

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF OUR YOUTH

An Ipsos Point of View

Authors:

Lauren Barry,
Giselle Perkowski,
Earlene Worrall



GAME CHANGERS



Introduction

Mental illness among teens and young adults has been an increasingly prevalent issue, observed to have been exacerbated by COVID-19. In fact, over the course of the pandemic, youth anxiety and depression doubled globally.^[1]

The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that the prevalence of anxiety and depression increased by 25% worldwide during the first year of COVID-19, and that youths were most severely affected.^[2] Further, the waning of the pandemic has not prompted a return to pre-pandemic levels. Rather, various research studies and extensive media coverage have documented the lasting impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of many populations, notably teens/young adults.

These troubling statistics prompted us to explore the experience of mental illness among our younger population (with focus on ages 13 to 24), how youth mental health conditions have evolved since the start of the pandemic and, most importantly, what these potential impacts could mean for the future as we adjust to a post-pandemic world. Ipsos Healthcare Advisory conducted secondary research and spoke with a qualitative sample of youths who are living in the U.S., as well as psychiatrists and psychologists who treat this patient population, in order to uncover insights into the current lived reality and opportunities to improve upon it.

This study explores:

- Typical symptoms and the experience of mental illness among teens/young adults.
- The most common underlying drivers of mental health challenges and new and/or intensified drivers arising as a result of COVID-19.
- The main impacts and implications of COVID-19 on the mental health of teens/young adults.
- Potential solutions that could be leveraged to help better manage the troubling increase in mental health challenges among this population.

Mental Illness as Experienced by Teens/Young Adults

Most people experience mental health concerns at times. A mental health concern becomes mental illness when ongoing signs and symptoms impede one's ability to function in daily life.^[3] Anxiety and depression are two of the most common mental illnesses, and disproportionately affect young adults. In fact, half (49.9%) of respondents ages 18-24 reported anxiety and depression symptoms in 2023, compared to about a third of adults overall.^[4]

Share of Adults Reporting Symptoms of Anxiety and/or Depressive Disorder, February 2023

All Adults

All Adults 32.3%

Age

18-24 49.9%

25-49 38.0%

50-64 29.3%

65+ 20.1%

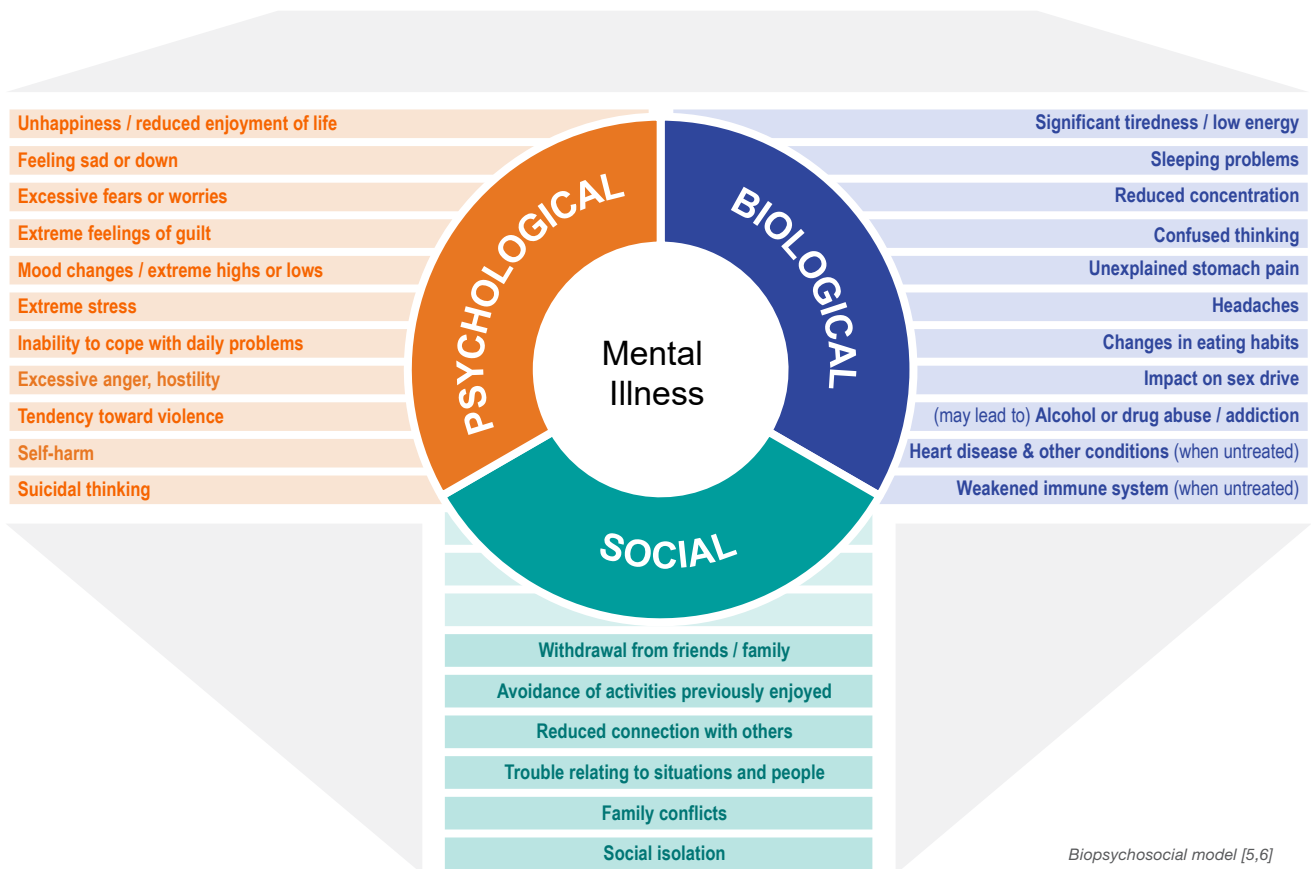
NOTE: Adults having symptoms of depressive or anxiety disorder were determined based on having a score of 3 or more on the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-Z) and/or Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-Z) scale.
SOURCE KFF analysis of U.S. Census Bureau. Household Survey. 2023

