

- Mental health

Positive psychology helping out in pandemic

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Positive psychology can serve as an effective method to alleviate pandemic-related anxiety and depression, which if not handled properly may impede future economic recovery, experts said.

“Positive psychology enables us to look at problems in new ways, which is very important to us during this critical period when the world is struggling with COVID-19,” said Shahbaz Khan, representative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s Beijing office.

Khan made the remarks at the fifth China International Conference on Positive Psychology held by Tsinghua University in Beijing on Saturday.

Leading experts worldwide attended the online conference and gave keynote speeches, sharing their ideas on how to preserve mental health amid a pandemic with an audience of nearly 400,000.

“We need to now hold on to our hopes and optimism more than ever before for a brighter future,” Khan added.

Positive psychology believes in helping individuals find their own advantages to improve their quality of life.

Rise in mental illnesses

Since the onset of the sweeping COVID-19 pandemic, countries worldwide have observed a substantial rise in symptoms of mental ill health, as people are afraid of getting infected and are distressed from the uncertainty and solitude brought by the pandemic and its resulting lockdowns.

Such decline in mental health threatens social stability and may hinder future economic recovery. Studies show that poor mental health hampers people’s ability to work productively and display healthy behavior that keeps themselves and others safe.

According to a 2020 United Nations policy brief on COVID-19, the global economy lost more than \$1 trillion per year due to depression and anxiety.

Peng Kaiping, chairman of the psychology department at Tsinghua

University, suggested at the conference that people could try to free themselves from anxiety by focusing on the change in their mental status and analyzing their mental activity.

He emphasized that the key to fight against pessimism is turning one’s attention to positive thoughts instead of trying hard to suppress negative thoughts.

Considering the scale of this mental health crisis and the limited availability of existing psychological support, positive psychology provides a cost-effective way to alleviate anxiety and depression among the general population, Peng added.