

# Increase in emotional distress observed worldwide in 2020

March 28 2023, by Elana Gotkine

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The pandemic period was characterized by an increase in emotional

distress in 2020, followed by a decline in 2021, according to a study published online March 27 in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

Michael Daly, Ph.D., from Maynooth University in Ireland, and Lucía Macchia, from City University of London, used annual representative survey data from 1.53 million individuals surveyed in 113 [countries](#) from 2009 to 2021 to examine emotional distress. Participants reported worry, sadness, stress, or anger during much of the previous day.

The researchers found that between 2009 and 2021, there was an increase from 25 to 31 percent in the prevalence of feelings of [emotional distress](#) in within-county estimates; the largest increases in distress were seen in countries with low levels of education and income. In 2020, distress rose by 2.5 percent over and above the existing prepandemic trend in distress, with significant increases observed among most demographic groups. From 2020 to 2021, distress levels decreased and did not deviate from existing time trends in [distress](#), as estimated using prepandemic data.

"Distress levels declined from 2020 to 2021 and at this point were not greater than expected based on prepandemic trends," the authors write. "This result is consistent with findings suggesting that populations flexibly adapted to the [stressful circumstances](#) of the pandemic and recovered relatively quickly from the distressing impact of the initial lockdown period."

**More information:** Michael Daly et al, Global trends in emotional distress, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2023). [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.2216207120](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2216207120)

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