

Having kids at home may reduce pandemic depression

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Kids have struggled throughout the pandemic—from attending school by Zoom video conferencing to quarantining from family and friends—but surprisingly, having children at home may help adults feel less

distressed.

According to a new University of Michigan study, [adults](#) in [households](#) with children have fewer mental health problems than other adults living without kids. Child care—beyond the effect of larger household size—may actually reduce depression during [pandemic](#) social isolation, the findings show.

"In other words, parents/caregivers may be struggling, but not more so than everyone else," said study lead author Shawna Lee, associate professor at the U-M School of Social Work and director of the Parenting in Context Research Lab.

Lee and colleagues say they believe it's possible that caring for children may provide increased social connections or an increased sense of purpose, both of which may contribute to improved mental health. These questions, while not specifically addressed in the current study, may need to be explored in future research.

The study, published in the current issue of the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, used data from mid-2020 that included answers to health questions about the respondents' [anxiety](#) and depression. Adults aged 18-64 were included in the sample of nearly 600,000 respondents.

During the 12-week study, about 35% of the respondents reported having anxiety, while 24% felt depressed. These rates were much higher than pre-pandemic levels. While women were more likely to feel anxious than men, the household-with-[children](#) status had no effect on anxiety.

Male caregivers may be vulnerable to pandemic worries, such as employment loss, which health care professionals should monitor, the researchers say. The study also found that adults who are not married and have low household income are more at-risk for anxiety and

[depression.](#)

The study's co-authors were Kaitlin Ward, U-M social work doctoral student; Andrew Grogan-Kaylor, the Sandra K. Danziger Collegiate Professor of Social Work; and Vijay Singh, assistant professor of emergency medicine, family medicine and internal medicine.

More information: Shawna J. Lee et al, Anxiety and Depression During COVID-19: Are Adults in Households with Children Faring Worse?, *Journal of General Internal Medicine* (2022). [DOI: 10.1007/s11606-021-07256-9](#)

Provided by University of Michigan

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