

People experiencing worsening levels of stress, loneliness, and anger due to COVID-19 pandemic

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Preliminary results, relative to the UK, from the largest worldwide study into the mental and physical impact of COVID-19 reveal that about one

in three adults are experiencing worsening levels of stress, loneliness and anger during the pandemic.

Additionally, when asked about their altruistic behavior—aiding neighbors and others in need—nearly one fifth reported improvement, although more than half said their behavior had not changed in this area during the pandemic say experts from the University of Southampton, the lead UK institution for the global survey.

Researchers from more than 100 countries are involved in COH-FIT—"Collaborative Outcomes study on Health and Functioning during Infection Times"—which has collected so far data from more than 105,000 people around the world on their mental and physical wellbeing, access to care and [coping strategies](#), during and after the pandemic.

The project collects anonymous information on adults and, with parental consent, adolescents and children aged six years or older. In addition to asking about the participants' physical and mental health status, the survey also collects data on demographics, professional status and environmental factors. Internationally, COH-FIT is led by the Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra / Northwell in New York, Charité – Universitätsmedizin in Berlin and the University of Padua in Italy.

Samuele Cortese, Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the University of Southampton and Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist with Solent NHS Trust, who is leading the UK section of the survey, and his colleagues across the UK have collected results from just over 2,000 respondents but are appealing for more to take part.

"The approach we are taking will help us learn more about the risk to people's mental and physical health as a result of the pandemic, as well as possible protective factors," said Professor Cortese, a specialist in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. "It's very important that we encourage

as many people as possible to take part in the survey as the results will inform health policies in the UK and internationally after the pandemic is over, including what actions could be taken to help those most affected should other pandemics arise. In terms of participants in the survey, the UK is currently behind a number of countries, such as Italy, with more than 10,000 respondents, and Germany, with more than 8,000, so we need more people to go online and complete the survey to ensure that the country is well-represented and contributing in much larger numbers."

To date, most of the UK respondents are aged between 29-51, although the survey is open to anyone over the age of 6 or more. Overall, more women (75%) have participated in the UK so far.

Regarding the specific data available so far results in the UK section of the survey, one-third of the respondents reported worsening in their own stress levels, while about one in seven reported improvement before the corona crisis and the last two weeks. Some 40% of women reported more stress worsening than men. Whilst there are no large differences in stress worsening (or improvement) between young and middle-aged adults, about 25% of elderly respondents also reported worsening in stress.

To counter this, the most effective coping strategies reported were direct personal contact or interactions, exercise or walking internet use, meaningful hobbies and media use. Around one-third said they found that keeping informed about COVID-10 through social media and remote social interactions served as good coping mechanisms with studying or learning something new, working on-site or from home, spending time with a pet and physical intimacy or sexual activity also proved successful.

In terms of loneliness, one-third reported worsening with women

reported more loneliness worsening than men with around 50% of young adults reporting worsening in loneliness. Older adults reported a slightly higher worsening compared to middle-aged adults.

For anger, almost one third of women reported worsening and were, once again, higher than men in this area. Worsening in anger was much higher in [young adults](#) and somewhat higher in middle-aged adults compared to the elderly.

COH-FIT respondents have also been asked about their satisfaction with the government. In the UK, around one in six (17%) were satisfied with government policy with the vast majority—nearly 70% - saying they were neither happy or unhappy. There were no differences between gender or age groups in answering this question but there was a significant decrease in satisfaction starting at age 30.

A high proportion (80%) of respondents reported an increase in spending hours with the media. Women had a slightly higher proportion of increasing hours of media use compared to men with young and middle-aged adults experiencing a higher proportion of increased hours with media compared to older adults.

The findings will be presented nationally and internationally to the scientific community, with the aim of helping to develop targeted interventions for persons at particularly high risk.

More information: Those interested in participating can access the anonymous survey at www.coh-fit.com.

Provided by University of Southampton

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