



Evidence Search results

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| Search topic: | Post-pandemic mental health in UK young adults: confidence, anxiety, isolation, socialisation and connection |
| Date requested: | 26 th February 2026 |
| Date completed: | 25 th March 2026 |
| Search completed by: | Claire Field |
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Citing this evidence search

If you reference this search in any paper, publication or presentation, please let us know and use the following format:

Field, C, (2026). *Evidence summary: Post-pandemic mental health in UK young adults: confidence, anxiety, isolation, socialisation and connection*. Taunton, UK: Somerset NHS Foundation Trust Knowledge & Library Service.

Summary of results

This summary has been generated in part using Copilot

A wide range of sources was searched to identify evidence on the current effects of the pandemic on UK young adults' confidence, anxiety, isolation, socialisation and connection. The available evidence base was limited as many studies did not focus on the target age group, concentrated on the impact of the pandemic *during* the COVID-19 period rather than on post-pandemic outcomes or was international. No evidence predating 2023 was included, as the review aimed to capture the contemporary effects of the pandemic on 18–24-year-olds. Several studies also examined the cost-of-living crisis, financial pressures, environmental concerns, academic strain and social media influences ([Sutton Trust, 2025](#); [Youth Futures Foundation, 2025](#); [House of Commons Library, 2025](#)). Although some research drew on broader age ranges (e.g., 14–29 years), the summary has picked out the evidence in these reports relating to 18–24-year-olds. (e.g., [Henseke & Schoon, 2025](#); [Newlove-Delgado & Creaswell, 2025](#); [Youth Futures Foundation, 2025](#); [NHS Digital, 2023](#); [Dost, 2025](#))

Although patterns are not uniform across all demographic subgroups within this age range, most of the evidence indicates enduring mental-health consequences following the COVID-19 pandemic. National survey data show that the proportion of 16- to 24-year-olds with a mental health condition increased from 17.5% in 2007 to 25.8% in 2023/24 ([NatCen Social Research et al., 2025](#)). While one study reported that average psychological distress returned to predicted trends by 2021 ([Henseke & Schoon, 2025](#)); and [Williams et al. \(2025\)](#) observed a significant



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decrease in self-harm incidence rates in 2023, most of the included evidence reports adverse mental-health outcomes among young adults in the post-pandemic period.

Confidence

There was a reduction in academic, personal and social confidence post-Covid. Educational disruption and reduced engagement lowered students' confidence in navigating academic and social demands. Disrupted grades, altered transitions, and realisation of the fragility of "normality" left young adults feeling less certain about their future pathways and increased dropout risk ([Jones & Bell, 2024](#); [Sutton Trust, 2025](#); [House of Commons Library, 2025](#)). Delays in assessments, long mental-health waiting lists, and service instability undermined confidence in support systems and in coping with adulthood ([Newlove-Delgado & Creaswell, 2025](#)). Students described self-confidence problems, body-image issues, and a struggle to rebuild routines "being normal" in the post-pandemic period. One participant stated that "... we pretend like it's now in the past, even though it's still something actually very present" ([Lee & Wong, 2024](#)). Self-esteem and resilience declined significantly in post-COVID cohorts ([Catling, 2023](#))

Anxiety

Anxiety among young adults increased during the pandemic and has not returned to baseline. Higher education students experienced significantly increased depression and anxiety, exacerbated by academic uncertainty and reduced resilience ([Jones & Bell, 2024](#)). Young adults reported anxiety linked to bereavement, financial instability, home stress, and disrupted routines ([Sutton Trust, 2025](#)). The UK COVID Inquiry's on children and young people found that population-level disruption of protective factors—social interaction, routine, community engagement—increased anxiety in 18–22-year-olds ([Newlove-Delgado & Creaswell, 2025](#)). [Youth Futures Foundation \(2025\)](#) identified COVID-19 as a contributing factor in the long-term rise of anxiety and low mood in 14–24-year-olds. [Barfoot et al. \(2026\)](#) found that anxiety worsened during lockdown and remained above baseline post-lockdown, with loneliness a principal predictor. [Finch & Ong \(2024\)](#) found that anxiety was a big issue, and many students' health had been impacted by the pandemic, which resulted in a change in their coping behaviours. Both [Liverpool et al \(2023\)](#) & [Catling and Sutton \(2023\)](#) found high levels of anxiety in university students post-covid.

