



The impact of COVID-19 on the Psychosocial and Mental Well-Being of Adolescents

RAPID ASSESSMENT STUDY

EVIDENCE FROM PALESTINE

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“Our results show that the COVID-19 pandemic and continuous lockdowns are having a significant impact on the psychosocial and mental health of Palestinian adolescents”



Background and context of assessment

Impact of COVID-19 on adolescents and youth

- Billions of students around the world have been drastically disrupted, particularly by school closures, no activities, seeing family and friends, and maintaining social distancing measures
- Young adults are experiencing the greatest deterioration in mental health, poor sleep, and increased fear and stressed levels
 - Quarantine and lockdown restrictions ultimately can lead to adolescents feeling socially isolated, and lonely potentially increasing the risk of mental illness in this young generation.
- Psychological impact of COVID-19 on adolescents seems to be far greater than the impact on adults
- Unless there are multi-sectoral approaches to implement essential psychosocial and mental health interventions for adolescents during times of, a much higher percentage of adolescents are at risk of long-term physical, socio-emotional, and psychosocial and mental health problems over the entire course of their lives

Context of issue in Palestine

- Palestinian population already facing psychological stress, anxiety and fear due to political situation and the ongoing war.
- Adolescents are one of the most neglected groups in Palestine, yet they make up over 30% of the entire population-need more attention!
- The severity of the measures to curb the spread of the virus in the oPt have had serious effects on many families' financial situation, and exacerbated mental health problems due to the ongoing political crisis.
- Rise in unemployment rates
- Lack of studies conducted on adolescent health (particularly mental health) in Palestine during/post COVID-19

Objectives of assessment

- to assess the overall impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on the psychosocial and mental well-being of adolescents
- to examine to what extent the pandemic and lockdown has affected daily routines, lifestyle behaviors, feelings and emotions, and social interactions of adolescents
- to assess the impact of the lockdown and pandemic on the quality of education received
- to understand if adolescents seek mental/psychosocial support and help if needed

Recruitment and Data Collection

Recruitment

- Females and males residing in West Bank and Gaza
- Convenience/purposive sampling
- Structured online survey was distributed to networks of Juzoor through network pages and social media sites
- Ethical approval obtained; informed consent obtained electronically.

Data Collection

- The online survey assessed sociodemographic factors, lifestyle behaviors during COVID-19, COVID-19 related factors, sources of stress, and psychosocial and mental health factors which occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. All questions were structured to be answered directly in comparison to “before” or “during” confinement conditions.

Mental well-being was assessed using the **Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS)**. It assesses positive affects including feelings of optimism, cheerfulness, and relaxation as well as autonomy, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, personal growth and purpose in life.

Sample characteristics

N=1829 adolescents between the ages 13-19 years were virtually surveyed.

- 58.9% females
- Mean age: 16 years old
- 72.4% West Bank; 27.6% Gaza Strip
- 34.3% from villages and 22.9% from camps
- 37.1% were high school students, 33.0% middle school students and 18.3% were enrolled in university.
- 48.2% reported family income less than 1000 USD

Key Findings

1. COVID-19 infections and fears of contracting the virus among sample

When asked about the fear of personally getting infected:

- 13.5% reported being scared all the time, while 23.6% expressed they were scared all the time of a family/household member contracting the virus
- 50.6% felt that the future seems extremely/a lot scarier than before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 28.9% felt extremely worried they may die from COVID-19
- Participants which were not infected from the virus were more likely to feel extremely scared about their future, worried about dying from COVID-19 and had extreme feelings of grief



- 23.5% of respondents reported they have been infected with COVID-19
- 37.5% of respondents reported one of their family/household members got infected with COVID-19



Key Findings

2. *Stress levels and main stressors during the COVID-19 lockdown*

Main causes of stress

- 47.0% -distance learning
- 33.5% -not attending recreational activities
- 32.4%- not going to school
- 26.5%- staying at home all day

Females more frequently stressed from:

- not going to school
- distance learning
- housework/cleaning
- distance from family and relatives

Stress Levels

- On a self-rating scale from 0-6 (6 =maximum stress), over 60% reported a 4 or higher
- Females were more likely to report higher levels of stress.
- High stress levels were more frequent among adolescents who have been infected with COVID-19
- Adolescents with high stress levels were also those who reported their quality of education was affected

