



COVID's Real Impact on our Mind and Body **A Workforce Under Siege**

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Session overview



Loneliness is REAL and COVID made it worse



COVID-19 and mental health disparities within our workforce



Strategies to successfully combat COVID-19 in a pandemic environment



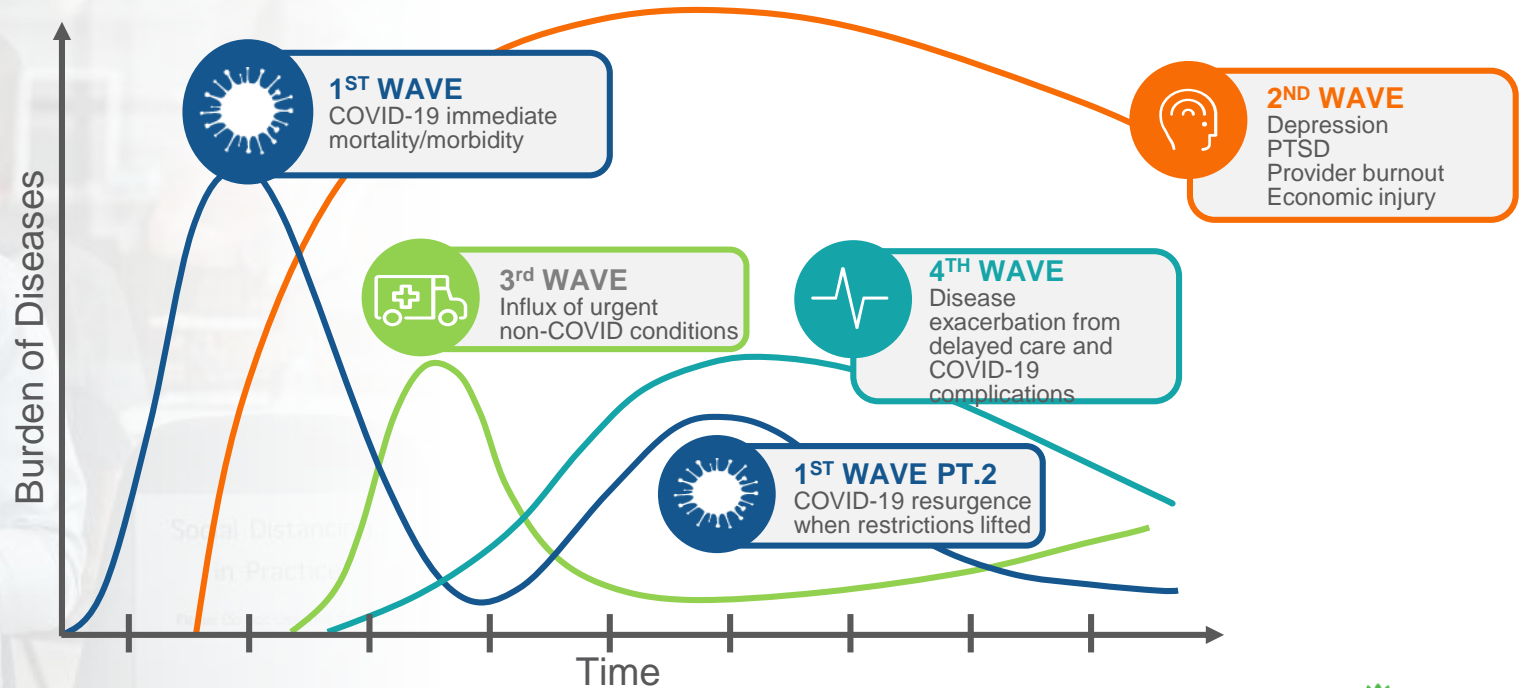
Mindfulness can help in times such as these

Loneliness is REAL
and COVID made it worse



Clinical waves of impact from covid-19

Cigna is addressing the evolving nature of the crisis over the long term



Graph adapted from Victor Tseng – Pulmonary & Critical Care Physician: University Of Colorado, March 2020

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Things I ponder...

