

For immediate release

Children and young people from low income backgrounds show elevated mental health difficulties throughout lockdown

The most recent [report](#) from the Co-SPACE study highlights that:

- Emotional and restless/attention difficulties (and behaviour difficulties for primary school aged children) were consistently elevated among children and young people from low income households over a month of lockdown compared to those from higher income households, with around **two and a half times as many children experiencing significant problems** in low income households.

Parents and carers from low income households reported that their children (aged 4 to 16 years) had higher levels of emotional difficulties, such as feeling unhappy, worried, being clingy and experiencing physical symptoms associated with worry than those from higher income households. Their children were also more fidgety and restless and had greater difficulty paying attention. Those with younger, primary school aged children also reported that their children were experiencing higher levels of behaviour difficulties, including temper tantrums, arguments and not doing what they were being asked to do by adults than those from higher incomes.

Other findings were that children and young people from single and multiple adult households were generally found to have similar levels of emotional, behavioural and restless/attention difficulties. However, when looked at on their own, primary school aged children from single adult households were reported as having more emotional difficulties than those from multiple adult households.

The study also highlighted that over the course of lockdown, there were increases for children of primary school age in emotional difficulties, behavioural difficulties and restlessness and attention difficulties, with the proportion of children having significant (clinical level) difficulties, increasing by as much as 35%. However, in young people of secondary school age, there was a reduction in emotional difficulties, no change in behavioural difficulties and a slight increase in restlessness/inattention.

More than 11,500 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. Crucially, the study is continuing to collect data in order to determine whether this has changed as schools re-open and many children return to the classroom.

Andy Bell, Deputy Chief Executive at the Centre for Mental Health, said:

“The pandemic and the lockdown have already had a significant impact on children’s mental health across the country. Every family and every child’s experiences are unique to them, but this and other research points to a worrying rise in distress overall, and a chasm between the most and the least deprived children and families.

“There is compelling evidence that poverty and inequality are toxic to children’s mental health. Sadly the pandemic has reinforced that divide. We must now see action at every level to close the gap and support children through the emotional challenges of this year.”

Professor Cathy Creswell, Professor of Developmental Clinical Psychology, University of Oxford, and co-leading the study, said,

“These findings highlight not only the huge variation in how children and young people have been coping throughout the pandemic but also how pre-existing vulnerabilities associated with inequality have continued during the crisis. It is crucial that we continue to build understanding of who has been most impacted by this challenging situation so that effective action can be taken.

The **Co-SPACE (COVID-19 Supporting Parents, Adolescents, and Children in Epidemics) survey is still open and keen for parents and carers to share their experiences www.cospaceoxford.com/survey, especially at this crucial time of schools re-opening and many children returning to school.** 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.

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.

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Notes to editor:

- This and other Co-SPACE reports can be found online at:
<https://cospaceoxford.org/findings/>
- Images accompanying this report are accessible here:
<https://cospaceoxford.org/findings/changes-in-children-mental-health-symptoms-september-2020/>

The Co-SPACE (COVID-19 Supporting Parents, Adolescents, and Children in Epidemics) survey is online at <http://cospaceoxford.com/survey>.

- 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
- 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 is 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
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