COVID-19: impact on mental health

September 2021

**Title:** Experiences of frontline healthcare workers and their views about support during COVID-19 and previous pandemics

BMC Health Services Research | 6th September 2021

Healthcare workers across the world have risen to the demands of treating COVID-19 patients, potentially at significant cost to their own health and wellbeing. There has been increasing recognition of the potential mental health impact of COVID-19 on frontline workers and calls to provide psychosocial support for them. However, little attention has so far been paid to understanding the impact of working on a pandemic from healthcare workers’ own perspectives or what their views are about support.

This review identified 46 qualitative studies which explored healthcare workers’ experiences and views from pandemics or epidemics including and prior to COVID-19. Participants across all the studies were deeply concerned about their own and/or others’ physical safety. This was greatest in the early phases of pandemics and exacerbated by inadequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), insufficient resources, and inconsistent information. Workers struggled with high workloads and long shifts and desired adequate rest and recovery. Many experienced stigma. Healthcare workers’ relationships with families, colleagues, organisations, media and the wider public were complicated and could be experienced concomitantly as sources of support but also sources of stress.  
  
Full paper: [Experiences of frontline healthcare workers and their views about support during COVID-19 and previous pandemics: a systematic review and qualitative meta-synthesis](https://bmchealthservres.biomedcentral.com/track/pdf/10.1186/s12913-021-06917-z.pdf)

**Title:** Experiences of maternity care during the COVID-19 pandemic in the North of England

British Journal of Midwifery | 1st September 2021

During 2020, UK maternity services made changes to service delivery in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of this study was to explore service users' and their partners' experiences of maternity services in the North of England during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Five major categories were identified: valuing support from health professionals, feeling lost in and let down by the system, the impact of restrictions to partners and others, virtual contact is not the same as in-person contact, and the need for emotional and psychological wellbeing support.

The changes implemented may have compromised mental health and wellbeing in a critical period of vulnerability. Bringing stakeholders together can maximise learning from the emergency measures, to better inform future service provision. Work is needed to better hear from minoritised groups and ensure they are not further marginalised by changes.

Further detail: [Experiences of maternity care during the COVID-19 pandemic in the North of England](https://www.magonlinelibrary.com/doi/abs/10.12968/bjom.2021.29.9.516)

The full article can be requested by Rotherham NHS staff from the [Library & Knowledge Service](https://www.trftlibraryknowledge.com/interlibrary-loans.html)

**Title:** Anxiety, Depression, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms in Adolescents During the COVID-19 Outbreak and Associated Factors

International Journal of Clinical Practice | 16th September 2021

Outbreaks of infectious diseases have negative effects on mental health. Currently, there is very little information about the psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on adolescents and associated factors affecting their mental health. The aim of this study is to determine the severity of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms in adolescents during the COVID-19 outbreak, and to investigate the associated factors with these symptoms.

The mean age of participants was 15.06, and 38.3% of the participants were male and 61.7% were female. The rate of participants with moderate or high levels of anxiety, depression and PTSD symptoms was 28%, 37.6% and 28.5%, respectively. High age and living in an urban area were associated with increased anxiety, depression and PTSD symptoms. In addition, female gender was associated with increased depression symptoms, and the presence of COVID-19 in the family or environment was associated with increased anxiety symptoms.

The study shows that adolescents have serious levels of anxiety, depression and PTSD symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic. These results emphasize the need for mental health interventions that are appropriate for the characteristics of this age group.

Full paper: [Anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms in adolescents during the Covid-19 outbreak and associated factors](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ijcp.14880)

**Title:** Record number of children and young people referred to mental health services as pandemic takes its toll

The Royal College of Psychiatrists | 23rd September 2021

Record numbers of children and young people are being referred to mental health services for crisis and non-crisis care, as the toll of the pandemic on the country’s mental health is revealed in a new analysis by the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

Eighteen months after the first lockdown and after warnings from the mental health sector about the long-lasting mental health impact of the pandemic, the Royal College of Psychiatrists’ analysis of NHS Digital data found that:

* 190,271 0–18-year-olds were referred to children and young people’s mental health services between April and June this year, **up 134%** on the same period last year (81,170) and 96% on 2019 (97,342).
* 8,552 children and young people were referred for urgent or emergency crisis care between April and June this year, **up 80%** on the same period last year (4,741) and up 64% on 2019 (5,219).
* 340,694 children in contact with children and young people’s mental health services at the end of June, **up 25%** on the same month last year (272,529) and up 51% on June 2019 (225,480).

