go to the doctor, or the trainer when you are physically hurt, shouldn't it be just as acceptable to go to a therapist or mental health professional when you are facing mental pain? That just shows that people are talking about mental health, people are urging it to be taken seriously and for focusses to be placed on everyone being both physically and mentally healthy. Additionally, in July 2022, the new simple 988 number to reach the suicide prevention lifeline will be available across the U.S. Having an easy to remember number like this, similar to 911, shows that mental health is being increasingly regarded as important and that people need to have access to being mentally safe as well as physically safe. Earlier this decade, going to a therapist would've been regarded as desiring attention or unnecessary, but now there is more focus on people being mentally taken care of, which surely is a reason to be optimistic for the future because access to mental health services will only improve from here.

Although there are many reasons to be optimistic regarding the recent rise in mental health issues, there are also just many reasons to be optimistic in general. Being someone of

faith, there is always cause for optimism, especially in this Easter season, as we look forward to the ultimate positive that came from a terrible situation, Jesus' resurrection. When Jesus was crucified many, surely many had little cause for optimism as the person they put all their hope in was just killed. However then 3 days later, He rose again bringing the ultimate sense of hope and forgiveness for all of our sins. In the Catholic faith, the knowledge that you can always be forgiven no matter what you do is an extreme cause for optimism because it gives you the assurance that no matter what you do in your life, you can always turn it around.

Additionally, challenges and difficult circumstances always change or improve. Some situations may take longer than others to turn around but they always improve eventually. There is statistical evidence for this but you can also explore this for yourself. Each night, I fill out my PET (Performance Enhancement Tool) Journal. It's a practice that I learned from my oldest brother, in which every day you reflect on and rate different aspects of your life such as the quality of your day, the time you went to sleep, and the quality of the food you ate. At the end of each month, I put into a spreadsheet the averages of my different categories. Specifically, for my quality of day category, I make a graph from the averages of each month and then I can see a trend in the data. I see when the graph drops and see the months or even years when I was at low or going through hardship, but the beautiful thing is that no matter what, eventually the trend of the graph starts to go back up again. No matter how low I get, how brutal a month or year is, eventually it will turn around, as I have seen be evident in my graphs. My method of journaling is just one way of reminding me that there are always ups and downs of life but all around us we can find a reason to be optimistic- in the changing seasons, the resurrection of Jesus, or the hug from a parent after a long day. Challenges and hardships, such as an increase in mental health

issues due to a world pandemic, will always exist but so will the relief and joy that comes after, and that certainly is a reason to have hope.

#### Works Cited

Nirmita Panchal, Rabah Kamal, and Feb 2021. "The Implications of COVID-19 for Mental Health and Substance Use." *KFF*, 20 July 2021,  
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