Isolation

Isolation during and after the pandemic is repeatedly identified as a cause of deteriorating mental health, and although most studies report on isolation during the pandemic, a study by [Barfoot et al \(2026\)](#) highlighted loneliness as the strongest predictor of poor mental-health outcomes in the post-lockdown phase, with a study by [Dost \(2025\)](#) reporting that the persistent adverse effects of the pandemic, such as loneliness warrant the development of comprehensive mental health programs to aid students to cope with disruptions caused by the pandemic. [Jones and Bell \(2024\)](#) reported that isolation contributed to lower resilience, reduced coping capacity and greater difficulty maintaining wellbeing, with many students feeling disconnected from their institutions and support networks. Reduced youth services following the pandemic deepened social isolation ([Youth Futures Foundation, 2025](#)).

Socialisation

Young adults missed critical social developmental periods, with enduring consequences. Lower opportunities for peer interaction and disrupted social routines reduced students' ability to integrate





socially, ([Jones & Bell, 2024](#)), interrupted schooling, socio-economic stress and altered educational pathways affected social confidence and willingness to engage socially ([Sutton Trust, 2025](#)). Lockdown-related loss of face-to-face contact created “*profound, distressing and life-altering*” social impacts for 18–22-year-olds ([Newlove-Delgado & Creaswell, 2025](#)). Post-pandemic academic and financial pressures reduced opportunities for social interaction ([House of Commons Library, 2025](#); [NHS Digital, 2023](#)). A qualitative study by [Lee & Wong, 2024](#) found participants described difficulty re-establishing routines, increased social caution, and distrust in daily interactions. [Dost \(2025\)](#) asserts that the negative impact of COVID-19 student on students’ sense of belonging.

Connection

The pandemic reduced connection opportunities and weakened a sense of belonging. HE students experienced reduced belonging and connection due to altered learning environments and ongoing anxiety ([Jones & Bell, 2024](#)) and collegiate belonging remains significantly affected by pandemic-related stress, especially for male undergraduate students ([Dost, 2025](#)). Young people felt disconnected from educational and career opportunities due to constrained choices and financial strain ([Sutton Trust, 2025](#)). A loss of protective factors (routine, services, community engagement) undermined young adults’ sense of connectedness ([Newlove-Delgado & Creaswell, 2025](#)). Broader pressures—economic insecurity, sleep disruption, reduced services—interacted with COVID-19 to weaken connection to life pathways ([Youth Futures Foundation, 2025](#)). Care leavers reported diminished connectedness and identified rebuilding connection as a key post-lockdown need ([Drew & Dunn, 2025](#)). A study by [Lee and Wong \(2024\)](#) found participants were confused by whom to trust and what to believe. For some, daily interactions involved being ‘very cautious’, ‘standoffish’ and ‘cold’.

In addition to the above the evidence reports on wellbeing and depression levels post pandemic in young people.

Wellbeing

64% of young people reported the ongoing impact of the pandemic on wellbeing. 32% reported a negative impact, with girls’ and non-binary + wellbeing lower than for boys, but no difference by socioeconomic status. Adverse life events experienced during the pandemic were also found to predict lower subjective wellbeing. ([Anders & Holt-White, 2026](#)). [Liverpool et al. \(2023\)](#) also found students showed lower wellbeing than pre-pandemic norms. A study by [Drew and Dunn \(2025\)](#) found a major impact on care leaver’s wellbeing with mental health identified as the primary post-lockdown support need. [Wiedemann et al \(2023\)](#) found that levels of psychological distress remained elevated 2.5 years after the initial COVID-19 outbreak. Levels of mental wellbeing, however, returned to pre-pandemic levels, suggesting that psychological distress and mental wellbeing may measure distinct constructs and should not be considered uncritically as being at different ends of a single mental health continuum.

Depression

[Finch & Ong \(2024\)](#) reported that post-pandemic, students’ levels of depression were relatively high, which negatively correlated with their coping resiliency and [Barfoot et al, 2026](#), [Catling \(2023\)](#) & [Liverpool et al \(2023\)](#) also reported that depression scores were worse in the post-pandemic era. [Catling & Sutton \(2023\)](#) reported significant gender differences in levels of depression in a university sample post COVID.





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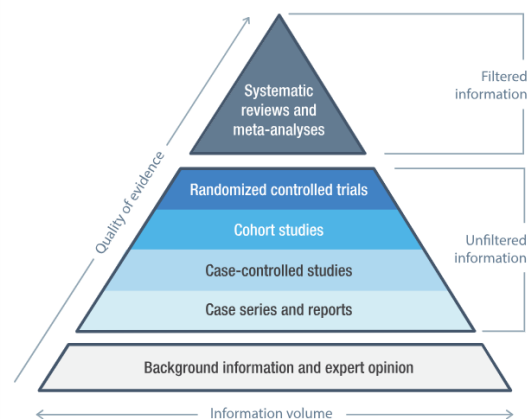
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Search results

Full-text access:

Abstracts are provided where available. To check if the full-text of an article is available, click on the links provided and log in with your NHS OpenAthens username and password, if prompted. You can register for an NHS OpenAthens username and password at: <https://openathens.nice.org.uk>. If there is no link, or the full-text is not available to you, please send the details of the article to library@somersetft.nhs.uk or and we will try and find it for you.

