

THE STATE OF PLAY

Each month, we examine how the mental health conversation in the media is evolving, focusing on youth, women, and the justice system. This month, we took a special look at how COVID-19 is shaping the discussion.

The diagram below illustrates the conversation on COVID-19 and mental health, drawing upon a sample of 4,000 news articles from January through March 2020. Takeaways include:

Emotional health for all

The public health crisis has prompted new concern for the emotional wellbeing of the entire population – not just individuals with existing diagnoses. **NY Governor Andrew Cuomo** has become a powerful advocate of “flattening the mental health curve,” urging us “[not] to underestimate the emotional trauma that will result.” Something else not to underestimate: the **6,000** mental healthcare professionals staffing New York’s free hotline.

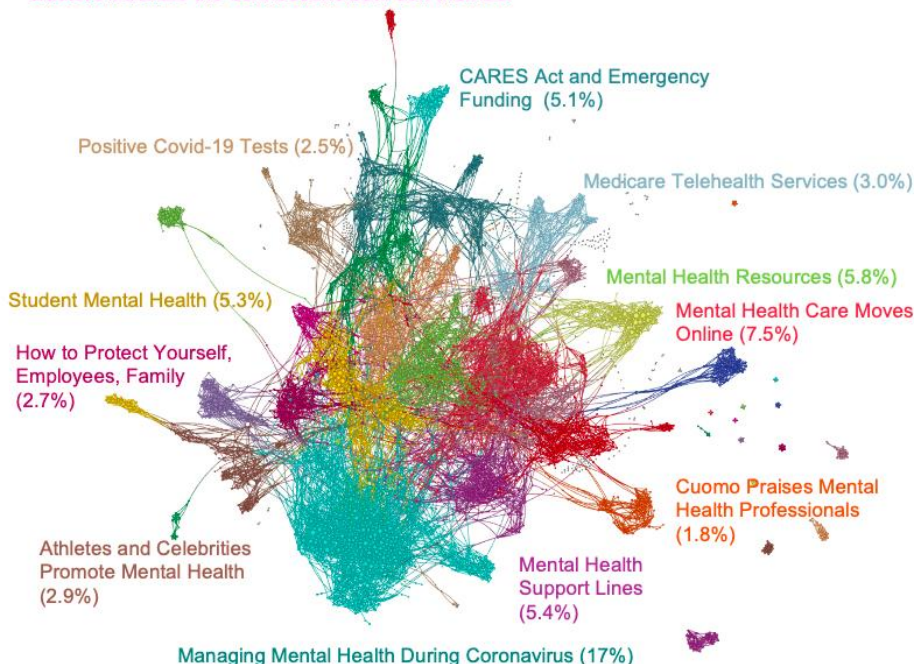
Virtual therapy is on the rise, but not without setbacks

For many, managing mental health during this pandemic means using apps for mindfulness and meditation. For others, it means telehealth, virtual therapy with a clinician, and virtual support groups. Despite the advantages, many are expressing worry about **privacy and disparities**. It also remains to be seen whether the mental healthcare system in the U.S. will **keep up** with the influx of individuals seeking care for depression and anxiety – even with telehealth as an option.

Mental Health and COVID-19

January to March 2020

The clusters in the diagram show themes under discussion, while the linkages between clusters illustrate the connections between themes.



Top 5 Topics

1. Managing Mental Health During Coronavirus (17%)
2. Mental Health Care Moves Online (7.5%)
3. Mental Health Resources (5.8%)
4. Mental Health Support Lines (5.4%)
5. Student Mental Health (5.3%)

THOUGHT STARTERS

A roundup of thought-provoking pieces on mental health for youth, women, and the justice system.



Youth Mental Health: Finding Foster Care in Quarantine

The foster care system's ability to find safe, stable homes for children depends upon in-person visits, the ability to move children swiftly out of unsafe environments, and the presence of families willing to open their doors. Lockdowns have slowed this system. [The Marshall Project](#) explores what happens when courts close, families retreat, and social workers experiment with virtual visits. Their conclusion: youths face higher risk of abuse, homelessness, and behavioral health issues. Yet, in a rare piece of non-COVID-19 news, [New Mexico](#) has pioneered legislation that could revamp the national model of mental healthcare in foster care:

"New Mexico is the first state to build a comprehensive system of child welfare organized around the principle of understanding and addressing the impact of trauma on foster youth [said Kathryn Eidmann, a lawyer with Public Counsel]...The new approach will be transformative for the children of New Mexico, but it also paves the way for broader change across the country."



Women's Mental Health: Is COVID-19 a Gendered Crisis?

The Kaiser Family Foundation has [compared](#) the emotional and practical responses of men and women during the COVID-19 pandemic. They have found that women are experiencing more anxiety, stress, and caregiving responsibilities:

"The COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on the gaps in workplace supports, such as paid sick and family leave, as well as the lack of affordable childcare and long-term care supports. In the absence of a long-term policy response, these issues will persist long after the urgency of the pandemic has passed."



Justice and Mental Health: Inmates and Incubation

Much attention is being paid to the rates of COVID-19 among individuals in the justice system and immigration detention facilities. The [Vera Institute of Justice](#) hosted a dialogue among public health experts to understand why this population faces higher risks of both contracting and spreading the virus:

- Individuals in the justice system, particularly those in jail or prison, are in generally poorer physical and mental health than the general population;
- The "churn" of people in and out of the system makes tracking and consistent care nearly impossible;
- Structural barriers to inpatient care and understaffing mean that many with the disease will go undetected and untreated.

THE PUNCHLIST



3 ways to take action on this month.

1

For your calendar:

Throughout April, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges is hosting a series of **webinars** to help families, youth caregivers, and juvenile drug treatment court (JDTC) teams navigate COVID-19. Topics include supervision, treatment, and helping youth continue to build skills while social distancing.

2

For quick reference:

The Child Welfare League of America has compiled a useful **repository** of federal and court responses, policy updates, and resources for anyone that works with vulnerable populations, including children, homeless, and low-income families.

3

For your reading list:

The World Health Organization Department of Mental Health and Substance Use has outlined the most important **mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak**. In counterpoint to the glut of daily news, the WHO seeks to provide only what key groups – healthcare workers, parents, and older adults – need to know.

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