COVID-19: impact on mental health

November 2021

**Title:** Youth in a pandemic: a longitudinal examination of youth mental health and substance use concerns during COVID-19

BMJ Open | 29th October 2021

This study analyses longitudinal data to understand how youth mental health and substance use are evolving over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is critical to adjusting mental health response strategies.

For the majority of participants, mood concerns increased early in the pandemic, declined over the summer months and subsequently increased in autumn. Among the youth with the highest level of mood symptoms at the beginning of the pandemic, increases in mental health concerns were sustained. Substance use remained relatively stable over the course of the pandemic. COVID-19-related worries, however, followed a trajectory similar to that of mood symptoms.

Girls/young women, youth living in urban or suburban areas, in larger households, and with poorer baseline mental and physical health are the most vulnerable to mental health concerns and worries during the pandemic.

Full paper: [Youth in a pandemic: a longitudinal examination of youth mental health and substance use concerns during COVID-19](https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/bmjopen/11/10/e049209.full.pdf)

**Title:** Six years of memory decline seen in anxious, depressed older people during pandemic

King’s College London | 9th November 2021

Older people who were more anxious and depressed during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic were found to have an average decline in their short-term memory equivalent to six years of natural ageing.

The research was conducted by the PROTECT study. The team found that participants aged 50 and over who reported an increase in validated measures of anxiety and depression also scored lower on cognitive tasks designed to measure short term memory and attention. For memory, the decrease was the equivalent to the decline normally seen over six years of natural ageing. For attention, the difference was the equivalent of five years of ageing.

Full detail: [Six years of memory decline seen in anxious, depressed older people during pandemic](https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/six-years-of-memory-decline-seen-in-anxious-depressed-older-people-during-pandemic)

**Title:** Association of SARS-CoV-2 Infection With Psychological Distress, Psychotropic Prescribing, Fatigue, and Sleep Problems Among UK Primary Care Patients

JAMA | 16th November 2021

Many people infected with SARS-CoV-2 experience symptoms beyond the acute phase of COVID-19, particularly fatigue, brain fog, and sleep problems.Studies have also reported worsening mental health and an increased risk of psychiatric illness after COVID-19, and mechanisms linking the immune system, inflammation, and the brain have been proposed.

The objective of this study was to assess risk of risk of incident or repeat psychiatric illness, fatigue, or sleep problems following SARS-CoV-2 infection and to analyse changes according to demographic subgroups.

This cohort study of individuals registered at an English primary care practice during the pandemic, found consistent evidence that SARS-CoV-2 infection was associated with increased risk of fatigue and sleep problems. However, the results from the negative control analysis suggest that unobserved confounding may be responsible for at least some of the positive association between COVID-19 and psychiatric morbidity.

Full paper: [Association of SARS-CoV-2 infection with psychological distress, psychotropic prescribing, fatigue, and sleep problems among UK primary care patients](https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2786180)

**Title:** Thousands of US Youths Cope With the Trauma of Losing Parents to COVID-19

JAMA | 17th November 2021

This Medical News article discusses the stress and grief reactions that children and teens face after losing a parent or close caregiver to COVID-19.

Full detail: [Thousands of US youths cope with the trauma of losing parents to COVID-19](https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2786533)

**Title:** Provider collaboration review: Mental health care of children and young people during the COVID-19 pandemic

Care Quality Commission | 17th November 2021

This report looks at mental health care of children and young people in 7 areas of England in June and July 2021.

Key findings

* The COVID-19 pandemic has had an enormous impact on the mental health of children and young people, and has led to an increased demand on services, particularly eating disorder services.
* While leaders responded quickly to try and ensure that there were enough staff with the right skills in the right places, services have also struggled to meet demand. Not only did this increase the risk of children and young people’s symptoms worsening and reaching crisis point, it also led to them being cared for in unsuitable environments.
* Across all areas, we have seen positive examples of systems working collaboratively together to ensure continued access to mental health support. However, there were some concerns around silo working.
* Communication, both between services and with families, was mixed, with some people not always aware of what support was available.
* The pandemic has also shone a light on, and exacerbated, health inequalities faced by some children and young people, in particular those people living in deprived areas. While some areas were taking steps to tackle this, more needs to be done.
* Digital technology enabled services to adapt almost overnight, ensuring continuation of care and, in some cases, increasing support for children and young people in comparison to pre-pandemic levels. But alongside this we heard about the associated risks to children and young people’s safety, for example staff missing cues or issues that would have been picked up face-to-face, as well as unseen risks within the home environment.

Full detail: [Provider collaboration review: Mental health care of children and young people during the COVID-19 pandemic](https://www.cqc.org.uk/publications/themes-care/provider-collaboration-review-mental-health-care-children-young-people#contents)

**Title:** Many people with mental illness did not seek help during the first lockdown; research highlights unmet need

National Institute for Health Research | 22nd November 2021

The number of people with mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and self-harm increased during the UK’s first lockdown. But a large study across England found that fewer people asked their GP or hospital for mental health support.

This is thought to be the first population-based study of help-seeking during the pandemic. It found that help-seeking fell most among adults of working age, women, younger people and those living in deprived areas. This suggests that existing inequalities in mental health grew wider in the pandemic.

Ensuring that people can promptly access mental health support, diagnosis, and treatment should be an urgent priority for the NHS, the researchers say. Public health messages need to address any long-term reluctance to seek help.

Full detail: [Many people with mental illness did not seek help during the first lockdown; research highlights unmet need](https://evidence.nihr.ac.uk/alert/people-mental-illness-did-not-seek-help-during-first-lockdown-unmet-need-increased/)

Full research:  [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/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(20)30288-7/fulltext). | Lancet Public Health 

**Title:** £5 million launched to support suicide prevention services

Department of Health and Social Care | 26th November 2021

People experiencing suicidal thoughts or approaching a crisis will be supported by a £5 million boost to suicide prevention charities, following increased demand during the pandemic.

The suicide prevention Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector saw an increase in the number of individuals seeking support - with some services seeing up to 20% more contacts over the last year, compared to previous years.

Recognising the increased pressures, the £4 million grant fund will open next week for applications from VCSE organisations that support suicide prevention.

The support will be targeted at high-risk groups who have struggled most during the pandemic, such as people with a pre-existing mental illness, children and young people, NHS and social care staff who’ve faced enormous pressure over the last 18 months, and people in contact with the criminal justice system.

The funding will provide organisations with additional resource that will enable them to either set up new projects or expand or sustain current services to ensure people are supported. The other £1 million of the funding has been set aside to support existing and ongoing voluntary sector suicide prevention programmes.

Full detail: [£5 million launched to support suicide prevention services](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/5-million-launched-to-support-suicide-prevention-services)

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