- How often I long for in-person job related social interaction on a daily basis.
- How comfortable I have become with remote work and using technology to connect and achieve my work goals.
- The ease at which I have migrated to video based technology in exchange for interactions in my personal life.
- How my version of loneliness has changed since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Is it only me?

If this is the NEW NORMAL, this is NOT NORMAL!!





**Three in Five
Americans classify
as lonely.**


**Cigna's U.S.
Loneliness Index
revealed most
American adults
are considered
lonely.**

**Loneliness is
pervasive in
the workplace.**

Health Resources & Services Administration. (2019, January 10). The "Loneliness Epidemic". Retrieved from <https://www.hrsa.gov/enews/past-issues/2019/january-17/loneliness-epidemic>. Accessed January 2020

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A photograph of three business professionals in an office setting, all wearing face masks. In the foreground, a man in a dark suit and a patterned face mask looks directly at the camera with a serious expression. Behind him, a woman in a light-colored blazer and a dark face mask is looking down at a laptop. To her left, another man in a grey suit and a light-colored face mask is also looking down at a laptop. The office environment is softly lit, with a window in the background showing blinds. A small potted plant is visible on a shelf in the background.

Key indicators of loneliness have increased across the board

Health Resources & Services Administration. (2019, January 10). The "Loneliness Epidemic". Retrieved from <https://www.hrsa.gov/news/past-issues/2019/january-17/loneliness-epidemic>. Accessed January 2020

Key indicators of loneliness

- 58% percent of respondents say they always or sometimes feel like no one knows them well, up four percentage points from 2018 (54%).
- More than half (52%) report sometimes or always feeling alone, up six percentage points from 2018 (46%).
- Half (49%) always or sometimes feel as though they lack companionship (2018: 43%).
- Nearly half (45%) say they sometimes or always feel that they are no longer close to anyone (2018: 39%).

*For statements used to calculate the overall loneliness score, there has been a statistically significant increase overall from 2018.



How has COVID-19 impacted loneliness?

- Population-wide social isolation was key to reducing the spread of COVID-19.
- Human relationships depend on some degree of close proximity. Removing or reducing that proximate relationship worsens behavioral health status.
- Greater impact on older adults, people of color, and those with income disparities. As pandemic progresses impact now being identified in younger generations.
- There are intermediate and long-term risks to social isolation.

*For statements used to calculate the overall loneliness score, there has been a statistically significant increase overall from 2018.

Health Affairs Blog. Holt-Lunstad J. (June 2020). The Double Pandemic Of Social Isolation And COVID-19: Cross-Sector Policy Must Address Both". Retrieved from <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20200609.53823>. Accessed August 2020.



Loneliness is more pervasive than we admit

Adults ages 18 to 25 appear to be the loneliest age group. However, loneliness can impact any age group and the elderly are at high risk.



Ipsos Public Affairs/Reuters News, (2018) Cigna US Loneliness Index: Surveying 20,000 Americans Examining Behaviors Driving Loneliness in the United States. Retrieved from https://www.multivu.com/players/English/8294451-cigna-us-loneliness-survey/docs/IndexReport_1524069371598-173525450.pdf Accessed August 2018.

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In a nutshell, the Loneliness index survey revealed...



- Poor work-life balance and feelings of inadequate work is associated with poor coworker relationship and loneliness.
- Lonely workers say their work is of a lower quality.
- Lonely workers think about quitting their jobs more often than non-lonely workers.

The surprising effects of loneliness on health

- We take for granted how loneliness impacts older people. The lack of companionship or isolation affects daily activities such as grooming, preparing meals and general hygiene. One study showed that over a six-year period deaths also increased in this population due to loneliness.
- Loneliness impairs health directly by raising levels of stress hormones which can influence inflammation, which in turn can increase the risk of cardiovascular disease, arthritis, Type 2 diabetes, dementia and even suicide attempts.
- One doesn't need to be alone to feel lonely. It is very real to feel lonely in the midst of a crowd especially if the relationships aren't genuine or emotionally rewarding.