KFF

The impact of mental illness spans all facets of human experience, affecting people biologically, psychologically and socially.^[5,6] Symptoms include, but are not limited to, feelings of extreme stress, constant worrying, sadness, guilt and anger — often leaving sufferers feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope with daily life. These emotional and psychological symptoms can manifest into physical symptoms such as low energy, a heavy feeling in the chest, stomach pain, headaches, increased heart rate and sleeping problems. Social aspects exacerbate mental health challenges as sufferers often withdraw from the friends and family who act as important support systems. Over time, avoidance of people and of activities that were previously enjoyed can reduce the sense of connection with others and lead to social isolation. Coping mechanisms such as binge eating and cutting are reported by some. Tragically, severe anxiety and depression can lead to suicidal thoughts or even attempts, with traumatic impact on not only the individual but also close family and friends.^[7]



Biopsychosocial model



While these symptoms were true of the experience of mental illness pre-pandemic, many were exacerbated as a direct result of the pandemic. COVID-19 triggered, for all of society, an unprecedented change in the way we lived our lives. The resultant increase in symptoms of mental illness led to a dramatic increase in the prominence of mental health concerns. In 2021, over 5.4 million people took a mental health screen in the U.S., representing a nearly 500% increase over screening in 2019.^[8]

Arguably, the COVID-19 life impact was most pronounced for teens and young adults — forcing many to leave in-person school and social activities to quarantine with their families, and to quickly adapt to a new way of life, all while grappling with the psychological impact of COVID-19 and amplified fears about the future. These effects were not short-lived and did not dissipate with the end of the “sheltering in place” necessitated by the pandemic. According to an Ipsos study conducted in October 2022, four in 10 college students described their mental health as poor^[9], and two-thirds reported searching for information regarding how to improve their mental health — which suggests that these mental health challenges for young adults are not going away, but instead constitute a very prominent issue that needs to be addressed.

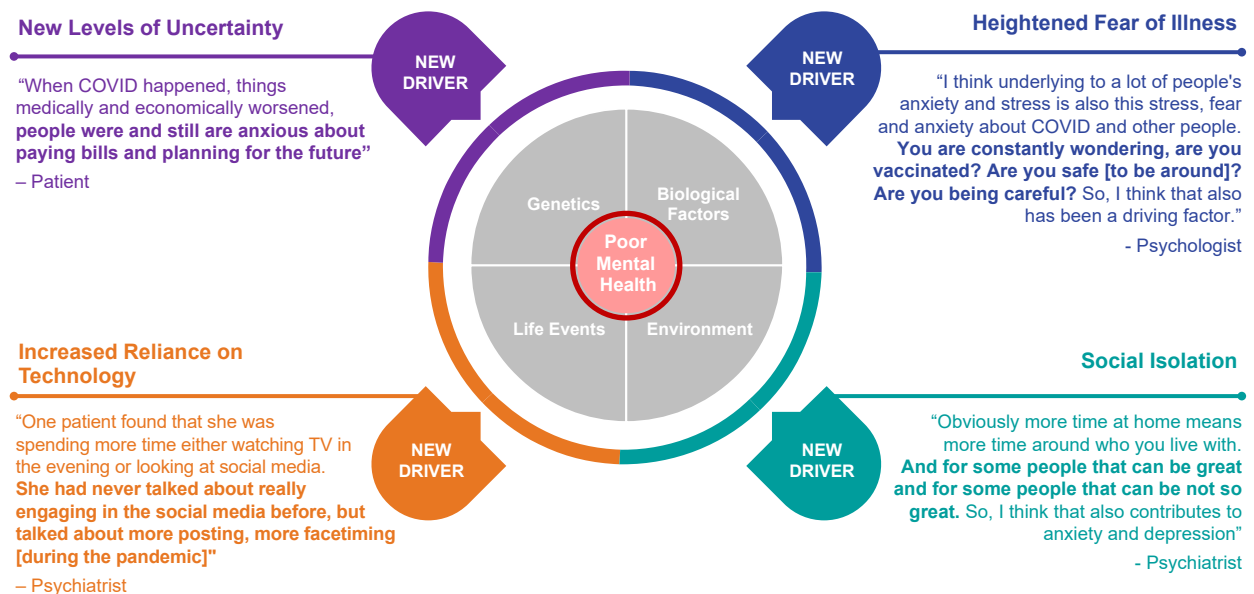


COVID-19 as a Driver of Mental Illness Among Youth

Mental illness can be traced to a combination of genetic, biological and environmental factors. While certain individuals may be predisposed to mental illness, in some cases an environmental trigger will cause mental illness to manifest. There is evidence that for some teens/young adults, the unprecedented circumstances surrounding the pandemic became that tipping point, pushing mental health concerns to the level of mental illness.

