



What Were the Mental Health Developments of the COVID-19 Pandemic For Those In Generation Z? By Ava Robinson

Abstract

The future of our youth's well-being was called into question by the rising number of long-lasting mental health effects induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, beginning in the year 2020. Many research studies and investigations have been done to observe the minds of young people before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This research was completed to educate ourselves on the similarities and contrasts of mental satisfaction during both periods surrounding the pandemic. It will be shown that a considerable number of adverse effects resulted from the pandemic. These negative effects include eating disorders, rises in rates of depression, as well as suicidal rates among adolescents. There were also positive effects resulting from the pandemic. The most prominent positive effects include an expanded level of time spent with family and more time during the day to pursue their creative enjoyments (such as extracurriculars, hobbies, and interests).

Along with these effects, there was also a rise in individuals pursuing self-care, self-scrutiny, and non-family relationships. Non-family relationships refer to those who are thought of as friends and online presence. It is essential to be aware of the profound effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on adolescents and young people. The compound of research available will be very influential to those concerned with how specific demographics live through and deal with the struggles that evolve from a crisis such as the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic.

Keywords: Adolescents, COVID-19 Pandemic, mental health, long-lasting effects

Introduction

Mental health is as essential to physical health as anything and everything else. Allowing one to neglect or ignore one's mental well-being can and will be rather harmful, especially for adolescents. Adolescents experience much "stronger and more intense" emotions compared to many more lengths of time (KidsHelpline.com 1). This is because they are experiencing puberty, a "stage in people's lives when they develop from a child into an adult" and "...is associated with emotional and hormonal changes" (Cambridge Dictionary 1; Breehl and Caban 1). These changes make individuals of this age susceptible to adverse mental health effects, which can have devastating consequences. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, a time when most of us around the world needed to follow mandatory lockdown procedures, adolescents were particularly vulnerable.

March 15th, 2020, was the day multiple states began to order lockdowns to prevent the spread of the quickly spreading and contagious virus, COVID-19 (CDC "Museum Covid-19 Timeline" 1). Originating in Wuhan, China, a situation thought to be handled quickly at first spread into a two-year lockdown that was unlike anything most individuals had ever known (CDC "Museum Covid-19 Timeline" 1). Adolescents had to attend school online, which was a drastic change compared to what they were used to (WHO 1). Along with that, recreational facilities were closed, they could not interact with their friends, and there was always a feeling of an unknown future that most definitely weighed heavily on their mental health. This review will evaluate surveys and information gathered from other research papers to answer the essential question: What were the mental health developments of the COVID-19 pandemic for those in Generation Z?

Discussion

The purpose of this review was to observe and note the information gathered from other sources surrounding the mental health developments and ramifications that occurred in adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is understandable from the information provided that there was a definite mental well-being result of the COVID-19 pandemic taking place. The public can definitely recognize that although there is (understandably) great favor to discuss the harmful effects of the lockdown experience for our youth, there were also long-lasting positive effects that should be noticed in order for one to make a complete conclusion about the COVID-19 pandemic experience. Most of the research observed during the research process was centered around the consequential effects of the lockdown period, along with it, existed beneficial outcomes, which is most advantageous to know. However, this area of investigation is imperative in order for those to understand the full effect of the pandemic on our youth, and possibly what mental health services are more important to place effort into than others. Helping society understand how this generation faces the impact of such a difficult time, at such a vulnerable, developmental stage in life, will give greater insight into how mental health trends could change in the future.

Negative Mental Health Effects

In the paper by Susan Branje and Amanda Morris, three focus areas concerning the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were measured. Data was gathered from individuals across four continents aged 9-22 years (Branje and Morris 3). First off, the emotional implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. Compared to "...before and during the first six months of the pandemic...", there was an escalation of adverse mental health effects (Branje and Morris 5). This rise is likely derived from the bleak outlook the COVID-19 pandemic presented to individuals in this age

group. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 was known for causing youths to feel these symptoms, along with many others, that typically "...lead to increased risk of drug use, experiencing violence, and higher risk sexual behaviors that can lead to HIV, STDs, and unintended pregnancy" (CDC "Mental Health" 22). However, there was also a reduction in everyday displeasure, "anxiety," and "self-internalizing problems" (Branje and Morris 5). The specifics of this data are displayed by an independent graph from Cambridge University (presented below):

