

REPORT on MENTAL HEALTH in the ERA OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

(full report available at www.mentalhealthinternational.ca)

SERIES OF RECAPS (2)

Super Power of Stress and Skyrocketing Suicide in US

(Report author Bill Wilkerson, LL.D. (Hon) was a former corporate chief and senior executive and a specialist in crisis management. His background ranges across business, government, politics, the arts, broadcasting, and major league sports.

Bill is MHI Executive Chairman and McMaster University Industry Professor of International Mental Health and in the mental health field, Wilkerson:

- *Co-Founded and led the Canadian-based Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health (1998-2011).*
- *Chaired a business-led Pan-European campaign targeting depression in the workplace (2013-17).*
- *Founded and chaired a five-city (Washington, Ottawa, Boston, Toronto, Denver) US/Canada Forum on Mental Health and Productivity (2007-13).*

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AI will be a super-power of dangerous, deep stress with the capacity to produce rumination that, in turn, predicts depression. Deep stress is at the root of severe frustration, fear, anger and uncertainty. These can threaten one's sense of personal identity and self-awareness.

Self-awareness is not a bland psychological concept. It is, in fact, everything. It is our understanding of who we are and what we are here to do, it is the source of our congruence with the world around us.

Deep, chronic stress can move us toward self-destruction. Just as cancer is a malignant growth, depression – in the words of author Lewis Wolpen - is malignant darkness.

It is also the trigger of 90% of suicides, now the leading cause of violent death. Human beings are killing ourselves faster than we are killing other people. Guns kill more Americans through suicide than homicide.

In late 2018, according to the Economist, suicides in the United States skyrocketed 18% between 2001-2017 while globally, suicide declined by nearly 29%, saving nearly three million lives.

Across the world, 50% of human beings are symptomatic of mental illness – 20% in any given year. And these human beings are the faces of the troubled, turbulent times in which the effects of AI will be felt.

This is the first time that technology – through AI and genomics (synthetic biology) is moving toward the replication of human beings, man-created “new biological beings,” a re-statement, in effect, of the human place in work and culture.

Dr. Bernstein sees “AI as such a powerful platform for analyzing data in new ways that its applications will extend into every aspect of our lives” -- energy, medicine, arts and culture.

The implications of this technology are different than past technologies. Its reach into society is penetrating. It has the potential to create an ambiguous and troubling ‘middle ground’ between machines and human beings. Yes, this new technology is different – very different.

One thing it means to be human in the era of AI is living with mental illness.

This, at a time when the human mind now does the heavy lifting for business and is at risk of being costly collateral damage from the vast infusion of AI into the digital economy.

Indeed, the world is crossing an historic bridge between human and AI, bringing together two minds, one human, one not. Can we keep them both healthy? That is unclear. But this much isn’t –

If AI feeds human mental unrest, disquiet and disorder, then it will damage society and if the primary purpose of AI is to lay off employees to cut costs, then it will not only cheapen the cost of goods and services, but our way of life.