

# Lockdown stress not so bad after all, but vulnerable families hit harder

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Credit: Leiden University

During the 'intelligent lockdown' in the Netherlands this spring, the respondents in a Leiden study reported a mild increase in their stress levels. This extra stress could have a negative effect on families, particularly if parents already had psychological problems before the corona crisis.

Suddenly we were all at home. In March 2020 our homes abruptly became a workplace, educational institution, restaurant and relaxation space all rolled in one. With [family members](#) were cooped up together more or less 24/7, Leiden researchers wanted to find out how this

affected our wellbeing.

In their study, the researchers found that the general stress level did not rise appreciably during lockdown. There was even a slight decrease in problem behavior in children, which suggests that some children flourished in the situation. However, if you look at parents with a prior history of [psychological problems](#) such as anxiety and depression, you see a greater increase in the stress level in this group. This extra stress led to this group of parents reporting more psychological symptoms during the corona crisis. Or in the words of the researchers: stress has a mediating effect on psychological problems.

The researchers knew from previous research that [stress](#) is heritable. Parents who worry a lot can pass this on to their children, which leads to a decrease in the child's wellbeing. The children of parents with psychological problems are therefore at greater risk of their [family](#) situation deteriorating during lockdown, the psychologists conclude in the research, which has been published in PsyArXiv.

"We should bear this information in mind now we are once again facing restrictive measures in the fight against COVID-19," says Michelle Achterberg, a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Psychology and lead author of the article. "It was one big chaos in March, and closing the schools was a snap decision. But now the dust has settled, you can start to offer custom solutions. Another time, for example, you could choose to give children from problem families the opportunity to go to school, to give them some time away from the family setting. Children from more stable families are less affected by home schooling."

One hundred and six parents participated in the study together with their 151 [children](#) aged between 10 and 13. These respondents are taking part in a longitudinal study in which they are interviewed once a year and sometimes also undergo an MRI scan. The researchers look at such

matters as [brain development](#), family dynamics and heritability of behavior. Because of the exceptional situation, the test respondents were also given an extra questionnaire to complete to see how they responded to the corona crisis.

**More information:** Michelle Achterberg et al. Home lockdown: Bloom or Boom? Perceived stress as mediator for longitudinal effects of the COVID-19 lockdown on wellbeing of parents and children. [DOI: 10.31234/osf.io/pj3sg](#) [psyarxiv.com/pj3sg/](#)

Provided by Leiden University

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