**The impact of the COvID-19 Pandemic on the Mental Health of young adults**

**Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic, an unprecedented global crisis that emerged in late 2019, had several adverse impacts on populations across the globe. In addition to its immediate and devastating impact on physical health, the pandemic brought about challenges on many other facets of human well-being (Vindegaard & Benros, 2020). Among the many consequences, the repercussions on mental health have been particularly pronounced, with individuals of all ages grappling with the psychological toll of the crisis. There are several stressors that were borne out of the covid-19 pandemic, and these include health concerns due to the fear of infection, disruption of day-to-day lives and routines, isolation due to lockdowns and economic uncertainties, among others (Caroppo et al., 2021). In this context, the focus of this research centres on young adults, a demographic that has faced unique challenges during these turbulent times.

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is inherently complex, marked by significant life changes, identity formation, and the pursuit of independence (Kloep et al., 2015). The COVID-19 pandemic brought about a high level of complexity to this critical phase of development, disrupting established routines, altering social dynamics, and presenting an array of unprecedented stressors (Zeytinoglu et al., 2021). This research seeks to unravel the multifaceted impact of the pandemic on the mental health of young adults, examining the interplay between the pandemic-induced stressors and the psychological well-being of this demographic group. Considering that a large population of young adults were in education or at entry levels of their respective jobs, they must have been among those most affected by disruptions caused by the pandemic. This is also an age where peoples’ socialisation is at the peak (Kloep et al., 2015), and isolations causes by lockdowns must have had adverse psychological impacts on them.

Through a comprehensive examination of these factors, this study will focus on exploring the different ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has shaped the mental health of young adults, providing valuable insights for both academic understanding and the development of targeted interventions to support this population.

**Research Question**

The research question for this study is formulated using the PEO framework which ensures that three elements are covered: the population, exposure, and outcome. In the context of this research, the population are young adults. Even though the age bracket is not fixed, they will mainly comprise of people aged between 18 and early 30s. The exposure will be the covid-19 pandemic, specifically the specific factors of the pandemic that could trigger mental health issues such as isolation and associated uncertainties. The outcomes that will be of interest in this study are mental health issues, which could comprise of anxiety and depression, among others. The research question, therefore, is as below:

What was the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on the mental health of young adults?

**Chapter 2: Methodology**

The research methods greatly contribute towards the attainment of the set objectives and questions (Walliman, 2021). For this study, a systematic review was preferred, and this section discusses the strategies that were used in the selection of articles for review. The research objectives and question to be addressed in this study are as below.

***Research Objectives***

1. To establish the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health of young adults.

2. To explore the different ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has shaped the mental health of young adults

***Research Question***

What was the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on the mental health of young adults?

***Search Strategy***

Selection of articles for review is an essential step effectively addressing the research question and as such it was essential to utilise a strategy that could return the most relevant articles. The research question was used to guide a systematic search strategy aimed at identifying relevant literature. To effectively search for the articles of this study, it was essential to come up with search keywords that helped to facilitate returning of relevant articles. In this regard, keywords such as "Covid-19," "pandemic," "young adults," "mental health," and "mental illnesses" will be employed. Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to combine these keywords effectively. Additionally, controlled vocabulary specific to each database were considered to refine the search.

***Databases***

One of the key factors that must be considered when searching for articles is the databases on which they are hosted, because the credibility of these databases determines the quality of articles to be used (Wanyama et al., 2022). To ensure a comprehensive review of the current evidence, a combination of electronic databases will be utilised. PubMed, CINAHL (Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature), and PsycINFO will be selected for their extensive coverage of healthcare and psychological literature. These databases collectively provide a broad spectrum of scholarly articles, reviews, and empirical studies relevant to the intersection of domestic violence and midwifery practice. Selection of these databases is because they are highly reputable because of the quality of articles that they host, most of them being peer-reviewed.

***Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria***

It was also vital to put in place comprehensive inclusion and exclusion criteria that helped to ensure that the selected articles are of the highest relevance for this study. One of these criteria was the dates in which the articles were published, with those published within the past 10 years being selected for this study. This was to ensure that the information included in this review is recent and applicable in the present-day. Therefore, the articles that were included in the Another inclusion criterion was that the articles must have been published in English. This was essential in ensuring that meanings presented in the articles were not lost in translation. Another criterion was the topics or subjects that were covered in the articles. With the study being about the effect of Covid-19 on the mental health of young adults, articles that cover these study areas were selected. These criteria helped to narrow down articles to the most relevant in addressing this research question. On application of this search strategy, 10 articles were selected. The PRISMA chart in appendix 2 illustrates a summary of this process.

**Chapter 3: Critical review of literature**

From the studies selected for review, three major themes linked to the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on young adults were identified. These are as below.

* Prevalent mental health problems experienced by young adults during the pandemic.
* Causes of mental health issues experienced by young adults due to the Covid 19 pandemic.
* Adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies used by young adults to cope with mental health issues during the pandemic.

This chapter focuses on critical discussion of these themes considering the findings of the studies selected for review. It elaborates on the themes as covered in the reviewed studies. The coverage of the emergent themes in wider literature is also evaluated. Critical review of the literature sources also entails analysis of their reliability and validity in consideration of their strengths and weaknesses.

**Theme 1: Prevalent mental health problems experienced by young adults during the pandemic**

From the findings of the studies, the most prevalent mental health problems experienced by young adults during the pandemic were; anxiety, depression, suicide ideation and psychological stress. Nearly all the studies considered for review that highlighted the most prevalent mental health problems among young adults during the pandemic mentioned at least 3 out of these four factors. 56 % of the young adults involved in the study by Agyapong et al. (2023) had major depressive disorder (MDD) during the pandemic period while 46.6 % of them had general anxiety disorder (GAD). Of the 823 precarious young adults involved in the study by Essadek et al. (2023), 45.93% reported significant symptoms of depression, 36.69% reported symptoms of anxiety, 39% reported symptoms of psychological distress and 25.39% reported experiencing suicidal ideation. The study by Chen and Lucock (2022) found high levels of anxiety and depression in young adults during the pandemic, with more than 50% of the 1173 respondents experiencing levels of depression and anxiety that were above the clinical cut offs. In the study, female participants reported significantly higher levels of depression and anxiety than their male counterparts. The survey also suggested relatively low levels of stress resilience which is the amount of time individuals take to deal with stress to prevent it from causing other mental health problems (Chen and Lucock, 2022). The findings of Petrovich et al. (2023) indicated that psychological stress, anxiety and depression were the main pandemic-related mental health problems that contributed internet addiction and abuse among young adults during the pandemic period. 19.5% of the young adults involved in the study by Wathelet et al. (2023) reported severe post-traumatic stress symptoms 1 month after the COVID-19 lockdown. In six bi-monthly follow-ups, the study by Graupensperger established that Covid-19 related stressors resulted in a higher incidence of depression and anxiety. Based on the findings of the study, the pandemic resulted in illness related stress which contributed to young adults developing symptoms of depression. The findings of the study suggest that young adults that exhibited symptoms of anxiety had a greater likelihood of exhibiting illness related stress. 43 % of the young adults involved in the study by Son et al. (2020) as participants said they were experiencing depressive thoughts because of the pandemic. 8% of the respondents involved in the study said they had experienced suicidal thoughts with 5 % of them reporting that the thoughts were mild and 3 % of them reporting that the thoughts were moderate. 8 % of the respondents involved in the study said they had experienced suicidal thoughts with 5 % of them reporting that the thoughts were mild and 3 % of them reporting that the thoughts were moderate. The findings of Scafuto et al. (2023) also indicate that depression, anxiety and psychological stress were the most prevalent mental health problems experienced by young adults during the pandemic period.