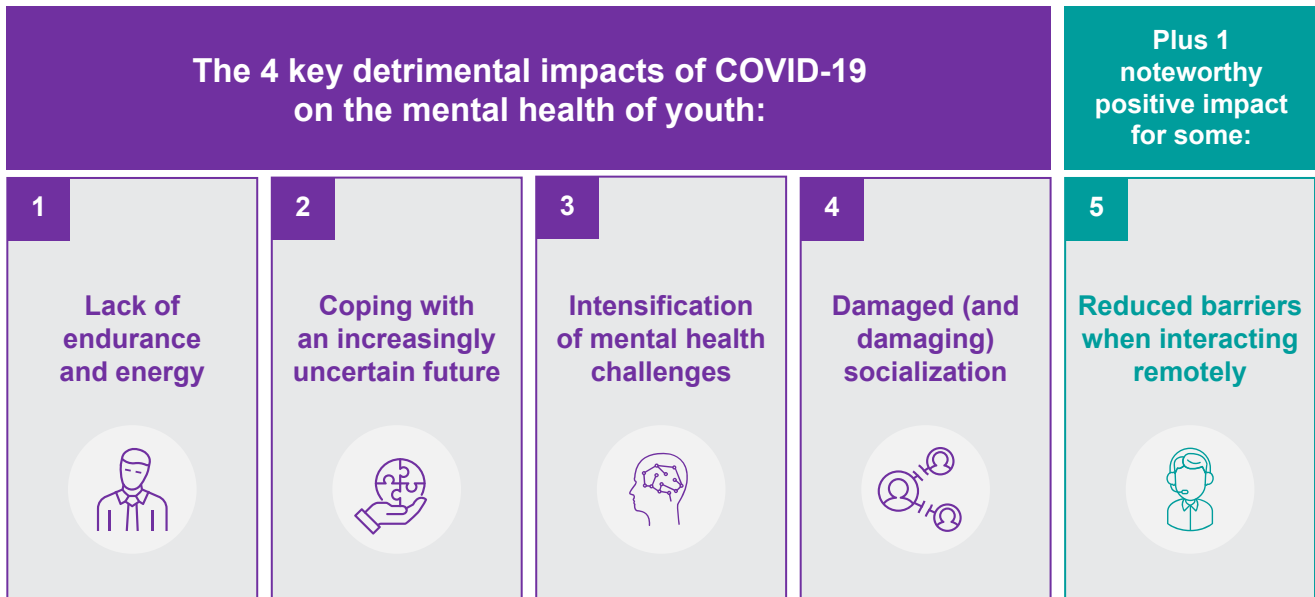
Environmental factors may include one's family structure and life experiences.^[7,10] Many agree that, before the pandemic, academic and social pressures — including peer acceptance and being overloaded with school and activities — were the most significant drivers of mental health challenges for this cohort.^[11] The increase in social media usage has also been well documented as a contributor to mental health challenges among teens/young adults pre-pandemic.

Forced social isolation was the most significant pandemic-born driver of mental illness, hitting this age group particularly hard given the importance of social connectedness when establishing one's identity during these formative years.^[11] Other new drivers included fear of COVID-19 itself; fear of contracting it, the risk of passing it to vulnerable older relatives, and persistent worry about the health and safety of loved ones. Heightened levels of uncertainty about the future were also multi-faceted and weighed heavily on the youth population; from economic instability during the pandemic with elimination of many service industry student/young adult jobs, to the impact on academic achievements given the shift to remote learning, along with the perceived impact on future opportunities and plans. In addition, many had to forego celebrating key life milestones — from graduation ceremonies to high school prom — and therefore missed out on the ritual and reflection that helps internalize these accomplishments and important life transitions, often contributing to a young person's sense of self. Lastly, increased reliance on technology, often the sole option for connecting with the outside world during the height of the pandemic, dramatically worsened an already troubling trend around harm from excessive social media usage.

