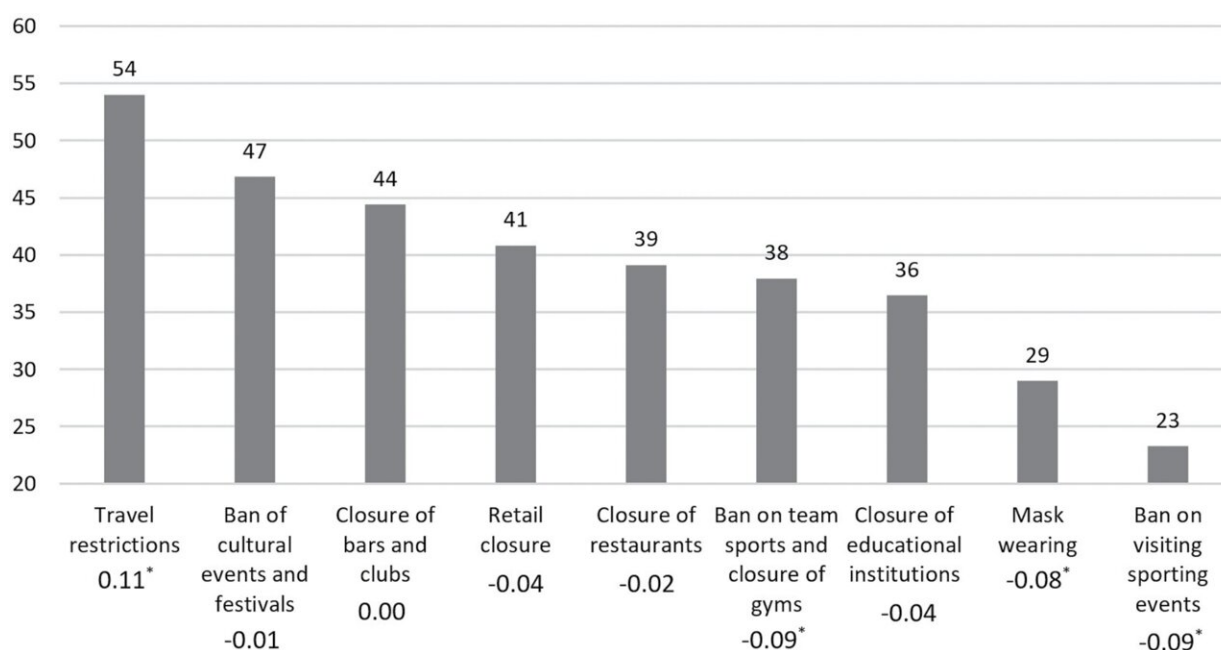


New study examines long-term negative effects of COVID-19 pandemic on well-being of young people

December 4 2023, by Japhet Johnstone



Share of respondents (in percent) who stated that a containment measure placed a (very) strong burden on them in winter 2021/2022. The legend shows different containment measures and the correlation between answers on the 5-point scale and life satisfaction. Correlations are based on OLS regressions to control for baseline life satisfaction from fall/winter 2019. Credit: *European Sociological Review* (2023). DOI: 10.1093/esr/jcad077

A [study](#) led by education professor Martin Neugebauer of Freie

Universität Berlin and published in the *European Sociological Review* shows that young people's life satisfaction significantly declined during the pandemic. The decline was three times stronger than among the overall German population.

Neugebauer, an expert on education at Freie Universität Berlin, in collaboration with Alexander Patzina from the University of Bamberg, Hans Dietrich from the Institute of Employment Research, and Malte Sandner from the Nuremberg Institute of Technology, examined the effects of the [pandemic](#) on the [life satisfaction](#) of high school students in their last year of secondary education between the start of the pandemic in early 2020 and early 2022.

Defining one's identity, first love, big life decisions

Teenagers between the ages of 16 and 19 face plenty of challenges during this period of their lives even under "normal" circumstances. But for this age group, 2020 and 2021 were exceptionally hard years given that [young people](#) were subjected to multiple quarantines, [social isolation](#), and frequent interruptions to their regular schooling and extracurricular activities. As a result, there has been significant concern about the long-term negative effects that the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing restrictions and anxieties might have on adolescents and young adults.

However, previous studies frequently focused solely on the effects of the first wave of the pandemic, meaning that long-term impacts went unreported. Most studies also lacked a [control group](#) to compare how life [satisfaction](#) was faring among people who were not impacted by a pandemic.

"We were able to fill this knowledge gap by looking at how life satisfaction developed among youths during the two years of the

pandemic and comparing that to trends among youths at the same development stage, but who did not experience the pandemic. The study also describes which restrictions these young people found to be particularly burdensome," Neugebauer explains.

The researchers compared data regarding life satisfaction from 2,698 teenagers who were affected by the pandemic and compared them with data from 4,834 teenagers at the same stage of development, but who did not experience the pandemic.

The data on the "corona cohort" come from a [longitudinal study](#) carried out by the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) on teenagers completing their last year of high school in Germany before the pandemic in fall 2019 as well as over the following two years during winter of 2020/2021 and winter 2021/2022. The data on the "pre-pandemic" cohort came from the National Educational Study Panel (NEPS) and covered graduating high school students in Germany from 2014 to 2018.

The results of the study titled "Two Pandemic Years Greatly Reduced Young People's Life Satisfaction: Evidence from a Comparison with Pre-COVID-19 Panel Data" demonstrated a significant reduction in life satisfaction by a scale value of about 0.8 on the life satisfaction scale (corresponding to an effect size of $d = 0.4$) that has persisted at least two years after the pandemic first began. This indicates that young people's drop in life satisfaction was three times stronger than in the overall population, which had a scale value of 0.24.

"A decrease in life satisfaction of this magnitude is highly unusual. Typically we only see a decline of this nature following a handful of devastating [life events](#), such as after becoming unemployed or the death of a spouse," says Neugebauer.

The study not only details the consequences of the pandemic, but also indicates which hygiene and social distancing regulations young people found the most taxing. In the winter of 2021/2022, 54% of the respondents, who would have been 18 to 19 years old at the time, said that they felt impacted or strongly impacted by restrictions on freedom of movement, such as festivals and cultural events being prohibited (47%) and bars and clubs being closed (44%).

Fewer respondents were bothered by the obligation to wear a [face mask](#), the closure of schools and universities, and the restrictions on sporting events, with a mere third of all those surveyed feeling impacted or strongly impacted by such measures. "Many people got used to the masks, but found not being able to move freely or socialize harder to bear," says Neugebauer.

The study highlights that specific support measures are urgently needed for young people so that they are better able to handle the psychological consequences they face in the midst and in the wake of emergencies. Its authors say that these findings will be essential for future political decisions and for devising measures in similar crisis situations.

One question left unanswered by the study is whether the situation of [young adults](#) has improved since the end of the pandemic and the conclusion of containment measures. "We are currently in the process of shedding light on this issue," says Neugebauer.

More information: Martin Neugebauer et al, Two pandemic years greatly reduced young people's life satisfaction: evidence from a comparison with pre-COVID-19 panel data, *European Sociological Review* (2023). [DOI: 10.1093/esr/jcad077](https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcad077)

Provided by Free University of Berlin

Citation: New study examines long-term negative effects of COVID-19 pandemic on well-being of young people (2023, December 4) retrieved 26 June 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2023-12-long-term-negative-effects-covid-pandemic.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.