1. TruSense (2018) The Surprising Effects of Loneliness On Your Health. Retrieved from: <https://mytrusense.com/2018/03/28/the-surprising-effects-of-loneliness-on-your-health/>. Accessed November 2018. 2. Marano, HE Psychology Today. (2016) The Dangers of Loneliness. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/200307/the-dangers-loneliness>. Accessed July 2018.



The realities of loneliness in the workplace

- Experiencing loneliness at work reduces commitment to the organization.
- Loneliness impedes approachability by coworker thus worsening loneliness.
- Increased loneliness at work leads to poor job performance due to low commitment to an organization.
- The emotional culture of an organization can moderate the negative impacts of loneliness.
- Use of interpersonal resources in work team has a positive impact by creating more guidance and emotional support.



Ozcelik H, Barsade S. The Academy of Management Journal 61 (6):amj. 2015.1066 February 2018 No employee an island: Workplace loneliness and job performance. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323007916_No_employee_an_island_Workplace_loneliness_and_job_performance Accessed February 2020.

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Ways to address loneliness at work

What can employers do to create workplace social connections?

5 recommended strategies:

- 1** Ask your employees about their perception of being socially connected in the workplace. And then do something with the results.
- 2** Focus on building high quality relationships in the workplace.
- 3** Be creative in finding ways to strengthen social connections as an organizational priority.
- 4** Make seeking help both a no-brainer and a non issue. Getting help should not be stigmatized.
- 5** Create opportunities in the workplace for employees to socialize and make it FUN and ENGAGING.



Kuhl, EA American Psychiatric Association. (2018) Loneliness in the Workplace Can Be a High Cost For Employers Retrieved from:
<http://workplacementalhealth.org/News-Events/Blog/January-2018/Loneliness-in-the-Workplace-Can-Be-a-High-Cost>. Accessed August 2018.

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A woman with red braids tied in a bun is sitting at a desk, looking down at a laptop. She has her hands covering her face, suggesting stress or emotional distress. The background is a blurred office environment.

COVID-19 and mental health disparities within our workforce

U.S. young adults are significantly impacted by COVID-19

1/3 of the U.S. workforce is comprised of young adults (18-30 years) often referred to as “Millennials” and “Generation Z” and represent a dominant workforce for the next decade. Societal functioning in the U.S. will depend on how well these generations manage through and emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic.



COVID-19 risk factors implicated in pandemic-related mental health:

COVID-19 related worry

Elevated levels of loneliness

Individual resilience

Liu, C. et al. Factors associated with depression, anxiety, and PTSD symptomatology during the COVID-19 pandemic: Clinical implications for U.S. young adult mental health. (2020) Psychiatry Research. Retrieved from <https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S0165178120311185?token=E2D115B14C6D10C54D27C9DAE2F0329CF4F7904D9A325F8669272EB69C1E32DC4CD25AE22E070072F913120792C36EB1> Accessed August 2020.

COVID-19 impacts ability to receive healthcare

Inability to access routine, urgent, and emergent healthcare is a major concern as Americans continue to have concerns regarding seeking healthcare services.

4 out of 5 Americans are very concerned or moderately concerned about exposure at doctor's office or hospital.

Certain conditions raise the most concerns.

- **Kidney and liver disease**
- **Immune compromised problems**
- **Respiratory and cardiac conditions**
- **Diabetics**
- **Severe obesity**

Concern is consistent among US adults ages 18-65+



Depression does not discriminate and is difficult to identify

- Always sad, blue feeling, or excessive crying
- Lack of appetite with weight loss. Sometimes the opposite with excess eating and weight gain
- Chronic and persistent physical complaints-headachy, abdominal and digestive concerns, chronic pain syndromes
- Increased irritability
- Lack of energy and feeling drained all the time, chronic fatigue
- Negative self esteem and guilt ridden, feeling a lack of self worth, feeling hopeless and negative
- Insomnia or hyper somnolence, possibly waking too early and inability to fall back to sleep
- Anhedonia or inability to find and experience pleasure in life
- Loss of concentration, memory lapses, poor decision making
- Suicidal ideation or suicide attempts

Mental Health America. (2019) Depression And African Americans. Retrieved from <https://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/conditions/depression-and-african-americans>. Accessed August 2019.