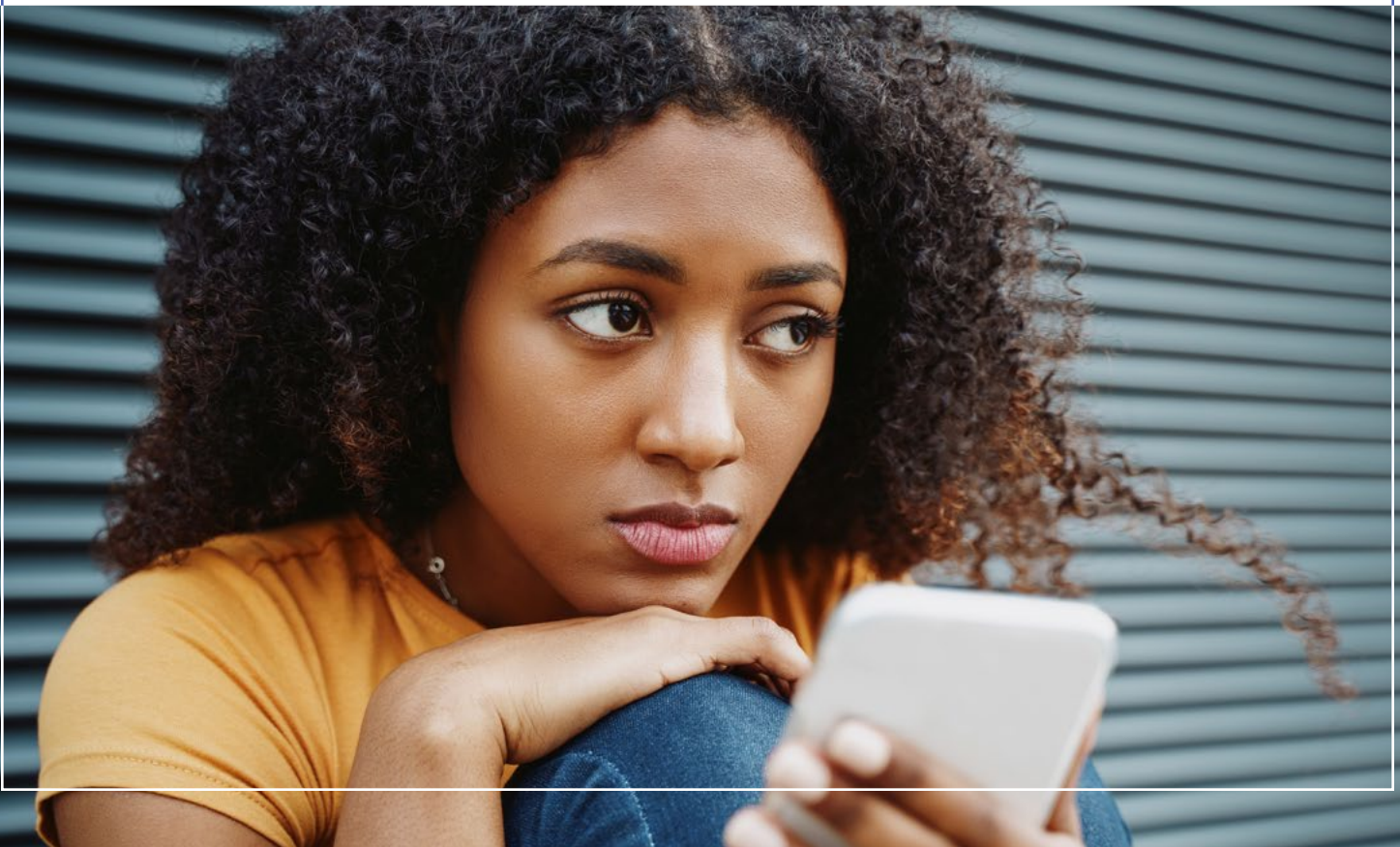


While becoming a tipping point for some, the pandemic also exacerbated pre-existing mental health conditions among youth. Those already dealing with anxiety, depression or other mental health disorders faced these same unprecedented challenges to their well-being, while also experiencing reduced support in managing their condition given less access to mental health services.

Most Significant Impacts of COVID-19 on Mental Health of Youth



COVID-19 was clearly a driver of mental illness among teens and young adults. In-depth interviews with this population, as well as psychiatrists and psychologists who treat them, revealed four key detrimental impacts of the pandemic on the mental health of youth, with significant implications for the future. One favorable impact also emerged and is discussed below.



The 4 key detrimental impacts of COVID-19 on the mental health of youth:

1

Lack of endurance and energy



Manifestation During the Pandemic

During the sustained pandemic, most teens/young adults cycled through a monotonous and extremely limited routine. The boredom was unrelieved by typical activities that not only stimulate mind and body, but also fuel personal growth during these critical formative years — such as sports, academic competitions, music and other lessons, social events, etc. For many of the young population, a sense of aimlessness set in, resulting in reduced energy levels that contributed to anxiety and depression.

On the positive side, there were also some reports that COVID-19 demonstrated the resilience of the human spirit — and of youth, in particular. However, lack of endurance and energy was the significantly more prominent trend.

Lasting Effects and Implications for the Future

Teens/young adults report feeling a sustained lack of endurance and energy, which creates a barrier to accomplishing daily tasks and is beginning to hold some back from effectively working toward and ultimately achieving long-term goals.

In contrast, those who more successfully navigated the pandemic may have newfound appreciation of their own resilience and that of others.



For consideration: How might this more positive framing of the pandemic experience help to overcome the widespread increase in apathy among this age group?

In their own words:

“In terms of tasks and working, I feel like I don’t have the same like attention span or a work drive... I think that is because I feel like I’m so drained...I would say burnout and just exhaustion, mental exhaustion that trickles into physical exhaustion and just not being able to fully engage.” - Patient

“During the pandemic, her practice stopped. There were no sports for I think an entire season... her school was all virtual, she did it from home...And she did say that it would be difficult to stay focused for an entire day. A lot of times she found herself kind of zoning out, or even nodding off.” - Psychiatrist

The 4 key detrimental impacts of COVID-19 on the mental health of youth:

2

Coping with an increasingly uncertain future



Manifestation During the Pandemic

COVID-19 fueled an incredible amount of uncertainty. As wave after wave of outbreaks hit society, with often conflicting medical advice and abundant misinformation, it brought health concerns to the forefront of young minds. Fear of contracting COVID-19 created uncertainty about their own health, and the risk of passing it to vulnerable older relatives created uncertainty around the right/best actions to take.

