

The state of global mental healthcare at a crisis point

By  Katja Hamilton

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2022 will be the year in which mental health and emotional wellbeing will be brought to the fore, a trend which has been fueled by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and which will continue to impact us as we enter the third year of living with the virus.



Source: [unsplash](#)

Unprecedented levels of stress, anxiety and poor coping skills to deal with the emotional stress the pandemic has thrown at us, has increased the demand for mental-health services globally.

Many who would usually be referred for talking therapy, either face-to-face or online (or receive support from a community mental-health team) are not able to get help due to long waiting lists for professional help.

Worldwide, the strain on mental healthcare leaves hundreds and thousands without help. The UK [reports](#) the strain on mental health care has left as many as 8m people without help, according to NHS leaders.

While in the US, similar trends have emerged showing the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has increased mental health care needs while simultaneously restricting access, with unknown long-term consequences.

A recent [report](#) states that in the US alone from August 2020 to February 2021, the CDC described an increase in the

proportion of adults reporting recent symptoms of anxiety or depression from 36.4% to 41.5%, with the fraction reporting unmet mental health care needs increasing from 9.2% to 11.7%.

Among children and adolescents, the proportion of mental health–related emergency department visits for those aged 5 to 11 years and 12 to 17 years increased 24% and 31%, respectively, compared with 2019.

[Information](#) coming out of SA shows markedly similar outcomes.



Free telephone counselling hotlines

30 Dec 2021



"SADAG's helplines have received over 466,400 calls since January 2021, with one in every five calls being a suicide-related issue. We are continuing to see an increase in the number of calls to our helplines each and every day, with 1,800 to 2,200 incoming calls per day," says operations director at South African Depression and Anxiety Group, Cassey Chambers.

Private practices at full capacity

[Morag Scordills](#), a clinical social worker and Brainworking Recursive Therapist ([BWRT](#)) concurs she has seen an increase in demand for mental-health services in the private sector in South Africa since the pandemic broke out.

"There are long waiting lists for mental-health professionals, and many of my colleagues are looking to refer new clients to no avail because they are fully booked up," she says.

"The private sector is inundated with requests for therapy of all kinds, but it is also true that those not on medical aids or within the State sector are equally in much need of help," she said. "All sectors are equally represented in terms of wanting help. No one sector is more needy than another. Everybody has been affected by the pandemic."



Source: 123RF

Scordillis confirmed she has seen an influx of both juniors, adolescents and adults requiring counselling at schools.

"With the advent of the pandemic, the numbers of adolescents seeking counselling went through the roof, and we then also started seeing junior-school aged children struggling with anxiety and needing help."

The situation has reached a crisis point to such an extent that experts globally are saying the mental-health impact of the virus is now the second pandemic to come out of Covid-19.

The crisis has shown up cracks in the system that existed long before the pandemic began, and there are developments in the offing that seek to address these challenges.

To this end, these are the areas in the mental-health sector that are set to grow exponentially in 2022 and beyond:

Increase of school counsellors

Employment of school and career counselors and advisors is [projected](#) to grow 11 percent in America from 2020 to 2030, faster than the average for all occupations. About 35,000 openings for school and career counselors and advisors are projected each year, on average, over the decade.

Businesses to step up

A global study by [Bupa](#) reveals that businesses are gearing up for the mental-health challenges ahead. It shows that almost 30% of UK business leaders are prioritising employee mental health above all else.

Spending on employee mental health is predicted to rise in UK businesses by 18% in 2022. And the study revealed that only companies in China are planning to spend more. With this extra spending, they plan to create new roles within their organisations that will focus on supporting employee mental health. HR departments will also be upskilled.

Further [predictions](#) are that it's unlikely that everyone will return full-time to their previous workplace. So, remote and hybrid working will become more common, and there will be a growing need in years to come for organisations to be aware of the mental health challenges created by hybrid and flexible types of working.



Digital drives innovation in healthcare services

Tony Singleton 6 Dec 2021



Continued expansion in telehealth services

Therapy administered via telemental health picked up steam in 2020, sustained in 2021, and is here to stay, according to experts.

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, many mental health professionals now have the training, experience, confidence, and technology to conduct telemental health services effectively and ethically. It also has the potential to increase mental health treatment access to rural and older adult communities.

According to the [statistics](#) 60% of mental-health practitioners currently have full caseloads solely on telehealth, with few clients requesting sessions in-person.

Some mental health and business analysts project that telemental health could expand even more.



Source: [unsplash](#)

The mental-health app market will keep on growing

Deloitte Global [predicts](#) that global spending on mobile mental-health applications will reach close to \$500m in 2022. That's assuming an annual growth rate of 20% - a conservative figure, considering the 32% growth these apps enjoyed, from \$203m to \$269m, from the first 10 months of 2019 to the same period in 2020.

For a list of the best mental health apps for 2022, click [here](#).

Trauma-centred approach to therapy

There will be a more trauma-centred approach to therapy. Studies have concluded that when someone experiences trauma, their brain goes into fight/flight or freeze mode. If this trauma is on-going in childhood, the cortical part of the brain is not able to develop properly.

This impacts on behaviour, as well as learning. The limbic and survival brain are engaged and on red alert but the thinking parts of the brain, the cortex and prefrontal cortex are disengaged to the detriment of normal.

Bessel van der Kolk, the founder and medical director of the Trauma Research Foundation in Brookline, Massachusetts has long supported this and continues his research in this field, which shows the body keeps the score on trauma.

Renowned addiction expert, speaker author Dr. Gabor Maté is sought after for his expertise on trauma. The documentary film "The Wisdom of Trauma", released in July last year, brought into question new approaches to integrating trauma in the body.

As a result, many emerging therapeutic modalities are moving away from engaging the cortex and pre-frontal cortex of the brain (the basis of traditional talk therapies) and are working instead with the concepts raised by these experts.

Two of these emerging developments are:

* Eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing therapy ([EMDR](#)) has also been used to work with trauma. While it's hardly a new form of treatment (EMDR has been around since 1987), the treatment has gained more popularity since celebrities like Prince Harry have opened up about using it.

* [BWRT](#) or Brainworking Recursive Therapy is gaining traction. BrainWorking Recursive Therapy is an innovative new concept of psychotherapy that works with the latest neuroscience developments, particularly related to limbic system functioning. BWRT works on the interval between the commencement of an action and conscious awareness, reprogramming the neural pathways responsible for triggers that spark past trauma memories and the body's reactions to these in the form of panic attacks and anxiety.

"The beauty of BWRT is that it works well with all ages and because it works so fast and effectively, it is now being actively sought out," says Scordillis. "Working fast makes it affordable. Few people have endless funds (even those on medical aids) for therapy. This means that a fast, effective form of treatment is very much needed and sought after.

"I know that many of my BWRT colleagues are inundated with requests for therapy and the BWRT family of therapists are very good at referring patients as needed. Brain Working Recursive Therapy is particularly effective in dealing with anxiety, panic attacks and post traumatic stress."

With so many people worldwide desperate for emotional support during these difficult times, let's hope that the mental-health profession welcomes the integration of these changes. Let's hope too, that in the wake of these new developments, that mental-health will be destigmatised. More importantly, let's hope that professional counselling will become accessible to all, and that getting help for anxiety, panic attacks and depression will no longer be the luxury it is served up to be.

ABOUT KATJA HAMILTON

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