COVID-19's impact on mental health impacts every industry

The top five industries most affected by depression cover a large spectrum¹.

Public and private transit workers 16.2%
Real estate (15.7%)

Social services (14.6%)

Manufacturing (14.3%)

Personal services (14.3%)

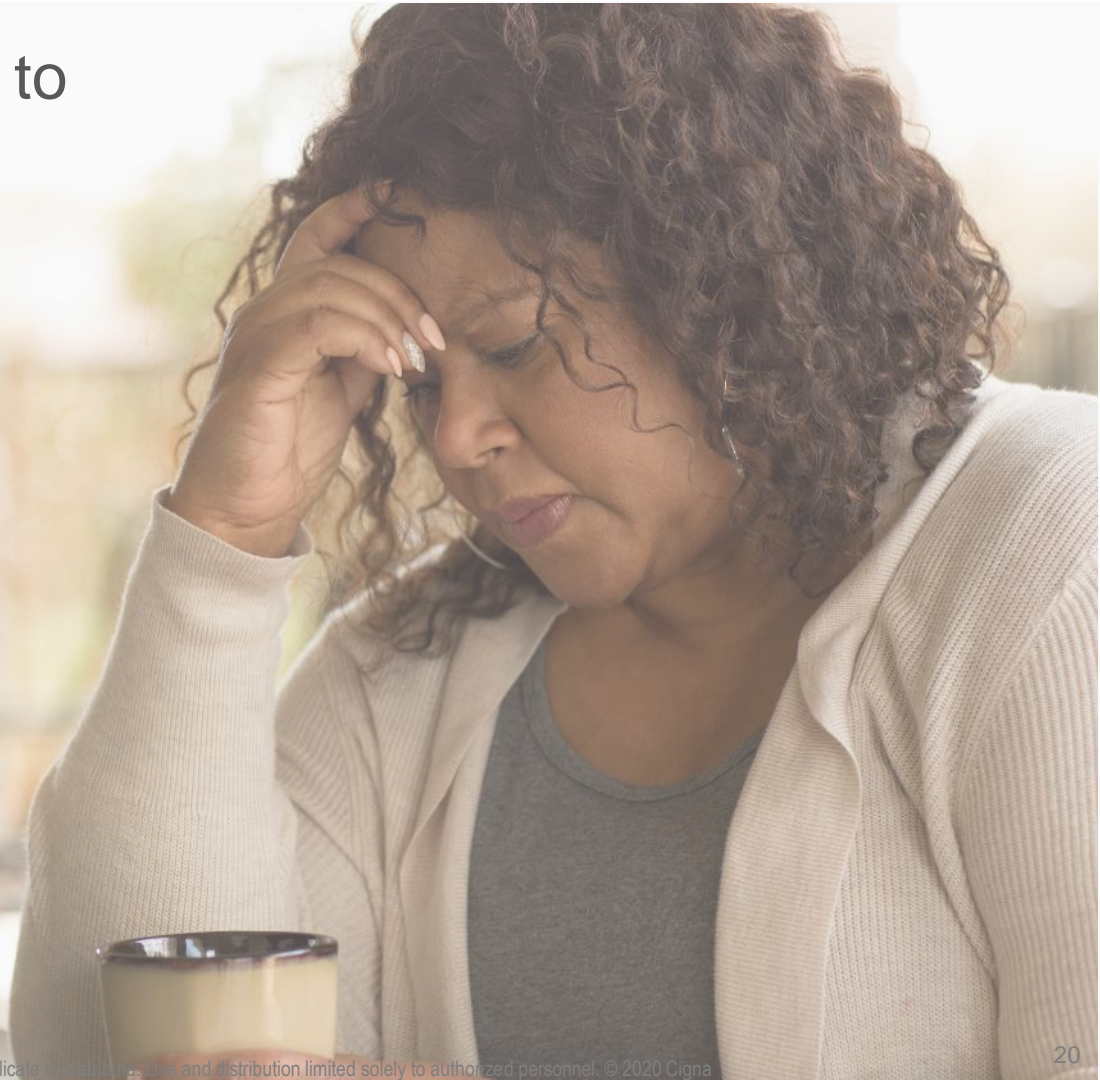
- Depression is not always visible as sadness, tearfulness, solitude, or the “blues”.
- Depression wears a mask and it can be pretty camouflaged.
- Often some of the most talkative and engaged people suffer in the throes of deep depression.