Economic instability arose with the elimination or disruption of many service industry and manufacturing jobs. Uncertainty about their parents' health and employment weighed particularly heavily since many at this stage of life remain largely/entirely dependent upon parents.

Many struggled to learn remotely given the lack of support and lack of motivation to learn in isolation, creating new levels of uncertainty about how to effectively advance education during the pandemic, and also about future prospects.

Lasting Effects and Implications for the Future

Teens and young adults are at a life stage where they are just beginning to chart the course for their lives — an inherently uncertain time with many as-yet-unanswered questions. Whereas other generations may have faced the future with a degree of optimism and even excitement, the “COVID” generation tends to feel overwhelmed by the confluence of negative trends. Pandemic-driven uncertainties persist: the troubled state of the economy, heightened perceived vulnerability from the risk of another pandemic, fault lines exposed in relationships, and less solid personal prospects for the future if learning and academic progress were hampered by the pandemic. Add to that the increasingly apparent impact of climate change and it is perhaps not surprising that some among this age group interpret the future as not just uncertain but downright bleak. Indeed, some express the sentiment that it is pointless to plan for such a future.



For consideration: What will be required to help teens/young adults successfully deal with the increasingly uncertain future revealed during the pandemic?

In their own words:

“ I feel like people are more anxious now because they don't know what's going to happen in the future because of the virus and the economy and everything else that's going on...The economy is getting worse, so people are anxious that they can't pay their bills or they don't know how to plan for the future.” - Patient

“ So I think the significant impact of COVID-19 is that young age where they're already uncertain about the future and know there is apprehension about what life has to offer and what their future is going to be...The pandemic really shook them up in that regard because that uncertainty or that apprehension got multiplied by 10...because it's not only about the morbidity factor, but it's also about the financial viability of themselves and the financial viability of their environment, their employers, their corporations, and their country.” - Psychiatrist

The 4 key detrimental impacts of COVID-19 on the mental health of youth:

3

Intensification of mental health challenges



Manifestation During the Pandemic

As noted, the pandemic became a tipping point for some, pushing mental health concerns to the level of mental illness.

It also exacerbated existing mental health conditions among other teens and young adults.

Given the extended multi-year timeframe of COVID-19, the intensification of symptoms of mental illness meant progression for some teens and young adults, which led to increased rates of substance abuse and suicidal ideation among this age group.

Lasting Effects and Implications for the Future

Experts report that prolonged mental health problems can inhibit cognitive development, with long-term implications for this age group.

In addition, intensification of mental health symptoms have produced sustained effects across the biopsychosocial spectrum. Some teens/young adults are attempting to address diagnosed mental illness for the first time, while others are still seeking diagnosis and initial treatment. Those who resorted to substance abuse as they struggled to cope during the pandemic require rehabilitation support. Those who are grappling with thoughts of self-harm will continue to require support and intervention in the years to come, as will the loved ones of people who may have acted on their suicidal ideation.



For consideration: How will new challenges that have emerged in the effective delivery of mental health care be addressed? How will the increase in the number of people experiencing mental illness be handled within an already overloaded healthcare system?

In their own words:

“I would be up all night and sleeping all day so I would wake up and it would be like 3 or 4PM. I’d just eat something frozen out of the fridge and I would just sit...I had very little purpose. During that time my sleep schedule was so off and I would be in my room alone and I would just watch TV and there wasn’t much to do, I would just kind of sit and cry a lot.” - Patient

“I definitely think I struggled a little bit more than I maybe would have had we not been doing the whole quarantine and dealing with the pandemic and everything. I think it also probably put more strain on my relationship because of us being stuck together all the time...we both also weren’t working for a while, so the financial strain adds a lot of stress and anxiety, and we’re still just now starting to recover from it... So yeah, I definitely think my anxiety was more over the last few years.” - Patient

“The social isolation part, people were lonely because they didn’t have these things to do... People didn’t go out in the world. They didn’t probably get as much exercise. I mean, all the things that are good for us and taking care of us, I think people were doing less of.” - Psychologist

The 4 key detrimental impacts of COVID-19 on the mental health of youth:

4

Damaged (and damaging) socialization



Manifestation During the Pandemic

Concern around youth reliance on technology, in particular social media, was growing pre-pandemic. During lockdowns, reliance on technology increased exponentially, as the sole safe means of communicating. As many teens/young adults began to spend the vast majority of their time on electronic devices, two harmful effects became apparent.

Firstly, there was a marked reduction in in-person socialization with its associated benefits. In-person engagement contributes to the release of endorphins and fuels a general sense of well-being. In addition, teens/young adults were deprived of people who had previously surrounded them and acted as positive influences, such as teachers and coaches. More time and a closer bond among immediate family may have filled the void where positive family dynamics already existed but, for many, there was nothing to offset the negatives associated with a dysfunctional home environment.

Secondly, young people became even more susceptible to the damaging impact on self-perception of constantly comparing one's own life to the carefully curated lives presented on social media. During COVID-19, with little else to do, passive screen time became a dominant activity and it was easy to "scroll mindlessly" for hours on apps. Some respondents noted that symptoms seemed to be triggered when viewing their peers' curated posts, leading to flawed comparisons. Many felt they were missing out. This resulted in low self-esteem and increased feelings of isolation and hopelessness for many.

