



The following information resources have been selected by the National Health Library and Knowledge Service Evidence Virtual Team in response to your question. The resources are listed in our estimated order of relevance to practicing healthcare professionals confronted with this scenario in an Irish context. In respect of the evolving global situation and rapidly changing evidence base, it is advised to use hyperlinked sources in this document to ensure that the information you are disseminating to the public or applying in clinical practice is the most current, valid and accurate.

## **YOUR QUESTION**

What is the role of social work and family liaison during global pandemics [such as COVID-19]?

### **What does the World Health Organization say?**

#### **[Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak](#)<sup>1</sup>**

WHO and public health authorities around the world are acting to contain the COVID-19 outbreak. However, this time of crisis is generating stress throughout the population. The considerations presented in this document have been developed by the WHO Department of Mental Health and Substance Use as a series of messages that can be used in communications to support mental and psychosocial well-being in different target groups during the outbreak.

### **Irish Association of Social Workers**

#### **[Guidance for Medical Social Workers Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)<sup>2</sup>**

This guidance document aims to support the professional response of Irish medical social work departments to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is informed by the limited literature available on the role of social workers in epidemics, broader research on the implications of epidemic or pandemic work on frontline staff and by preliminary consultation with healthcare staff in Italy. Proactive leadership is required during the management of disease outbreak. Fortunately, the experience of medical social workers during the SARS outbreaks in 3 hospitals in Toronto and Singapore helps inform what constitutes effective social work leadership during a pandemic.

## What does the international literature say?

### **Experiences and implications of social workers practicing in a pediatric hospital environment affected by SARS<sup>3</sup>**

This study is the first using qualitative research to investigate the unique perspective of social workers in an epidemic environment. The results reflect the social workers' subjective experience of their interventions with patients and families and indicate that a number of professional tenets, such as advocacy, family-centered approach, knowledge of systems, open communication and ethics effectively supported social work practice in a crisis environment.

### **Medical Social Work Practice and SARS in Singapore<sup>4</sup>**

This article reports on the findings of a qualitative study exploring the impact of SARS on social work practice in 5 different hospitals in Singapore. The study sought to examine the range of interventions adopted by 28 medical social workers and the theoretical orientations underpinning them. The findings discussed include the impact of infection control practices on social work intervention, the range of interventions undertaken, respondents' reflections and self-awareness, the role of values and ethics, creativity and training, and their recommendations for future emergencies. While the findings of the study relate specifically to hospital social work practice, the crisis and trauma nature of the work makes it applicable to a broader range of practice in these areas and a range of populations. The findings from this study could also inform the development of training programs for social work and other clinical health workers and emergency management planning.

### **Immediate Psychological Responses and Associated Factors During the Initial Stage of the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Epidemic Among the General Population in China<sup>5</sup>**

The 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) epidemic is a public health emergency of international concern and poses a challenge to psychological resilience. Research data are needed to develop evidence-driven strategies to reduce adverse psychological impacts and psychiatric symptoms during the epidemic. The aim of this study was to survey the general public in China to better understand their levels of psychological impact, anxiety, depression and stress during the initial stage of the COVID-19 outbreak. The data will be used for future reference. During the initial phase of the COVID-

19 outbreak in China, more than half of the respondents rated the psychological impact as moderate-to-severe, and about one-third reported moderate-to-severe anxiety. Our findings identify factors associated with a lower level of psychological impact and better mental health status that can be used to formulate psychological interventions to improve the mental health of vulnerable groups during the COVID-19 epidemic.

### **The Impact of COVID-19 Epidemic Declaration on Psychological Consequences: A Study on Active Weibo Users<sup>6</sup>**

COVID-19 has significantly resulted in a large number of psychological consequences. The aim of this study is to explore the impacts of COVID-19 on people's mental health, to assist policy makers to develop actionable policies, and help clinical practitioners such as social workers, psychiatrists and psychologists to provide timely services to affected populations. People were concerned more about their health and family, while less about leisure and friends. The results contribute to the knowledge gaps of short-term individual changes in psychological conditions after the outbreak. It may provide references for policy makers to plan and fight against COVID-19 effectively by improving stability of popular feelings and urgently prepare clinical practitioners to deliver corresponding therapy foundations for the risk groups and affected people.

### **The Ethics of Care: Social Workers in an Influenza Pandemic<sup>7</sup>**

The challenges of caring for the incurable, the uncured, healthcare workers and the survivors and their families will place almost unprecedented demands on mental health workers. This article discusses these ethical and medical challenges and the role that social workers will be called on to play.

### **Psychosocial Impacts of Quarantine During Disease Outbreaks and Interventions That May Help to Relieve Strain<sup>8</sup>**

The threat of outbreak of infectious disease such as non-seasonal influenza A (H1N1) can provoke the implementation of public health control measures such as quarantine. This paper summarises the psychosocial consequences that may follow for patients and health care and other front-line workers when using quarantine controls. Those affected by quarantine are likely to report distress due to fear and risk perceptions. This distress can be amplified in the face of unclear information and communication that is common in the initial period of disease outbreaks. This paper outlines recommendations for care of those in quarantine and those working with



them, such as helping to identify stressors and normalising their impact as much as possible. This should take place at all levels of response, from public information and communication messages to individual face-to-face advice and support.

