

What Can the Pandemic Teach Us About Human Nature?

December 09, 2020

It all happened so quickly. In a matter of weeks, our world was upended when a far-flung outbreak spiraled into a genuine pandemic. With vaccines and pharmaceutical interventions still a speck on the horizon, human behavior has become a key factor in battling the disease. The crisis has also pummeled both individuals and society itself with a plethora of mental health burdens, from stress and anxiety to social isolation.

Research on COVID-19's psychological impact is still evolving. But by midsummer of 2020, call counts had spiked up to 10 times more than pre-pandemic levels at the Disaster Distress Helpline, a federal hotline for mental-health crisis, according to the American Psychological Association. For decades, social and behavioral scientists have been examining the toll of long-term loneliness, the difficulty of behavior change and the human capacity for resilience. Their insights can help gauge the pandemic's lasting consequences — and better equip us to stem the virus' spread.

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