Key Findings

3. Change in financial situation as a result of the lockdown



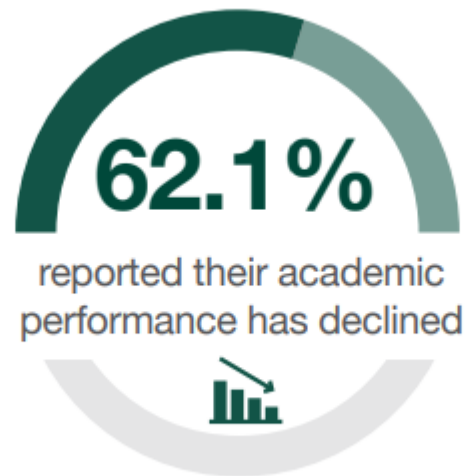
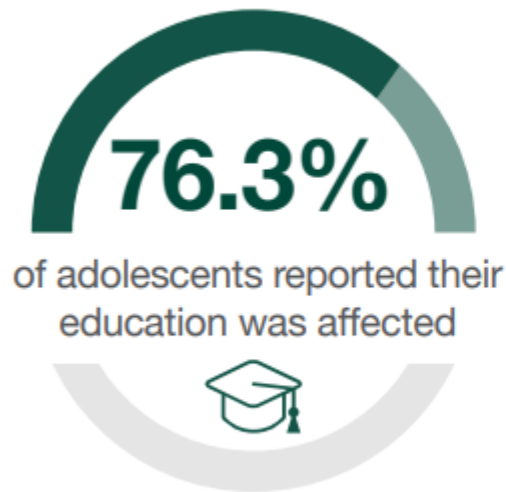
32.0% had difficulty in accessing healthy food; 31.9% had difficulty in accessing medications and 37.1% had difficulty in paying for medical treatment

18.1% of employed adolescents and 62.5% of adolescent's family member financial situation had become WORSE, respectively

8.3% of employed adolescents and 43.5% of adolescent's family member lost their job due to COVID-19

Key Findings

4. Impact of lockdown on education




Females
were more likely to report a decline in academic performance than males

Participants which reported a decline in their academic performance were those who also reported having difficulty accessing electronic devices for online learning.

Key Findings

5. Change in social interactions and family relationships during lockdown



reported a lot more tension between their parents, while 20.4% reported a lot more tension between themselves and their parents.



reported their parents have been a lot more strict on them following lockdown restrictions.



reported they were staying in touch with family and friends less compared to before the lockdown.



reported they have been less socially connected compared to before the lockdown. On the other hand, 17.3% stated they were more socially connected.



reported they have experienced some sort of cyberbullying during the lockdown.

**Cyberbullying was
more frequently
reported among
females than males**

Among the sample, females were less likely to stay socially connected than males.

