

Impact of Covid-19 on Youth with Mental Health Conditions

“Cases of depression are growing in the wake of two years of the covid-19 pandemic and are likely to continue escalating amid growing economic strains and social stress. The burden of depression is also changing shape, as more young people are reporting symptoms of depression.” (Depression in Europe - The Economist Impact Group, 2022)¹

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, it was conservatively estimated that more than **14 million** young people aged 15-29 had a mental health issue in 2019.² Since the start of the pandemic, the number of young people with mental health disorders has more than doubled in European countries and worsened existing conditions and 49% of those were not having their needs met.³ An OECD report in 2023 states that mental health issues overall, are still 20% higher than 2019.

Isolation and loneliness contributed to increased levels of depression and anxiety, coupled with withdrawal from face-to-face services. Not being able to socialise with friends, play sports or go for a walk, constantly on-line to communicate and learn, ‘doom-scrolling’ and ‘fake news’, impacted on the development of social skills and relationships.

“an estimated 99% of children worldwide live in one of 186 countries that implemented COVID-19 restrictions, and 60% of children live in countries which imposed full (7%) or partial (53%) lockdown.” (Fore, 2020)

Mental health support for young people in an educational setting was and is incredibly disrupted due to the lockdowns alone.

¹ Janssen: Depression in Europe. Economist Impact

² European Council Mental Health: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/mental-health/>, October 2023

³ Ibid



Support services provided in educational settings were interrupted and progress made in addressing mental illnesses in youth, regressed in addition to service users being transferred from youth services to adult services.⁴ Furthermore, it was noted that when students returned to the classroom, there was a noticeable increase in substance abuse. [*Meath Partnership, 2023*].

Students were dependent on having access to the internet to learn (in addition to the availability of internet services in their area). This highlighted inequalities in terms of affordability resulting in learners falling behind, therefore increasing feelings of stress, anxiety and depression. Parents had to adapt the role of ‘teacher’ in addition to their employment, particularly where there was limited or no digital delivery of schooling. The shift from face-to-face learning also meant that indicators of mental health illnesses were unnoticed as they may present differently in a classroom setting than at home.

The impact was higher on those from the LGBTQ community due to lack of access to support services, especially in countries that still have discriminatory or homophobic practices and/or attitudes. (European Commission 2022). Young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds or of an ethnic minority, were disproportionately impacted, with an increase of approximately 11% increase in anxiety or depression.⁵

Educators themselves also reported increased levels of stress and anxiety from having to redevelop the curriculum to suit digital education to having to make up for

⁴ Supporting young people’s mental health through the COVID-19 crisis 12th May 2021
[OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

⁵ [OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

Supporting young people’s mental health through the COVID-19 crisis. 12 May 2021



lost time when schools reopened.⁶ Poor mental health increased significantly by 27–84% in 2020 and teachers had the highest prevalence of fear of infection and poor mental health.⁷

The impact of Covid-19 on young people, educators and parents, may not fully present itself for several years. As demand for services is increasing year on year all over the world, societies must adapt new approaches to addressing mental health issues in a way that is accessible for all regardless of social or economic background. Raising awareness is one of many steps that must be taken.

Additional Reading:

Kuhfeld, M., Soland, J., Tarasawa, B., Johnson, A., Ruzek, E., & Liu, J. (2020). Projecting the potential impacts of COVID-19 school closures on academic

⁶ Winter, E., Smith, S., & Szproch A. (2022). Bouncing back post COVID-19: Responding to needs arising from the closure of educational settings within the Irish primary and early years' education sector. *Irish Journal of Education*, 45(4), 1–24. www.erc.ie/ije

⁷ Nabe-Nielsen, K., Christensen, K.B., Fuglsang, N.V. *et al.* The effect of COVID-19 on schoolteachers' emotional reactions and mental health: longitudinal results from the CLASS study. *Int Arch Occup Environ Health* 95, 855–865 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00420-021-01806-8>





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Mental Health Awareness & Education
for Parents, Guardians, Educators
and School Administrators of Teenagers

www.youthmentalhealth.eu

achievement. Annenberg Institute at Brown University.
<https://www.edworkingpapers.com/sites/default/files/ai20-226-v2.pdf>

OECD: Mental Health <https://www.oecd.org/els/mental-health.htm>

Singh, S., Roy, D., Sinha, K., Parveen, S., Sharma, G., & Joshi, G. (2020). Impact of COVID-19 and lockdown on mental health of children and adolescents: A narrative review and recommendations.

Warne, N., & Sellers, R. (2019). Impact of child mental health problems is worse than 40 years ago. *The Conversation*.

Trotter, S. (2021). Ways of being together during the COVID-19 pandemic: Support bubbles and the legal construction of relationships. *Frontiers in Sociology*,

Tsolou, O., Babalis, T., & Tsoli, K. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on education: Social exclusion and dropping out of school. *Creative Education*



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