

LIFE IN LOCKDOWN

Child and adolescent mental health
and well-being in the time of COVID-19



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A child studies his Class 6 textbooks. He cannot participate in online learning as his family has no mobile phone. “This is a pandemic,” says his mother, “and the measures are necessary, but a disaster for the kids.” Informal settlement of Mathare, Nairobi, Kenya, 2020.

LIFE IN LOCKDOWN:

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in the time of COVID-19





This study was conducted by the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, in Florence, Italy.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADHD	attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
ASD	autism spectrum disorder
COVID	coronavirus disease
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
EVD	Ebola virus disease
GAD	generalized anxiety disorder
H1N1	influenza A virus subtype H1N1
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
ICD	International Classification of Diseases
LMICs	low- and middle-income countries
MERS	Middle East respiratory syndrome
OCD	obsessive compulsive disorder
ODD	oppositional defiant disorder
PRISMA	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses
PTSD	post-traumatic stress disorder
SAMHSA	Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
SARS	severe acute respiratory syndrome
SARS-CoV-2	severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2
WHO	World Health Organization



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The COVID-19 pandemic is focusing global attention on child and adolescent mental health.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all levels of society globally. Government-imposed lockdowns and school closures in response to the disease have significantly disrupted the daily lives of children and adolescents, leading to them spending increased time at home, restricted freedom of movement, online learning, and limited or no physical social interaction with their peers. Despite the potential for greater connection within families, this isolation also risks loss of peer support and community networks, education and learning, social isolation

and uncertainty about COVID-19 and the future. The pandemic has had a significant impact, not only on the mental health of children and adolescents, but also on their caregivers, families and communities.

Before the pandemic, it was estimated that diagnosable mental health conditions affected about one in eight (13 per cent) children and adolescents aged 6–18 years. Further, it was also estimated that around 50 per cent of mental health conditions arise before the age of 14, and 75 per cent by the mid-20s.

BEFORE THE PANDEMIC:

Mental health conditions affected about **1 in 8** children and adolescents aged **6–18** years.





Studies from previous epidemics, such as Ebola and HIV, and from humanitarian settings with similarities to the COVID-19 context – such as quarantine, isolation and stigma – have demonstrated enduring impacts on mental health. These include anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), although there is limited evidence for how these conditions have affected child and adolescent mental health during these epidemics.

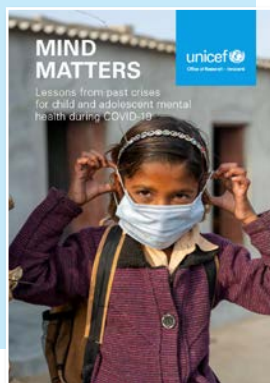
Our first report in this series on child and adolescent mental health is entitled *Mind Matters: Lessons from past crises for child and adolescent mental health during COVID-19*. This second report looks at how the early stages of the global pandemic in 2020 affected the mental health of children and adolescents (those in the first two decades of life).

Our rapid evidence review seeks to understand the immediate effects of COVID-19 on child and adolescent mental health from the initial wave of the pandemic, and apply lessons learned to mitigating these effects, as well as future health crises. To assess the mental health and psychosocial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and adolescents, UNICEF Innocenti conducted a rapid

- *Which risk and protective factors have affected the mental health of children and adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how have these factors varied across subgroups of children and adolescents?*

The conceptual framework guiding this rapid review is derived from three different instruments: the social-ecological systems model; the life-course perspective; and the social determinants of health approach. The framework places the child in the family, community and society, and explores the ramifications of COVID-19 on the child's intimate world, the world around them and the outer worlds of influence. The framework also emphasizes the importance of pre-existing and ongoing mediating and moderating risks and protective factors across various ages and developmental stages of the child.

Applying a continuum – from positive to negative – to assess mental health outcomes, we categorized our findings into *externalizing, internalizing, and lifestyle-related behaviours and reactions*. We also looked at *positive mental health outcomes* of the pandemic. Our research focused on key risk and protective factors including individual and family



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