Lasting Effects and Implications for the Future

Mental healthcare providers report noticing increased levels of social awkwardness and unease among their younger patients since COVID-19. Reduced exposure to in-person social situations for an extended period of time has meant reduced development of social skills among this generation.

Even those who realized some benefit when socializing differently during COVID-19 are now experiencing a detrimental impact when transitioning back to the demands of an in-person world. Some experienced a degree of relief from the barriers of their social anxiety when interacting one step removed from other people, online rather than in-person. Others noted that wearing a mask left them feeling less exposed and therefore less vulnerable when interacting in-person, so this new social norm brought some comfort during COVID-19. However, the removal of these social crutches post-pandemic has tended to increase feelings of social inhibition and/or inadequacy.

Many teens/young adults are now experiencing substantial challenges and increased levels of anxiety and depression as they adjust back to regular society.

Teens/young adults and their healthcare providers agree that the damage inflicted on this group by passive screen time, and specifically social media use, was amplified during the pandemic — with long-lasting effects. Mental health support will be needed to address low self-esteem and feelings of hopelessness among larger numbers of this cohort. Not surprisingly, demand for cognitive behavioral therapy has increased, with a troubling corresponding increase in wait-times for consultations with psychiatrists, psychologists and therapists.



For consideration: How might the socialization gap be addressed? What can be done to mitigate the potential for harm from passive social media consumption? How will the increased need for mental health support among teens/young adults be handled within an already overloaded healthcare system?

In their own words:

“ [When asked if looking at social media worsens one’s symptoms] Yeah, I think yes. Especially for people that may already struggle with self-esteem, things like that. Or say you know there’s someone that you’re attracted to, but you see them constantly heart reacting or commenting on another person’s post. You know you end up playing, getting sucked into a rabbit hole of going through all their stuff and comparing all their stuff to your stuff. And you’re always going to find something to feel bad about in that comparison, because that’s ultimately what you are looking for. By doing that, you’re not looking at it and thinking, ‘oh, I’m going to find all these things that I have that are better’...The reason you are doing it is because you already feel like they are better in comparison.” - Patient

“ We’re on a lot of those platforms so we were able to still keep up friendships. But I think because of the sheer number of new people that I had met online during that time, I probably was talking to people that I had never met in person more so than even the friends that I did have. If you’re watching a movie virtually instead of going to the theaters, it’s almost parasocial in a way sometimes...just because there’s a barrier.” - Patient

“ It seems that COVID-19 also impacted social interaction. There seems to be some social awkwardness and lack of the niceties that used to happen. When a patient comes into my office, the pleasantries don’t happen as much, they just want to get down to business. There is this increased social awkwardness from not being around in person and I wonder what type of impact that will have.” - Psychiatrist



Plus 1
noteworthy
positive impact
for some:

5

Reduced barriers
when interacting
remotely



Manifestation During the Pandemic

Increased reliance upon technology for communication yielded a benefit for some of members of the youth demographic. Particularly for those whose social interactions had been hampered by anxiety and depression pre-pandemic, engaging via platforms such as Zoom proved less emotionally fraught than in-person interactions. Active digital socializing proved helpful in combatting anxiety and depression for some, facilitating their ability to communicate and find support from other people during a period of extreme isolation. [12] Some respondents in our study reported greater success interacting with a broader network of peers, with beneficial effects in terms of feelings of happiness and togetherness.

The switch to remote therapy also made the support of mental health professionals more accessible for some teens/young adults.

Lasting Effects and Implications for the Future

Early evidence suggests there is potential for active digital socializing — when utilized appropriately and in conjunction with in-person engagement — to support sustained feelings of connection among some groups of the population.

As with telemedicine more broadly, COVID-19 became a catalyst, forcing healthcare providers to overcome barriers to remote delivery of healthcare services. The new capabilities and enhancements to remote provision of mental health treatment, including prescribing/monitoring of medication and cognitive behavioral therapy, can help address gaps created in certain geographies by insufficient numbers of practicing psychiatrists/psychologists/ therapists, and by the overall increase in demand for mental health services.



For consideration: How might new/ sharpened insights into the potential benefits of active digital socialization be leveraged moving forward? What is required to optimally harness the technological and other healthcare delivery advances achieved during the pandemic?

In their own words:

“I had friends in different time zones, so some of the time I would talk to those kids. We had friends over in the UK too, so it was round the clock. Whenever I was by myself, if somebody was awake. I would be on Discord or Skype or something talking to people.” - Patient

“[When asked about telemedicine] There’s a big part of me that’s like, why was this never an option before COVID? Some people don’t always have access to therapy or the opportunity to drive in for a therapy session... Definitely had some clients over the years that I had to terminate because they just couldn’t get to the office.” - Psychologist

Potential Solutions and Key Considerations Moving Forward

The lasting impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of youth is clear. Research reveals potential solutions to help mitigate that impact and improve the lived experience of this cohort moving forward, by reducing symptoms of mental illness and providing optimal support.

Opportunities for improvement exist in three key areas: educational system, mental healthcare delivery, and technological supports. Cross-stakeholder collaboration will amplify the positive impact.