1. Watkins, M. Wagner, D. Brande, L. (2018) Depression Among Demographics and Professions. Retrieved from <https://www.mentalhelp.net/depression-among-demographics-and-professions/>. Accessed October 2017

Disparities exist with regard to mental health services

- 1 in 3 African Americans receive mental health care when they need it
- Opioid overdose is ½ of the rate of non-Hispanic whites
- Mental health services generally not guideline-consistent
- Hispanic/LatinX less likely to report high levels of anxiety
- Disparate groups receive care from emergency room or primary care provider rather than mental health providers
- Provider communication styles differ for African American than for non-Hispanic whites



Mental Health Disparities: African American. (2017) Psychiatry.org. Retrieved from Mental-Health-Facts-for-African-Americans%20(2).pdf. Accessed August 2019.

Factors associated with depression, anxiety, and PTSD during the COVID-19 pandemic

- Individual resilience
- Psychological resilience
- Distress tolerance
- Perceived social support
- Instrumental support
- Loneliness
- Generalized anxiety

Liu, C. et al. Factors associated with depression, anxiety, and PTSD symptomatology during the COVID-19 pandemic: Clinical implications for U.S. young adult mental health. (2020) Psychiatry Research. Retrieved from <https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S0165178120311185?token=E2D115B14C6D10C54D27C9DAE2F0329CF4F7904D9A325F8669272EB69C1E32DC4CD25AE22E070072F913120792C36EB1> Accessed August 2020.

Depression can be masked by denial



A deeper context

- Being macho has prevented men from facing the facts about mental health, especially their own mental health.
- Men with depression are often not diagnosed
 - *Failure in recognition*
 - *Ignoring and downplaying signs/symptoms*
 - *Hesitance to discuss symptoms*
 - *Male resistance to seeking help*

Mayo Clinic. (2019) Male depression: Understanding the issues.
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/in-depth/male-depression/art-20046216>. Accessed August 2020.

Becoming strategic in the journey for wellness in a COVID-19 environment



Mitigating the downside of remote work and organizational culture

- Be sure to define the drivers of your organizational culture
 - Be clear and communicate often
- Understand that culture can be interpreted differently by members of your organization so be consistent but sensitive.
- Create metric that measure your culture drivers
 - Quarterly to semiannual surveys
- Acknowledge that virtual work is here to stay. Learn to manage the complexities of the new environment.



Herway J. Hickman A. (2020) GALLUP Remote Work: Is It a Virtual Threat to Your Culture? Retrieved from <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/317753/remote-work-virtual-threat-culture.aspx> Accessed September 2020.

The mental health of your employees impacts business

COVID-19 increased stress and worry in business employees

- Do your employees feel their job is detrimental to their wellbeing?
- What steps have you taken to protect your employees from the impact of COVID-19 from customers, co-workers, and others?
- How often do business operations reinforce the commitment to safety first to the employee?

Did you know that millennials consider support for their wellbeing one of their priorities for their jobs?



