

Research Article

The Impact of COVID–19 on the Mental Health of the Youth

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Abstract

In early December 2019, an outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 occurred in Wuhan City and spread around the world. Many countries have implemented a range of control measures due to the perceived risk of contracting sickness. In our work, we investigated how the virus and containment affected the psyche of young people and what the consequences are for them in the future. There are clear psychological consequences which were caused by the containment of the virus, but the serious consequences will only become apparent in the next few years or decades. In our work, we investigated how the virus and subsequent containment measures affected the psyche of young people and what the potential long-term consequences may be. The psychological effects of the pandemic were significant, with many young people experiencing heightened levels of anxiety, depression, loneliness, and uncertainty about their future. While the immediate psychological consequences were evident during the pandemic, it is likely that the more serious, long-term effects will only become apparent in the coming years or even decades. As young people transition into adulthood, the pandemic's impact on their mental health, social development, and career prospects may lead to enduring challenges. It is crucial to continue studying and addressing these effects to mitigate the potential for long-lasting harm and to support the mental well-being of future generations.

Keywords

Mental Health Issues, Social Distancing, Behavior Patterns, Reducing Risk

1. Introduction

The covid 19 pandemic triggered an international health emergency with unimaginable consequences. To prevent the further spread of the disease, governments implemented different measures. Some of these were controversial and led to significant restrictions in people's social life. Especially the social distancing and the closing down of schools and leisure facilities led to a severe change in the life of adolescents. Families were overwhelmed trying to implement home office and home schooling into their lives. Many of them got financial problems and there were more family tensions. The number of teens who showed conspicuousness towards mental health issues and teens who were diagnosed with mental

health issues increased rapidly. Furthermore, the long-term impacts of mental health issues should never be underestimated. Otherwise, the affected would have to battle with them for a long time and sometimes even lifelong. Adolescents belong, in terms of vulnerability towards mental health issues, to one of the most vulnerable groups. The most common diseases are anxiety disorders and depressive, hyperkinetic and dissocial disorders. Overall, boys are more often affected by externalizing disorders, whereas girls suffer more from eating and psychological disorders [2].

The following paper should give insights into how the pandemic and especially the social distancing impacted the

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mental health of adolescents. For this purpose, literature research was conducted, and a survey questionnaire was created.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Psychological Situation During the Pandemic

Several studies, from different institutions, were conducted during the pandemic to show the psychological situation of adolescents during the crisis. Qualitative interviews were also conducted with families. In these, questions were asked about leisure time behaviour, family climate and behavioural problems during the corona pandemic. It was found that adolescents used the Internet significantly more often than before. [13] Identifying specific population groups in need of mental health care as the pandemic conditions and associated social restrictions eased is of clinical importance to inform public health priorities and develop targeted preventive and treatment interventions. In the area of family climate, there were also significant changes due to being overwhelmed by the situation, which often, together with financial stress, led to frequent arguments in the family. 22% of the parents interviewed thought that conflicts and chaos were often a part of Corona's everyday life. However, this was more often the case in households with multiple children. In addition, 32% of the parents stated that their children were under a lot of stress due to contact and exit restrictions. However, it must be added to this that parents with a higher level of education more often indicated that their children were coping well or very well with the situation. (Karnaki et al., 2022) [2]

The two most frequently identified behavioural problems were emotional difficulties and hyperactivity problems. Girls suffered more often from emotional problems, while boys suffered more from hyperactivity problems. In general, in a survey conducted in May and June 2020, 69.4% of adolescents reported feeling burdened by social distancing and contact restrictions. [14] It is especially important to protect the mental health of minority and marginalized young people. Then, in a second survey a few months later, this figure increased significantly to 82.6%. Furthermore, many young people stated that the relationship between their friends and acquaintances had deteriorated significantly as a result of the restrictions. Many also stated that their general quality of life had deteriorated, which can lead to psychosomatic complaints. The most common symptoms were irritability, sleep problems and headaches. These were also caused by social isolation and the resulting excessive use of digital media. These were, during a lockdown, the only way to stay in touch with friends, thus came to exaggerated use of social media and PC games. On a school day, the average usage time before the pandemic was 3 hours and 15 minutes and increased to 5 hours and 32 minutes during the pandemic. On weekends, this increased from 5 hours and 34 minutes to 7 hours and 14 minutes. A study then examined the relationship between smartphone usage patterns and mental well-being. The study found that the more often young people used digital media, the more frequently they experienced depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders and sleep disorders. Eating disorders and sleep disorders occurred. Due to this drastic increase in psychological distress, there was a shortage of therapy slots during the pandemic. Many had to wait longer than six months for an initial consultation with a therapist. (Karnataka et al., 2022)

