

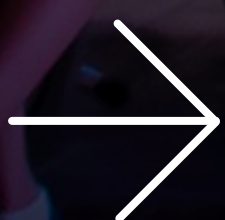
LIFE AFTER COVID-19

مؤسسة دبي للمستقبل
DUBAI FUTURE FOUNDATION

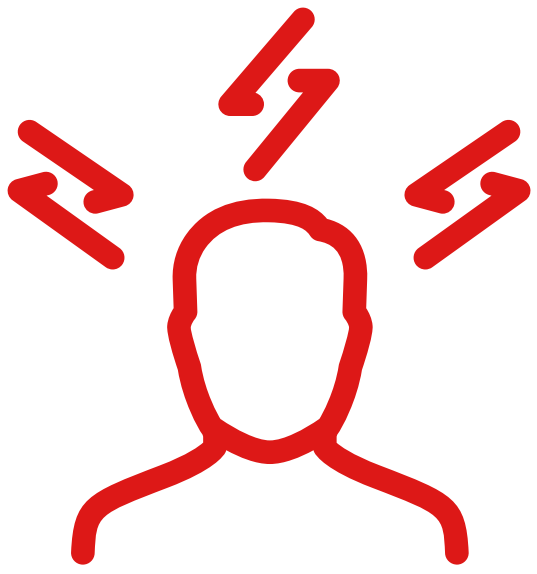


FUTURE TRENDS

COMMUNITY



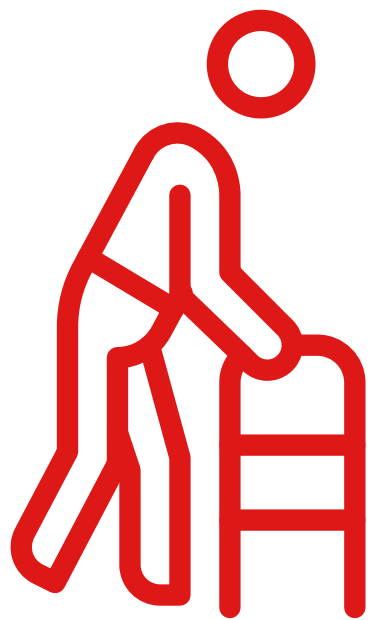
INSIGHTS IN BRIEF



Social distancing has led to increased online activity. This has benefited virtual platforms but is potentially increasing anxiety and mental health issues.



Worldwide lockdowns have changed family dynamics, with families together 24 hours a day, balancing work, home-schooling and relationships.



Senior citizens and people of determination are extremely vulnerable populations and require programs that ensure community security is inclusive.

CURRENT SITUATION

In the initial months of the spread of COVID-19, international organizations and governments worldwide urged citizens and residents to start social distancing. Social distancing, more literally explained as physical distancing, is characterized as “staying away from mass gatherings and keeping a distance of six feet (or two meters) away from people.”¹

Social distancing has led to increased online activity. Video-conferencing platforms have had an increase in their customer base, with Zoom registering 2.22 million new monthly active users since the beginning of 2020, more than it accumulated over the whole of 2019.² Although many of these platforms were initially used for work, they are now being used to form online communities, to host virtual birthday parties and events, and even to create content.



¹ Anderson, J., “Social distancing isn’t the right language for what Covid-19 asks of us”, Quartz, 2020.

² Novet, J., “Zoom has added more videoconferencing users this year than in all of 2019 thanks to coronavirus, Bernstein says”, CNBC, 2020.



The worldwide lockdowns have meant that many families are spending more time together than they did before. Parents are staying home together, expected to work and to home-school their children at the same time. Couples, who may have been used to spending the majority of their day at work, are now living with their partners 24 hours a day. In China, divorce cases have gone up, with lawyers in Shanghai reporting a 25% increase in divorce applications since early March.³ Yet, for some, this has also been an opportunity to spend more time and reconnect with one's spouse.

Moreover, discussions about mental health have become increasingly common, with many people self-isolating. Wise Mind Center, one of the psychology centers participating in the UAE National Campaign for Mental Support, under the National Program for Happiness and Wellbeing, has seen a rise in 'collective anxiety' due to COVID-19, causing more therapists to move group and individual sessions online to create support groups.⁴

³ Prasso, S., "China's Divorce Spike Is a Warning to Rest of Locked-Down World", Bloomberg Businessweek, 2020. Global News, 2020.

