

New survey reveals toll COVID-19 is taking on mental health in Wales

11 November 2020



Around half of the 13,000 participants who took part in a survey of Welsh wellbeing during the pandemic showed clinically significant psychological distress. Credit: Pexels

Wales faces a wave of mental health problems in the wake of COVID-19, with younger adults, women and people from deprived areas suffering the most.

That is the warning contained in new research, led by Swansea University's Professor Nicola Gray and Cardiff University's Professor Robert Snowden, which examines the pandemic's impact on the mental [wellbeing](#) of the Welsh population.

The initial findings of the survey reveal that around half of the 13,000 participants showed clinically significant psychological distress, with around 20 percent suffering severe effects.

Their responses were given during June and July, when the pandemic was seen to be having a dramatic effect on psychological wellbeing.

Professor Gray, from the College of Human and Health Sciences, said: "We examined

psychological wellbeing and the prevalence of clinically significant mental distress in a large sample 11 to 16 weeks into lockdown and compared this to population-based data collected pre-COVID-19. It showed a large decrease in wellbeing from pre-COVID-19 levels."

She said the effects in Wales—and by implication those in the UK and beyond—are larger than previous studies had suggested.

"This probably reflects that the current data was taken deeper into the lockdown period than previous evaluations. Public sector services need to prepare for this increase of mental health problems with an emphasis on younger adults, women, and in areas of greater deprivation."

The project was established to track the impact of the pandemic on people's wellbeing, examining the prevalence of significant levels of psychological distress and looking at the factors that might mitigate or aggravate that distress.

The 12,989 participants were recruited via social media and publicity and with support from large organizations across Wales who shared details of the bilingual survey widely. It had the backing of all seven Welsh health boards, the four [police forces](#) in Wales, the Welsh Ambulance Service Trust and the Fire & Rescue Service as well as many large employers and third sector organizations.

The Wales Wellbeing research group also consists of Dr. Chris O'Connor, Divisional Director of Mental Health and Learning Disabilities at Aneurin Bevan University Health Board with assistance from marketing professional Stuart Williams and Swansea University Ph.D. students James Knowles, Jennifer Pink and Nicola Simkiss.

Their paper, the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental wellbeing and psychological distress: impact upon a single country, has just

been published in journal *Frontiers in Psychiatry*.

The group has also presented its research to the Welsh Government with the findings set to help the NHS in Wales to not only understand the issues affecting communities but also how it can shape support services for the future.

The researchers are currently preparing to reopen the survey to collect more data from participants examining just how the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic continues to impacts daily life, what particular factors act as stressors and further analysis of how age affected responses and experiences.

Professor Snowden said: "While we need science to fight the physical consequences of disease and reduce rates of infection, we also need to understand the consequences of actions such as lockdowns have on the mental [health](#) and wellbeing of people so that any treatment is not worse than the disease it aims to cure."

More information: Nicola S. Gray et al, The Influence of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Mental Well-Being and Psychological Distress: Impact Upon a Single Country, *Frontiers in Psychiatry* (2020). [DOI: 10.3389/fpsy.2020.594115](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2020.594115)

Provided by Swansea University

APA citation: New survey reveals toll COVID-19 is taking on mental health in Wales (2020, November 11) retrieved 20 October 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-11-survey-reveals-toll-covid-mental.html>

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