

By Kathleen M. Pike, PhD

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**Five** *on*  
**Friday**

*Musings on Mental Health*

## **Women On My Mind**

*This Sunday is Mother's Day. At the time of this writing, Coronavirus accounts for 274,651 deaths globally. And this week, my honeybees are buzzing.*



*The unexpected intersections of Mother's Day, COVID-19, and honeybees bring together themes that move me to awe and prompt me to share five musings about women and mental health.*

**1. Mom's coping with COVID-19 will dramatically shape kids' coping.** The world is at war with the novel coronavirus, and some lessons we have learned in the context of WWII, albeit a different kind of war, shed light on our current situation. In the 1940-41 Blitz of WWII, German bombers attacked London every day and night, bar one, for eleven weeks straight. A third of the city was destroyed. Anna Freud, the youngest of Sigmund Freud's six children, and founder of child psychoanalysis, examined the impact of this potentially traumatic experience on London's children. In her work, [War and Children](#), published with Dorothy Burlingham, she found that the strongest predictor of children's mental health response was the children's experience of security and comfort provided by being with mom. When moms were able to model coping and resilience characterized by confidence and calm, the traumatic effects of the bombing were mitigated for the children.

**2. Women are reporting more stress than men during COVID-19.** Most Americans report that COVID-19 is impacting their lives in some significant way according to a [recent Pew Research Center study](#). But the [Kaiser Family Foundation Report](#) reveals that women are reporting much higher levels of stress than men. Specifically, 53 percent of women as compared to 37 percent of men describe worry or stress related to coronavirus that has negatively impacted their mental health. This gendered experience gives me pause, particularly for the women who are moms given what we have learned from Anna Freud and others.

**3. One group of women is especially at risk.** In the United States, [women hold 76 percent of healthcare jobs and make up more than 85 percent of nurses](#). They are responsible for the vast majority of patient interactions in primary care settings, hospitals, and nursing homes, including during this current pandemic. [In a previous post](#), I shared my sister's experience serving as a physician during this crisis. [Around the globe](#), the data clearly indicate that frontline healthcare providers are vulnerable to experiencing increased stress, insomnia, anxiety and other mental health problems. I am grateful to all the women, and men, who are providing healthcare to others at this time of extraordinary need. With National Nurses Day last Wednesday and Mother's Day on Sunday, it's an opportune moment to pause and say thank you.

**4. Women are mitigating stress through social connection.** Despite the COVID-19 physical distancing requirements, women are connecting creatively to support each other in all kinds of ways - from child care to funny memes and Zoom cocktail hours - which takes me to my honeybees. At the peak of summer, each hive has about 50,000 bees - one queen and 100 female bees for every male bee. The females are the worker bees who care for the queen, tend the hive, forage for food, and make honey. Each has work to do that can only get done if everyone else is doing her work. So too with women. The power of connection is helping women manage their elevated levels of stress in COVID-19 in the same way that the interdependence of the bees ensures an abundance of honey to be shared.

**5. Ultimately, it's about the next generation.** Mother's Day is about celebrating women who have come to have children and who have dedicated hard work to raising the next generation. COVID-19 is bringing into high relief questions about the future for this next generation and beyond. What kind of government do we want? How do we build back better our public health system? What are the takeaways for the environment now that the skies over Mumbai, Los Angeles, and Beijing are clearer than they have been in decades?

And that's when I turn to my bees, again. Tens of thousands of them foraging for nectar and pollen, tending the colony, and caring for the queen. They will fill the combs of the hive with honey that they will never consume. The honey is for those who will need it in early spring when other food sources have yet to bloom. The producers of this summer's honey will be long gone by next spring. It's all about paying it forward for the next generation.

*To all the moms of the world, Happy Mother's Day. May the heightened stresses of daily life during this global pandemic be assuaged by supports and connection as sweet as honey.*