⁴ Research Call, Wise Mind Center, 2020.

Increased forms of substance abuse have been reported in several countries due to anxieties over unemployment and family life.⁵ According to the UN Labor Body, COVID-19 may lead to the loss of 195 million jobs globally.⁶ Dubai Future Foundation will address unemployment as a separate report in the weeks to come, discussing the impact of unemployment on the community. Additionally, domestic violence and emotional abuse have also increased as people have been forced to stay indoors in tense environments. Although there are no comprehensive statistics, domestic abuse claims have risen in the MENA region. In response, countries like Jordan and Lebanon have set up dedicated helplines to support victims.⁷ In Europe, in France, domestic abuse victims who come forward are being protected and sheltered in hotels during COVID-19, paid for by the government.⁸

Finally, there is much concern worldwide about vulnerable populations. The elderly, and people of determination, are most likely to be affected by COVID-19. In many countries, senior citizens have been asked to stay indoors. This has led to further isolation for many older people, leading to concerns over other serious health issues such as heightened risk of cardiovascular and autoimmune diseases.⁹



⁵ Arsenault, S., "Why COVID-19 is a Perfect Storm in the Addiction World", Shatter Proof, 2020.

⁶ Reuters in Geneva, "Covid-19 to wipe out equivalent of 195m jobs, says UN agency", The Guardian, 2020.

⁷ Houssari, N., "Lebanese hotline set up to handle surge in COVID-19 domestic violence cases", Arab News, 2020.

⁸ Godin, M., "French Government to House Domestic Abuse Victims in Hotels as Cases Rise During Coronavirus Lockdown", Time, 2020.

⁹ Armitage, R., "COVID-19 and the consequences of isolating the elderly", The Lancet Public Health, 2020.

