COVID-19: impact on mental health

15th January 2021

**Title:** Number of people seeking help for mental health problems dropped in first lockdown

National Institute for Health Research | 11th January 2021

The number of people seeking help for mental illness or self-harm during April 2020, while the UK was in full lockdown, dropped by more than a third, according to NIHR-funded research.

Forecasts suggest that millions of people in England will require new or additional mental health support as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this research showed marked reductions in people seeking help for mental health problems during the early stages of the pandemic.

The researchers used data from 14 million people across the four nations of the UK to analyse the first time people sought medical help for their mental health, either at their general practice or at a hospital A&E department. In April 2020, the first full month of the UK wide lockdown, the number of incidents of depression recorded in general practice records in England dropped by 43%, and anxiety disorders dropped by 47.8%. In addition, the number of people presenting with self-harm was 37.6% lower than expected in April. The reduction was greatest for women and people aged under 45.

By September 2020, reported rates of depression, anxiety disorder and self-harm were either close to, or had reached, expected levels.

The research which is published in The Lancet Public Health also uncovered significant drops in treatment, such as prescribing of antidepressants. This was greatest for people of working age and those registered at general practices in more deprived areas, where the reduction in diagnoses coded was greatest.

Full detail: [Number of people seeking help for mental health problems dropped in first lockdown](https://www.nihr.ac.uk/news/number-of-people-seeking-help-for-mental-health-problems-dropped-in-first-lockdown/26552)

Full research paper: [Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on primary care-recorded mental illness and self-harm episodes in the UK: a population-based cohort study](https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2468-2667%2820%2930288-7)

**TITLE:** LOCKDOWN RAISED ANXIETY IN PEOPLE WITH ANOREXIA AND THEIR CARERS, BUT ONLINE RESOURCES HELPED

National Institute for Health Research | 8th January 2021

This NIHR Alert highlights a recent paper which explores how COVID-19 has affected the lives of adult patients with anorexia nervosa and their carers. The research uses semi-structured interviews with adult patients and carers, which researchers analysed to identify a number of themes.

 Themes identified from patients:

* reduced access to eating disorder (ED) services
* disruption to routine and activities in the community
* heightened psychological distress and ED symptoms;
* increased attempts at self‐management in recovery.

Themes identified from carers:

* concern over provision of professional support for patients;
* increased practical demands placed on carers in lockdown;
* managing new challenges around patient wellbeing;
* new opportunities.

The lockdowns and restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted eating disorder services. People with anorexia nervosa experienced a loss of routine, heightened anxieties, and increased symptoms. Carers felt more concern and greater responsibility for their loved ones. Despite these difficulties, some patients and carers benefitted from digital self-management resources.

Full detail: [Lockdown raised anxiety in people with anorexia and their carers, but online resources helped](https://evidence.nihr.ac.uk/alert/lockdown-raised-anxiety-in-anorexia-online-resources-helped/)

**Title:** Mental health of staff working in intensive care during COVID-19

King’s College London | Occupational Medicine | 13th January 2021

New research from King's College London shows nearly half of Intensive Care Unit (ICU) staff are likely to meet the threshold for PTSD, severe anxiety or problem drinking during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Results from a study of ICU healthcare workers, published in *Occupational Medicine*, shows the stark impact of working in critical care during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers found poor mental health was common in many ICU clinicians although they were more pronounced in nurses than in doctors or other healthcare professionals.

The authors state that the high rate of mortality amongst COVID-19 patients admitted to ICU, coupled with difficulty in communication and providing adequate end-of-life support to patients, and their next of kin because of visiting restrictions, are very likely to have been highly challenging stressors for all staff working in ICUs.

709 healthcare workers, from nine ICUs in England, completed anonymous web-based surveys in June and July 2020 comprising 291 (41 per cent) doctors, 344 (49 per cent) nurses, and 74 (10 per cent) other healthcare staff.

Over half (59 per cent) reported good wellbeing, however 45 per cent met the threshold for probable clinical significance for at least one of: severe depression (6 per cent), PTSD (40 per cent), severe anxiety (11 per cent) or problem drinking (7 per cent). Worryingly more than one in eight respondents (13 per cent) reported frequent thoughts of being better off dead, or of hurting themselves in the past two weeks.

Full paper: [Mental health of staff working in intensive care during COVID-19](https://academic.oup.com/occmed/advance-article/doi/10.1093/occmed/kqaa220/6072139?searchresult=1)

Press release: [New study shows mental health of ICU staff should be immediate priority](https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2021-01/kcl-nss011221.php)

See also: [Many ICU staff in England report symptoms of PTSD, severe depression, or anxiety, study reports](https://www.bmj.com/content/372/bmj.n108) | BMJ

**TITLE:** COVID-19 AND MENTAL HEALTH DETERIORATION BY ETHNICITY AND GENDER IN THE UK

PlosOne | 6th January 2021

This study uses the UK Household Longitudinal Study and compare pre-COVID-19 pandemic (2017-2019) and during-COVID-19 pandemic data (April 2020) for the same group of individuals to assess and quantify changes in mental health as measured by changes in the GHQ-12 (General Health Questionnaire), among ethnic groups in the UK.