Key Findings

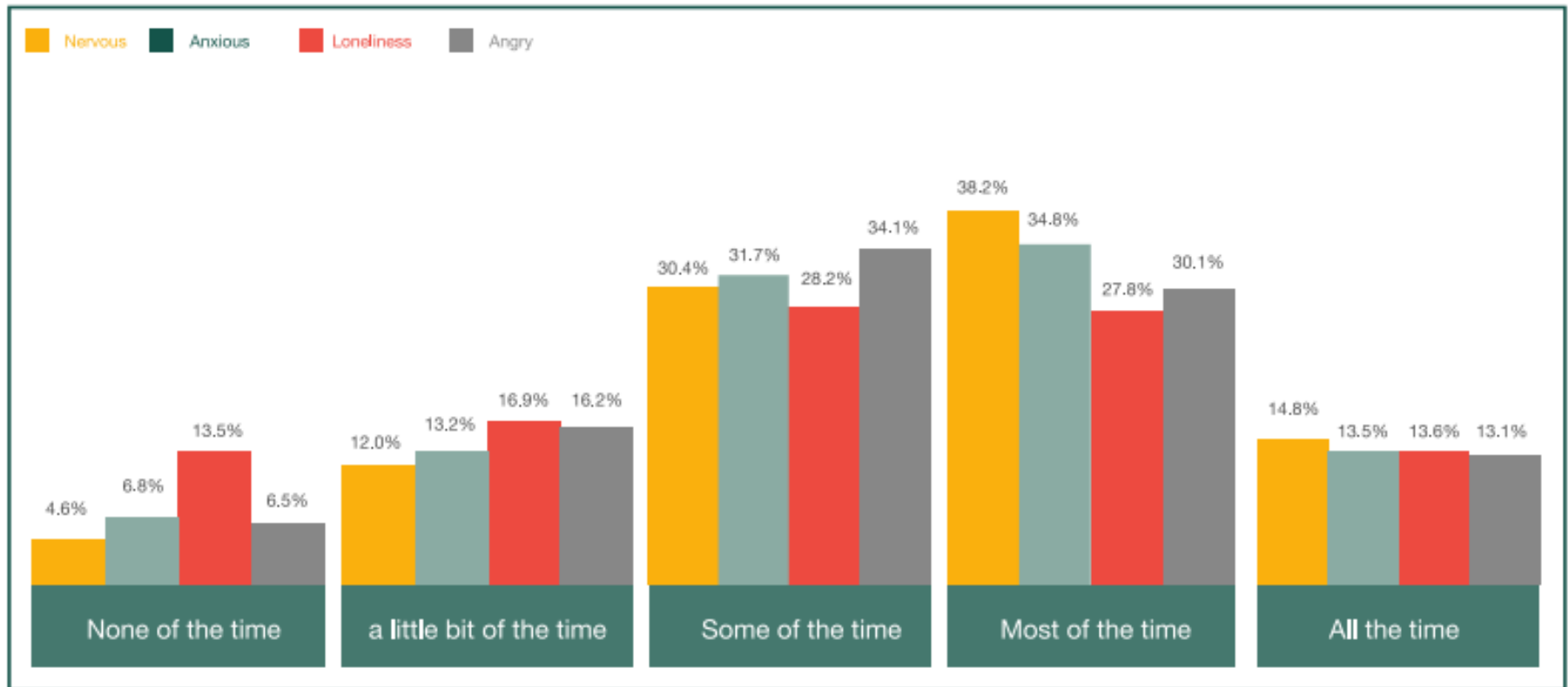
6. Change in lifestyle behaviors during lockdown

Compared to before the lockdown....

- 40.0% were less motivated to do activities they normally enjoy
- 73.6% spending more time on TV, computer and tablet
- 71.9% food intake increased
- 42.1% reported they gained weight
- 19.6% reported they have been conducting PA much less than before

