

Impact of first lockdown on depression and anxiety diagnoses

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The first COVID-19 lockdown in the UK, which began two years ago

today on 23 March 2020, had a profound effect in increasing the prevalence of anxiety and depression among the general population, according to a new study.

A detailed systematic review, conducted by psychologists at the University of Bath and published in the *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, suggests that [depression](#) and [anxiety levels](#) in the UK jumped markedly as a consequence of restrictions and isolation.

Whereas prevalence for diagnosed depression pre-pandemic was around 4% of the population, this rose to 32% following lockdown (a jump of nearly 28%). Diagnosed cases of anxiety, which pre-pandemic were around 5%, increased to 31% (a jump of over 26%).

According to the NHS, psychological symptoms of depression include continuous low mood or sadness, feeling hopeless and helpless and having low self-esteem. Diagnosis for anxiety typically includes worrying significantly about [daily life](#), work and [social life](#) and finding worries overly stressful, upsetting, and uncontrollable.

The research team, who reviewed data from 14 separate studies involving 46,158 participants, say that heightened levels of depression and anxiety have manifested with people increasingly struggling to think clearly or to sleep.

They say some of the possible causes correlate to increased [social isolation](#), uncertainty about the state of the world, and being under a constant perceived threat of illness or death. And, whilst the COVID lockdown two years ago may seem just a memory now, the team argue that future potential lockdowns could lead to a long-standing problem which urgently needs to be addressed.

In response, the researchers from the Addiction & Mental Health Group

(AIM) at the University of Bath are calling for greater evidence-based psychological interventions, like Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). They say it is vital that policymakers and [mental health services](#) double their efforts to monitor [mental health](#) and provide interventions to support those in need.

Lead researcher, Dr. Gemma Taylor from the University of Bath, explained: "We all know the dramatic toll lockdown had on our lives, and two years on it's a moment to pause and reflect on what some of the long-standing effects this period has had on our mental health.

"Our study shows a sharp rise in depression and anxiety as a result of lockdown. These are challenges which cannot be undone overnight. Tackling them will require significantly greater resources to ensure those who need it can access psychological support. Psychological support is not cheap, and services have notoriously been underfunded.

"Whilst there is good news for people's mental health in regard to vaccination rates and the return to some degree of normality in the UK, we need to be mindful of these possible lasting mental health effects that lockdown had on many of us."

More information: Luca Marie Dettmann et al, Investigating the prevalence of anxiety and depression during the first COVID-19 lockdown in the United Kingdom: Systematic review and meta-analyses, *British Journal of Clinical Psychology* (2022). [DOI: 10.1111/bjc.12360](https://doi.org/10.1111/bjc.12360)

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