The authors confirm the previously documented average deterioration in mental health for the whole sample of individuals interviewed before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the study finds that the average increase in mental distress varies by ethnicity and gender. Both women –regardless of their ethnicity– and Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) men experienced a higher average increase in mental distress than White British men, so that the gender gap in mental health increases only among White British individuals.

These ethnic-gender specific changes in mental health persist after controlling for demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Finally, the study finds some evidence that, among men, Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani individuals have experienced the highest average increase in mental distress with respect to White British men.

Full document: [COVID-19 and mental health deterioration by ethnicity and gender in the UK](https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0244419)

**TITLE:** CHILD MENTAL HEALTH IN ENGLAND BEFORE AND DURING THE COVID-19LOCKDOWN

The Lancet Psychiatry | 11th January 2021

Although evidence has emerged of the effect of COVID-19 on adult mental health, few studies around the world cover children. Given the importance of probability sampling and similar prepandemic baseline measures, the follow-up of [England's Mental Health of Children and Young People (MHCYP) survey](https://files.digital.nhs.uk/CB/C41981/mhcyp_2020_rep.pdf) provides a rare resource on what the pandemic has meant for children.

The study showed that the increase in probable mental health problems reported in adults also affected 5–16 year olds in England, with the incidence rising from 10·8% in 2017 to 16·0% in July 2020 across age, gender, and ethnic groups. As in 2017, during the pandemic young women had the highest prevalence of probable mental health problems (27·2%), indicating they should remain a group of particular policy concern.

More than a quarter of children (aged 5–16 years) and young people (aged 17–22) reported disrupted sleep and one in ten (5·4% of children and 13·8% of young people) often or always felt lonely. Both problems were more common in those with probable mental health problems, of whom 18·0% felt fearful of leaving the house because of COVID-19.

This comment piece considers the clinical and policy implications of the initial study results.

Full detail: [Child mental health in England before and during the COVID-19 lockdown](https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2215-0366%2820%2930570-8)

**Title:** The impact of sharing physical activity experience on social network sites on residents' social connectedness:a cross-sectional survey during COVID-19 social quarantine

Globalization and Health | 11th January 2021

During isolation, sharing physical activity experiences on social network sites (SNS) can enhance individual social connectedness. The objective of the present study was to examine the associations between sharing physical activity experiences on SNS, positive self-presentation, positive feedback, and social connectedness during isolation.

The study concludes that during the COVID-19 pandemic, sharing physical activity experiences on SNS can create a positive, healthy, and energetic personal image, gain recognition from others, and establish new interpersonal relationships.

Full article: [The impact of sharing physical activity experience on social network sites on residents' social connectedness: a cross-sectional survey during COVID-19 social quarantine](https://globalizationandhealth.biomedcentral.com/track/pdf/10.1186/s12992-021-00661-z.pdf)

**Title**: The prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder related symptoms in Coronavirus outbreaks

Journal of Affective Disorders | Volume 282, March 2021 pages 527-538

Infectious disease outbreaks affect physical and mental health of humans worldwide. Studies showed that the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms increased in these conditions. This systematic-review and meta-analysis aimed to assess the prevalence of PTSD related symptoms in coronavirus outbreaks.

Meta-analysis reported that about three in every ten survivors of coronavirus infection, about two in every ten healthcare workers, and about one in every ten individuals of general population experienced PTSD symptoms in outbreaks.

Full article: [The prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder related symptoms in Coronavirus outbreaks](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S016503272033278X)

**Title:** Employment Uncertainty and Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic Initial Social Distancing Implementation: a Cross-national Study

Global Social Welfare: Research, Policy & Practice | 7th January 2021

Social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in changes in the work environment and employment uncertainty. This paper reports on a cross-national comparison of four countries (Norway, UK, USA and Australia) and examines the differences in mental health between those individuals employed and those not employed during the social distancing implementation.

Compared with their counterparts, participants who were employed reported lower levels of mental health distress, higher levels of psychosocial well-being, better overall quality of life, and lower levels of overall loneliness, social loneliness, and emotional loneliness.

Full article: [Employment uncertainty and mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic initial social distancing implementation: A cross-national study](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40609-020-00201-4)

**Title:** Conducting School Suicide Risk Assessment in Distance Learning Environments

Contemporary School Psychology | 4th January 2021

The social distancing mandate, implemented in response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) global pandemic, has guided many schools to deliver instruction via distance learning. Among the many challenges generated by this delivery system is the need for school mental health services, including school suicide prevention and intervention, to be conducted remotely.

After briefly discussing the magnitude of the problem of youth suicide and how the COVID-19 pandemic has likely increased risk for youth suicidal ideation and behaviors, this article provides guidance on how school systems can prepare for and conduct suicide risk assessments in distance learning environments.

Full article: [Conducting school suicide risk assessment in distance learning environments](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40688-020-00333-6)

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