For your information, and to help you assess the quality of the research, here is a [hierarchy of the quality of evidence](#) that you may find useful:



REVIEWS

[1. Under increasing pressure in the wake of COVID-19: a systematic literature review of the factors affecting UK undergraduates with consideration of engagement, belonging, alienation and resilience](#)

Authors: Jones, Caroline Sarah and Bell, Huw

Publication Date: 2024

Journal: Perspectives: Policy & Practice in Higher Education 28(3), pp. 141–151

Abstract: This literature review systematically analyses publications and articles up to mid-2023 related to the COVID-19 pandemic in the field of HE, specifically identifying pressures that students are experiencing. The aim of the review was to identify insights into the tensions faced by students in HE following their experiences of educational interruptions due to COVID-19. Additionally, this review explored the literature relating to the personal, professional, academic and societal pressures experienced by HE students. Student engagement, sense of belonging, alienation and resilience in a post-pandemic context was also examined. Results suggest that the effects of COVID-19 have increased pressure on HE students in multifaceted and interconnecting ways. Post-pandemic, students' mental health and wellbeing is significantly reducing resilience. Issues facing the cohort of students currently at school will filter on into HE if not actioned. Therefore, Government and HEIs





need to address the macro, meso and micro after effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. To do this, further focussed research is needed into post-pandemic HEI support systems and practical pedagogical strategies. HEIs could examine the effects of stress and anxiety resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and could apply conceptual tools and educational theories to influence future strategies to increase students' resilience, engagement, sense of belonging and thus academic resilience.

INSTITUTIONAL PUBLICATIONS

2. Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey: Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, England, 2023/4

Authors: NatCen Social Research, University of Leicester and City St George

Publication Date: 2025

Item Type: Web Page

Abstract: The Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (APMS) series provides data on prevalence of psychiatric disorder in the English adult population. It is the 5th in a series and was conducted by NatCen Social Research, in collaboration with the University of Leicester and City St George's, UoL. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.24367.39840. The proportion of 16 to 24 year olds with a common mental health condition rose from 17.5% in 2007 to 25.8% in 2023/4. Younger adults were also more likely to report lifetime non-suicidal self-harm and to screen positive for disordered eating symptoms, PTSD and ADHD than older age groups

3. Altered courses : A qualitative exploration of the experience and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and cost-of living crisis on young people in the UK.

Publication Date: 2025

Authors: The Sutton Trust

Abstract: An updated look at the impact of the COVID pandemic and cost-of-living crisis on young people. The COVID Social Mobility and Opportunities study (COSMO) is a major national youth cohort study, looking at the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis on educational inequality, wellbeing and social mobility. In this report, we aim to deepen our understanding of the impact of these dual crises on this generation through in-depth interviews with 22 young people from the COSMO cohort in Winter 2023. Participants were interviewed between the ages of 18 and 19, a key transition point between childhood and adulthood. We find that:

- The young people interviewed often saw their current position as the result of their own life choices, based on their sense of intrinsic motivation, interests, and ambitions. However, many were often highly constrained by their circumstances, including their socio-economic background, their household context and environment, and additional challenges such as struggling with their mental or physical health.
- While many of their current circumstances were shaped to varying degrees by the COVID-19 pandemic and cost-of-living crisis, signs of longer-term economic vulnerability such as insecurity around parental earnings or limitations in resources available to them, appeared to be more important in determining outcomes than short-term financial shocks and pressures.
- Looking at the impact of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis on this group, some individuals were unable to follow their desired plans due to educational setbacks and poor grades resulting from a disrupted pandemic education. Others felt they had to go straight into a career to avoid the costs of university.





- The group discussed many effects of the COVID-19 pandemic that have received less attention in previous research. This included young people's sense of frustration and loss around missing out on key anticipated milestones such as proms and their yearbook, the challenges of managing friendships as these moved online, and the social disconnection experienced when returning to school.

4. Expert Report for the UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry. Module 8. Children and Young People : The impact of the pandemic on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people

Authors: Associate Professor Tamsin Newlove-Delgado and Professor Cathy Creaswell

Publication Date: 2025

Abstract: This report presents an overview of the evidence relating to the mental health of children and young people in the UK before, during and following the Covid-19 pandemic. Overall, the balance of evidence suggests that the pandemic had a detrimental impact on the mental health of children and young people at population level. In our view, this negative impact is due in large part to the disruption on a population level of many protective factors, such as in-person connection, learning, play and socialising, and to a greater exposure to risk factors, such as unstable home environments, parental stress, isolation, and financial strain, as well as reduced opportunities to identify and address emerging problems early through support in home, school, community or service settings. However, we stress that the effect of the pandemic was not uniform. Some children and young people experienced more severe impacts, whereas others reported improved mental health and wellbeing. There is also evidence to suggest that certain groups with shared characteristics were differentially impacted, thus widening inequalities. We note that there may also have been particular challenges for younger children in terms of stresses on parents, and impacts on their development, and for young people making the transition to adult life. We conclude the report by providing recommendations to prevent and mitigate the impact of a future pandemic on children and young people's mental health.