Educational system

- Schools and colleges, as well as other community organizations, are well-positioned to create environments that foster mental health. Already central to the lives of teens/young adults, they can take a leadership role in recognizing and helping to address the mental health needs of youth.
- Implementing mental health policies will provide the foundation. Promising early steps have been taken during and since the pandemic.
- More training for teachers will enable them to identify early warning signs of mental health challenges among their students, so they can appropriately direct support and resources.
 - Even if not reaching the level of mental illness, students who are continuing to struggle with lack of energy and endurance may need focused support to get back on track with their academics.
- Incorporating mental health education into the curriculum is underway within many educational institutions. This will help young people appreciate the importance of mental well-being and teach them to recognize and manage symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression — in themselves and others.
 - Importantly, this update to curricula will contribute to broader awareness and acceptance of mental health challenges, thereby helping reduce stigma.
 - Educational programs should focus on teaching young people resilience-building strategies and coping mechanisms, arming them with the tools needed to combat future challenges and maintain their well-being. This will be particularly important given the increasingly uncertain future revealed during the pandemic.
 - There is opportunity to build upon positive indicators of resilience observed during the pandemic. For many, their demonstrated ability to persevere and adapt during unprecedented life circumstances should be celebrated and promoted as a strength to be nurtured.
 - Educators can also play a role in addressing the socialization gap for the COVID generation, helping promote and develop in-person social skills.
 - Additional planning-based programs may be needed to help tackle the foreboding driven by perceptions of an increasingly uncertain future. Experience with setting and achieving goals can promote a more positive outlook and help overcome feelings of apathy and hopelessness. Thinking through risk mitigation strategies could empower students with a sense of greater control over their future.



- Peer support programs in schools could help combat loneliness and fuel meaningful connection while specifically addressing underlying drivers of mental illness among this age group.
 - Accepting support must be “destigmatized” and made attractive for teens/young adults. While success has been limited in past, minds appear to now be primed for greater acknowledgement and acceptance of the importance of mental health, and of acting to preserve it.
 - Study respondents suggested lunch/buddy programs, as well as sport events centered around mental health and well-being.
- Some youth would benefit from school programs that are purely social, as well, to help with the transition back from almost exclusive dependence upon remote connections to forging in-person friendships.
 - Online friendships may not fully compensate for a reduced “live” network of friends and may not be as sustainable.
 - More counselling regarding romantic relationships may be required for some who missed out on early immersion and observation during key formative years. Time will reveal the impact of the COVID-19 socialization gap on the forming of life partnerships among this generation.
- School-based mental health programs have begun to appear and need to expand, with appropriate insurance coverage to permit access.
- Better targeting and advertising of mental health resources offered by schools and colleges will improve access. Improvements are needed, given the currently reported low level of awareness among this cohort regarding where to turn if experiencing symptoms of mental illness.

Mental healthcare delivery

- Given the high level of need post-pandemic, it is essential that affordable and timely access to mental health services be expanded.
- Telemedicine platforms have demonstrably improved access during COVID-19, providing a foundation upon which to now build.
 - For some teens/young adults, online therapy is reportedly more conducive to open sharing, and facilitates maintaining regular mental health touchpoints.
 - Remote mental health services are an accessible option for individuals who may not otherwise seek help.
 - Online counseling services can be redesigned to maximize both access and effectiveness.
 - For example, there is potential for virtual support groups to bring together geographically dispersed teens/young adults who have similar circumstances and mental health needs, and will benefit from seeing that there are others going through something very similar. Benefits could include reduced social isolation, improved self-esteem, and motivation toward action via firsthand sharing of tips and coping mechanisms.
 - Successful utilization of targeted mental health support groups, in addition to 1:1 cognitive behavioral therapy, will increase the impact that therapists can have per hour of professional time, helping to increase capacity in the stretched mental healthcare system.



- Efforts have been made to improve access, and investment must be continued.
 - For example, the federal government has implemented policies to increase reimbursement for telemedicine, making it more financially viable for mental health providers to offer remote services.
 - Licensing waivers by some states have permitted practicing across state lines, thereby increasing access to care for individuals in underserved areas.
 - Some insurance companies have revised policies to cover teletherapy, making it a viable option for more people.
- Partnerships with schools, colleges and community organizations, as described above, will increase reach by meeting teens/young adults where they are.
- Crisis hotlines and helplines have been expanded during and since the pandemic, providing immediate assistance to those in distress.
- Pharmaceutical companies who manufacture treatments for mental health conditions can maximize the benefit of effective treatments by also playing a key role in education and support.
 - Disease state awareness campaigns bring more visibility to the lived experience of mental illness, with potential to reduce stigmatization and inspire support among friends, family and the broader community.
 - Support programs can extend beyond assistance with the medication itself, taking a leadership stance within a particular therapeutic area, fueled by deep insight, to improve patient experience and outcomes.
 - Communication that meaningfully connects will reflect true understanding of people experiencing mental illness, helping to reduce their feelings of isolation and potentially increasing receptivity to treatment and support that will ultimately contribute to improved outcomes.
 - Tailoring interventions, support and communications to the specific needs of this age cohort will increase effectiveness and impact.

