

COVID-19 pandemic severely impacts mental health of young people

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The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted the mental health of young people, with increased levels of clinical depression being identified, a new study published in the journal *Psychiatry Research* reports. A decrease in alcohol consumption was also identified amongst young people during the pandemic.

During this unique study researchers from the University of Surrey surveyed 259 young people pre- pandemic (autumn 2019) and in the midst of initial lockdown measures (May/June 2020) on their levels of [depression](#), anxiety, wellbeing, alcohol use and sleep quality.

Researchers found evidence of a substantial impact on the mental [health](#) of these young adults due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a significant rise in depression symptoms and a reduction in overall wellbeing during lockdown compared to the previous autumn. Levels of clinical depression in those surveyed were found to have more than doubled, rising from 14.9 percent in autumn 2019 to 34.7 percent in May/June 2020.

Sleep quality was not seen to decline in the overall sample but, importantly, a correlation was seen between the rise in depression and lower sleep quality under lockdown. Also of concern, researchers identified a significant shift towards 'eveningness' (a preference to go to sleep and wake later), which has previously been associated with higher levels of anxiety and a greater prevalence of minor psychiatric disorders.

Interestingly, despite reports of rising worldwide sales of alcohol during the first lockdown, researchers identified a [significant decrease in alcohol consumption](#) amongst the group that could be attributed to social restrictions in place during this period. Researchers were encouraged by this finding as it suggests that young people were not using alcohol as a coping strategy during that time.

Findings from this study highlight the substantial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people's mental health. The link to [sleep quality](#) could help inform strategies to support their wellbeing as the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve.

Dr. Simon Evans, Lecturer in Neuroscience at the University of Surrey, said: "For many years there has been a rise in the number of young people experiencing problems with their mental health, and it is concerning to find that this has been significantly exacerbated due to COVID-19. Supporting the mental health of [young people](#) and ensuring they can access the support they need is vital to ensure their overall wellbeing. As social restrictions continue in response to the [pandemic](#), it is crucial that we take steps to protect their mental health."

More information: Simon Evans et al. Effects of the COVID-19 lockdown on mental health, wellbeing, sleep, and alcohol use in a UK student sample, *Psychiatry Research* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.psychres.2021.113819](#)

Provided by University of Surrey

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