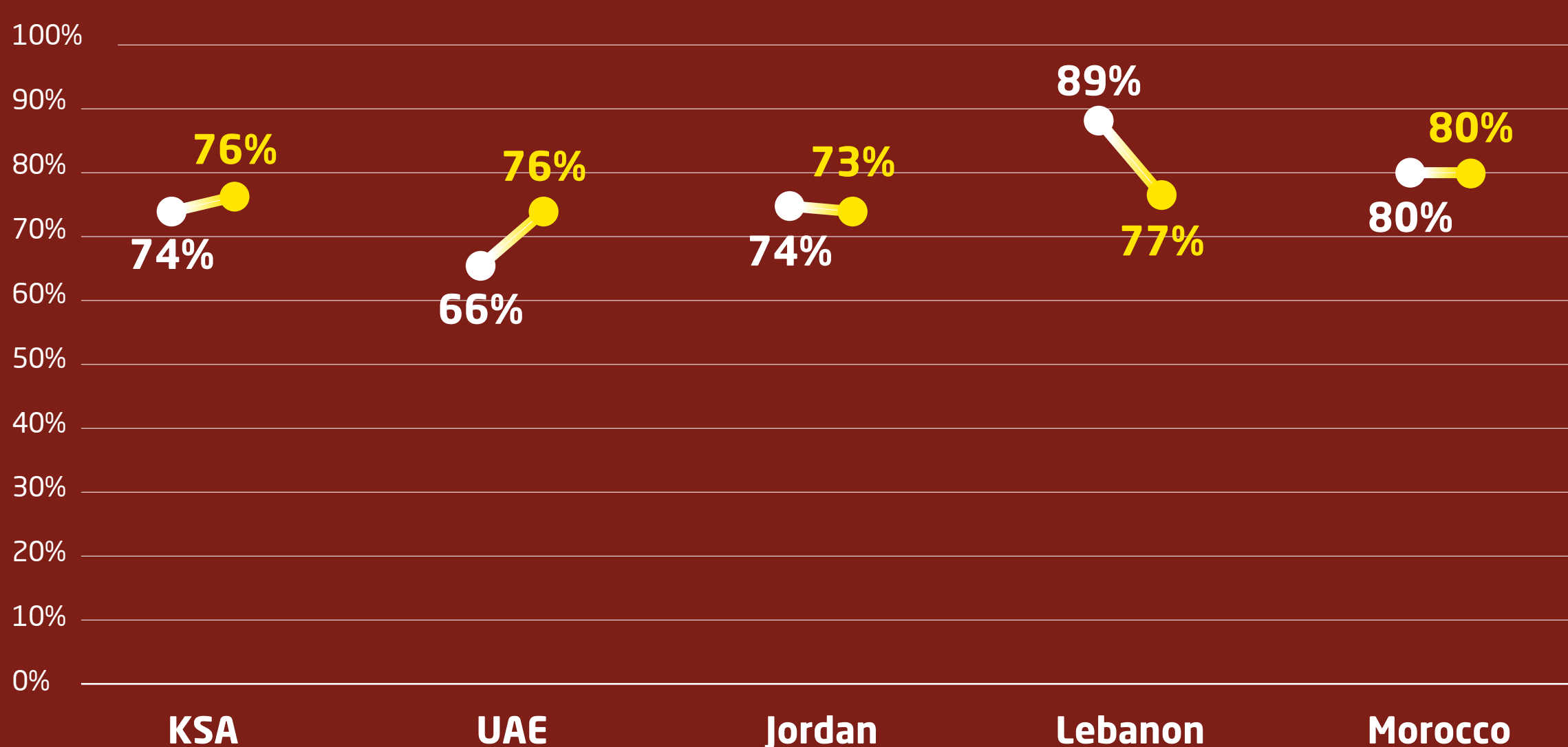
OPPORTUNITY

The shift to digital communications has opened up a number of opportunities for future community engagement. Several UAE-based therapists see value in providing free virtual support groups. This allows people to engage in sessions during their busy schedules without potential mobility or monetary issues. It also provides people with an outlet to share concerns or meet others with similar interests. Worshippers are also using online platforms to watch services they would previously have gone to physically.¹⁰

Across the Arab world, most communication is through social media platforms or applications, such as WhatsApp and TikTok. Due to different forms of communication, there has been a diverse response to COVID-19 across the region, with some MENA countries viewing the threat of COVID-19 as less dangerous than others. Social media platforms are now trying to counter misinformation. An example of that is TikTok, widely used by millennials, which has partnered with UNICEF MENA and WHO to provide verified messages about COVID-19 to the region.¹¹

What level of threat do you think the coronavirus poses to your country?

● March 20-23
● April 10-13



Source: Ipsos, COVID-19 MENA Consumer Sentiment Tracker

¹⁰ Ryan, P. & Dajani, H., "Coronavirus: worshippers urged to pray from and watch service online", The National, 2020.

¹¹ Mansoor, Z., "Dubai's DHA partners with TikTok to launch #ThankYouHeroes Challenge", Gulf Business, 2020.

Since so much of the information on COVID-19 is communicated digitally, there is a growing need to create more inclusive forms of messaging for all members of the community. One example is the use of sign language in news conferences. However, a wider discussion is needed on how to ensure all members of the community are reached and protected equally. There is also a need to unify messaging across multiple languages. In the MENA region, there are over 50 languages spoken by residents and citizens, including French, Kurdish, Italian, Urdu, Hindi and Tagalog. Information provided on COVID-19 in the MENA region, such as quarantine rules and sanitization efforts, needs to be accessible to all members of the population so as not to exclude communities whose members may then contract the virus.

In the 2019 Arab Youth Survey, 31% of respondents said they knew someone with a mental illness. However, this issue has often not been very widely discussed in the MENA region due to societal stigma. As more programs are being offered now publicly, there is an opportunity to focus more on mental conditions in health systems worldwide.¹²

Finally, even with familial challenges, many believe COVID-19 has been an opportunity to reassess priorities. As families are asked to stay indoors together, there is an opportunity to take back 'lost time' and spend more time with children and older people. Social media platforms will thrive, and remain important for those separated from each other, but in other cases people who might have spent part of their time a physical family gathering on their phone before COVID-19 may gain a greater a larger appreciation of 'real time' spent together.

