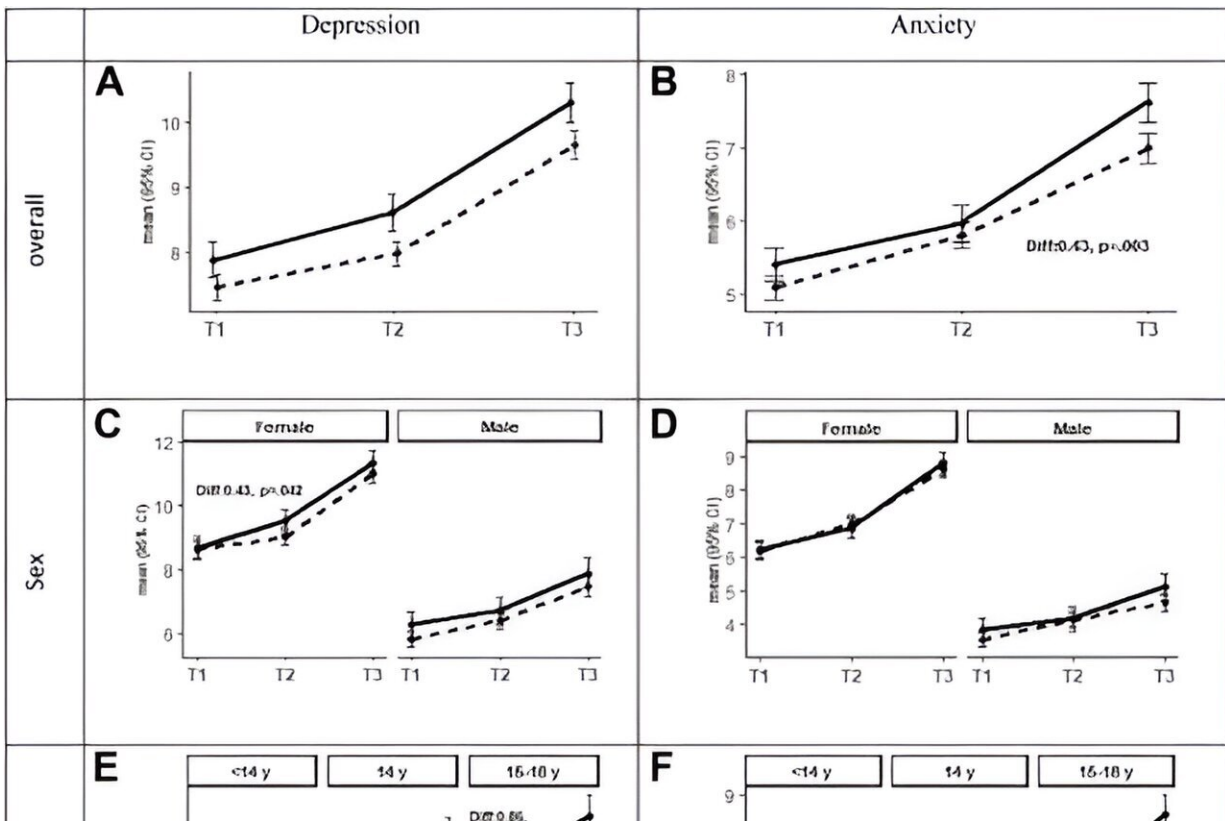


# Q&A: Examining high school student mental health post-pandemic

October 17 2023



Depression (CESD-R-10) and anxiety (GAD-7) scores in two prospective cohorts of adolescents over three years of the COMPASS study. Only significant estimates at  $\alpha = 0.1$  are reported, showing a significant difference between changes in pre-COVID cohort (who surveyed in Sept–Feb 2019–20 right before the start of the pandemic) and COVID cohort (who surveyed in May–June 2020 right after the start of the pandemic). \*T1:2018/19, T2:2019/20, T3:2020/21. CESD = Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale Revised; GAD = generalized anxiety disorder; COMPASS = cannabis use, obesity, mental health,

physical activity, alcohol use, smoking, and sedentary behavior. Credit: *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2023). DOI: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2023.07.024

Mental health issues had been a concern before the pandemic, but they came into focus even more during this time. In [a recent study](#) published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Dr. Mahmood Gohari from the University of Waterloo's School of Public Health Sciences used survey data from almost 5,400 Canadian adolescents to examine changes in depression and anxiety from 2018 until 2021. For World Mental Health Month, he discusses his findings:

## **How did high school youth mental health fare during the pandemic?**

We observed a persistent rise in depression and [anxiety symptoms](#) among high school youth throughout the pandemic. Notably, the symptoms showed a steeper increase one year after the pandemic's onset compared to the initial month. Factors such as prolonged isolation, frequent disruptions in school routines and the implementation of new protocols upon returning to school within a year post-pandemic likely contributed to this heightened rise in symptoms—surpassing the levels seen during the early stages of the pandemic.

## **Did you find that some students were affected more than others?**

We observed varying impacts on students based on gender and age. A notable difference was observed in depression symptoms among females and older adolescents. Specifically, females showed a more significant increase in depression symptoms compared to males. Moreover, [older](#)

[adolescents](#) experienced a notable surge in depression symptoms in contrast to their younger counterparts.

## **Can these changes be attributed to the pandemic, or to something else?**

Our analysis employed a robust design that differentiated the effects attributable to the pandemic from other potential influences, like age. Despite observing a notable surge in [depression](#) and anxiety within our extensive high school student dataset, especially during the second year of the pandemic, our findings suggest that this increase during the pandemic didn't significantly deviate from the natural upward trajectory of these internalizing symptoms typical during adolescence. It aligns more with the gradual progression of internalizing symptoms experienced by adolescents as they transition from early to later stages of adolescence.

**More information:** Mahmood R. Gohari et al, Adolescents' Depression and Anxiety Symptoms During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Longitudinal Evidence From COMPASS, *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2023.07.024](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2023.07.024)

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