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Getting Young People and Young Adults Included and Engaged in the Cultural and Creative Sectors

Corona has been blamed for the poor well-being of young people: The explanation is different! Danish experience.

The pandemic and associated country lockdowns had a major impact on the mental health of populations, and certain subgroups should be closely followed to prevent negative long-term consequences. Younger individuals and individuals with a history of mental illness would benefit from tailored public-health interventions to prevent or counteract the negative effects of the pandemic. Individuals across Western and Northern Europe have thus far responded in psychologically similar ways despite differences in government approaches to the pandemicⁱ.

Adolescent mental health in Denmark is grim reading. But the corona crisis has primarily had an effect just during the shutdowns and not in the long run, shows a study from the University of Copenhagen.

Loneliness. Depression. Anxiety. There has been widespread concern about how the corona crisis has affected the mental health and health of young people as a result of them not being able to go to school, see their friends or go out into town.

Two years of corona have left their mark on children and young people. Loneliness and challenges in engaging socially with others. Increased conflicts with the parents at home and pressure over long periods of schooling from home via a screen. 2,672 calls on *BørneTelefonen*ⁱⁱ about corona from January 2020 to January 2022 shows that two years of a pandemic has left its mark on children and young. In 2021, 18.0 per cent of the conversations about corona about loneliness, 5.4 per cent. about anxiety and 3.3 per cent. about suicide.

The conversations became heavier as corona became an integrated part of everyday life. The conversations on *BørneTelefonen* testify that corona has left its mark on many children and young people. During the two years when corona has characterized everyone's everyday life, loneliness is e.g. became more dominant in the conversations about corona. In 2020, 3.8 per cent said children about loneliness in conversations about corona. In 2021, the share had risen to 18.0 per cent, and loneliness became the most frequent topic of conversation about corona. In 2021, 5.4 per cent of the conversations about corona were also about anxiety and 3.3 percent of conversations about suicide.

An analysis of the content of the conversations shows that where children turned at the start of the pandemic, partly because they were afraid of the disease, the talks are in 2021 and at the beginning of 2022 marked by the fact that many children are affected by discouragement and abandonment. Children and young people talk about feeling lonely and isolated from peers, about conflicts at home, and about how affects them negatively when the parents are under pressure.

A study from the University of Copenhagenⁱⁱⁱ now shows that we may not need to be quite so worried. This is what Katrine Strandberg-Larsen, associate professor of public health science, who led the study, tells us.

"We did not find strong indications for a persistent negative effect on mental health measured as quality of life, mental well-being and loneliness. Neither the first nor the second long-term shutdown of the country,' she says.

The study is based on data from 30,000 young people aged 18 to 24. Before, during and after the two major corona shutdowns, they answered a number of questions about quality of life, mental well-being and loneliness. And the outcome is overall reassuring, Katrine Strandberg-Larsen estimates.

Dive during shutdown

The National Board of Health recently published a major report on the health of Danes, the Health Profile. It paints what researchers at the University of Copenhagen call "a gloomy picture of young people's mental health". But it is not immediately the corona crisis that can be attributed to this condition. At least not in the long term.

Although there are no long-term consequences, it does suggest that young people's mental health plummeted during both the first and second shutdowns. Mental health was at its lowest level during the most comprehensive lockdown of 2020, according to the figures.

"This suggests that there is a shock effect. That when something big hits, it affects our well-being. But somewhere or other it is also an expression of something healthy that you react to what is happening in the world around us,' says Katrine Strandberg-Larsen.

In line with the first gradual reopening, however, mental well-being was at the same level as before. However, according to the study, the quality of life remained lower for a while.

Young people with depressive symptoms do not experience a dip in mental health

Something else that Katrine Strandberg-Larsen believes is important to note is that the study shows that young people with depressive symptoms do not seem to experience a similar decline in mental health as young people without depressive symptoms.

"We actually see hints of improvement for young people with depressive symptoms. It could be that the shutdowns create a slowdown in society, which for some can be experienced as a relief - but that is pure guesswork."

However, it is important to keep in mind that young people with depressive symptoms before the shutdown have significantly lower mental health compared to young people without depressive symptoms, also during the shutdown^{iv}.

ⁱ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S266677622030020X>

ⁱⁱ BørneTelefonen: Open line for children and youth

ⁱⁱⁱ https://nyheder.ku.dk/alle_nyheder/2022/04/nedlukningerne-bed-sig-ikke-fast-i-unges-mentale-helbred/

^{iv} <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S002239562201236>

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