

Not pursuing your goals during the pandemic is good for your mental health

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People who shelved their long-term goals during the pandemic were better able to avoid anxiety and depression, according to a new study.

Researchers at the University of Waterloo aimed to investigate the relationship between what they call COVID-frozen goals—goals for which progress has been disrupted due to COVID-19—and psychological well-being.

"Typically, when we think about how to increase goal success and well-being, we focus on how to be more committed and more engaged with our goals," said Abigail Scholer, a professor in Waterloo's Department of Psychology and Canada Research Chair in Motivated Social Cognition. "Our research highlights that being able to let go of goals, particularly during COVID, is actually a critical part of staying mentally healthy."

Candice Hubley, lead author and a Ph.D. candidate in psychology at Waterloo, and Scholer surveyed 226 participants to examine the relationship between psychological well-being and goal pursuit. Participants reported on their psychological distress and [life satisfaction](#) and were asked questions about normally progressing goals as well as COVID-frozen goals.

The researchers found that COVID-frozen goals were associated with poor well-being: the greater number of them people had, the greater [psychological distress](#) they experienced, such as suffering from stress, [depressive symptoms](#) and anxiety.

The researchers also highlighted that the way in which people engage with their goals drastically impacts their well-being.

"Goal rumination is compulsive and can aggravate worries and frustrations while also taking away mental resources from other goals," said Hubley. "We hope people can apply these findings to their own life by taking the time to assess their goals and engagement with them."

Hubley adds that disengagement is not an all-or-nothing situation, and sometimes we relinquish one type of engagement but not others. By quitting unattainable goals and redirecting efforts to alternative goals, individuals are setting themselves up for a healthier [relationship](#) with their goals and better [psychological well-being](#).

The researchers plan to build on these findings and hope their work will aid in future interventions aimed at helping individuals become more flexible in their goal pursuit to improve well-being.

The paper, "Melting COVID-frozen [goals](#): How goal disengagement supports well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic," appears in the journal *Motivation and Emotion*.

More information: Candice Hubley et al, Melting COVID-frozen goals: How goal disengagement supports well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Motivation and Emotion* (2022). [DOI: 10.1007/s11031-022-09959-w](#)

Provided by University of Waterloo

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