Gandhi V. Robison J. (2020) GALLUP Business Suffers When Your Employees Do. Retrieved from <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/317348/business-suffers-employees.aspx> Accessed September 2020.

Additional steps reducing COVID-19 impact on workers

- Communicate clearly and often
- Continue to be flexible in work options
- Develop credible resources for COVID-19 information
- Make wellbeing and behavioral health services available and known to your workforce.
- Talk through options for financial assistance.
- Ensure COVID-19 rules and obligations are clear.
- Make sure there is adequate two-way communication between workforce and management. Use social media tools where applicable.

Our workforce is our most valuable asset and we must enable and protect them.



Mindfulness is a useful tool in the COVID era



What is mindfulness or mindfulness meditation?

Mindfulness is the psychological process of bringing one's attention to experiences occurring in the present moment with less dwelling on the past.

Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us.



Carnathan J. (2016) The Power of the Subconscious Mind to Heal You!.

Retrieved from <https://www.jillcarnahan.com/2016/08/21/power-subconscious-mind-heal/> Accessed Nov. 2018.

Woods-Giscombe C, Gaylord SA. (2014) The Cultural Relevance of Mindfulness Meditation as a Health Intervention for African Americans: Implications for Reducing Stress-Related Health Disparities. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4102670/pdf/nihms584651.pdf> Accessed August 2019.

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Mindfulness and managing world events

- COVID-19 continues to be disruptive to our need for a positive environment.
- We need to bring our mindfulness to work daily. Negative feelings can impede strategic thinking.
- Mindfulness will help with social distancing which contributes to feelings of anxiety and negativity.
- Planning mindfully for future moments can influence your positivity and help you make better decisions regarding future uncertainties.



Weil Z. (2020) What COVID-19 Can Teach Us About Mindfulness. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/becoming-solutionary/202003/what-covid-19-can-teach-us-about-mindfulness> Accessed March 2020.

Mindfulness IS useful with all populations

Many ethnic groups would be open to mindfulness meditation if presented to them with minor adaptations:

- Emphasize the health benefits of mindfulness meditation
- Connect mindfulness meditation practice to familiar religious or spiritual ideology
- Connect mindfulness meditation with familiar activities
- Enhance the ways that mindfulness meditation is taught to different audiences



Woods-Giscombe C, Gaylord SA. (2014) The Cultural Relevance of Mindfulness Meditation as a Health Intervention for African Americans: Implications for Reducing Stress-Related Health Disparities. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4102670/pdf/nihms584651.pdf> Accessed August 2019.

The power of your subconscious mind



Because of how the subconscious functions it only manifests what is placed in front of it. It doesn't judge, censor, or discriminate.

Learn to cultivate your subconscious mind for improved mindfulness and success.

Negative emotions are dangerous



- A professor at the University of North Carolina tells us that negative emotions can hit us like a freight train.
- The level of intensity far exceeds positive emotions.
- For reasons unexplained negativity seems to have a higher priority in our minds than positive emotions.
- We have to change that.

Malcolm L. (2015) Scientific evidence points to importance of positive thinking. Retrieved from <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/allinthemind/the-scientific-evidence-for-positive-thinking/6553614> Accessed Nov. 2018.

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How positive thinking builds your skill set

Positive emotions have a lasting impact and benefit go beyond just the “feel good” effect.

Positive emotions also reinforce skill building and the development of useful resources that determine how successful we can be in life.



In summary

- Mindfulness is a successful tool to impact stresses in all populations.
- Positive emotions enhance our ability to build skills and develop resources for use later in life. Positive emotions enable greater creativity and innovation.
- Depression impacts populations differently and there must be multiple approaches to management of mental health conditions.
- COVID-19 has worsened the behavioral health of many in America and the workplace. Loneliness affects younger demographics but it touches every age range. Technology alone is not the sole determinant of worsening loneliness in the younger age ranges.
- Organizations must be strategic in addressing both depression and loneliness. Strategic initiatives must be multifaceted, demographically applicable, and must involve top management to front line staff.



Questions?