	Pre-COVID-19 <i>M</i> (S.D.)	COVID <i>M</i> (S.D)	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
CDI	5.93 (5.70)	9.61 (7.74)	10.11	0.002	0.29
Females	6.49 (9.22)	10.76 (8.23)	10.13	0.002	0.34
Males	4.68 (4.09)	7.05 (5.78)	0.94	0.34	<0.01
Panic/Somatic symptoms	4.77 (4.29)	4.96 (5.03)	13.45	<0.001	0.33
Females	5.27 (4.68)	5.91 (5.41)	12.21	0.001	0.38
Males	3.64 (3.01)	2.86 (3.15)	0.01	0.99	<0.01
Generalized anxiety	5.62 (4.38)	7.62 (4.92)	20.58	<0.001	0.42
Social anxiety	4.83 (3.57)	5.43 (4.00)	7.57	0.006	0.24

Table 1: The symptoms presented before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. From Hawes et al. 5.

The data above (Table 1) displays the individuals who presented "depression and anxiety symptoms before and during the pandemic" (Hawes et al. 5). The data from this paper was collected through a study of 451 individuals classified as adolescents and young adults (Hawes et al. 4).

In addition, there were other grounds as to why many youths experienced adverse mental health effects during the pandemic. For instance, "disadvantaged" students tended to experience higher levels of negative mental health symptoms. This data is because "...they experienced the loss of family income, higher rates of illness and death among community members, and problems in virtual connectivity," to name a few examples (Branje and Morris 6). This paper further proves that those considered "disadvantaged" in some form tended to experience the most harmful effects of the pandemic.

Positive Mental Health Effects

Apart from that, the paper by Branje and Morris presents evidence of what could be considered positive mental health effects resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Since all school-obligated youths had to receive their schooling at home and online during the lockdown period, some may regard the distance learning experience as positive. This belief could be

concluded since some adolescents may learn better under the learning setting that the lockdown period provided.

Additionally, the relationship between the parents and the youths proved to be a considerable factor when considering the well-being of an individual during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the paper, "[p]ositive relationships with parents were associated with better adjustment during the pandemic" (Branje and Morris 7). This further backs up the idea of who experiences positive mental health effects during the pandemic, and why they may.

Factors Influenced by Mental Health Developments

During the pandemic, many adolescents experienced both positive and negative effects from the unique and unfortunate experience. These mental health developments influenced many aspects of their lives, including "social and academic" (Branje & Morris 9). Additionally, the social aspects of an adolescent's life were significantly affected. The lockdown period made it quite difficult for youths to spend time with others their age and socialize like they used to before the pandemic began, causing a high level of "loneliness" to emerge (Banje & Morris, 9).

The academic aspect affected by the pandemic was of great concern to many educators nationwide. It was reported that "...about 15% of adolescents reported a steeper decrease in academic well-being, characterized by lower school engagement and higher burnout..." (Banje and Morris 11). The paper then goes on to express more in-depth how the academic aspect of an adolescent's life has been affected and gives examples to give the audience a better understanding of the topic.

Conclusion and Interpretations

In closing, the research paper exhibited much information regarding the mental health development of adolescents who experienced the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The data is gathered from 21 studies across four mainlands to contribute to the endeavors of this study (Banje & Morris 1). Much information was discovered about many individuals in that age range and how they may have felt during that time, including what aspects of their lives (social and academic) were affected by this worldwide experience. In this paper, many connections could be made concerning the mental health developments of individuals and other parts of their lives. For example, those who were raised in a "disadvantaged" environment tended to experience higher rates of adverse mental health effects compared to others (Branje and Morris 9). It assumes that in those environments, it may prove hard to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic (Branje and Morris 9).

In conclusion, this research paper provides an abundance of information regarding the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people around the world. Through this, one can craft a significant analysis of what the future may look like for these young individuals who went through the pandemic. These effects may emerge through national test scores, behaviors, emotional tendencies, and more. This paper was also able to inform people that there were positive mental health effects (in addition to adverse mental health effects) of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Work Cited Page

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