SUMMARY REPORT 1
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The Oxford ARC Study: Achieving Resilience during COVID-19 - Psychosocial Risk and Protective Factors amidst a Pandemic in Adolescents and their Parents

**SUMMARY**

In this **first** report from the first **three weeks** of our study we report data from 233 parents and 321 young people. In this report, we focus on some general measures of mental health relating to anxiety, depression, and general wellbeing, as well as the experience of loneliness. We are finding that young people are being highly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis and social distancing measures. We suggest that young people are likely to be more affected by social distancing measures than other age groups.

**BACKGROUND**

Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic has required a prolonged period of social distancing and government advice to stay at home. This is likely to be particularly difficult for young people who are already undergoing substantive neural, cognitive and social changes and we know that first-onset of mental health problems often occurs during this period of life. We have designed this longitudinal study to examine resilient functioning in relation to the wide ranging stresses that have arisen from the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown measures. While many things can impact resilient functioning, understanding the role of individual psychological processes is important. Our primary aim is to deepen our understanding of those psychological risk and protective factors that relate to worry, mental health and resilience in relation to social isolation in young people.

We are asking four key questions in this study:

1. What are the psychosocial experiences of young people in isolation and how is it affecting their mental health?
2. What psychological factors promote or hinder resilient functioning in young people and their parents in relation to Covid-19?
3. Does increased worry and perceived stress due to the Covid-19 situation result in reduced resilience?
4. Is the association between perceived stress and worry and resilience influenced by differences in cognitive processes such as mental flexibility?
In our previous research we have found that worry and anxiety are very common in young people, with 80% of a sample of ~500 reporting that they engage in some form of worry on a regular basis. Our on-going work suggests that psychological processes such as mental flexibility, which involves the ability to adjust goals and shift a thought or action according to the fluctuating demands of the situation, can have an important impact on the development of worry and psychological resilience. We will investigate this hypothesis in relation to the increased worry and stress likely to be induced by a period of enforced social isolation.
MAIN FINDINGS

- Young people are reporting lower levels of wellbeing than parents
- Young people are feeling more lonely than parents during social isolation

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE REPORTING LOWER LEVELS OF WELLBEING THAN PARENTS

We asked young people and their parents to each rate how anxious and depressed they are, and to estimate their overall wellbeing on standardized mental health measures. Young people reported higher levels of depression and anxiety, relative to parents, in each of the first three weeks of the study. We also see a slight trend for increases in anxiety and depression over time in young people. However, we need a larger sample across a longer period of time to draw any firm conclusions.

Figure 1: Total score on the Generalized Anxiety Scale (left) and Patient Health Questionnaire [Depression] (right) for parents and young people. Higher scores indicate higher reported depression/anxiety.
Young people tended to report lower positive wellbeing than parents, although the difference is not as evident as in depression and anxiety. Tracking depression, anxiety, and wellbeing in combination over time will allow us to disentangle the factors that help, or hinder, positive and negative wellbeing in young people.

![Wellbeing graph]

Figure 2: Total score on the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale. Higher scores indicate higher wellbeing.

**Young people are feeling more lonely than parents during social isolation**

![Loneliness and isolation chart]

Young people are feeling **lonely and isolated** more of the time than parents.

Figure 3: Comparing feelings of loneliness and isolation in young people and parents
Young people are spending an average of 3 hours a day on social media, almost exclusively to keep in touch with people. Despite this, they feel significantly more lonely than their parents. In our study, 35% of young people said they feel lonely often or most of the time, while only 17% of their parents indicated this was true for them. Conversely, 40% of the parents said that they never feel lonely, while only 20% of the young people did.

**Figure 4: Response on the question “How often do you feel lonely?” 1 – Never, 5 – Often/Always.**

Within young people, a sizable proportion of all age groups from 13 to 18 reported feeling lonely. We found a trend for loneliness to increase with age, with 18-year-olds being the loneliest. Our future reports will investigate age related factors that are likely to contribute to this difference.
Figure 5: In young people, loneliness slightly increases with age. Response on the question “How often do you feel lonely?” 1 – Never, 5 – Often/Always. Note that we have zoomed in the scale to highlight differences with age.
**APPENDIX**

**METHODS**

The Oxford ARC Study (Achieving Resilience During Covid-19) is a *longitudinal quantitative study* that is obtaining data on demographics, personality traits, behaviour and attitudes relating to COVID-19, mental health, perceived stress, loneliness, mental flexibility and worry in an online sample of young people aged 13-18 years. We are also collecting data from parents/carers of those who are participating in the study. To date, 321 of young people and 233 of their parents have participated in the study. Participants are asked to answer a range of survey questions during their first assessment session along with an optional behavioural measure of mental flexibility and then will be asked to complete a weekly online survey for the duration of the pandemic. Follow-up data will then be obtained on a monthly basis for up to 1 year from the beginning of the study. Our sample size is currently low and therefore the results are not representative of young people. The study sample is being recruited by means of a variety of channels including through schools, social media, and targeted advertising.

This first report presents findings from the first three weeks of the survey. Subsequent reports will be released on a weekly basis. The Oxford ARC Study has full ethical and data protections approval and is fully GDPR compliant. For further information, please contact either Dr Sam Parsons: sam.parsons@psy.ox.ac.uk or Prof Elaine Fox: Elaine.fox@psy.ox.ac.uk.

To participate, visit: [https://oxfordARCstudy.com/](https://oxfordARCstudy.com/)
RESEARCH TEAM

The Oxford ARC study research team is based at the Department of Experimental Psychology, University of Oxford and includes: Prof Elaine Fox (Principle Investigator), Dr Sam Parsons, Dr Ana Todorovic, Dr Annabel Songco, and Ms Michele Lim.

Our Collaborators

Prof Susanne Schweizer (University of Cambridge & University of New South Wales)

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