

Mental health impact of COVID still being felt, study finds

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The deterioration in people's mental health linked to COVID-19 is showing no sign of returning to pre-pandemic levels, a new study finds.

Researchers from the University of Exeter Business School and the Adam Smith Business School at the University of Glasgow used the UK

Household Longitudinal Study to compare the [mental health](#) of more than 10,000 UK individuals.

They found that on average, mental [distress](#) in the height of the pandemic in April 2020 was 11 percent higher than it was before the pandemic in 2017-19.

But in March 2021, amid the vaccine rollout and with restrictions starting to lift, the researchers found no evidence of any improvement in the population's mental health. The average mental distress in March 2021 was essentially the same as in April 2020.

Mental distress was measured by the 12-point General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), a screening device for identifying minor psychiatric disorders. Respondents completed the GHQ-12 once between 2017 and 2019, again in April 2020, and again in March 2021.

Climent Quintana-Domeque, a Professor of Economics at the University of Exeter Business School, said, "Our study shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the mental health of people across society, and that these [negative consequences](#) continue to be felt—even when we are told the worst is over."

Previous research has found that women and Black, Asian and ethnic minority individuals experienced higher increases in mental distress during the [pandemic](#).

The researchers found these gender and ethnicity gaps persisted in March 2021.

"More needs to be done by policymakers to address these plateauing mental distress levels and to explain the differential deterioration on mental well-being among women and those in ethnic minority groups,"

said Professor Quintana-Domeque.

More information: Climent Quintana-Domeque et al, On the Persistence of Mental Health Deterioration during the COVID-19 Pandemic by Sex and Ethnicity in the UK: Evidence from Understanding Society, *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy* (2022). [DOI: 10.1515/bejeap-2021-0394](https://doi.org/10.1515/bejeap-2021-0394)

Provided by University of Exeter

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