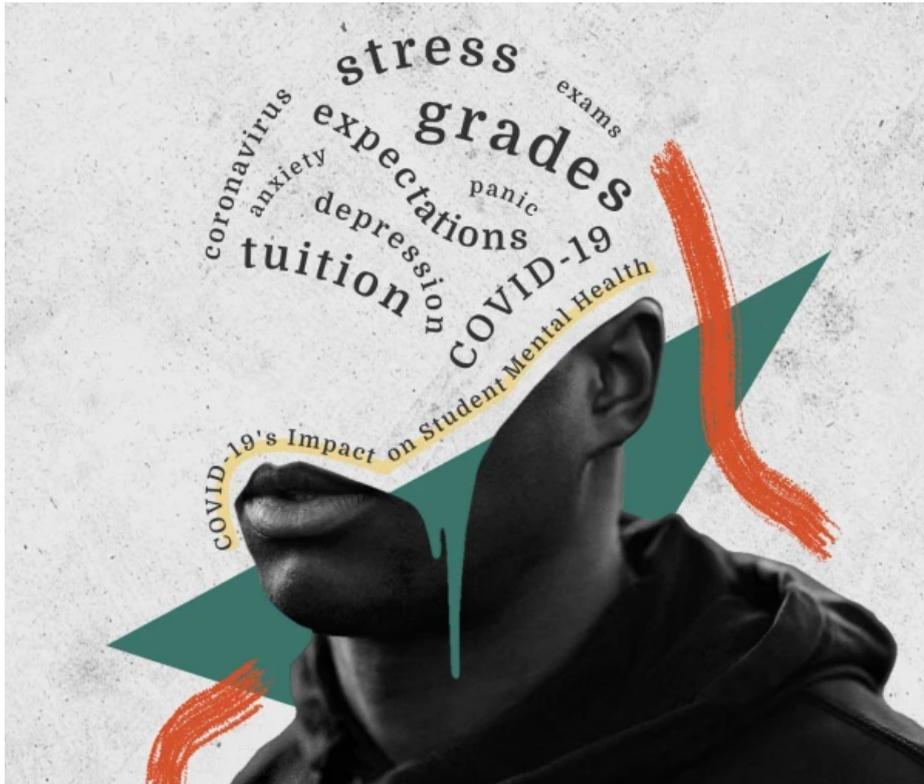


THE TRUE COST OF COVID

How has the COVID 19 pandemic affected the well-being of the youth?



HIGHLIGHTS

HIGHLIGHTS - 1

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS - 2

- The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has significantly changed the lives of billions of people worldwide.
- Absolute and relative frequencies of the categorical health-related quality of life (HRQoL) and mental health outcomes were calculated based on weighted data from wave two and compared with data from wave one and pre-pandemic data from the BELLA and Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) studies.
- To identify factors associated with HRQoL and mental health changes across waves 1 and 2, interaction terms between the pandemic and lockdown and the time-constant variables were included as additional predictors.
- The study found that children and adolescents experienced lower HRQoL and significantly more mental and psychosomatic health problems than before the pandemic.
- The findings indicate that children are missing school frequently or having less social contact due to lockdown measures, and socially disadvantaged children and children of mentally ill parents are particularly at risk of being burdened.
- While the COPS study shows that most children are burdened during the pandemic and that a considerable number of children are at risk, we identified a positive family climate and social support as essential resources that strengthen their HRQoL and mental health during the pandemic.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Builds on previous research

- The population-based study design of the COPSY study and first results were described elsewhere. The investigators collected nationwide self-reported data from children and adolescents aged 11–17 years (n = 1040), and parent-reported data for 7- to 17-year-olds (n = 1586)
- The study could not rule out pandemic-related factors (like regional differences in infection rates or lockdown measures). Or factors other than the pandemic (like seasonal changes, growing older during the study, etc.) could also have led to the higher rates of mental health problems found in the present study. However, the results were roughly in line with systematic reviews of cross-sectional studies on the impact of the pandemic.
- The study revealed that children and adolescents who attended school less frequently due to lockdown measures or stayed at home more often reported more mental health problems. Moreover, a recent longitudinal Icelandic study found an increase in depressive symptoms and a deterioration in mental well-being in 10/2020 during the pandemic compared to pre-pandemic data—similar to the investigators' initial finding of worsening mental health.
- The study results emphasize that children at risk need to be identified and supported early to avoid the progression of mental health problems to mental disorders. It is known from a large body of research that social inequality is related to mental health. Recent studies also indicate that there are social inequalities in the risk of infection with COVID-19.

Differs from previous work

- Thus, we can say that this study describes a negative mental health effect related to the pandemic. Comparing the study's results to the prevalences found in the reviews of cross-sectional studies, we can see that the anxiety levels were higher (30%), and the depression levels were lower (15%) than the pooled average of the reviews.
- Further research is needed to explore what may have led to those differences. Comparing this study to the significantly few longitudinal studies, the Co-SPACE study found an increase in conduct problems and more severe hyperactivity problems, but a slightly lower increase in emotional issues during the pandemic than in the COPSY study

Confirmation of earlier findings

- However, as they did not have official infection rates but only the knowledge of the pandemic waves in Germany, they couldn't discuss their findings of those rates in detail but call for future studies to explore the link between infection rates and mental health problems in children more closely.
- Although the pandemic (among potential other factors) appears to increase overall mental distress in children and adolescents, no changes in the age- and gender-specific distribution of mental health problems were found during the pandemic. In line with the results of population-based studies conducted before the pandemic, externalizing problems such as hyperactivity was more pronounced in boys than girls and younger children than older children, while internalizing problems such as anxiety were more likely in girls than boys and older children than younger children.
- They further found that pandemic-related changes in parental occupational status and family conflicts were associated with impaired HRQoL and mental health in children and adolescents. This is in line with the German COVID-19 Snapshot Monitoring (COSMO) results, which found that the pandemic poses significant challenges for many families.
- It seems that psychosocial resources and resilience factors, which have already proven their protective effect in previous studies, can also protect children's mental health in times of crisis. Overall, there were several strengths and limitations related to this study.