Impact of lockdown on Psychosocial and Mental well-being

Feelings and emotions

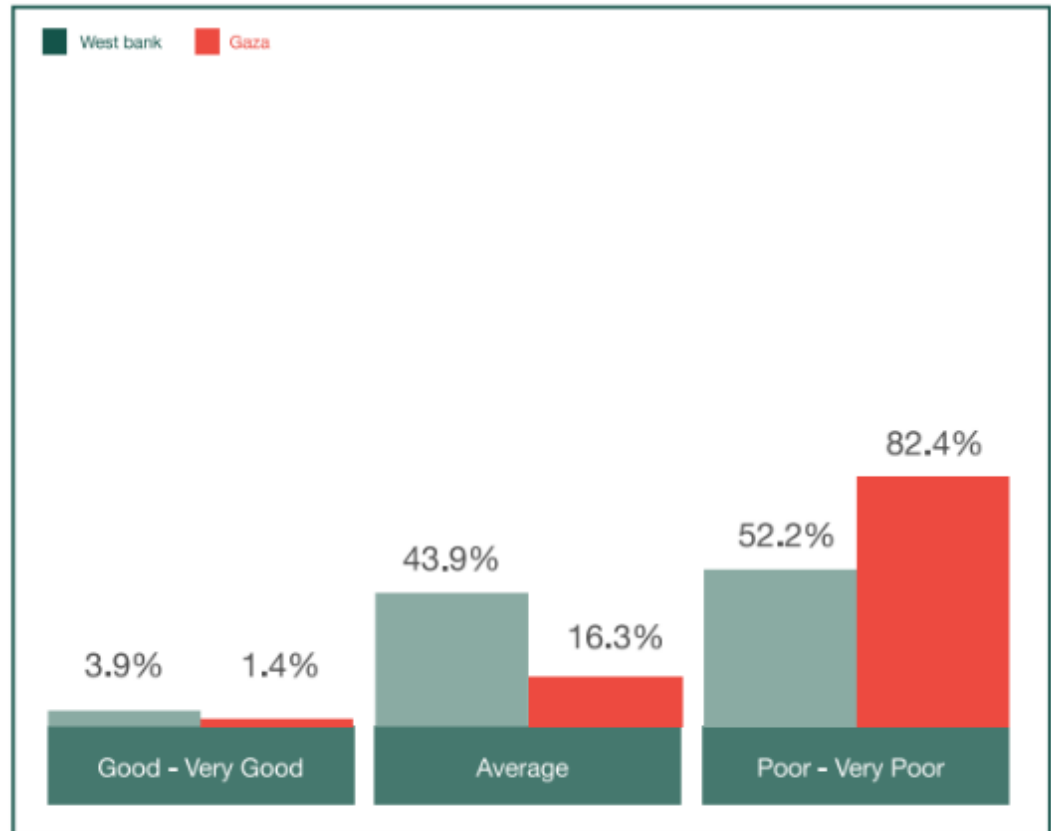


Females were more likely to exhibit nervousness, anxiousness, loneliness, and anger all the time or most of the time during the lockdown than males.

Impact of lockdown on Psychosocial and Mental well-being

Mental well-being status using Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being scale

- *60.5% reported poor-very poor mental well-being*
- *3.2% reported good-very good mental well-being.*



50.6%

Approximately, 50.6% felt that the future seems extremely/a lot scarier than before the COVID-19 pandemic.



