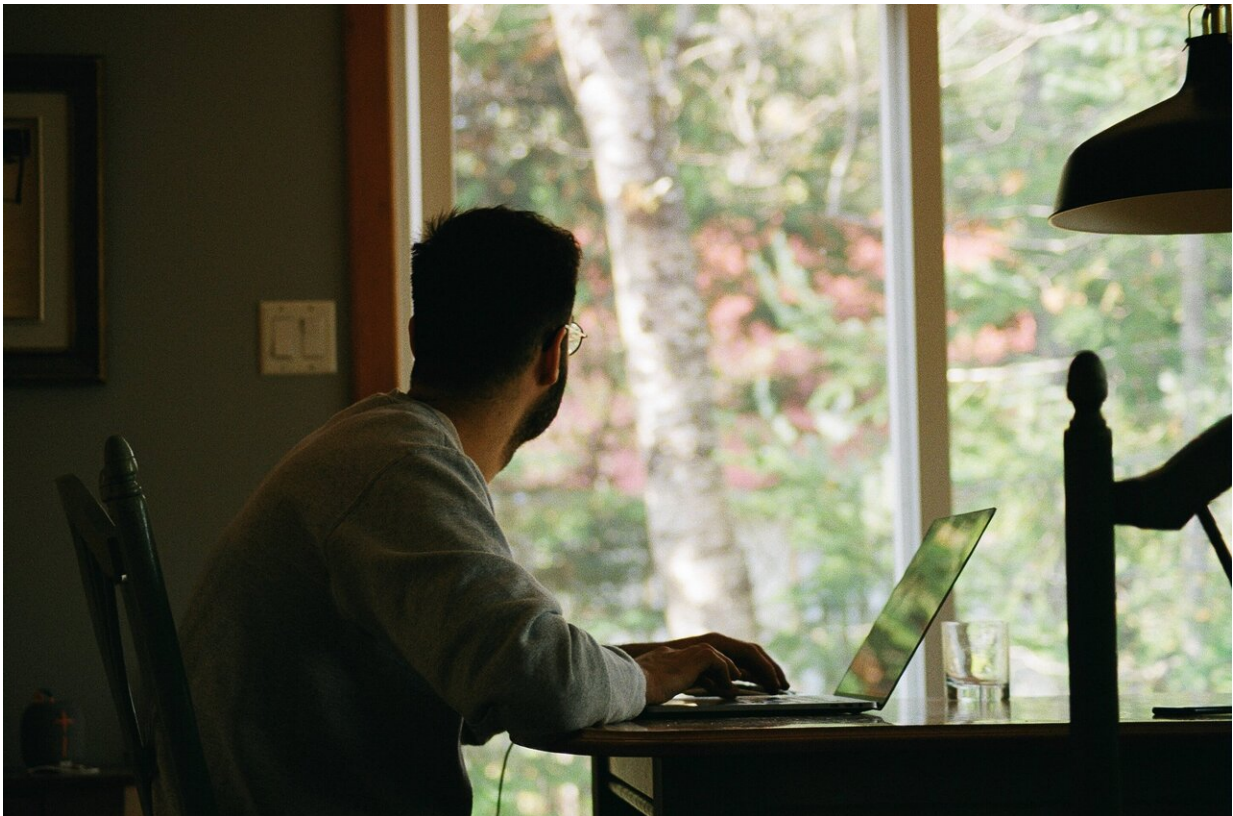# Mental health patients leaving hospital in first lockdown felt lonely and isolated

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Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Mental health patients who were discharged from or admitted to acute mental health services during the first Covid-19 lockdown experienced loneliness and social isolation, according to a new study.

Published in the journal *British Journal of Psychiatry* Open the 34 patients, carers and clinical staff were interviewed by a team of researchers from The University of Manchester.

The study was funded by the National Institute for Health Research Greater Manchester Patient Safety Translational Research Centre (NIHR GMPSTRC).

NIHR GMPSTRC is a partnership between The University of Manchester and Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust.

Mental health service users also reported 'working harder' to avoid admission due to fears around environmental safety as a result of COVID-19.

"Even before the pandemic, there are lots of safety concerns associated with recent discharge from inpatient mental health services, for example suicide and self-harm," said lead author Dr Natasha Tyler, researcher at the GM PSTRC and The University of Manchester.

Dr Tyler added that their "patients and carers felt that because of the national need to free-up hospital beds, the quality of discharge and admission planning was compromised at times."

"That meant discharging patients from hospitals who were not ready to cope in the community or not admitting patients who needed in-patient care."

"The closure of most community support services meant patients had minimal opportunities for accessing care via alternative routes. This worsened their feelings of helplessness and loneliness."

However, co-author Dr Maria Panagioti, from The University of

Manchester and NIHR GM PSTRC said there were some positive outcomes during the first lockdown:

Dr Panagioti said that "despite some distressing findings, there were rapid changes in acute care, some of which resolved long-standing problems about patient safety."

"Virtual meetings, for example, enabled interdisciplinary teams and agencies to jointly discuss patient discharge which was often considered unrealistic prior to the pandemic."

"They also improved patients' attendance by eliminating barriers such as traveling complications and social phobias."

Co-author Andrew Grundy who has also used mental health services said that "having personally lived through transitions from inpatient to community services myself, I know how worrying and how stressful this time can be, and COVID-19 has only added to these pressures."

"Our study sheds further light on service users' own 'safety concerns' around rapid discharge, difficulties in accessing community services post-discharge, and feelings of loneliness and social isolation post-discharge, which they have experienced as a direct result of the first national lockdown."

More information: Natasha Tyler et al, Effects of the first COVID-19 lockdown on quality and safety in mental healthcare transitions in England, *BJPsych Open* (2021). DOI: 10.1192/bjo.2021.996

Provided by University of Manchester

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