The findings of the reviewed studies pertaining to the most prevalent mental health problems among young adults during the pandemic are corroborated by findings from multiple existing studies. This is one of the factors that underpins the reliability and validity of their findings. Varma et al. (2021) and Hawes et al. (2021) highlight the high incidence of depression, anxiety and stress due to pandemic related stressors. The significant incidence of suicide ideation due to psychological and emotional distress during the pandemic is highlighted by Brailovskaia et al. (2021) and Farooq et al. (2021). Bonichini and Tremolada (2021) and Cao et al. (2022) corroborate the findings of Wathelet et al. (2023) pertaining to individuals developing PTSD due to lockdown restrictions imposed to control the spread of Covid 19.

One of the key strengths of the reviewed studies that underpins the robustness of their methodology in identifying the prevalence of different mental health problems during the pandemic is the use of standardized tools to assess the mental health problems exhibited by participants during the pandemic. Agyapong et al. (2023), Chen and Lucock (2022) and Essadek et al. (2023) used GAD-7 to assess the participant’s anxiety and PHQ-9 to assess their level of depression. According to Dhira et al. (2021), GAD-7 boasts of excellent internal consistency (high Cronbach's alpha) and good test-retest reliability, making it a robust tool for assessing anxiety. PHQ-9 is generally considered a reliable tool for assessing depression, as it is widely used in clinical settings and research (Carroll et al. 2020). It has demonstrated good internal consistency and validity, providing a standardized and effective measure for evaluating the severity of depressive symptoms (Carroll et al. 2020). To assess the depression level of participants, the study by Scafuto et al. (2023) used the Beck Depression Inventory II scale. The validity of this scale is highlighted by multiple studies including Lee et al. (2017). It is is considered a reliable tool for assessing depression due to its strong internal consistency, well-established psychometric properties and widespread use in clinical and research settings (Lee et al. 2017). The study by Scafuto et al. (2023) assessed the anxiety of participants during the pandemic period using the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory scale. Delgado et al. (2016) highlight the validity and reliability of this scale in assessing anxiety arguing that it is is effective in assessing anxiety because it distinguishes between temporary, situational anxiety (state anxiety) and a more enduring, personality-based tendency towards anxiety (trait anxiety). This enables comprehensive evaluation of symptoms of anxiety. To assess the participant’s stress level during the pandemic, the study by Scafuto et al. (2023) used the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). Maroufizadeh et al. (2018) highlight the reliability of PSS in assessing perceived stress. Petrovich et al. (2023) used the Impact Event Scale (IES) to assess symptoms of stress and the hospital anxiety depression scale (HADPS) to assess symptoms of depression and anxiety. According to Djukanovic et al. (2017) and Uzer (2020), the reliability of IES in assessing stress and HADPS in assessing depressing and anxiety are underpinned by their internal consistency and test-retest reliability.

Another major strength of the studies of that underpins their reliability is the adequacy of the sample sizes considered. All the quantitative studies that provided statistical insights on the prevalence of different mental health problems among young adults during the pandemic had more than 300 participants. The adequacy of sample size in quantitative studies is paramount, as it directly influences the reliability and generalizability of study findings (Sykes et al. 2018). Additionally, an adequate sample size contributes to the representative nature of the study, ensuring that findings can be generalized to the broader population (Sykes et al. 2018). This is particularly crucial when aiming to draw meaningful conclusions and establish the external validity of research. In view of this, even though the studies reviewed only included participants from segments of the population, their findings can be generalized to apply to young adults in the UK.

The use of robust statistical analysis methods is a major strength that underpins the relevance of the studies considered for review. Agyapong et al. (2023), Essadek et al. (2023), Wathelet et al. (2023) and Son et al. (2020) highlighted the percentage of respondents that developed different mental health problems due to Covid 19 related stressors. From the statistical insights provided by the findings of these studies, the statistical prevalence of different mental health problems developed by young adults during the covid 19 pandemic can be deduced.