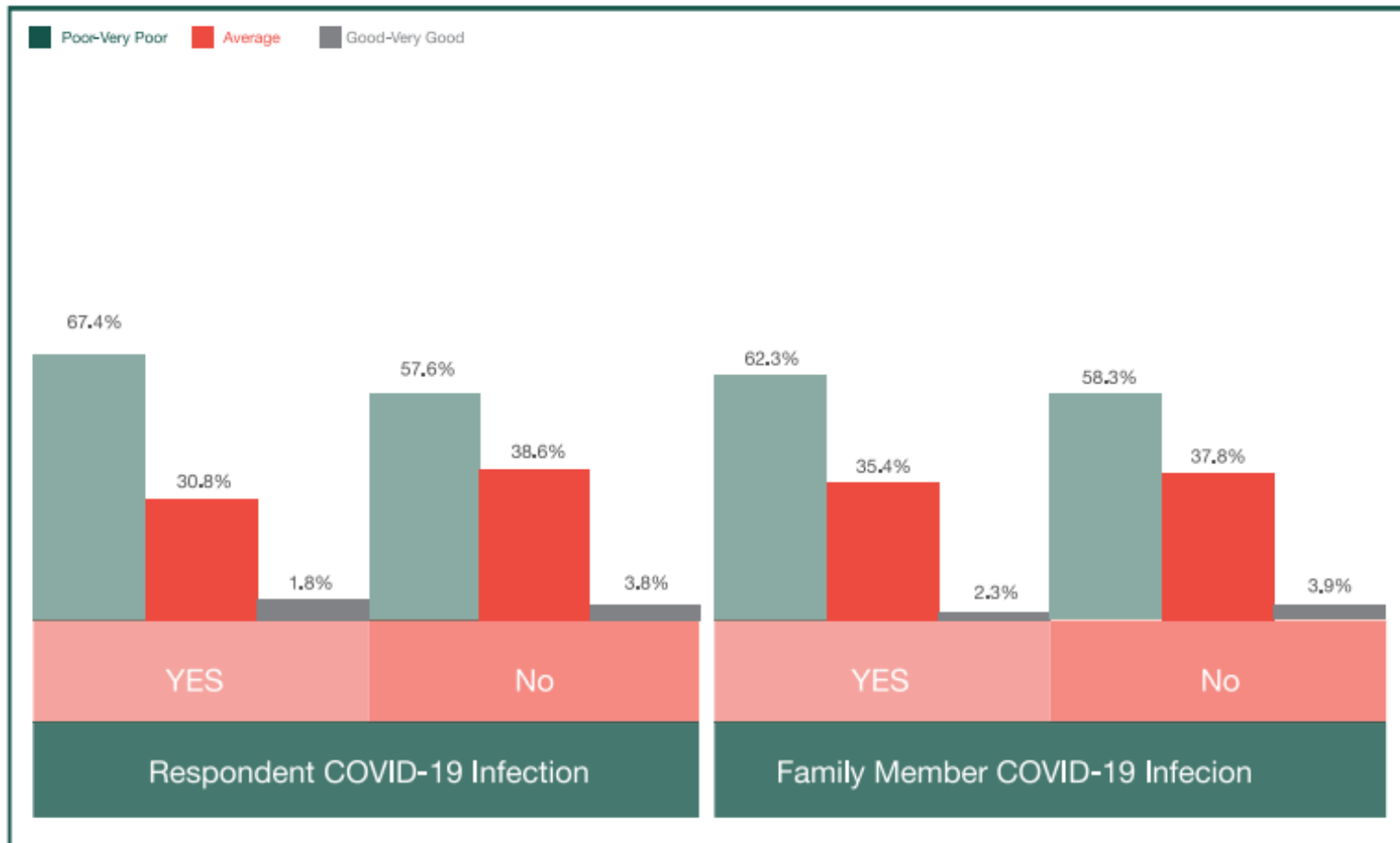
59.6%

of adolescents reported their mental health got worse as a result of the pandemic and lockdown



Impact of lockdown on Psychosocial and Mental well-being

By infection status



Infection status of participant/family member associated with mental well-being

Factors associated with POOR-VERY POOR Mental Well-being

- Ages 16-19 years old (older adolescents)
- Living in camps
- Higher education level
- Parents had no education
- Parents had either lost their job due to COVID-19 or were unemployed
- Difficulty to access health food, medications and medical treatment during the COVID-19 lockdown
- Financial situation got worse after lockdown
- Contracting the COVID-19 virus or having a family member infected
- A lot of tension since the beginning of the lockdown between parents and between parents and study participants
- Lower levels of motivation
- Less socially connected
- Decline in academic performance and education affected
- Poor quality of sleep
- Feelings of nervousness, anxiousness, loneliness, and anger all the time during the pandemic compared to none of the time
- High levels of stress from family relationships, loss of a family member's job, family's financial situation, not working, and staying at home all day

29.1%

needed to ask someone for help about their physical health;

21.2%

actually requested help

21.2%

actually received support

29.6%

reported the need to ask someone for help about their mental health. However, among those who needed to ask someone for support;

Conclusions

- COVID-19 pandemic drastically impacted adolescents, with over 60% exhibiting poor-very poor mental well-being.
- Elevated rates of psychological distress, among this group, compared to before the pandemic and lockdown
- Normal that adolescents reported poor mental well-being, fear, worry, stress as not only are they facing the fear of contracting the virus in a pandemic such as COVID-19 but they are also facing the significant changes to their daily lives
- Findings highlight the need for longitudinal research to assess the ongoing impacts of the pandemic on adolescents and their mental health
- Need for interventions to support young people through this disruptive time.
- Findings were similar to several studies conducted in other countries
- There is an urgent need to develop psychoeducation campaign, raising awareness of adolescents on the importance of their mental health and to seek help, either in school or university settings as well as in health facilities.

Recommendations

- It is imperative to plan strategies to enhance adolescent's access to mental health services during and after the current crisis.
- Provide emergency support for those in need of psychosocial and mental health assistance during current pandemic.
 - Inclusion of psychosocial and mental health consideration in the COVID-19 emergency response plan in the oPt.
- Increase awareness among adolescents on the importance of their mental well-being and to seek support if needed.
- Strengthen psychosocial and mental health programs at schools with a special focus on the adolescent's risky behaviors.
- Strengthen community mental health services to respond to the needs of the community, in particular the needs of adolescents.
- Promote healthy lifestyles (eg. diet, nutrition, physical activity, avoiding risky behaviors, no tobacco and mental health) for adolescents.
- Promote ONLINE exercise activities and recreational activities, to try and avoid sedentary lifestyles

Thank you for your attention!