Further detail: [Record number of children and young people referred to mental health services as pandemic takes its toll](https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/news-and-features/latest-news/detail/2021/09/23/record-number-of-children-and-young-people-referred-to-mental-health-services-as-pandemic-takes-its-toll)

See also:

* [Children’s NHS mental health referrals double in pandemic](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/sep/23/childrens-nhs-mental-health-referrals-double-in-pandemic) | The Guardian
* [Children face 'agonising' waits for mental health care](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-58565067?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=KARANGA) | BBC News

**Title:** COVID-19 pandemic-related transition to telehealth in child and adolescent mental health

Family Relations | 20th September 2021

This article explores one mental health company's urgent response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, and the multifaceted implications of quickly transitioning to telehealth services.

The data suggest there are both benefits and limitations to engaging in telehealth services within a mental health company. Attendance rates increased dramatically, engagement improved with adolescents but proved challenging with the younger children. Telehealth helped overcome many typical barriers to mental health treatment. Concerns remain regarding confidentiality, assessment of abuse and neglect, and ability to read nonverbal social cues.

Families and practitioners experienced the convenience and benefits of telehealth but also expressed concerns over certain limitations. Finding a responsible way to incorporate telehealth into practice post pandemic is a priority for mental health practitioners, both now and in the immediate future.

Full paper: [COVID-19 pandemic-related transition to telehealth in child and adolescent mental health](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/fare.12588)

**Title:** Rethinking autism spectrum disorder assessment for children during COVID-19 and beyond

Autism Research | 22nd September 2021

Physical distancing and the abrupt end to in-person services for many children on the autism spectrum has forced clinicians to examine the existing challenges with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnostic assessment and consider things they want to keep and things that should be changed in the years ahead.

New approaches such as telehealth both alleviated and exacerbated existing disparities, and brought into stark focus the importance of equitable and timely access to family-centered care. This commentary suggests ways of improving clinical practices related to ASD assessment to continue along this path.

Full detail: [Rethinking autism spectrum disorder assessment for children during COVID-19 and beyond](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/aur.2615)

**Title:** Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth mental health among youth with physical health challenges

Early Intervention in Psychiatry | October 2021

The aim of this study was to examine mental health in conjunction with physical health during the COVID-19 pandemic among youth with physical health conditions compared to those without.

The authors found that mental health concerns are highly prevalent among youth with physical health concerns, and also appear to be exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Physical health concerns appear to constitute risk factors for heightened mental health responses to the pandemic situation. System planners striving to adapt mental health services to meet social/physical distancing recommendations are urged to consider youth with physical health conditions and ensure that adequate integrated mental health and physical health supports are available to them.

Full article: [Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth mental health among youth with physical health challenges](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/eip.13052)

**Title:** Anxiety and depression symptoms after COVID-19 infection: results from the COVID Symptom Study app

Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry | 28th September 2021

Testing positive for COVID-19 has a slight association with subsequent anxiety and depression symptoms, new research has found. This association appeared to be short-lived and small compared to having other health conditions.

The study analysed data from 421,977 participants of the ZOE COVID Symptom app. Of that group 26,998 had tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 between February 23rd and April 12th 2021. Previous studies have reported that COVID-19 survivors were at an increased risk of mood and anxiety disorders after infection. The authors of this study sought to compare prevalence of anxiety and depression in individuals with or without COVID-19 infection and assess the influence of other common risk factors.

Researchers found that anxiety and depression were slightly more prevalent in people who tested positive for COVID-19 (30.4%) versus those who tested negative (26.1%). When adjusting for factors such as age and sex, researchers found this modest increase in reporting in those testing positive for COVID-19 was statistically significant.

The people most at risk of experiencing anxiety and depression symptoms in the months analysed were those who reported a previous mental health condition, which included depression, anxiety disorder and bipolar disorder. They were at 126% increased risk of experiencing these symptoms.

Full paper: [Anxiety and depression symptoms after COVID-19 infection: results from the COVID Symptom Study app](https://jnnp.bmj.com/content/jnnp/early/2021/09/27/jnnp-2021-327565.full.pdf)

See also: [Impact of COVID-19 infection on later anxiety and depression is small and short-lived](https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/covid-19-infection-anxiety-and-depression-small-and-short-lived) | Kings College London

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