

# Study reveals lockdown impact on youngsters' mental health

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Young people were the hardest hit as the second COVID-19 lockdown took its toll on the mental health and wellbeing of the Welsh population, new research has revealed.

The study—the first to compare experiences during the first and second lockdowns of the pandemic—discovered levels of wellbeing dropped significantly between the two periods with those aged between 16 and 24 and people living in deprived areas the most affected.

The Wales Wellbeing research group—a collaboration between Swansea University, Cardiff University, and the NHS in Wales—was set up to monitor just what issues most affected the population. It has carried out a series of surveys throughout the coronavirus crisis, asking the Welsh public how they have been coping.

Headed by Professor Nicola Gray, of Swansea University's School of Psychology and Professor Robert Snowden, from Cardiff University, it has now revealed:

- Clinically significant levels of psychological distress in 40.4 percent of participants in the second [survey](#), a 9.8 percent increase from the first survey;
- Poorer [mental health](#) in women, younger adults, and those from deprived areas; and,
- The greatest reduction in mental health in the youngest age group (16–24 years old).

Its latest findings, based on surveys carried out by between June and July 2020 and January to March 2021, have just been published in online journal *Advances in Mental Health*.

The researchers examined the responses of 12,989 participants to the Wave 1 survey and 10,428 participants to the Wave 2 survey.

Their answers showed levels of wellbeing were lower in the second survey compared to the first, which were already low compared to pre-pandemic data from 2019.

Professor Gray said: "Of most note is that the decrease in mental health is greatest in younger people, exaggerating the existing imbalance in mental health for these younger people. Thus, 66.3 percent of the youngest group sampled were reporting moderate to severe psychological distress compared to 16.7 percent of those 75 and older.

"These results suggest that the presence of a second period of lockdown may be responsible for the present findings of a decline in mental health."

She said the data shows [young people](#)'s mental health is especially vulnerable to lockdown restrictions: "There are many potential reasons. We know peer relationships play an especially important role in protecting adolescents against anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.

"So, any restrictions that limit peer contact are likely to be especially detrimental to younger people. Younger age groups also have lower resilience compared to older people and they have less financial and employment security."

Professor Bob Snowden added: "While there needs to be more research to understand the causal elements, our finding that younger individuals continue to be more adversely impacted by the pandemic must be considered by those responsible for planning wellbeing support for communities during the pandemic and beyond."

The team now hopes its findings will reinforce the need to consider wellbeing as we gradually move on from COVID-19.

Professor Gray said: "The virus has caused a global crisis with unprecedented impact. Continual monitoring of population wellbeing and psychological distress levels, alongside investigations into the causes of decreased mental wellbeing, is vital.

"Post-pandemic recovery programs must address the increase in mental [health](#) and [wellbeing](#) difficulties in young people, individuals from deprived areas, and women."

**More information:** James R. P. Knowles et al, Mental wellbeing and psychological distress in the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic: a comparison across time, *Advances in Mental Health* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/18387357.2022.2039072](#)

Provided by Swansea University

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