

Scientific insights into young peoples' anxiety today

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Young people and the pandemic

- » The COVID-19 pandemic particularly affected young people (Danese & Smith, 2022)
- » There are several risk factors related to person, family and society



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Individual risk factors

- **Perception of threat**, such as the infection and its dramatic health consequences
- Negative consequences of **school closure** – from social isolation to disruption of routine and lack of structure
- **Uncertainty** about the future, loss of educational and economic **ressources**, and malnutrition for the most disadvantaged
- Reduced levels of enjoyable **activities** and physical activity, loss of social contacts, **loneliness**
- Direct effects of the **infection** on the brain.



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Family and disaster related stressors

Family Stressors

- » Parental mental illness,
- » Family financial stressors,
- » Child abuse/neglect,
- » Complicated/traumatic bereavement

Disaster related breakdown of protective structures

- » Young people have been left without important **external infrastructures** that are normally in place to ensure their safety and provide support (Danese et al., 2020). Especially the impact of school closure was proven to be devastating.
- » Breakdown of **social services**; although the need was rising they had to reduce activity because of the social distancing measures imposed through the lockdown. Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) had similar trends and now have even longer waiting lists than before lockdown.



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Effects on young people

- » Young people **worry** about the persistent threat and uncertainty; they become **fearful**, clingy, jumpy or very irritable (or, in contrast, they may become detached or numb)
- » They develop **headache and stomach ache** related to the intense distress (Danese et al., 2020)
- » During lockdowns they developed problems with **sleep, eating behavior and lack of movement**



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Rising levels of depressive and anxiety symptoms

A cross-sectional survey of 1,784 **primary school children** (77% of the 2,330 surveyed) from Wuhan and Huangshi after 30 days of **home confinement** showed that the rates of high **depressive and anxiety symptoms** were elevated compared to previous surveys of primary school students in China (a 30% increase in depressive symptoms; Xie et al., 2020).

A cross-sectional survey of 8,079 junior and senior **high school students** from 21 provinces and autonomous regions again showed elevated rates of high **depressive and anxiety symptoms** (Zhou et al., 2020).

Our data showed the same pattern in Austria (Kulcar & Juen, 2020)



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Not every child/adolescent is affected in the same way

- » Remarkable **resilience** of many young people in the face of adversity (Rutter, 2013)
- » Need to identify the determinants of individual differences in risk
- » Pre-existing psychosocial vulnerabilities (e.g. child victimisation, social-economic disadvantage, history of psychopathology and caregiver mental health) play an important role



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Inequalities in risk

- » Lewis et al. (2019) showed inequalities in risk across the population
 - Paradoxical effects: while **school** is a positive and nurturing environment for the majority of young people, those who were affected by bullying or intense academic pressure might have fared better during the lockdown



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Overview

(Cielo et al., 2021)

- » Increase of anxiety, stress, depression, event-specific distress, decrease in psychological wellbeing, and changes in sleeping, moving and eating habits
- » Psychological symptoms were related to the experience of several **stressors**, such as risk for reduced academic perspectives, massive e-learning adoption, economic issues, social restrictions, and implications for daily life related to the COVID-19 outbreak



