



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on March 30, 2020

Suicide and Mental Health Concerns May Be Bigger Threat Than COVID-19 Itself

By now, the dangers of the coronavirus — or COVID-19 — pandemic are impossible to ignore. As the virus has spread from China to the rest of the world, nations and state and local governments have closed businesses, schools, and even churches; prohibited public gatherings; imposed “shelter-in-place” orders, quarantines, and curfews — all to contain the spread of coronavirus. Terms such as “social distancing” and “flatten the curve” have become part of our everyday language.



There have been more than 2,880 deaths in the United States attributed to the coronavirus, but reports are surfacing that the effects of social isolation — stemming from the measures put in place to separate people and prevent them from spreading the virus — are having a serious impact on the mental health of many people. A March 27 report in *The Hill* quoted Richard Schwartz, a psychotherapist who heads the Illinois-based IFS Institute. Said Schwartz, “There’s an epidemic of loneliness in the United States. Loneliness is such a risk factor to your health. This obviously has the effect of increasing that, especially for people who live alone, and more especially for people who live alone and are already lonely and who don’t have a lot of loved ones left.”

The seriousness of mental depression that may be exacerbated by social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic was noted in a report in *The Federalist* on March 27 headlined, “More People Died From Suicide Than Coronavirus In Tennessee This Week.”

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The report noted a very high number of suicides in Knox County, Tennessee, the third most populous county in the state, with 432,000 people:

Knox County, Tennessee saw nine deaths by suicide within 48 hours this week as doomsday predictions over the novel Wuhan coronavirus panics an already anxious public and leaves millions unemployed and isolated.

In Tennessee, the crisis is taking its toll on those who were not physically sick but who appear to have fallen victim to the virus anyway. As of this writing, more people have died from suicide in Knox County than people have from the virus in the entire state, where there have been 6 fatalities from the disease, according to the Tennessee Department of Health.

The report also quoted Dr. Martha Buchanan, the director of the Knox County Health Department, who advised people in her county: “Now, more than ever, we need to be kinder and gentler with ourselves and with each other. If you are struggling, I encourage you to reach out. Reach out to your pastor, a friend, call the hotlines.”



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It is significant that Dr. Buchanan advised those who are contemplating harming themselves to reach out to their pastor.

An article published in *The New American* in 2018 underscored the importance of having a strong religious faith to counter the effects of depression.

The author quoted someone he described as “a somewhat melancholic friend” who once told him, “If it weren’t for my faith, I’d eat my .45.”

Sadly but unsurprisingly, he observed, as Christianity wanes in the West, more and more people are doing just that.

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Warren Mass has served The New American since its launch in 1985 in several capacities, including marketing, editing, and writing. Since retiring from the staff several years ago, he has been a regular contributor to the magazine. Warren writes from Texas and can be reached at wmass@thenewamerican.com.

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