We have focussed on children and young people aged between 2 and 18 years, **although we also consider young adults aged 18 to 25, especially where they may be in higher risk groups, for example, those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities**. For information on the developmental impacts on children under the age of five please see the expert report on Child Development (INQ000587957).

5. Student Mental Health in England : statistics, policy and guidance

Item Type: Report

Authors: House of Commons Library

Publication Date: 2025

Abstract: The covid-19 pandemic had a detrimental impact on student mental health. This impact was particularly severe during the pandemic lockdowns and periods when restrictions were in place.²³ It has also had a lasting effect, as new students have struggled to transition and adapt to higher education following significant disruption to their lives. In November 2022, Nightline, which coordinates student-run listening and information services, reported it had recorded a 51.4% increase in calls in 2020–21. Early data indicated numbers for 2021–22 were 30% higher, suggesting the pandemic was still influencing student mental health.





6. UNDERSTANDING DRIVERS OF RECENT TRENDS IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH – Technical Report

Authors: Youth Futures Foundation

Publication Date: 2025

Abstract: During the pandemic, there were widespread concerns about the impacts on young people and their mental health. Interpretations of what these impacts might be fall within three groups. First, it could be conceived that changes during the pandemic represent a normal and healthy negative response to a stressful event, rather than genuine mental health difficulties. For example, it is natural for people to worry during a crisis, and this does not necessarily reflect changes in mental health. Second, it could be that mental health was affected with impacts on a range of mental health symptoms, but this may only be temporary and subsided along with returns to 'usual' routines. Lastly, the pandemic may have resulted in a structural shift to young people's mental health, with potential reverberations for youth mental health beyond pandemic disruptions. We attend to various perspectives in reviewing various mechanisms, noting where such perspectives have been delineated in relation to specific processes. The report presents robust evidence that young people's mental health has undergone a *structural shift*, driven by long-term socioeconomic, technological, and environmental changes, and not just a temporary reaction to COVID-19. Because the report synthesises multiple factors and analyses trends broadly rather than attributing change to a single event, it is not possible within its findings to separate any structural impact of COVID-19 from wider, ongoing influences

7. Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2023 - wave 4 follow up to the 2017 survey

Author: NHS Digital

Publication Date: 2023

Abstract:

The Mental Health of Children and Young People survey series provides England's best source of data on trends in child mental health. This follow-up survey looks into the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on children's mental health.

This report presents findings from the fourth (wave 4) in a series of follow up reports to the 2017 Mental Health of Children and Young People (MHCYP) survey, conducted in 2023. 2,370 children and young people who took part in the MHCYP 2017 survey took part in the wave 4 follow up. The mental health of children and young people aged 8 to 25 years living in England in 2023 is examined, as well as their household circumstances, and their experiences of education and services and of life in their families and communities. Comparisons are made with 2017, 2020 (wave 1), 2021 (wave 2), and 2022 (wave 3) where possible, to monitor changes over time.

STUDIES

8. Young People's Subjective Wellbeing in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Evidence from a Representative Cohort Study in England

Authors: Anders, Jake and Holt-White, Erica

Publication Date: 2026

Journal: Social Indicators Research 181(2), pp. 1–74





Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic and the disruption it has caused had substantial short-term effects on young people. These effects have been found to be highly unequal, exacerbating existing inequalities in society, including those associated with socio-economic status, gender and ethnicity. But, just as importantly, it is believed that they continue to cast a long shadow over some young people's lives. In this paper we use data from the COVID Social Mobility & Opportunities study (COSMO) — a representative cohort study of over 13,000 young people in England aged 14–15 at pandemic onset whose education and post-16 transitions were acutely affected by the pandemic's disruption through their remaining education and subsequent transitions — to highlight inequalities in young people's subjective wellbeing and mental health in the wake of the pandemic. We document the substantial differences in subjective wellbeing — especially highlighting differences by gender — after adjusting for other demographic characteristics, self-reported levels of social support, and experience of adverse life events. We estimate how wellbeing differs by young people's own perceptions of the ongoing impact of the pandemic: those who indicate an ongoing negative impact in their lives have substantially lower subjective wellbeing scores. Finally, we find a link between adverse life experiences during the pandemic and lower post-pandemic wellbeing, but do not find evidence that this is mediated by demographic characteristics or social support.