¹² Research Call, National Program for Happiness & Wellbeing, 2020.

LOOKING AHEAD

Short term insights ●-----

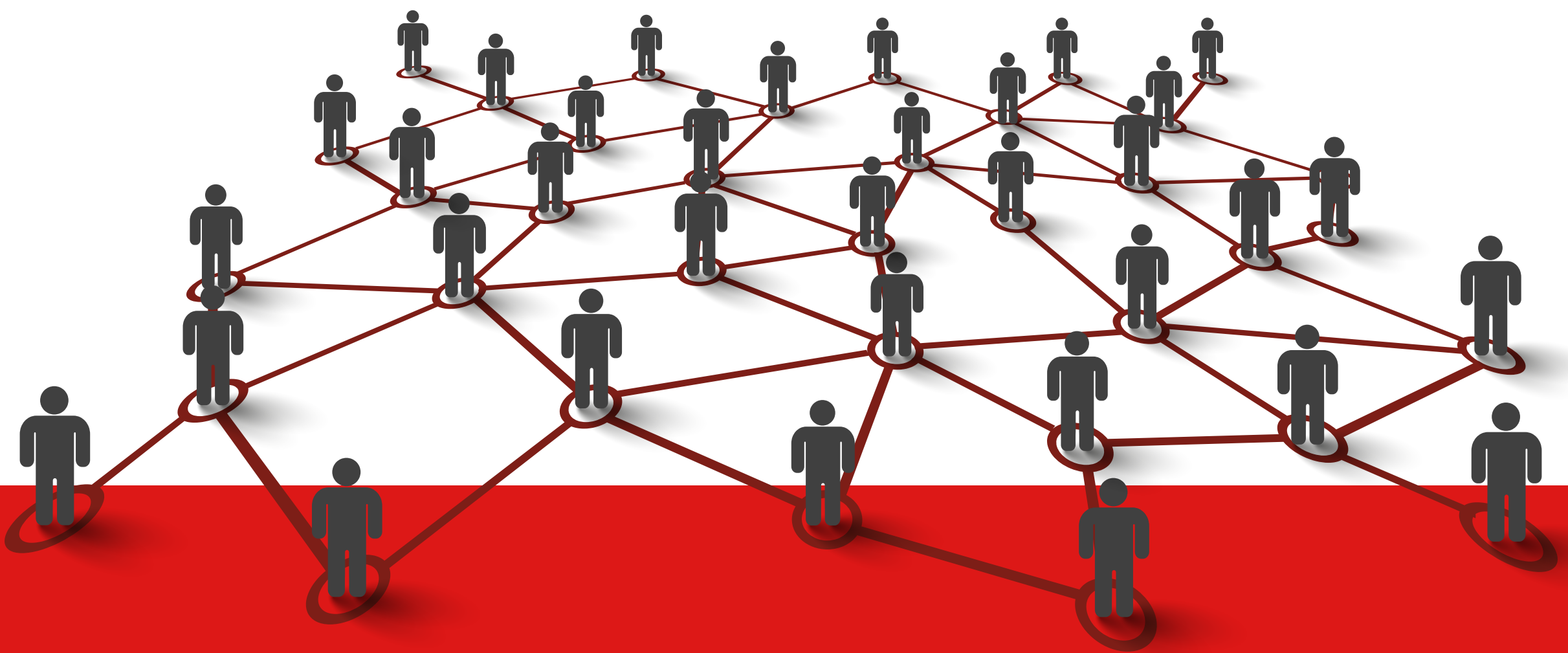
(during the COVID-19 outbreak)

Caregivers and midwives will have a larger role to play in domestic healthcare, particularly for those who are unable to leave their households, including senior citizens and pregnant women. Training will be required for these new roles that could continue after the pandemic.

Short to long term insights ●-----

(post the COVID-19 outbreak)

Online sessions and live support groups will continue as they provide the opportunity to form new, more inclusive, communities that enable people to engage with each other positively without mobility or monetary challenges.



If you, or someone you know, is suffering from anxiety, depression, or mental health stress in the UAE, please go to www.hw.gov.ae/registration or [@happyuae](https://www.instagram.com/happyuae) on Instagram to find further details on individual and group sessions with experts.