

# Young people's mental health deteriorated at greater rate during the pandemic, finds study

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Researchers led by Professor Willem Kuyken at Oxford University's Department of Psychiatry compared the mental health difficulties and well-being of thousands of UK secondary school pupils who experienced

three lockdowns, with a group of students who participated in the same study before the coronavirus pandemic emerged in 2020.

The findings, part of the [MYRIAD \(My Resilience in Adolescence\) study](#) and published in the journal [JAMA Network Open](#), show:

- Young people who went through the [pandemic](#) were more likely to experience increased depression, social, emotional and behavioral difficulties and worsening general mental well-being.
- While [mental health](#) declined in both groups over time, those in the pandemic experienced a worsening in their mental [health](#):
  - Cases of depression increased 8.5% in those going through the pandemic versus 0.3% in the pre-pandemic group.
  - Cases of high/very high social, emotional and behavioral difficulties increased 7.9% in the pandemic cohort vs. 3.5% in the pre-pandemic cohort.
  - Cases of possible/probable [mental health difficulties](#) increased 12.8% in the pandemic group versus 4.5% in the pre-pandemic group.
- Girls and those who were initially at low risk of mental health difficulties experienced greater deteriorations during the pandemic.
- Having a positive [school](#) climate, good relationships at home and having a friend to turn to for support during lockdown were protective factors.
- Even partial school attendance during lockdown was better for the subsequent adjustment when coming back to school than no attendance at all.

Professor Kuyken, Sir John Ritblat Family Foundation Professor of Mindfulness and Psychological Science in Oxford's Department of Psychiatry, said, "This research not only demonstrates the impact the pandemic had on [young people](#)'s mental health but importantly also some of the protective factors that helped them get through it."

"With the increased focus on young people's mental health, it is vitally important that we work to understand both what places young people at risk and what protects them under challenging circumstances."

"This study shows that to promote better mental health and adjustment among young people, we need policies that foster home connectedness, friendship and a positive school climate and consider young people's individual differences, needs and vulnerabilities. Also we can see that full school closures should be avoided to protect the adjustment of young people."

The pupils in the study were recruited when aged between 11 and 13 with their mental health and mental well-being assessed at four different time points over three years. More than 6,300 pupils were in the group that participated in the research during the pandemic, with the final follow-up taking place in spring 2021. Meanwhile, 864 students were in the group that were assessed before the pandemic, with final data collection from that group in autumn 2019.

**More information:** Jesus Montero-Marin et al, Young People's Mental Health Changes, Risk, and Resilience During the COVID-19 Pandemic, *JAMA Network Open* (2023). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.35016](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.35016)

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