9. Perceived loneliness, anxiety and depression symptomology before, during and after COVID-19 lockdowns in England

Authors: Barfoot, Katie L.; Child, Jessica; Dunn, Rachel and Colombage, Rebecca L.

Publication Date: 2026

Journal: Current Psychology 45(5), pp. 1–11

Abstract: This study investigated perceived loneliness, anxiety, and depression among young adults in the UK across five timepoints: pre-pandemic (December 2019), two coronavirus disease (COVID-19) lockdowns (March–June 2020, January–April 2021), and two post-lockdown phases (November–December 2021, May 2022). It aimed to assess mental health resilience, defined as a return to baseline levels post-lockdown, and identify critical timepoints where loneliness predicted mental health outcomes. A total of 158 participants (aged 18–82, predominantly under 25) completed online questionnaires measuring mental health (Patient Health Questionnaire-8 (PHQ-8); General Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7)) and loneliness (DeJong Gierveld Loneliness Scale) at two data collection points, under a cross-sectional design. Retrospective data were collected for pre-pandemic and lockdown periods, while prospective data were gathered post-lockdown. Linear mixed models and regression analyses were used to examine changes in mental health and loneliness over time and to identify predictive relationships. Loneliness and mental health significantly deteriorated during lockdowns, with depression and anxiety scores worsening from pre-pandemic levels. Partial recovery was observed post-lockdown, but scores remained above baseline. Loneliness emerged as a key predictor of mental health outcomes, particularly during post-lockdown phases. The immediate post-lockdown period was identified as a critical window for intervention. COVID-19 lockdowns were associated with heightened loneliness and mental health challenges, with sustained effects post-lockdown. Timely interventions targeting loneliness, especially after periods of social restriction, are essential to mitigate long-term mental health impacts and inform future responses to global crises.





10. Student well-being: the impact of belonging, COVID-19 pandemic related student stress, loneliness, and academic anxiety.

Authors: Dost, Gulsah

Publication Date: 2025

Journal: Frontiers in Psychology 16, pp. 1481328

Abstract: Introduction: This research investigates the relationship between collegiate community and degree department belonging, loneliness, COVID-19 pandemic related student stress, coping self-efficacy, and academic anxiety among UK collegiate context. The study focuses on how these factors have shaped students' academic and social experiences in the post-pandemic era, with particular emphasis on variations based on gender as well as home versus international status among both undergraduate and postgraduate cohorts. **Methods:** This study utilized structural equation modelling (SEM). A sample of 430 students was administered, with 284 (66%) completed by female students and 120 (28%) by male students. The number of undergraduate students was ($N=244$, 56.7%), and ($N=184$, 42.8%) participants were postgraduate students. **Results:** The research findings indicate that stress related to COVID-19 has adversely affected both types of belongingness- collegiate community and degree department belonging -while concurrently elevating academic anxiety across diverse demographic groups. Loneliness emerged as a significant mediating variable, with pronounced effects observed among international and male students. The presence of academic anxiety exacerbated feelings of loneliness and diminished coping self-efficacy, particularly in female and undergraduate cohorts. International students experienced notable disruptions in their sense of collegiate belonging and heightened levels of loneliness. Undergraduate students demonstrated greater susceptibility to stress-induced declines in belongingness, whereas postgraduate students reported more severe ramifications of loneliness on their academic and social relationships. **Discussion:** These results underscore the necessity for targeted interventions designed to foster social connectedness, alleviate academic anxiety, and bolster support systems within the post-pandemic educational framework.

11. What support do care leavers want after the COVID-19 pandemic? Key messages to services and their peers.

Item Type: Journal Article

Authors: Drew H. and Dunn, V.

Publication Date: 2025

Journal: Journal of Children's Services 20(1), pp. 10–26

Abstract: Abstract Purpose UK care leavers are among society's most vulnerable groups and were badly impacted by the COVID 19 pandemic. The Beyond Lockdown study explored the impact of the crisis on their daily functioning, relationships and mental health. The primary focus was the coproduction of key messages from care leavers: to services, to facilitate the provision of relevant, accessible post-lockdown support; and to their peers, to encourage positive post-lockdown readjustment. Design/methodology/approach 134 UK care leavers, aged 18-25, responded to an online survey, then 14 care leavers, recruited via local authorities in the South of England, participated in online Care Leaver Expert Working Groups (CLEWGs) to build on survey findings, draft messages and outputs, and disseminate findings at local and national events. The care-experienced Young Person's Advisory Group (YPAG) of a UK national charity for care leavers (Become) was involved throughout. Findings Survey results and CLEWG discussions showed major impacts on care leavers'





wellbeing, daily lives and connectedness. Mental health was identified as the primary post-lockdown support need. CLEWGs recommended peer support to help rebuild confidence and encourage help-seeking post lockdown. Participants called for social care professionals, especially personal advisors, to be proactive and to offer personalised, flexible, genuine support. The primary message to peers was to 'ask for help if you need it', but several barriers were identified.

