

Italy survey finds irritability, anxiety in locked-down kids

June 16 2020, by Nicole Winfield



Sandra Zampa, Health Ministry Undersecretary arrives for a press conference at the Italian Health Ministry to present the results of an investigation on the psychological and behavioral impact the coronavirus lockdown has had on children and adolescents in Italy, in Rome, Tuesday, June 16, 2020. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino)

A survey conducted in Italy on the psychological impact of coronavirus lockdowns on children has quantified what many parents observed during weeks cooped up at home: kids were more irritable, had trouble sleeping and for some of the youngest, wept inconsolably and regressed developmentally.

Those symptoms were more pronounced in families in which the parents were particularly stressed and in families with elderly relatives at high risk of becoming seriously ill with COVID-19, the [national survey](#) by the Giannina Gaslini Pediatric Hospital in Genoa in conjunction with the University of Genoa found.

Italy's Health Ministry on Tuesday released the results of the anonymous survey of 6,800 people who voluntarily responded to an online questionnaire March 24-April 3. The start date was two weeks into a 10-week lockdown in Italy, the first country in the West to be hit by the [coronavirus](#) pandemic.

The questionnaire on the Gaslini website asked a series of questions about how respondents and their families were experiencing the government-ordered lockdown. Gaslini didn't provide a margin of error, but hospital chief Dr. Paolo Petralia said the "surprising" national response indicated it was geographically representative. Of the 6,800

people who participated, 3,245 reported having [children](#) under age 18.

Among those with children under age 6, 65% reported their children suffered [behavior problems](#) and regression. The most [common problems](#) cited were increased irritability, sleep issues and separation anxiety. Some respondents also reported their children wept inconsolably, the researchers found.



In this May 4, 2020 file photo, a child rides a bicycle in a park which reopened after several weeks of closure, due coronavirus lockdown restrictions, in Milan, Italy. A national survey of the psychological impact of coronavirus lockdowns on Italian children presented in Rome on Tuesday, June 16, 2020, has quantified what many parents noticed offhand during weeks cooped up at home: Their kids were more irritable, had trouble sleeping and for some of the youngest, wept inconsolably and regressed developmentally. (AP Photo/Antonio Calanni, file)

Of respondents with children aged 6-18, 71% reported their children also displayed problems including anxiety and shortness of breath. Adolescents had particular trouble going to sleep and waking up, sleep disturbances that researchers termed a sort of "domestic jet lag."

"The degree of gravity of dysfunctional behavior in the children was correlated in a statistically significant way to the degree of malaise experienced by their parents" the researchers said.

Such malaise included increased anxiety, sleep problems and use of pharmaceuticals, and was more acute in families with children and elderly members, the researchers said.

Deputy Health Minister Sandra Zampa said it was clear from the results that the lockdown took a toll on children. Now that Italy is opening up again, they must be helped to recover a sense of stability and normalcy, she said.



In this May 4, 2020 file photo, a child looks at a sealed-off playground at Rome's Villa Pamphili park as the park reopened after several weeks of closure, part of nationwide limited easing of some coronavirus lockdown restrictions, in Rome. A national survey of the psychological impact of coronavirus lockdowns on Italian children presented in Rome on Tuesday, June 16, 2020, has quantified what many parents noticed offhand during weeks cooped up at home: Their kids were more irritable, had trouble sleeping and for some of the youngest, wept inconsolably and regressed developmentally. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino)



General Manager of the Gaslini children's hospital in Genoa, Paolo Petralia, left, listens to Sandra Zampa, Health Ministry Undersecretary, during a press conference at the Italian Health Ministry to present the results of an investigation on the psychological and behavioral impact the coronavirus lockdown has had on children and adolescents in Italy, in Rome, Tuesday, June 16, 2020. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino)



Sandra Zampa, Health Ministry Undersecretary, left, and psychiatrist Fabrizio Starace, sit at the start of a press conference at the Italian Health Ministry to present the results of an investigation on the psychological and behavioral impact the coronavirus lockdown has had on children and adolescents in Italy, in Rome, Tuesday, June 16, 2020. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino)



Sandra Zampa, Health Ministry Undersecretary, left, and psychiatrist Fabrizio Starace, arrive for a press conference at the Italian Health Ministry to present the results of an investigation on the psychological and behavioral impact the coronavirus lockdown has had on children and adolescents in Italy, in Rome, Tuesday, June 16, 2020. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino)

"Not being allowed to go to school or see their teachers and friends, not being allowed to run and play in the park with their friends certainly penalized them," Zampa said.

Children now must be helped to take the experience and emerge stronger, "knowing that you can fight and win even a difficult battle like the one we fought against the coronavirus," she said.

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