

A third of teens, young adults reported worsening mental health during pandemic

July 12 2021



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

As typical social and academic interaction screeched to a halt last year, many young people began experiencing declines in mental health, a

problem that appeared to be worse for those whose connections to family and friends weren't as tight, a new study has found.

In June 2020, researchers invited participants in an ongoing study of teenage boys and young men in urban and Appalachian Ohio to complete a survey examining changes to mood, anxiety, closeness to family and friends, and other ways the [pandemic](#) affected their lives. The study, co-led by researchers at The Ohio State University and Kenyon College, appears in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

Nearly a third of the 571 participants reported that their mood had worsened or their anxiety had increased between March 2020 and June 2020. The study found that worsening mood and increased anxiety during the pandemic were more likely in those with higher socioeconomic status, those who felt decreasing closeness to friends and family and those who were older. Self-reported increases in anxiety were more common among those with a history of depression and/or anxiety.

One example of feedback from a participant: "A return to a much more introverted, anxious and sedentary lifestyle, after recently making attempts to become more social, outgoing and level-headed."

The research team said the study shines light on those who could be most vulnerable to mental health struggles during a pandemic, and potentially during other situations in which they find themselves isolated from their typical social interaction.

"Though serious cases of COVID-19 have been rare among young people, the pandemic appears to have taken another toll on them," said study senior author Amy Ferketich, a professor of epidemiology at Ohio State.

Eleanor Tetreault, the study's lead author and a recent graduate of

Kenyon College, said the existing relationships formed within the ongoing Buckeye Teen Health Study provided an opportunity to quickly assess any perceived changes in mood or anxiety at the onset of the pandemic.

Though the findings about worsening mental [health](#) are concerning, Tetreault said there were some surprising positive themes that emerged as she and fellow researchers dived into the respondents' answers to open-ended survey questions.

"The group that had really positive experiences talked about the opportunity for self-exploration, having more time to sit and think or get more connected to their family—at this age, most people are just going, going, going all the time and all the sudden they had this period of time where they could slow down," said Tetreault, who completed a Pelotonia Summer Research Internship at Ohio State's Comprehensive Cancer Center in 2020.

Though the researchers can't be sure what contributed to the worsening mood and anxiety among some respondents, they do have theories.

Being cooped up with parents who were struggling to work from home and manage the stress of the pandemic could be distressing to young people, Ferketich said, adding that those whose home lives weren't stable to begin with would be hardest hit. Participants from higher socioeconomic groups may have been more likely to have parents who were able to work from home and were more likely to report worsening [mental health](#) in the first months of the pandemic.

And though the break from the usual routine "might have been kind of nice at first, it did seem that for some people that changed over time, leading them more toward [social isolation](#), [anxiety](#) and depression," Tetreault said.

Though pandemics are rare, the findings from the study don't apply just to a global crisis, she said.

"I think this could apply to any kind of really big change or change in routine for an adolescent or group of adolescents. It highlights the importance of finding ways to maintain social connection, and to help [young people](#) maintain those connections when normal social interactions are disrupted."

More information: Eleanor Tetreault et al, Perceived Changes in Mood and Anxiety Among Male Youth During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Findings From a Mixed-Methods Study, *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2021.05.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2021.05.004)

Provided by The Ohio State University

Citation: A third of teens, young adults reported worsening mental health during pandemic (2021, July 12) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-07-teens-young-adults-worsening-mental.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--