

German children suffer from psychological issues in pandemic

10 February 2021, by Kirsten Grieshaber



Children and families toboggan in Volkspark Friedrichshain in Berlin, Germany, Sunday, Feb. 7, 2021. (Christoph Soeder/dpa via AP)

A new survey of children in Germany suggests that the stress and deprivations of the coronavirus pandemic are taking a toll on their mental health, especially among those from underprivileged families, researchers said Wednesday.

The study by the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf found about one in three German children are suffering from pandemic-related anxiety, depression or are exhibiting psychosomatic symptoms like headaches or stomach aches.

Children and teenagers from poorer families and those with migrant roots are disproportionately affected, according to the study.

"Children who were doing well before the pandemic and feel sheltered and comfortable within their families will get through this pandemic well," said Ulrike Ravens-Sieberer, the head of the study and research director of the children's psychiatric clinic at the university hospital.

"However, we need better concepts to especially support and strengthen the mental and emotional health of children from at-risk families," she said.

Particularly during lockdowns "schools need to keep in regular contact with the students and express appreciation and attention," she said. "Otherwise there is the danger that children from at-risk families lose their motivation and eagerness to study."

Researchers questioned more than 1,000 children between ages seven and 17 and more than 1,500 parents online from mid-December to mid-January. More than 80% of them had participated in a previous survey in June.

Overall, four out of five children reported feeling burdened by the pandemic.

They said their families fight and argue more, they have more problems in school and the relationships with their friends are deteriorating. They also eat less healthfully, spend more time online and play fewer sports, according to the study.

"The parents seem to have adjusted to the challenges of homeschooling and work and are trying to cope as best as possible," Ravens-Sieberer said. "But they, too, are reaching their limits."

A bout of snow across Germany this week allowed children to get outdoors for a brief break from lockdowns and other virus restrictions.

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APA citation: German children suffer from psychological issues in pandemic (2021, February 10)
retrieved 27 April 2021 from
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-02-german-children-psychological-issues-pandemic.html>

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