

People in Wales experiencing severe mental health issues doubled during pandemic

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COVID-19 has exacerbated existing mental health inequalities for people in Wales, according to a new report from Cardiff University.

The analysis, conducted by academics at the Wales Governance Center, reveals the share of people experiencing severe mental [health](#) issues increased from 11.7% during the period immediately before the pandemic to 28.1% by April 2020.

While all parts of the Welsh population experienced [mental ill health](#) to some degree during the pandemic and accompanying lockdowns, the report highlights the disproportionate impacts on women, younger adults, low-income earners and those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds.

Researchers say the findings highlight a crucial public health challenge for the Welsh Government in years to come as mental health is a key determinant of educational success, future earnings, employment, and physical health of an individual.

Jesús Rodríguez, Research Assistant on the Center's Wales Fiscal Analysis program and the report's author, said: "The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a huge toll on mental health across the Welsh population.

"And while no group has fared particularly well in terms of their mental health, women, younger adults, [low-income earners](#) and individuals from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds have experienced worse outcomes. The mental health gap between the wealthiest and poorest has also widened during the pandemic, and we expect significant demands for mental health services for years to come.

"We know that these kinds of mental health impacts can negatively influence an individual's future education, employment and health outcomes, and so, significant resources will be required for [mental health services](#) going forward."

To investigate the impact of COVID-19 on mental health in Wales, researchers used data from the Understanding Society UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS), which asked participants to report symptoms such as difficulties with sleep, concentration, problems with decision making, strain, and feeling depressed and overwhelmed.

Whereas previous reports have used the UKHLS to analyze UK-level trends, this is the first study to focus and present data on Wales-only.

Covering the pre-COVID-19 pandemic period (2009-2019) and during COVID-19 pandemic (April 2020 to March 2021) the team aimed to quantify the impact of the pandemic, lockdowns and social restrictions on mental health in Wales.

They evaluated the mental health outcomes using a 12-item General Health Questionnaire—a commonly used indicator to study individual mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression or stress.

The report found:

- The share of people in Wales reporting severe mental health problems climbed from 11.7% pre-pandemic to 28.1% by April 2020.
- Young adults aged 16-24 experienced the largest deterioration in their mental health as a result of COVID-19, with their average indicator worsening by 24% relative to the pre-pandemic period.
- On average, women exhibited worse levels of mental health after the onset of the pandemic compared to men.
- By June 2020, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in Wales reported on average more than 4.1 problems associated with mental distress, while White British reported 2.7, a difference of 55% in relative terms.
- The mental health gap between those on the lowest and highest incomes widened significantly during the [pandemic](#). Mental health scores for people on low incomes worsened by 39% by November 2020, compared to by 6.5% deterioration for the highest income earners.

The report follows the team's analyses of future budgetary pressures on the Welsh Government published in April 2021. Among those was [a report on the NHS and the Welsh Budget](#), which identified significant pressures and demand for [mental health](#) services in Wales over coming years.

More information: COVID-19 in Wales: the mental health and wellbeing impact:

[www.cardiff.ac.uk/_data/asset...
FINAL-08-07-2021.pdf](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/_data/asset...FINAL-08-07-2021.pdf)

Provided by Cardiff University

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