12. Revisiting the Mental Health Impact of COVID-19 on Young Adults in the UK: Long-Term Trends, Temporary Setbacks, and Recovery

Authors: Henseke, Golo and Schoon, Ingrid

Publication Date: 2025

Journal: Social Indicators Research 180(1), pp. 91–112

Abstract: This study assesses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of 16- to 29-year-olds in the United Kingdom, using longitudinal data from the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS) and its predecessor, covering the period from 2001 to 2023. The study identifies the causal effects of the lockdown (April 2020–March 2021) and the post-lockdown period (April 2021–March 2022) by estimating counterfactual mental health trajectories based on long-term trends. Unlike prior research, it accounts for potential reporting bias introduced by the UKHLS COVID-19 study. Mental ill-health among young adults had been rising for nearly two decades before the pandemic. During the lockdown period, the average General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) psychological distress score increased by 9% of its standard deviation, while the prevalence of clinically relevant psychological distress rose by 4.5% points. This impact was temporary, with mental health levels returning to predicted trends by April 2021, suggesting no lasting 'scar' on average mental health. The recovery coincided with declining feelings of loneliness and increased life satisfaction. The study also identifies variations in the pandemic's mental health effects by gender, household income, age, and ethnicity. Women and young adults in the top third of the household income distribution experienced a more pronounced increase in psychological distress during lockdown. However, there is no evidence that the under-30 age group suffered, on average, more severe mental health effects than the rest of the adult population under 60 during the lockdown period. The findings challenge prevalent narratives by demonstrating the relative resilience of young adults in the face of the pandemic.

13. Self-harm incidence among children and young people 2019–2023: time series analysis of electronic health records in Greater Manchester, England

Author: Williams, Richard, Kapur, Nav, Darren, M. Ashcroft, Kontopantelis, Evangelos, Lovell, Karina, Garg, Shruti, Carolyn, Chew Graham, Louise, Jane Hussey, Mok, Pearl and Roger, Thomas Webb

Publication Date: 2025

Publication Details: BMJ Mental Health, 28, (1) BMJ Publishing Group.

Abstract: Background The mental health of children and adolescents has declined in recent years. Self-harm is frequently an expression of this psychological distress. Objectives To examine trends in self-harm incidence among 10–24-year olds between January 2019–December 2023. Methods We conducted time-series analyses of all incident episodes of self-harm among 10–24-year olds using the Greater Manchester Care Record. The observation period was split into four phases: pre-pandemic (1/2019–2/2020); pandemic phase 1 (3/2020–6/2021); pandemic phase 2 (7/2021–12/2022) and post-pandemic (1/2023–





12/2023). Rate ratios by sex, age, ethnicity and Indices of Multiple Deprivation were modelled using negative binomial regression. Findings Self-harm incidence rates decreased significantly in the post-pandemic phase, compared with the pre-pandemic period (male—incident rate ratios (IRR) 0.72; 95% CI 0.62 to 0.84, female IRR 0.85; 95% CI 0.74 to 0.99). In females, this followed increased rates, rising by 18% in pandemic phase 2 (IRR 1.18; 95% CI 1.04 to 1.34). In males, rates decreased throughout the study period. Incidence rates were lowest for 10–12 year olds. However, the greatest increase was observed in this age group, with rates in pandemic phase 2 being almost two times that seen pre-pandemic for females (IRR 1.91; 95% CI 1.47 to 2.48). The change in rates among females was also most marked in the least deprived neighbourhoods, rising by more than 50% (IRR 1.54; 95% CI 1.21 to 1.95) in pandemic phase 2. Conclusions Our results indicate a decrease in self-harm incidence during 2023. Analysis by age group showed the greatest increase in rates in 10–12-year olds. Further research is needed to confirm these findings and to identify the mechanisms driving these trends.

