

# Post-pandemic mental health issues remain

by MARK PAVILONS

What's wrong with the current picture of our society?

I'm talking about the big picture lens of society, which is plagued with problems, exacerbated by mental health issues.

In our post-pandemic world, few are still talking about the COVID impacts ? the loss, displacement, upheaval. The last virus has been handled, so let's move on.

Well, let me tell you folks, it's not that easy, for any of us.

I didn't lose anyone during to COVID, but many, many people lost parents and loves ones, all in a matter of months. I?can't fathom losing both parents to a single disease at the same time. Just how are those adults supposed to carry on?

Unfortunately, our species is one of current events and what's out of sight is out of mind. Yet the post-COVID healing is far from over.

We also think our youngsters are quite resilient and tough. They seemed to handle the pandemic well at home with online learning. Okay, their social activities were limited, but they seemed to bounce back.

Or did they?

I?can tell you the impacts were like a delayed reaction, a sudden burst of emotion and pent-up frustration.

We parents were ill equipped to deal with a lot of these things because it was new to everyone.

Everyone was simply ?playing it by ear??and taking things one day at a time.

But that doesn't mean we handled it well at all.

As a parent of a teen who's wrapping up high school, this transition was a bit of a challenge. And for her, getting back into the swing of things was even more difficult.

According to one local teenager:

?The worldwide pandemic changed a lot in today's world, and for a teenager trying to find their way ??fter being isolated for such a long time ? creates further fear and anxiety. We've been trained to learn digitally, how have we been taught to talk to people??

Pediatric centres have seen increases in hospitalizations and emergency room visits for mental health conditions such as eating disorders, anxiety and suicide attempts since the pandemic began. The Canadian healthcare system was already struggling to meet the mental health needs of young people before the pandemic, and they continue to rise.

Experts say Canada needs a national mental health strategy for children and youth, and universal, school-based programs to help children develop social and emotional capacity.

I spoke to a local family physician recently, and he said the incidence of mental health is reaching alarming rates and he sees 3-4 mental health cases per day ??n unprecedented rate.

It was a 'perfect storm' of factors that have led to this increase. The stresses of the pandemic, along with job security and social anxiety have all come together to weigh heavy on people. But COVID-19, the doctor noted, definitely pushed people over the edge.

School boards and the ministry are playing catch-up to implement some sort of mental health support.

Only time will tell if any of these measures prove effective.

Quite possibly, the long-term of pandemic-related mental issues may well define the current generation. They may linger and fester for another decade.

The teenager added:

'How do we decide how we want to grow, when we've been so sheltered and hidden. How do we present ourselves to the general public, when we've been hiding behind a screen?' How do we find acceptance and build trusting relationships when our views are so skewed by what is the latest trend?

My own children suffer from various mental health issues, and I've been taking anti-depressants for some time.

I also spoke with a work colleague, an 'old school' gentleman who wasn't familiar with mental health issues, until he encountered them himself. He admitted it was an eye-opener.

I tend to believe that the post-pandemic 'recovery,' or lack thereof, is one of the factors or the current rise in crimes, violent and otherwise. Senseless stabbings, robberies, car jackings and more are perhaps desperate moves by seemingly 'normal' people. I may be wrong, but I do believe many have been pushed over the edge.

We've seen a dramatic rise in grocery thefts, in the face of sky-high food prices. Shoplifting is on the rise, too.

For those who work in retail, you may have noticed a rise in unruly customers. Most are irritable and impatient, but some do take it to whole new level.

Again, it's hard to say where this comes from, but some of it can be attributed to post-pandemic blues.

Some say we've lost a lot of our social graces since we were largely 'covered' during the pandemic. Do you recall, wandering around doing errands with a mask on, keeping your eyes down and not talking to anyone?

Some say we've forgotten how to smile. In fact, you can take 'smiling lessons' in Tokyo to help regain your social charm!

A person's smile is a beautiful thing.

Despite my own personal challenges, I am one to smile and laugh as often as I can. There's nothing like spreading joy, especially when it's out of thin air.

We've been 'under cover' for too long, so much so that it's hurt us in many ways.

I think we all need to up our game a bit, and be overly helpful, congenial, polite and compassionate, to make up for lost time.

It's like fuel in our empty tanks. A smile or goodwill gesture from a stranger can put a bounce in your step. Just ask Tigger!