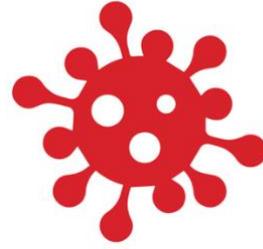


Swiss Corona Stress Study

www.coronastress.ch



Significant increase in psychological stress in the second Covid-19 wave

The latest survey by the University of Basel on psychological stress in the second Covid-19 wave has revealed that levels have increased significantly in comparison with the spring of this year. The proportion of people with severe depressive symptoms stood at 9% during lockdown in April, but this figure had risen to 18% in November. Young people are particularly affected, and those who have suffered financially during the pandemic. French-speaking Switzerland has been affected more strongly than the rest of the country.

More than 11,000 people from all over Switzerland took part in the new survey, as part of the Swiss Corona Stress Study led by Professor Dominique de Quervain. The form of data collection means that by definition this is not a representative survey. However, the sociodemographic attributes of the respondents reflect a broad spectrum of the Swiss population, and the current survey is no different to the first one carried out during lockdown in April 2020 in terms of these attributes. All the correlations and comparisons reported are statistically highly significant.

According to the current survey, stress levels have increased significantly in comparison with the first wave – the proportion of people experiencing severe stress during the lockdown in April stood at about 11%; in November, this figure was as high as 20%. Depressive symptoms have also increased.

Financial problems, conflicts at home and anxiety about the future

The main drivers of psychological stress and symptoms of depression include changing situations at work, at school or in vocational training caused by Covid-19. Further factors include the burden of financial losses, increased conflicts at home and anxiety about the future, all caused by the pandemic. These factors are currently reported by respondents to be more burdensome in comparison with the lockdown period in April. Study participants found the fear that their loved ones may become seriously ill or even die from Covid-19, and the pressure of social restrictions as stressful.

Increase in severe depressive symptoms

The proportion of respondents with severe depressive symptoms was 3% before the pandemic, 9% during the lockdown and 12% following the easing of restrictions in May, with a rise to 18% in November.

Those particularly affected comprise:

- Young people: The prevalence of severe depressive symptoms is 29% in those aged 14-24, 21% in ages 25-34, 17% in ages 35-44, 14% in ages 45-54, 13% in ages 55-64 and 6% in the over 65s.
- People working in areas of business affected by the measures imposed by the federal government and the cantons (e.g. restaurants, culture, tourism). With a prevalence of 28%, people who have seen their financial reserves decline are twice as likely to experience severe depressive symptoms as people with unchanged or increased reserves (14%).
- At 22%, people from French-speaking Switzerland are more strongly affected than those in German-speaking Switzerland, with 17%, or Italian-speaking Switzerland, with 16%. In addition, researchers found a link between the strength of the second wave (incidence of new infections) and the prevalence of severe depressive symptoms in the cantons.

Stress-reducing factors

As seen in their previous surveys, the research team again found that people who are physically active experience less stress and fewer depressive symptoms on average than those who are less physically active. The stress-reducing effect of sport is already known from previous studies.

The researchers advise those affected by depressive symptoms to seek help, which is available by phone at 143 (www.143.ch) and 147 for children and young people (www.147.ch), or from psychological or psychiatric professionals. A short and anonymous self-test for depressive symptoms can be found at www.coronastress.ch.

The researchers also point out that young people are particularly affected by the psychological impact of the pandemic, and that schools should take this into account with a flexible approach to the curriculum.

The survey also reveals that financial losses related to Covid-19 have a significant effect on mental health, and that compensation of these losses is therefore important.

The results are based on a survey period of 11-19 November 2020. During this period, 11,612 individuals from all over Switzerland took part in the anonymous online survey at www.coronastress.ch.

Further information:

Professor Dominique de Quervain

University of Basel, Transfaculty Research Platform Molecular and Cognitive Neurosciences

Member of the [Swiss National COVID-19 Science Task Force](#)

Web: <https://mcn.unibas.ch/de/home/>

email: Dominique.dequervain@unibas.ch, tel: 061 207 02 37