14. Exploring coping resiliency and depression among university students in a post-pandemic context

Authors: Finch, Bethany and Ong, Elsie

Publication Date: 2024

Journal: Advances in Mental Health

Abstract: Objectives Emerging research investigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has indicated mental health issues are particularly prominent among university student populations. Method The current research explored how a small sample of students in the UK had been impacted by the pandemic, focusing on coping resiliency and depression. In this study, 80 university students completed two self-reported measures of depression and coping resilience. Results Showed students' levels of depression were relatively high, which negatively correlated with their coping resiliency. Students' perspectives were further explored via open-ended questions. Anxiety was a big issue, and many students' health had been impacted by the pandemic, which resulted in a change in their coping behaviours. Discussion The findings reflected areas of improvement concerning students' university transition experiences to facilitate students' psychological well-being and coping strategies, especially during such a crucial time of development into adulthood. (PsycInfo Database Record (c) 2025 APA, all rights reserved)

15. Mental health inequalities, challenges and support needs during COVID-19: a qualitative study of 14-to-25-year-olds in London

Author: Lee, Jasmine and Keri Ka-Yee Wong

Publication Date: 2024

Publication Details: BMJ Open, 14, (4) BMJ Publishing Group.

Abstract: Objectives The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on adolescent's mental health and relationships has received growing attention, yet the challenges and support needs of adolescents living in existing deprivation are not well understood. The current qualitative study, part of a broader project cocreating mental health and life-skill workshops with young people, documents adolescents' lived experience and support needs 4 years on from the COVID-19 pandemic. Design 20 semi-structured interviews and 6 focus groups were transcribed and thematically analysed in NVivo V.12 to inform codesigned workshops to support adolescents' needs. Setting Islington borough in North London, United Kingdom.





Participants 20 adolescents aged 14–25 years (mean=18.3; 60% female, 60% white) from Islington with a history of difficulties (eg, mental health, deprivation, court order) were referred by Islington local authority teams to our study. Results Thematic analyses revealed eight themes on adolescents' COVID-19 experiences and five associated suggestions on 'support needs': health challenges and support; relationships and support; routines and support; educational challenges and learning support; inequality and support; distrust; loss of opportunities and grief. Conclusions In our qualitative study, adolescents spoke of positive reflections, challenges, and need for support 4 years on from the COVID-19 pandemic. Many adolescents shared their lived experiences for the first time with someone else and wished they would have the space and time to acknowledge this period of loss. Adolescents living with existing inequality and deprivation before the pandemic have reported sustained and exacerbated impacts during the pandemic, hence coproduced support for adolescents should be a priority.

16. The Long-Term Impact of Covid-19 on Student Mental Health

Authors: Catling, Jon

Publication Date: 2023

Abstract: Introduction: The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting restrictions placed upon society have had a profound impact on both physical and mental health, particularly for young people. The current study assesses student mental health pre, within and post COVID. Method: Eight hundred and fourteen first year undergraduate students completed a battery of self-report questionnaires to assess for depression, mobile phone use, self-esteem, resilience and social support with data being collected over a three-year period. The data from each year was compared (216, 218 and 380 students respectively). Findings: Statistical analysis revealed that COVID-19 had a significant impact on self-reported levels of depression, smartphone use, self-esteem, resilience and social support. Multiple regression analysis revealed that smart phone use and resilience were significant predictors of levels of depression. Discussion and Conclusion: Overall, we found far higher-than-expected mental health problems within the student cohort. These findings are discussed in relation to potential interventions. The findings suggest that COVID-19 has had a major impact upon student mental health, and that we have not yet seen a recovery within our new 'post-COVID' times. Take home message: The COVID-19 pandemic has had a long-term impact not only on student mental health and self-esteem, but importantly on levels of student resilience, making them vulnerable to the impact of any further stress invoking events.

17. Cohort Profile Update: The Neuroscience in Psychiatry Network (NSPN) 2400 cohort during the COVID-19 pandemic

Authors: Anna Wiedemann, Junaid Bhatti, Roxanne W Hook, Sharon AS Neufeld, NSPN Consortium, Raymond J Dolan, Peter Fonagy, Ian Goodyer, Edward T Bullmore, Samuel R Chamberlain and Peter B Jones

Publication Date: 2023

Journal: International Journal of Epidemiology, 2023, 52, e315–e323

Abstract: When COVID-19 first hit the UK in February 2020 and the government subsequently announced its first national lock down in March 2020, it was unclear how the psychological, social, educational and economic effects of stay-at-home orders would impact the mental health and wellbeing of young adults. At the time, cohort participants were still





young and remained at risk for the emergence of most major psychiatric disorders of adulthood. Building on the consent to be re-contacted, we launched the first NSPN COVID-19 follow-up in May 2020. The cohort offered an ideal opportunity to study the untoward impact of the pandemic on mental health and wellbeing. All participants completed measures of psychological distress and mental wellbeing at least once prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, hence allowing us to assess potential pandemic-related changes. In addition, the cohort was designed to be broadly representative of the general population. As the UK regained a post-pandemic equilibrium, we launched a second COVID-19 follow-up in July 2022 to assess the longer-term impact of the pandemic. In October 2022, we further invited a subset of 30 purposively sampled participants to take part in one-to-one interviews to acquire qualitative evidence of pandemic-related experiences on an individual level.