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More studies to read

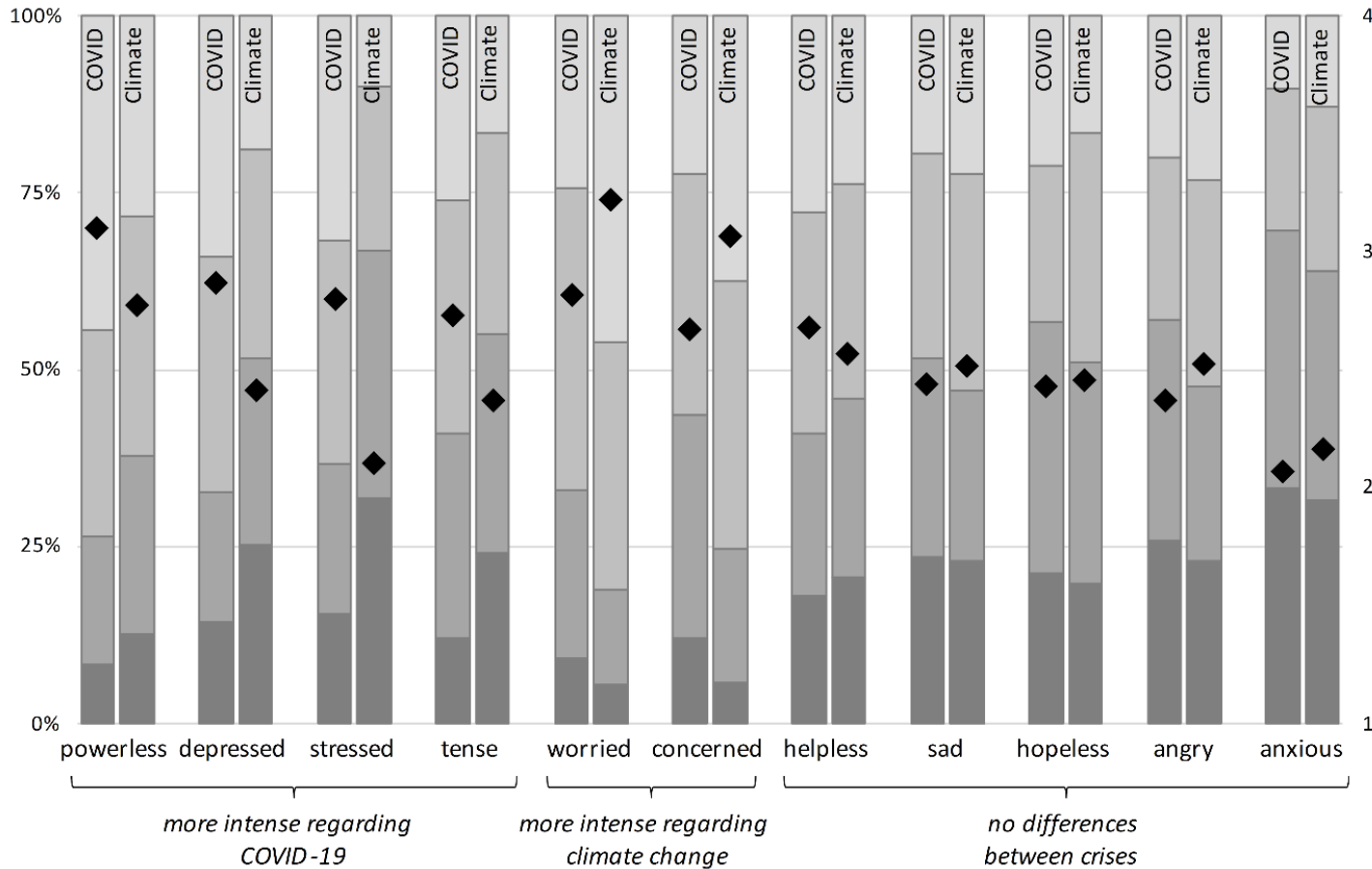
- » Many more studies have been published, for example *Welcome Trust-funded catalogue of empirical research COVID-Minds* (<https://www.covidminds.org/longitudinal-studies>), Co-SPACE Study, ARC Study and RAMP Study