### **Impact of SARS-related restrictions on residents and family members<sup>9</sup>**

During the SARS outbreak in Toronto, infection control measures were implemented throughout the region. One of the measures was a total ban on visitors to long-term care facilities. In a retrospective of what is being learned about the SARS crises a social worker deployed to a nursing home environment describes the impact the restrictions had on residents, family members and staff.

### **Impact of SARS visiting restrictions on relatives of long-term care residents<sup>10</sup>**

Social workers and other staff had to be creative in order to support families and to keep them informed and involved. The research described here was conducted in order to understand families' experiences and evaluate the effectiveness of social work interventions during the SARS visiting restrictions. Focus groups were conducted with spouses and adult children of residents of a large long-term care facility, to examine how they experienced the visiting restrictions and attempts to mitigate distress caused by the restrictions, including interventions by social workers and others. Participants described the impact on themselves and their worries about the well-being of their relatives during the time when families, friends and privately paid caregivers could not visit the facility.

### **The SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) Pandemic in Hong Kong: Effects on the Subjective Wellbeing of Elderly and Younger People<sup>11</sup>**

This study examined the impact of the SARS outbreak in Hong Kong in 2003 on the subjective wellbeing of elderly people and a younger comparative sample. The Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI), a contemporary instrument employed to measure subjective wellbeing, was also examined for its psychometric performance to substantiate its use. Psychological resilience was identified among both the elderly and younger age-groups in Hong Kong during the SARS pandemic. The PWI is verified as a suitable instrument for subjective wellbeing measurements.

## Ageing and Psychological response during the post-SARS period<sup>12</sup>

After controlling for depression, residents in high SARS-prevalent regions, regardless of age, consistently developed more intense post-traumatic disturbance than residents in low SARS-prevalent regions. Furthermore, the prevalence of probable post-traumatic stress disorder cases was significantly higher in older people and in residents of SARS-prevalent regions. Our findings suggest the importance of mental health aftercare in the post-epidemic period of disease epidemics.

## The Role of Social Work for Foreign Residents in an Epidemic: The MERS Crisis in the Republic of Korea<sup>13</sup>

This article explores the experiences of foreign residents during the period of the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) outbreak in South Korea and discusses from a social work perspective the implications of their experiences and their needs. Data were obtained from interviews with 22 foreigners who either live and work or study in Korea. The data were then interpreted using a thematic analysis approach in a multilingual research context. The findings from the study show that foreign residents experienced a wide range of social and psycho-emotional difficulties during the MERS health threat. Implications for social work practice in an epidemic emergency are presented.

Produced by the members of the National Health Library and Knowledge Service Evidence Team.<sup>†</sup> Current as at 07 April 2020. This evidence summary collates the best available evidence at the time of writing and **does not replace clinical judgement or guidance**. Emerging literature or subsequent developments in respect of COVID-19 may require amendment to the information or sources listed in the document. Although all reasonable care has been taken in the compilation of content, the National Health Library and Knowledge Service Evidence Team makes no representations or warranties expressed or implied as to the accuracy or suitability of the information or sources listed in the document. This evidence summary is the property of the National Health Library and Knowledge Service and subsequent re-use or distribution in whole or in part should include acknowledgement of the service.

The following PICO(T) was used as a basis for the evidence summary:

<b>P</b> Population person location condition/patient characteristic	SOCIAL WORK
<b>I</b> Intervention length location type	CRISIS INTERVENTION DURING COVID-19/SARS PANDEMICS
<b>C</b> Comparison another intervention no intervention location of the intervention	
<b>O</b> Outcome	MODEL OF PRACTICE



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- <sup>1</sup> Park et al. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27351075/> [Accessed 07 April 2020]  
<sup>2</sup> Irish Association of Social Workers. <https://www.iasw.ie/covid-19> [Accessed 07 April 2020]  
<sup>3</sup> Gearing et al. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17432738/> [Accessed 07 April 2020]  
<sup>4</sup> Rowlands. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17855230/> [Accessed 07 April 2020]  
<sup>5</sup> Wang et al. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32155789/> [Accessed 07 April 2020]  
<sup>6</sup> Sijja et al. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32204411/> [Accessed 07 April 2020]  
<sup>7</sup> Rosoff. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18956512> [Accessed 07 April 2020]  
<sup>8</sup> Johal. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19652680/> [Accessed 07 April 2020]  
<sup>9</sup> McCleary et al.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232821695\\_Impact\\_of\\_SARS\\_Visiting\\_Restrictions\\_on\\_Relatives\\_of\\_Long-Term\\_Care\\_Residents](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232821695_Impact_of_SARS_Visiting_Restrictions_on_Relatives_of_Long-Term_Care_Residents) [Accessed 07 April 2020]  
<sup>10</sup> McCleary et al.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232821695\\_Impact\\_of\\_SARS\\_Visiting\\_Restrictions\\_on\\_Relatives\\_of\\_Long-Term\\_Care\\_Residents](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232821695_Impact_of_SARS_Visiting_Restrictions_on_Relatives_of_Long-Term_Care_Residents) [Accessed 07 April 2020]  
<sup>11</sup> Lau et al. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19023726/> [Accessed 07 April 2020]  
<sup>12</sup> Lee et al. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16777659/> [Accessed 07 April 2020]  
<sup>13</sup> Park et al. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27351075/> [Accessed 07 April 2020]