

## Mental health impact of COVID-19 on the youth



COVID-19 has created major disruptions in what society has known to be normal not only in South Africa, but globally too. It has affected many individuals including young people. And led to much concern and worry as well as high rates of anxiety, stress, and depression. Not everybody is aware of or conversant with mental health. This means that some of the older generations might find it difficult to understand what youngsters are experiencing and may be dealing with, as their experience of their youth may be different than the challenges we are faced with now as today's youth.

With many lives lost due to COVID-19, there are so many young people who have experienced multiple losses and complicated grief, which may have been new to them. Young people, among everyone else, have lost their parents and loved ones due to sudden disease. There are those family members who survived this dreadful disease, but many youngsters may have also witnessed them suffered or being away from them in quarantine, fearing their death. The fear of getting sick or having to lose a loved one was a heavy burden to carry and a very traumatic process.

Young people had to adjust their lives to an entirely new routine. Many opportunities were suddenly cut short leaving them with no closure on important milestones they were looking forward to their entire lives. Young people have suffered emotional distress over the past two years and now they ask themselves if their lives will be the same again? My answer to that question would be that we still don't know, all we can do is hope that the light at the end of the tunnel is within our reach.

We can improve and support the mental health of our youth by encouraging a good balance between

work and life as well as initiate wellness programmes in schools, universities, and the workplace. It is important that we provide mental health support that meets young people's needs. It needs to be easily accessible. Investing in our youth's mental wellness and providing them the support they need, can drive them to become better and healthier contributors of society. This is critical as the youth is our hope for the future. In the words of Roy Bennet, "Nobody is exempt from the trials of life, but everyone can always find something positive even in the worst of times".