Technological supports

- While COVID-19 forced adaptation in a short period of time, there remains considerable room for improvement among platforms utilized for healthcare delivery — in terms of functionality, user experience, protecting privacy, and accessibility.
- Mental health apps have surged in popularity, helping promote better mental health and also address symptoms of mental illness; for example, through meditation, better sleep hygiene, exercise regimens, and even matching people with qualified therapists.
- A national online database of mental health resources would credibly facilitate identifying, locating and utilizing available resources.
- Respondents suggest creation of an online mental health tipline, enabling a friend to submit a request to send mental health resources anonymously to someone they know is in need of intervention. (“A friend was concerned and thought you may find these resources helpful...”)



- Platforms for remote work could be optimized to more effectively replicate the sense of connection that tends to be fostered by in-person work environments. While the trend toward remote work continues for jobs where this is possible, many young adults report feeling disconnected from their remote jobs and colleagues.
- The benefits that some observed from active digital socialization during the pandemic could now be facilitated via platform advances and promotion. When used in conjunction with in-person engagement, active digital socialization can support sustained feelings of connection and togetherness, for key subpopulations of the youth cohort.
- To help combat the potential for harm from passive social media consumption, mental health tips can be embedded into apps.
 - For example, “take a break” prompts can be programmed to appear after a certain period of time has elapsed.
 - Sensor triggering content could be deployed based upon elapsed time and/or the nature of searches undertaken.
- Social media sites should consider introducing a pop-up when users post content related to severe mental health (as Facebook currently does).

All stakeholders can play a part in enhancing mental health literacy, ultimately reducing the stigma around mental illness and ensuring timely support for those in need. Importantly, collaboration across these sectors and stakeholders is crucial for a comprehensive and integrated approach to youth mental health. Healthcare providers, educational institutions, government agencies, community organizations, med-tech innovators, pharmaceutical companies, parents and teens/young adults themselves...all have a role to play.

By prioritizing youth mental health and optimizing care delivery — in terms of both prevention and treatment — we, as a society, can mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and build toward a positive, mentally healthy future.



References

- ^[1][Youth Depression and anxiety doubled during the pandemic, new analysis finds](#)
- ^[2][COVID-19 pandemic triggers 25% increase in prevalence of anxiety and depression worldwide](#)
- ^[3][Mental Illness Symptoms and Causes](#)
- ^[4][Latest Federal Data Show That Young People Are More Likely Than Older Adults to Be Experiencing Symptoms of Anxiety or Depression](#)
- ^[5][The need for a new medical model: a challenge for biomedicine](#)
- ^[6][Engel's biopsychosocial model is still relevant today](#)
- ^[7][Anxiety and Stress in Teens](#)
- ^[8][Mental Health and COVID-19 2021 Data](#)
- ^[9][Four in ten college students describe their mental health as poor](#)
- ^[10][What Causes Mental Illness in Youth?](#)
- ^[11][Mental Health Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Children and Adolescents](#)
- ^[12][The Kids Aren't Alright — Stress & Development team studies impact of the coronavirus pandemic on youth mental health](#)

Quotations from patients, psychiatrists and psychologists that are included throughout this white paper came from primary research conducted by the Ipsos team as part of our exploration of this topic. Qualitative interviews were conducted remotely, with respondents from across the U.S., in October of 2022.



About the Authors



Lauren Barry

Lauren is a Consultant in Ipsos' Healthcare Advisory Services team and is experienced in providing consultative insights to clients through primary and secondary research. She has helped execute and support a variety of engagements ranging from commercial strategy and positioning projects to market landscape and partnership initiatives, across different therapeutic areas. Lauren holds a Bachelor's degree in Biology from the University of Miami and an MPH in Health Policy and Management from Columbia University.



Giselle Perkowski

Giselle is a Consultant in Ipsos' Healthcare Advisory Services team and is experienced in bringing consultative insights to biopharma and healthcare clients to solve their most pressing business challenges. She has helped to support many client initiatives, including commercial strategy and market access work, with a strong focus on branding and positioning. Giselle holds a Bachelor's of Science in Biomedical Engineering from Union College and a Master in Engineering Management from Dartmouth College.



Earlene Worrall

Earlene is a Partner at Ipsos Healthcare Advisory whose work focuses on brand-building and positioning strategy. She brings decades of brand strategy expertise across healthcare and CPG. Healthcare clients commend Earlene's ability to uncover disruptive insights and translate those into opportunities for meaningful connection with customers. She challenges and guides client teams to uncover fresh perspectives and achieve the kind of expansive thinking that is capable of breaking through to positively disrupt existing habits, attitudes, beliefs — and treatment algorithms. She unfailingly delivers actionable strategic recommendations, while actively engaging the team throughout the process. Earlene is passionate about the area of mental health and seeks to bring about positive change through education and through her strategy work with healthcare clients.

About Ipsos Healthcare Advisory

Ipsos Healthcare Advisory is a multi-disciplinary team of experienced consultants who work with biopharma, med tech, digital health, and other healthcare organizations to solve complex challenges across the spectrum of healthcare. We partner with our clients in a trusted advisor role to tackle their toughest strategic challenges, optimizing performance with clarity, speed, and certainty.

About Ipsos

At Ipsos we are passionately curious about people, markets, brands, and society. We deliver information and analysis that makes our complex world easier and faster to navigate and inspires our clients to make smarter decisions. With a strong presence in 90 countries, Ipsos employs more than 18,000 people and conducts research programs in more than 100 countries. Founded in France in 1975, Ipsos is controlled and managed by research professionals.