

Challenges for research on adolescent mental health in the wake of COVID-19

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Consequencies of school closures from a global perspective

“Hundreds of millions of children have lost at least a full year of schooling due to COVID-19. This pandemic has brought about the largest loss of human capital in living memory and the worst education crisis in a century.”

“It’s vital for children to be in school, especially primary school age children. The consequences of school closures could be felt for decades and are contributing to even wider inequality, particularly for girls.”

David Malpass, World Bank Group President,
October 29, 2021

Systematic review of associations between school closures and mental health among children and adolescents

*“In this systematic review of 36 studies from 11 countries, school closures and social lockdown during **the first COVID-19 wave were associated with adverse mental health symptoms (such as distress and anxiety) and health behaviors (such as higher screen time and lower physical activity) among children and adolescents. The effects of school closures could not be assessed separately from broader social lockdown measures.**”*

Viner R, Russell S, Saull R, et al. School Closures During Social Lockdown and Mental Health, Health Behaviors, and Well-being Among Children and Adolescents During the First COVID-19 Wave: A Systematic Review [published online ahead of print, 2022 Jan 18]. *JAMA Pediatr.* 2022;10.1001/jamapediatrics.2021.5840. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2021.5840

A call for quality monitoring

WHO European Technical Advisory Group recommendation

“Countries should monitor changes in mental health at population level through valid, standardized and comparable measures and instruments”.

WHO (2021). Mental health impacts of COVID-19 in the WHO European Region: recommendations from the European Technical Advisory Group on the mental health impacts of COVID-19, 30 June 2021. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2021.

“Tip of an iceberg”

*“But even absent a pandemic, psychosocial distress and poor mental health afflict far too many children – including millions who, each year, are forced from their homes, scarred by conflict and serious adversity, and deprived of access to schooling, protection and support. **In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic represents merely the tip of the iceberg when it comes to poor mental health outcomes.** It is an iceberg we have been ignoring for far too long, and unless we act, it will continue to have disastrous results for children and societies long after the pandemic is over”.*

[Henrietta H. Fore, UNICEF Executive Director]

United Nations Children’s Fund, The State of the World’s Children 2021: On My Mind – Promoting, protecting and caring for children’s mental health, UNICEF, New York, October 2021.

Thanks!

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