

**Under Embargo until 0.01 Wednesday 17 February 2021**

## **Younger Children's Mental Health Worse in the New Lockdown**

The latest [report](#) from the [Co-SPACE](#) study highlights that in their study sample:

- Behavioural, emotional, and restless/attentional difficulties in primary school aged children have increased again since the latest national lockdown was introduced.
- Proportion of secondary school aged girls with emotional problems in January 2021 was at the highest level reported since March 2020.

Parent and carer reported behavioural, emotional, and restless/attentional difficulties in their offspring have increased again since the latest national lockdown was introduced. This was especially the case in primary school aged children (4-10 years old). More secondary school aged girls (11- 17 years) were also reported to have experienced emotional problems than in previous months including feeling unhappy, worried, and experiencing physical symptoms associated with worry. Children with SEN/ND and those from low-income (< £16,000 p.a.) or single adult households have continued to show elevated mental health symptoms throughout the pandemic, with higher levels of behavioural, emotional, and restless/attentional difficulties. The report also shows that being an only child was associated with higher levels of restless/attentional difficulties throughout the pandemic (but was not associated with differences for behavioural or emotional symptoms).

**Cathy Creswell, Professor of Clinical Developmental Psychology at the University of Oxford and co-lead of the study** said:

*"We are really concerned that in our study population we have once again seen increases in mental health symptoms across emotional and behavioural domains in primary school children in January - and also that emotional symptoms among secondary school girls are at the highest point that we have seen since we started our study in March 2020. We also continue to see that families who are living on low incomes and children and young people with special educational needs are experiencing high levels of difficulties."*

**Clare Stafford, Vice-Chair, CYPMHC and CEO of Charlie Waller Trust** said:

*"The findings from the latest CoSPACE report highlight the worrying rise in mental health symptoms among children and young people during the latest lockdown. We know that the pandemic has widened existing inequalities, and these findings once again highlight the unequal impacts on children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities and children living in families on low income.*

*The findings also show worrying increases in mental health symptoms among primary school aged children. School closures will have likely meant children have lost their social connections and regular routines, something that we know is so important to their mental health and wellbeing. The youngest children can't be forgotten in the pandemic.*

*The Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition are calling for a more ambitious approach in the way we support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. We need a system that fully responds to mental health needs, now and beyond the pandemic. Most importantly, we must listen and respond to what children and young people tell us so that we can build a system that works for them."*

More than 12,500 parents have now taken part in the **Co-SPACE (COVID-19 Supporting Parents, Adolescents, and Children in Epidemics) [survey](#)** led by experts at the University of Oxford. This research is tracking children and young people's mental health throughout the COVID-19 crisis. Survey results are helping researchers identify what protects children and young people from deteriorating mental health, over time, and at particular stress points, and how this may vary according to child and family characteristics. This will help to identify what advice, support and help parents would find most useful. Crucially, the study is continuing to collect data in order to determine how these needs change as the pandemic progresses.

This research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) as part of the UK Research and Innovation's rapid response to COVID-19 and the Westminster Foundation, and supported by the NIHR Oxford Health Biomedical Research Centre, the Oxford and Thames Valley NIHR Applied Research Consortium and the UKRI Emerging Minds Network Plus.

**Ends**

**Notes to editor:**

- This Co-SPACE report and images accompanying this report are accessible here: <https://cospaceoxford.org/findings/changes-in-children-mental-health-symptoms-from-march-2020-to-jan-2021/>
- Other Co-SPACE reports can be found online at: <https://cospaceoxford.org/findings/>

- The Co-SPACE (COVID-19 Supporting Parents, Adolescents, and Children in Epidemics) survey is online at <http://cospaceoxford.org/take-part/>
- The UKRI Emerging Minds webinar series is online at: <https://emergingminds.org.uk/emerging-minds-covid-19-webinar-series/>
- The University Department of Psychiatry's mission is to conduct world-class research, teach psychiatry to medical students, develop future researchers in a graduate programme, teach doctors in training, promote excellence in clinical practice, and develop and provide innovative clinical services. It supports research in four key areas: neurobiology, psychological treatments, developmental psychiatry and social psychiatry. The Department is committed to the translation of scientific discovery into benefits for patients. [www.psych.ox.ac.uk](http://www.psych.ox.ac.uk)
- The University of Oxford's Experimental Psychology Department's mission is to conduct world-leading experimental research to understand the psychological and neural mechanisms relevant to human behaviour. Wherever appropriate, we translate our findings into evidence-based public benefits in mental health and well-being, education, industry, and policy. Key areas of research include Behavioural Neuroscience, Developmental Psychology, Social Psychology, and Psychological and Brain Health.
- Funding for the University of Oxford's coronavirus research is crucial to the development of a vaccine and the subsequent delivery of effective drugs to combat this new virus. Unprecedented speed, scope and ambition are required. Please [make a gift](#). Any gift made will help contribute to the fight against coronavirus.
- The NIHR Oxford Health Biomedical Research Centre is a partnership between the Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust and the University of Oxford. We aim to bring the best science to the complex problems of mental health and dementia. [www.oxfordhealthbrc.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.oxfordhealthbrc.nihr.ac.uk)
- **Oxford University** has been placed number 1 in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings for the fifth year running, and at the heart of this success is our ground-breaking research and innovation. Oxford is world-famous for research excellence and home to some of the most talented people from across the globe. Our work helps the lives of millions, solving real-world problems through a huge network of partnerships and collaborations. The breadth and interdisciplinary nature of our research sparks imaginative and inventive insights and solutions.
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