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# From Child to Adult with Lockdown In-Between – Learning Lessons from the Lived Experiences of Adolescents during Lockdown: A Qualitative Interview Study

Diana Downer - Senior Lecturer in Social Work at Buckinghamshire New University

## Rationale

- Lockdowns of 2020-21 prompted behaviours and policies not previously seen on national and global scales.
- Caused significant disruption to the experiences of all children and adolescents.
- Study motivated by a range of international literature evidencing negative impact lockdowns had and continue to have on the mental health and wellbeing of young people.

**“the effects of lockdown on my generation were deliberate. They were not an accident and it should be researched deeply...”**



## Methodology

- Qualitative phenomenological approach to facilitate in-depth exploration of participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013).
- Indirect recruitment via online platforms (Jenner & Myers, 2019).
- No incentives offered/provided to participants.
- Interviews conducted online (Nov 2023 – March 2024), promoting recruitment reach and inclusivity.
- Typical small sample size, prioritising depth over breadth in data collection (Smith et al., 2009).
- Qualitative Research Distress Protocol (QRDP) followed to support identification & minimisation of research-related distress (Whitney & Evered, 2022).
- Interviews transcribed by researcher to promote data familiarity.
- Data transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy in data analysis (Yin, 2014).
- Member checking to allow participants to confirm accuracy of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
- Iterative process of data collection & analysis, until data saturation achieved (Fusch & Ness, 2015).
- Reflexive thematic analysis applied (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- Four major themes identified.
- Researcher reflexivity maintained via journal, supervision & peer debriefing to acknowledge and mitigate potential biases & ensure integrity of data analysis (Berger, 2015).



## Demographic Data

- **n = 13**; female = 9, male = 4
- **Age:** 18yrs (4), 19yrs (4), 20yrs (4), 21yrs (1)
- **Ethnicity:** White British (7), Black African (2), Asian (1), Asian/European (1), Middle Eastern/European (1), White European (1)
- **Religion:** None (8), Christian (3), Catholic (1), Muslim (1)
- **Residing during lockdown:** England (9), Australia (1), Germany (1), Nepal (1), South Africa (1)



## Mental Health (n=13)

All reported experiencing poor mental health, with “anxiety” and “depression” the most recurring. Description of panic attacks, fear of the unknown, suicidal thoughts and an alarming increase in suicide rates. Reduction or complete cessation of social contact had a profound negative impact:

“a lot of people were affected mentally...things like **depression** and **anxiety**”

“**decline** in my mental health because being like in that **isolation** was not good for anyone”

“as a generation, I think we’ve become **more fragile** when it comes to like mental health”

“**panic attacks** and **social anxiety** or anxieties in general that were **triggers**, or depression as well, of **being cooped up** at home”

“I’m **praying** for **no more** lockdowns”, “I saw my world **crumbling** around me”

“a path is being laid out to me of **pessimism** and **nihilism**...there is a mental health **crisis**”



## Education (n=12)

Adverse impact of online learning highlighted. Shift to virtual classrooms resulted in significant disruptions, leading to substantial deficits in learning. Further opportunities lost due to cancellation of activities, trips and work experience. Existing educational inequalities exacerbated and envisioned career paths altered:

“**online** lessons...the absolute **worst**”

“[people say] covid happened three years ago, you should be fine now. We’re **not fine** because we didn’t have the learning”

“we just **lost** the **opportunities** to have those experiences”

“I think a lot of people have **struggled** with education”

“my **education** was **ruined**”

“my generation are so **poorly educated**; they even struggle to articulate what they’re thinking”

“I **hate** thinking about, like I can never let myself think about **what I would have been** if [lockdown] had never happened”



## Economy (n=11)

Concerns of current and future adverse effects on the economy. Rising costs of living, inflation and employment instability feel like there is a constant struggle for survival. Socio-economic gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged continues to widen:

“we’re all young adults and we can **barely afford** to buy anything”

“people were **losing** their **jobs**, breadwinners were losing their jobs, they couldn’t go to work, **businesses** were **closing down**”

“everything today is so pricey...to live today is **extremely hard**”

“I think we’ll be **surviving**, not living. Our parents used to live their life...now we will be...surviving through it”

“people are going to **struggle** to survive”

“it had quite a big **impact** on me, but I know a lot of people who had it a lot **worse** than I did”

“economically as a generation, **we’re screwed**”



## Government Response (n=13)

Government policies lacked coherence and were disregarded by politicians themselves. The government projected fear and failed to fulfil promises they made, resulting in ongoing mistrust of government and their policies:

“a lot of people...my age...**didn’t trust** the government or anything they were saying”

“definitely **weakened** the **trust** that people have in the government...government should have followed their own rules because there was always something coming out”

“the government use **nudge theory** to morph people’s minds, especially young minds, into **submitting** to different sorts of policies later on...approach was purely around psychology and how they can **manipulate** the **population**”

“The government made so many **promises** to the majority of the country, and they **didn’t follow through** with any of them...they made all these rules for covid and they didn’t even follow them themselves”

## Recommendations:

- Government to honestly acknowledge impact of lockdowns on children and young people.
- Develop transparent, collaborative policies based on reliable, unbiased evidence.
- Reduce the socio-economic disparities further exacerbated by lockdowns.
- Prioritise mental health services and resources for young people.
- Holistically assess ongoing consequences of disrupted education, including equitable access for all.
- Invest in facilities and resources specifically designed for young people, including community centres, recreational spaces and educational programmes.

