Dear Colleagues,

Greetings from Wuhan, China.

As we enter 2020, a rare new coronavirus outbreak has occurred in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. The contagion of this virus is unprecedented, with the number of infections and deaths increasing every day at an alarming rate around the world. To prevent the virus from spreading further, on January 23rd the central government of the People’s Republic of China imposed a lockdown on Wuhan and other cities in Hubei to quarantine the epicenter of the coronavirus to contain and prevent an epidemic. On January 30th, the World Health Organization declared the outbreak of the virus a global health emergency. This health emergency has already adversely impacted the lives of people in Wuhan, Hubei, China, and other parts of the world, with effects that will endure forever!

The epidemic poses an extreme medical emergency to our global civilization, threatening the psychological well-being of people around the world. We have observed the rate of related psychological issues increasing even faster than the rate of medical issues. High percentages of people in all the infected cities have sustained psychological trauma due to the loss of loved ones and friends in the last three weeks alone. People face an overwhelming sense of fear and helplessness as the number of deaths and number of people infected increases. Misinformation and complicated models of epidemics and transmission make it difficult for people to decide what exactly to do. The need for professional guidance and help for everyone is urgent!

In response to this urgent need for expert psychological consultation in Wuhan area, the School of Psychology at Central China Normal University collaborated with other local organizations. For example, the Psychological Association of Hubei Province has already started a number of projects to serve the psychological needs of populations at risk. For a brief update, below we list a few:

- We have organized professional psychologists to offer free psychological consultations. Over 600 certified psychologists (including 80 overseas counselors who speak English) have offered psychological consultation to thousands of individuals all over China. The services are offered via dedicated hotlines, online chatting services, and social media tools such as WeChat.
- Our faculty members have written easy-to-read articles to address common concerns of citizens who are confined since the city lockdown. In the last three weeks, we have published these articles in over 60 national and regional newspapers and social media outlets. These articles offer professional advice to the public, benefiting millions.
- The researchers in our school are among the most influential psychologists in the
nation. In one of the national forums, three of our faculty members give online lectures that attract over 3 million college students and faculty members!

- We have created mobile behavior intervention and survey instruments for the outbreak. We have used one app that collected over 15,000 survey responses focusing on the impacts of the outbreak. Our analyses have been reported by 17 major news media in China. Another self-check and diagnostic app has been used by over 64,000 individuals in the last two weeks.

Our efforts appear to be helping thousands of people who have been suffering these traumatic experiences.

While we are doing our best to alleviate the negative emotions and related adverse impact on the public thus far, we cannot begin to provide the immense amount of care needed without further help. Our outreach efforts must be strengthened in the face of such a devastating pandemic and widespread trauma. We, the members of the School of Psychology of Central China Normal University, are urgently appealing to psychological colleagues and organizations around the world to join us to fight this unprecedented historical challenge. The wisdom and expertise of you and your colleagues can help us make more effective decisions, create better solutions in helping comfort the public, and guide us in offering the best mental health care to those enduring the required long quarantine periods. We need to minimize the amount of suffering so many have experienced and prevent permanent psychological damage.

We are calling upon you to help us better serve all impacted communities. Below are some actions that can help make this happen.

1. Recommend relevant research and best practice guidelines for helping those in need and for minimizing misinformation on how to control the coronavirus and similar viruses. (links or PDF)
2. Recommend/nominate relevant experts who may be able and willing to help.
3. If you have colleagues in Wuhan and other impacted cities, send letters of support. Your support and understanding means a lot to those who are at the epicenter of the global crisis.

Sincerely yours.

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