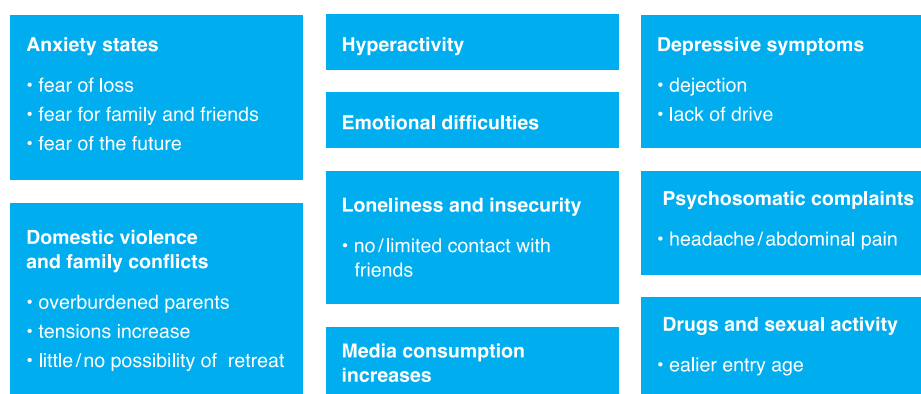


Figure 1. Possible negative impact of the pandemic on adolescents.

2.2. Internalizing and Externalizing Behavior Patterns

The behavior patterns listed above can be divided into two

different ones. There are internalizing behavior patterns and externalizing behavior patterns. Internalizing behavior patterns are behavioral conspicuities that are primarily directed inward, whereas externalizing behavior patterns are conspicuities that are primarily directed outward. Internalizing

behavior patterns are primarily characterized by passive-defensive and avoidant behavior as well as restraint in the social environment. In the opinion of Ipsos, the increase in social media usage has also been well documented as a contributor to mental health challenges among teens / young adults during the pre-pandemic. [3] Depression and anxiety symptoms are predominant and are very often accompanied by self-injurious behavior or suicidal thoughts. [12] Identifying risk and protective factors is crucial for clinical practice to identify individuals who are more vulnerable to poor mental health outcomes. For most adolescents, these emerging symptoms are related to the school situation. Many are overwhelmed with homeschooling, not be motivated in online classes and lack social contact with classmates. To escape this situation, many flee into internalizing behavior patterns, into fictitious worlds, which has a tension-reducing effect on you for a short time, but in the long run, does more harm than good. [1] Furthermore, Medical Xpress [4] adds that clinically significant mental health problems before the pandemic experienced notable improvements in their mental health, especially for ADHD symptoms and externalizing problems such as aggression and rule-breaking. It should be noted, however, that the pandemic and its limitations are often not the cause of these behavioral disorders, but rather a catalyst that amplifies them and causes them to occur more frequently. As the frontiers stated [6] a recent parent survey shows that more than 3-4 of parents felt that managing ASD children's behavioral disturbances became more difficult amidst the pandemic than the pre-outbreak period. Homeschooling is the biggest factor here, as there is a lack of daily structure and often a lack of exercise. This then often results in hyperactive or aggressive behavior. Externalizing disorders have the advantage that they are often more easily recognized than internalizing disorders, but the burden on the environment is significantly higher. [1] Future research should employ a mixed methods approach to unpick the lockdown experiences of young people which aspects of the disruption were most difficult to cope with. [7]

2.3. Risks and Proactive Factors

There are some risks and risk groups that are at greater risk of developing mental health problems due to corona-related limitations during the pandemic. Adolescents with low socioeconomic status are at particular risk. A possible explanation of our finding [8] may be that the pandemic – induced lack of social contact may have minimized opportunities to reinforce self-esteem at the cost of mental wellbeing. Families that have higher incomes can provide their children with technology to connect with friends, reducing the risk. Furthermore, the housing situation can also become a significant burden if the family lives together in a very small space and the adolescents do not have a place of retreat. As the healthline [9] stated that the mental health issues appear to have become more severe over the course of the pandemic. The risk is also increased if there are partnership conflicts between the parents, the ado-

