

One in nine adults struggled with mental health during pandemic, researchers find

7 May 2021, by Michael Addelman



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

One in nine adults consistently had very poor or deteriorating mental health during the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic according to new research.

Those living in the most deprived neighborhoods along with ethnic minority groups were the most affected say the team based at The University of Manchester, King's College London, Cambridge, Swansea and City University.

However, two thirds of adults were in groups whose [mental health](#) was largely unaffected by the [pandemic](#) finds the study published in *The Lancet Psychiatry*.

The team analyzed monthly surveys between April and October 2020 on 19,763 adults to identify typical patterns of change in mental [health](#), revealing five distinct groups.

The unaffected groups were more likely to be older, white, and from the least deprived areas, with men being especially likely to have consistently very good mental health. According to

the research:

- 12% of the sample were in a group that experienced initial declines in their mental health at the beginning of the pandemic then recovered over the summer. Women and parents of school-aged children were particularly likely to be in this group, experiencing significant improvements in mental health around the time schools' reopened.
- 7% of the sample experienced a sustained decline in their mental health.
- 4% of the sample had mental health that was consistently very poor throughout.

The groups experiencing a sustained decline or consistently very poor mental health were more likely to have had pre-existing mental or physical conditions. They were also more likely to be Asian, Black or mixed ethnicities, and live in the most deprived areas.

The researchers also found that infection with COVID-19, local lockdown, and [financial difficulties](#) all predicted a subsequent deterioration in mental health.

The research team analyzed the UK Household Longitudinal Study from the University of Essex and the Economic and Social Research Council.

Dr. Matthias Pierce, is lead author and research fellow from the Centre for Women's Mental Health at The University of Manchester.

He said: "It's clear from this study that in terms of mental health, the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on minority ethnic groups, those living in deprived areas, others experiencing financial difficulties and those who already had poorer mental health.

"But also we find a large proportion of the

population has remained resilient to the effects of the pandemic."

Provided by University of Manchester

He added: "The data we used are superior to other surveys because the UK Household Longitudinal Study uses a high quality representative random sample and includes groups such as the digitally excluded who might not otherwise participate.

"Other surveys, especially those which use social media, are often unrepresentative and can lead to unreliable results."

Senior author, Professor Kathryn Abel from The University of Manchester said: "We are increasingly aware that social and economic advantages have an important influence on how well people are able to cope with challenges that appear to have affected everyone equally.

"The health and [social inequalities](#) we already know about for women and for people in poverty relate to different burdens of stressful life events and different resources to deal with them.

"These remain relevant and are important reasons for the differences we are seeing in the mental health trajectories across the pandemic.

Sher added: "For people in ethnic minorities, their experience of the pandemic has meant dealing with both existing discrimination and inequalities alongside higher risks of severe illness, disability and, of course, death.

"This represents a devastating landscape for their mental health borne out in our findings.

"We must respond by making sure services are aware of these disparities and that their offerings are culturally sensitive and appropriate for the complexity of unmet need."

More information: Matthias Pierce et al. Mental health responses to the COVID-19 pandemic: a latent class trajectory analysis using longitudinal UK data, *The Lancet Psychiatry* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/S2215-0366\(21\)00151-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(21)00151-6)

APA citation: One in nine adults struggled with mental health during pandemic, researchers find (2021, May 7) retrieved 15 June 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-05-adults-struggled-mental-health-pandemic.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.