

By Alexandra Paul

Covid and Mental Illness

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a rough time period for all of us. It has affected everyone's mental health in one way or another. Although many people have had immense trials throughout the quarantine period, people who already had mental health problems have been hit harder. People with preexisting depression, substance abuse issues, and mental disabilities are prone to feel more hopeless or suicidal than others.

It's no doubt that 2020 was a rough year. The pandemic and quarantine period caused many people to feel lonely, worthless, and helpless. According to www.brown.edu, 32.8% of adults experienced depressive symptoms since Covid-19 first began. How did this affect people who already had depression? Well, from someone who had depression before and after quarantine, it was not easy. In the midst of quarantine and online school, I felt so alone and worthless. I have a pretty solid home life now, but in 2020, my mom, my older brother and I had a lot of struggles. My mom and older brother would fight with each other all the time. They would scream and yell and sometimes punch things out of anger. I would just sit in my room and listen to them scream at each other. I didn't have my license yet so I was literally stuck at the house with nowhere to go. Because of this, I got really depressed, I stopped trying at school, and I lost motivation for everything. I didn't feel like I belonged anywhere. I turned to self-harm and self-isolation. There was even a point where I almost ended it all. After a long conversation with myself, I decided not to take my life.

Baton Rouge Mental Hospital says that "the Covid-19 pandemic had caused people with pre-existing mental conditions to have triggering mental health crises." Fortunately, suicide rates

did not increase since the pandemic started (Advisory Board, 2021). The CDC found an 8% drop in suicide among women and a 2% drop in suicide for men. Although the suicide rates were lower in 2020, the depression and anxiety rates shot up like a rocket. People reported feeling more anxious and helpless since March 2020. Most people who had depression before Covid started had even worse depression after Covid (CDC, 2020). This is because of a lack of face-to-face communication, endless scrolling on social media, and fear of the unknown of the pandemic. 10-19 years old were affected by this the most. "More parents of teen girls than parents of teen boys reported an increase in anxiety/worry (36% vs. 19%) or depression/sadness (31% vs. 18%)," says Robert Preidt, *Daily Health*. This is due to comparison on social media, lack of friends, and the feeling of not being understood by their parents.

Not only did people with depression suffer greatly, but so did people with prior substance abuse. Alcohol and drugs can be used as an escape from reality. Many adults drink to get away from their home life or their work life. I know a very close family member who was a closeted alcoholic. Before the pandemic, he was drinking mildly and not using alcohol as a coping mechanism. But during the pandemic, he started to drink a lot more, and would sometimes go home drunk and yell at his family. He felt like he had no out. Being trapped at home can mess with your mental health so much that you will turn to anything for a way out, whether it be healthy or unhealthy. A study at the University of Arizona found "dramatic increases in harmful alcohol consumption" over the first six months of the pandemic. An increase in alcohol abuse was linked to unemployment due to COVID-19, according to the study.

There is another people group that has been greatly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. People who have mental disabilities and special needs were hit hard from quarantine and self-

isolation. Some struggles they face are their lack of communication due to their diagnosis and their inability to go out to the store and other places because they can't wear a face mask. They also are unable to progress in their social skills and neurological development because they may be unable to receive the usual help they need. Luckily my two little brothers did not suffer from this. My little brothers are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The pandemic actually improved their social skills because of the close family ideology they had. One brother's anxiety went down because he had his family for comfort constantly, and the other brother was able to explore the outdoors much more independently because of the lack of people outside.

But what can we learn from these stories? We know that everyone has suffered in some sort of way from the pandemic. There are so many people that stay silent with their problems because they feel alone. So if you know someone struggling with suicide, please talk to them or someone about it. I felt like I had no one to talk to about my depression. The only reason that I am alive today is because of Christ alone. I am so thankful I was able to turn to Jesus as my comfort instead of ending my life. Everyone struggles with something, so it is good to consider that when someone opens up, especially after the pandemic.

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