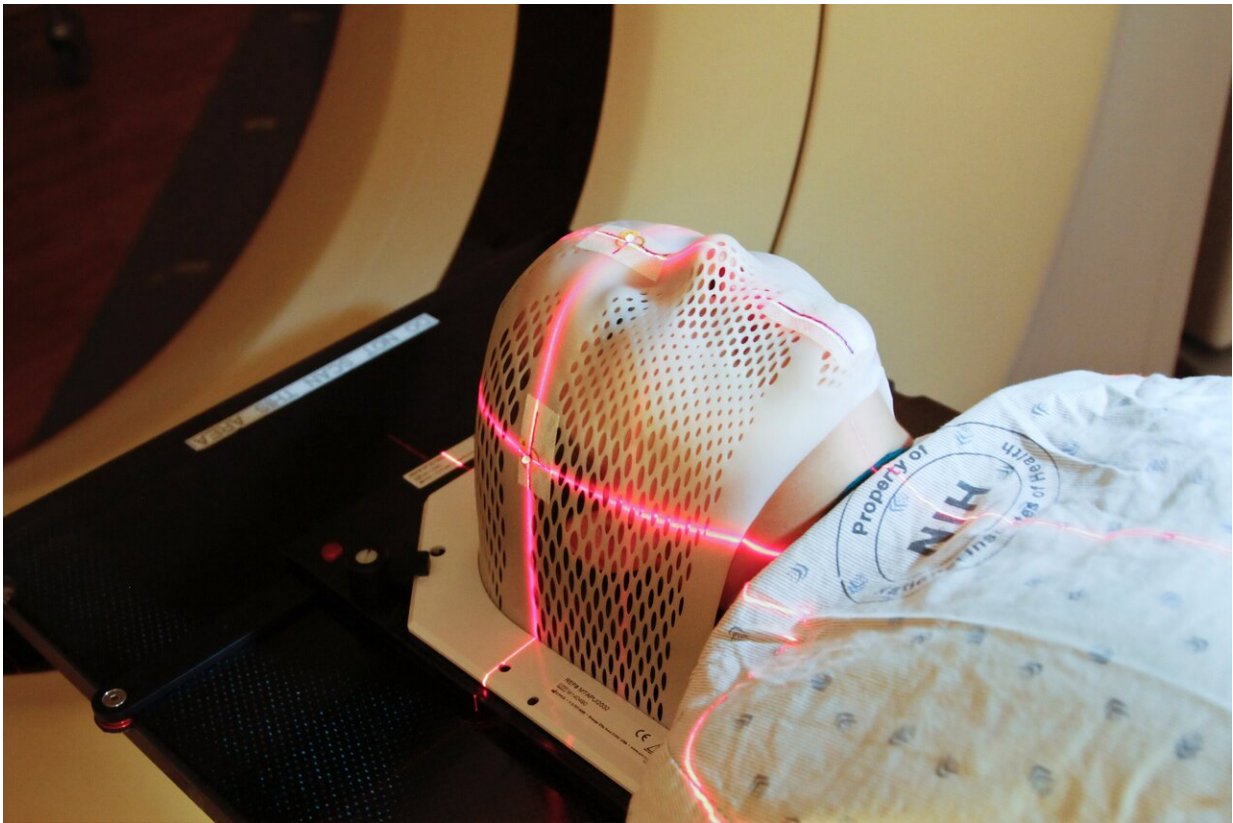


Younger MS patients feel worst effect of pandemic-related mental health

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Younger people, those with existing psychological symptoms, and those with a progressive diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis have experienced clear negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic affecting their mental

health, new research shows.

In a paper published in *Neurology and Therapy* today, researchers from the University of Reading have surveyed 324 Multiple Sclerosis (MS) patients from around the world about their mental well-being and experiences of psychological support. Among the questions, participants were asked about how the [pandemic](#) caused by COVID-19 has impacted on their life.

The findings show that [younger people](#), those with existing psychological symptoms and those with progressive MS have been worst affected. Among the participants who said that their experience was negative, the vast majority said that the primary impact was on their mental health with worry and concern about health and treatment or care interruption being commonly cited.

Dr. Aileen Ho, Associate Professor in Psychology at the University of Reading said: "This paper gives us a much richer understanding of the wellbeing experience of MS patients. Knowledge of which people are most vulnerable to a negative impact of COVID-19 and understanding the factors that contribute to the COVID-19 experience amongst chronically ill populations can help direct support to those who need it most."

"More than 100,000 (190 per 100k) people live with MS in England, and [mental health issues](#) are much more prevalent in people with neurodegenerative disease, so it is really important to understand whether there are different experiences that MS patients have in terms of mental health, and how we can better support them."

Among participants, there were two main responses to the impact of the pandemic, those who reported experiencing a negative impact (36%), primarily due to worsening mental health type concerns, and another

group that reported a neutral impact (48%).

Interestingly, a third minority group reported a positive impact (16%). While mental health related concerns were reported by all groups, what distinguished those in the neutral and positive groups from the negative impact group was the use of helpful coping strategies that centered around making the most of the situation and also actively taking control where possible—for example building supportive social connections.

Hannah Morris-Bankole, a Ph.D. researcher at the University of Reading who was involved in the research said: "Contrary to expectations, certain factors such as previous antidepressant medication use, time since disease diagnosis, gender, location, living arrangements or employment status was not linked to impact of COVID-19.

"From discussions with patients and advocacy groups, we are seeing that for many MS patients the pandemic had somewhat neutral impact as their experiences of the ongoing challenges about MS has helped to develop coping strategies that have been used during the pandemic."

The study is part of ongoing research to understand how to better support neurological patients who are at increased risk of worsening mental health. A greater understanding of the [mental health](#) challenges facing neurological patients will help policy makers on best treatments and support.

David Martin, chief executive officer of the MS Trust said: "At the MS Trust, we recognize the impact that COVID-19 has had on people with MS. This research paints a nuanced picture of the many ways that the pandemic has impacted the MS community, and draws particular attention to the role of positive coping strategies in helping foster resilience. As we support MS services to rebuild this year, these findings will help [health](#) professionals direct attention to those that need it most. "

More information: Hannah Morris-Bankole et al. The COVID-19 Pandemic Experience in Multiple Sclerosis: The Good, the Bad and the Neutral, *Neurology and Therapy* (2021). [DOI: 10.1007/s40120-021-00241-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s40120-021-00241-8)

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