

Mental Health Aspects of COVID-19 - Recommendations for Muslim Community Leaders

Introduction:

The COVID-19 pandemic presents itself with a different set of challenges for our Muslim community. Increased feelings of low mood, stress, and anxiety are being seen first-hand in our clinical practice.

We acknowledge that religious leaders are frequently called upon to deal with the complex issues of their followers, such as marital disputes, financial hardships, and social matters involving the family. They may also find themselves dealing with Muslims who are living with a Mental Health diagnosis or a more serious crisis situation.

COVID-19 has led to social isolation, loss of work, financial difficulties, and uncertainty about the future. These factors may in turn lead to strained family relations, increase in domestic violence, and higher crime rates.

Challenges for the Muslim Community:

- Our community is unique with its diversity in culture, language, socioeconomic background, and levels of health literacy. This may present barriers in a person's likelihood to ask for the right help.
- Mental Health struggles often bring about feelings of shame. Our brothers and sisters should feel comfortable to discuss their mental health issues, as this will facilitate better health outcomes.

Some suggestions for Community Leaders:

- **Repeating and reinforcing positive words:**
 - Being in a position that people look up to, this will instil hope. People can be encouraged to recognise and acknowledge feelings of distress, and be reassured of the many avenues (religious, and professional advice) out there to take more control of their thoughts and feelings. Incorporating a spiritual understanding will help as a way of coping and making sense of the situation.
- **Mental health training: Muslim Mental Health Professionals (MMHP) Inc.**
 - MMHP is an Australian based organisation (consisting of psychologists, counsellors, social workers etc.); they are able to provide a short workshop for community leaders on mental health issues and strategies, via the Zoom online platform. (Visit <https://mmhp.org.au/>).
- **Refer for further professional help:**
 - Different professionals offer different types of services: GP, Psychologist, Psychiatrist, Counsellor.

- GPs can be a good starting point and can refer a person to a psychologist or psychiatrist. GPs are now easily accessible through bulk billed telehealth (phone) consultations in this pandemic, and our community can take advantage of this avenue. Psychologists provide psychological therapies for mental health conditions. Psychiatrists are doctors who have specialised in mental health.
- As per the urgency of the situation, where safety of a person or family safety may be at risk, urgent referral to one of the helpline services may be needed. More details given below.

Helpful Resources:

<p>All of the following helplines are available 24 hours, every day of the year. Translation services available.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lifeline: 13 11 14 (available 24 hours) - Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636 (24 hours) - Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467 (24 hours) - Kids Helpline: 1800 551 800 (24 hours) - MensLine Australia: 1300 789 978 (24 hours) - In an emergency dial 000 for an immediate response 	<p>Certified training courses for Mental Health First Aid Training: there are multiple providers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Red Cross: https://www.redcross.org.au/get-involved/learn/first-aid/courses/mental-health-first-aid - Mental Health First Aid Australia: https://mhfa.com.au/
<p>COVID-19 related resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mental Health Resources – related to COVID-19. https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/mental-health-resources-coronavirus-covid-19 - Beyondblue Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service. https://coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au/ 	<p>Domestic violence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1800RESPECT, Phone: 1800 737 732. www.1800respect.org.au. Confidential counselling service for domestic violence. Translator service available! - The Orange Door: Free service for adults, children and young people experiencing family violence: https://orangedoor.vic.gov.au/ - Safe Steps 24.7 Family Violence response line 1800 015 188 or https://www.safesteps.org.au/
<p>Expert mental health information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Your Health in Mind. www.yourhealthinmind.org 	<p>Drug and alcohol:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MyCentre Support Service. Free, confidential, professional drug and alcohol support service for the Muslim community in the Northern and Western regions of Melbourne. Service for individuals and their families. Self-referrals are accepted. Phone: (03) 9078 3840 (Tuesday-Friday 9am-5pm); Email: mysupport@mycentre.org.au

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