18. The impact of gender and ethnic background on physical and mental health in a post-pandemic student cohort in the UK

Author: CATLING, Jon and SUTTON, Emma

Publication Date: 2023

Publication Details: Journal of Health and Social Sciences, 8, (3) pp.219–229. Edizioni FS.

Abstract: Introduction: The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profoundly negative impact on the population's mental health, which was most severe on young people, particularly those students studying at university. This study examines the effects of gender, age, ethnic background, physical exercise, and smartphone use on the psychological well-being of UK students in a post-pandemic setting. Methods: A cross-sectional study design was utilized. The study was conducted online, with participants studying at a Higher Education Institution within the UK. The current study sampled seven hundred and ninety-eight undergraduate students. Data was gathered through a series of anonymous questionnaires administered online. Results: We found that gender significantly impacted mental health, levels of physical exercise, and mobile phone use. Further analysis demonstrated that age, amount of exercise, and mobile phone use were significant predictors of depression, and mobile phone use was a significant predictor of anxiety. Discussion and Conclusion: Overall, we found far higher-than-expected mental health problems within the student cohort. These findings are discussed concerning potential interventions.

19. Mental health and wellbeing of further and higher education students returning to face-to-face learning after Covid-19 restrictions

Authors: Liverpool, Shaun; Moinuddin, Mohammed; Aithal, Supriya; Owen, Michael; Bracegirdle, Katie; Caravotta, Meggie; Walker, Rachel; Murphy, Ciaran and Karkou, Vicky

Publication Date: 2023

Journal: PLoS ONE 18(1), pp. ArtID e0280689–18

Abstract: Aim: This study aimed to examine the mental health and wellbeing of further and higher education students and the associating factors after returning to face-to-face (in-person) learning after Covid-19 restrictions.

Methods: A cross-sectional study informed by student consultations was conducted using a survey design. Mental health and wellbeing were assessed using self-report items on the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21) and the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS). Descriptive statistics and stepwise multiple linear regression analyses were conducted on data collected between December 2021 and June 2022.





Results: N = 1160 students participated; 69.6% between 16 and 25 years, 67.9% studying in the UK, 66.5% studying away from home, 60.2% identified as she/her, 59.8% studying at the undergraduate degree level, 42.5% belonging to non-White ethnic backgrounds, 29.6% identifying as having additional needs and 22.8% as sexual minority. Moderate anxiety (M = 13.67, SD = 9.92) and depression (M = 17.04, SD = 11.56) scores were mainly reported. Wellbeing scores (M = 20.31, SD = 3.93) were lower than the estimate for the pre-pandemic general population. Gender expression, sexuality, age, ethnicity, having additional needs, and level and location of study was associated with mental health or wellbeing. Individual coping styles, levels of self-efficacy and physical activity were also associated with mental health or wellbeing.

Conclusions: Many students returning to further and higher education after Covid-19 restrictions experienced reduced mental health and wellbeing, and some students were at greater risk. Providing student-centred interventions focusing on self-efficacy, coping styles and physical activity may help improve the mental health and wellbeing of students.

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| Keywords/search strategy | Limits used |
|---|-------------|
| <p>Pandemic OR covid-19 OR covid* OR lockdown OR coronavirus</p> <p>Young adult* OR youth OR student* OR college student* OR university student* OR emerging adult* OR young people or 18-24 OR 18 to 24 OR (18 adj3 24)</p> <p>Impact* OR effect* OR affect* OR consequence* OR outcome* OR experience* OR influence OR risk OR relationship</p> <p>Confidence OR self-esteem OR anxiety OR anxious OR worry OR worries OR depression OR stress OR isolation OR social isolation OR lonely OR loneliness OR socialisation OR socialization OR social interaction OR social connect* OR social network OR connection* OR wellbeing OR interpersonal relations* OR mental health</p> <p>UK OR United Kingdom OR NHS OR national health service OR Wales OR Scotland OR Ireland OR England OR Great Britain OR British OR London</p> <p>Longitudinal OR long* term OR long*-term OR post-pandemic OR after* OF following OR follow up OR follow-up OR time series OR post-covid* OR cohort study OR cohort OR ongoing OR (after OR following OR post OR since) adj3 (pandemic OR covid* OR coronavirus)</p> | |

| Databases/sources used | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pubmed | <input type="checkbox"/> HMIC | <input type="checkbox"/> BMJ Best Practice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MEDLINE | <input type="checkbox"/> Social Policy & Practice | <input type="checkbox"/> UpToDate |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Emcare | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CINAHL | <input type="checkbox"/> Trip Pro |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Embase | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PscyINFO | <input type="checkbox"/> Cochrane Library |
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| Other (please list): | | |

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