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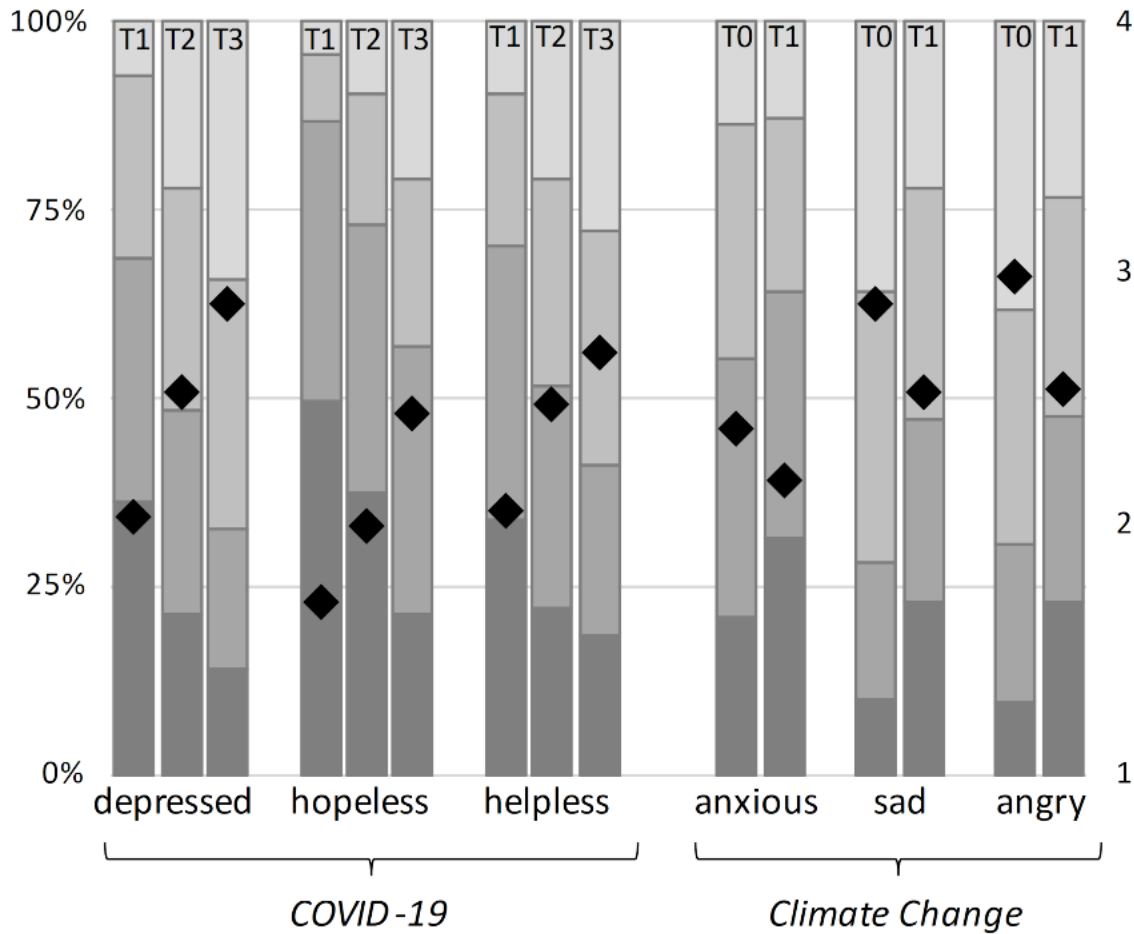
Emotions in young people regarding climate change and Covid (Kulcar, Siller & Juen, 2021)



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Change of emotions over time



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Emotions and wellbeing

- » **Activating emotions** like concern and worry did not have mental health impacts and were associated with increased **mitigation efforts** which imply adaptive reactions to the COVID-19 crisis.
- » Concern, worry, and anxiety appeared to represent an adaptive response to climate change as well, as these emotions were associated with increased mitigation efforts.
- » In contrast, the **inactivating emotions** of hopelessness, powerlessness, and helplessness were associated with **decreased wellbeing**.
- » Hopelessness has been suggested to obstruct emotion regulation (and to contribute to depression).
- » Therefore, **motivating action** against crises to support hope and a positive perspective might be one pathway of protecting mental health while mitigating the crises.



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What, can we do to minimise the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young peoples' mental health?

- » Policy measures that promote **social justice and equity** as well as investment in **schools and social services** can buffer the effects of the risk factors discussed above (Morgan & Rose, 2020).
- » Staff and volunteers working with young people have important roles to play as **advocates** for young people.
- » Provide more **targeted support** to young people who develop psychiatric disorders. Chronic underfunding has decimated CAMHS and needs to be urgently addressed to enable the services to cope with rising demand (The Lancet, 2020).
- » Promote mental well-being in the population; **universal psycho-educational interventions** for young people and parents can also be implemented (e.g. (<https://maudsleycharity.org/familiesunderpressure/> ; <https://pscentre.org/?resource=psychological-first-aid-for-young-peers-a-handbook&selected=single-resource>))



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Participation

Adolescents, in particular, are at greatest risk of emotional disorders but progressively separate from their parents and strive to gain agency through **individuation** processes.

Therefore, it is important to involve adolescents in **coproduction** of the materials targeted to them and find effective ways to engage their developing interests and preferences.

Young people have to be **involved in decisions and actions** that help to reduce threats and manage effects of climate change and other critical developments (One Health approach).



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Apply the elements of Community Engagement (UNICEF 2020)

- » Participation
- » Empowerment and Ownership
- » Inclusion
- » Two-way Communication
- » Adaptability and Localization
- » Building on Local Capacity



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The voice of young people

- » We collected answers from adolescents, one example
- » *„Do not talk about young people, talk WITH young people, we need equal and just distribution of wealth/chances and true forms of participation“*



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