

Impact of returning to school on adolescent mental health the subject of a new study

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Oxford University study investigates how going back to school is affecting young people's mental health. Credit: Shutterstock

Researchers from Oxford University have found that, during lockdown, teenagers mental health is struggling compared to their parents.

The Oxford ARC study, launched in May, has found that teenagers consistently report higher levels of anxiety and depression than parents. Around 35% of teenagers are saying they feel lonely often or most of the time, compared to 17% of parents. At the same time, about 40% of parents say they never feel lonely, compared to only 20% of teenagers. Since May, teenagers consistently reported that they felt unable to control the important things in life, with rates as high as 60% last month.

Now, millions of teenagers are returning to [school](#). Far from being a typical return to school after summer break, this year's students will bring with them unique experiences, worries, and traumas from lockdown during this global pandemic lockdown.

The Oxford ARC study, is launching a new phase of research in order to understand how certain aspects of the school experience are helping or

harming young people's [mental health](#) during the transition back to school and into the 'new normal'. Teenagers interested in taking part can go to the Oxford ARC website to find out more.

Elina Thomas Jones from the TRIUMPH Network's Youth Advisory Panel said, 'Personally, my mental health has been up and down throughout lockdown. To begin with, it was being affected by the fact it felt as if everything had been ripped away so suddenly. However, at this point, it is the uncertainty of what comes next that affects my mental health the most. With the anxiety regarding the transition of going to university, along with the pressure leading up to A-level results day, the education system has had a major impact on my mental ill health; and I think that would be similar for most young people.'

The Oxford ARC study will investigate what helps and what hinders psychological resilience in young people during the transition back to school.

A staggering 75% of mental health conditions present themselves during this key phase in child development. Despite this, only a minority of research funding goes towards understanding mental health during adolescence. Most disconcertingly, young people report feeling left out of the COVID-19 conversation.

In the Oxford ARC study, teenagers have their say by being a fundamental part of the research. There are over 1000 teenagers and their parents participating in the study so far, but we need many more to get the best picture of how to promote resilience and optimal wellbeing in young people. The results will provide vital information that can help us better respond to the mental health needs of teenagers now and in the future.

Elaine Fox, professor of psychology & affective neuroscience at the University of Oxford, said, 'It is vitally important that we include the voice of young people in understanding the impact of the

COVID-19 pandemic on mental [health](#) and wellbeing. Little is known about what factors promote resilience in times of uncertainty and the Oxford ARC study is designed to answer this question. We urgently need lots of young people to take part in the study now that schools are beginning to re-open so that we can truly begin to understand what most concerns [young people](#).'

For further details and how to take part, please visit the [Oxford ARC study website](#).

Provided by University of Oxford

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