
'Major' Mental Health Crisis Looming Due to COVID-19: UN

By: Telesur
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The COVID-19 outbreak risks sparking a major global mental health crisis, the United Nations warned Thursday, calling for urgent action to address the psychological suffering brought on by the pandemic.

While protecting physical health has been the primary concern during the first months of the crisis, it is also placing substantial mental strains on large swathes of the global population, the U.N. said in a policy brief.

"After decades of neglect and underinvestment in mental health services, the COVID-19 pandemic is now hitting families and communities with additional mental stress," U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned in a video message launching the brief.

"Even when the pandemic is brought under control, grief, anxiety, and depression will continue to affect people and communities," he said.

The U.N. brief highlighted the mental strains on people fearing that they or loved ones will be infected or die from the novel coronavirus, which has killed nearly 300,000 people worldwide since it first emerged in China late last year.

It also pointed to the psychological impact on vast numbers of people who have lost or are at risk of losing their livelihoods, have been separated from loved ones, or have suffered under drastic lockdown orders.

"We know that the current situations, the fear, and uncertainty, the economic turmoil – they all cause or could cause psychological distress," Devora Kestel, head of the World Health Organization's mental health and

substance use department, told a virtual briefing.

On the other hand, experts warn of paying attention to specific groups that could be in a more vulnerable condition to the rest, such as children who stay out of school or women who also face a heightened risk of domestic abuse as people spend lengthy amounts of time cooped up at home.

The brief stressed the need for countries to include access to psychosocial support and emergency mental care in all aspects of their response to the pandemic.

It called for a significant hike in investments in this area, pointing out that before the crisis, countries on average dedicated only two percent of their public health budgets to mental health support.