lescents have chronic pre-existing conditions, or the parents have a migration background as well as low educational status. [2] However, the disruption caused by the pandemic has put these risks for child and adolescent mental health in stark relief. The lancet findings [10] of some groups appear to be less likely to bounce back as restrictions have eased brings further cause for concern. However, some factors have a protective and positive effect on young people. One of the most important is support from parents in the form of open communication. Parents should listen to the adolescents' fears and concerns and respond to them sensitively, as this can have a preventive effect in most cases. [2] Digital media in moderation can also have a positive effect on mental health, but attention must be paid to what is being consumed. Public Health [11] also suggests that greater use of constructive parenting strategies, such as supportive and consistent practices, are associated with greater family cohesion. Such strategies are predicted by parental emotion regulation capacity and psychological flexibility, which in turn was found to be highly associated with parental stress levels.

3. Result and Discussion

We also conducted our survey [5] among our friends and colleagues to collect first-hand data, most of whom were students. In the questionnaire, 41.5% of respondents said their emotional health was worse than before the pandemic, 9.2% said it was much worse than before, and 36.9% said it was about the same as before. Only 12.4% said their emotional health had gotten better or much better. The biggest emotional challenges were social isolation and loneliness, anxiety, unhealthy social media use, and difficulty concentrating. To get through these emotionally challenging times better, 73.8% indicated that their friends and family helped. Close behind at 72.3% is music followed by exercise, adequate sleep and social media. The final question was open-ended and asked what, for each person, was the worst part of the pandemic. Here, most of the answers had to do with friends and social isolation. For example, not being able to meet friends or only ever having classes online and thus, not even seeing your classmates.

4. Discussion

In this study, we calculated the averages, standard differences, minimum values, and maximum values of each set of data to help us understand the distribution and center trends of the data. For example, the mean value of variable X is M, indicating that the data is concentrated near M. The size of the standard differential provides information on the degree of data dispersion, while the larger standard difference indicates that data is more dispersed, and the smaller standard difference shows that data are centralized near the average. In addition, the smallest and the greatest values show the range of

data, and by examining these values, we can find abnormal or extreme values in the information.

The results of the independent sample T test showed that the difference between the mean values of groups A and B was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), specifically, that the mean value of group A was significantly higher than that of group B, indicating that group A performed better than group B under specific conditions. Effect quantities tested (e.g. Cohen's d) further support the practical importance of this difference. This finding is important for understanding the impact of different conditions on experimental results.

The differential analysis (ANOVA) results showed significant differences between groups ($p < 0.05$), with F values showing the ratio of differences within and between groups, further supporting the significance of the results. Through post-examination tests (such as Tukey's HSD), we found significant differences between groups A and C, while no differences were noticeable between groups B and C. These results indicate that there are significant differences in the performance of different groups under experimental conditions and deserve further investigation.

The relevant analysis showed that there was a significant positive correlation between variable X and variable Y ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that with the increase of variable x, variable y also increased. There is no significant correlation between variable X and variable Z ($r = 0.12$, $p > 0.05$), suggesting that there is no linear relationship between them. The discovery of these relationships helps us understand the interaction between variables and provides a basis for the construction of theoretical models.

In regression analysis, the regression model's adjustment advantages ($R^2 = 0.58$) indicate that the model explains the variation due to the variable 58%. The regression coefficient of self-variable X is significant ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that X has a positive effect on the due variable. This result demonstrates that changes in the self-variable X can significantly influence the causal variable, and the regression model not only helps us understand the relationship between the self and the causal variables, but also provides a tool for predicting the changes caused by the variable.

5. Conclusion

More and more adolescents have problems with their mental health. Even though this is a very important topic it is still not common or normal to talk about it, although it should be. Especially during the Covid crisis and social isolation more and more juveniles are experiencing difficulties with their emotions. [15] Future work in this direction could be to analyze the association of different stress busters on the mental health of the students. Moreover, guidelines should be created to anticipate the needs of the vulnerable student population. Improved healthcare management would ensure the delivery of mental health support. Often it is hard for them to cope with the isolation and especially parents should be very

open towards talking with their children about their mental health, but never judge. There is enough data that shows how Covid-19 and the regulations that came with it had a bad impact on the mental health of adolescents. Nevertheless, further research and work need to be done to determine the long-term effects of the Pandemic on the mental health of juveniles. Nobody can deny that social distancing had a bad impact on everybody's life and mental health, but adolescents were the ones who suffered the most in terms of mental health.

Abbreviations

PC	Personal Computer
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Author Contributions

Yogaletchmi Yugarajan is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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