The reviewed studies are subject to a number of weaknesses relating to their investigation of the prevalence of different Covid 19 related mental health problems among young adults. All the studies highlighting the prevalence of different mental health issues except Son et al. (2020) were entirely quantitative in nature and therefore did not provide in-depth insights relating to Covid 19 related mental health problems faced by young adults. Additionally, there is potential gender bias in the study by Agyapong et al. (2023) as the study sample consisted of 70 % female respondents. This significantly limits the extent to which the findings of the study can be generalized to apply to all young adults in the UK. The exclusive use of GAD-7 and PHQ-9 to screen participants for depression and anxiety to a certain extent undermined the reliability of the findings of Agyapong et al. (2023), Chen and Lucock (2022) and Essadek et al. (2023). GAD -7 and PHQ-9 are screening tools and not definitive diagnosis tools for anxiety and depression. In the absence of clinical evaluation, the studies’ analyses of anxiety and depression were subject to inaccuracies. This undermined the validity and reliability of their findings, albeit to a limited extent.

**Theme 2:** **Causes of mental health issues experienced by young adults due to the Covid 19 pandemic**

The reviewed studies provided critical insights pertaining to the causes of mental health issues experienced by young adults due to the Covid 19 pandemic. The main causes of the mental health problems based on the findings of the reviewed studies were; social isolation, the negative economic impact of the pandemic, the fear contracting covid 19, a past history of mental health problems and disruption of the normal way of life.

Among the reviewed studies, Graupensperger et al. (2021), Wathelet et al. (2023), Son et al. (2020), Chen and Lucock (2022) and Blake‐Holmes and McGowan (2020) highlighted the causal link between strained social relationships and the mental health problems experienced by young adults during the Covid 19 pandemic. Graupensperger et al. (2021) established that social/relational stressors were strongly associated with increased symptoms of anxiety and depression. The findings of the study were consistent with the findings of Wathelet et al. (2023) which indicated that living through the lockdown period alone and poor-quality social ties were some of the main factors that contributed to international students developing PTSD during the pandemic. Based on the findings Son et al. (2020), a significant number of young adults developed stress, anxiety and depressive thoughts during the Covid 19 pandemic period due to limited social interactions as a result of physical distancing requirements. According to Chen and Lucock (2022) Covid-19 restrictions resulted in worsening of social relationships which in turn resulted in mental distress among 40 % of the young adults involved in the study. Blake‐Holmes and McGowan (2020) revealed that covid-19 restrictions limited the social support young adult carers in the UK could receive. This contributed to the severity of mental health distress they experienced. Son et al. (2020) also revealed that restricted outdoor activity significantly contributed to the increased prevalence of stress, anxiety and depression among young adults during the Covid 19 pandemic period. This was due to limited opportunities for social interaction and reduced opportunities to engage in outdoor exercise activities that alleviate stress. The findings of multiple existing studies corroborate the findings of the reviewed studies regarding the causal link between strained social relationships and the mental health problems experienced by young adults during the Covid 19 pandemic. Some of these studies are; Rogers and Cruickshank (2021) and O'Donnell et al. (2022).

The findings of Essadek et al. (2023), Graupensperger et al. (2021), Chen and Lucock (2022) and Son et al. (2020) highlight how the negative economic impacts of the pandemic contributed to the mental health problems experienced by young adults in the UK during the pandemic. In a multivariate analysis, Essadek et al. (2023) determined that food insecurity as a result of financial distress (less than one meal per day) was associated with depression, anxiety, distress, and suicidal ideation among young adults. Graupensperger et al. (2021) found that financial stressors were most strongly associated with decreased satisfaction with life and increase in severity of symptoms and anxiety and depression. The findings of the study provide unique insights pertaining to the impact of time on the severity of covid-19 related financial stressors. Based on the findings of the study, the association between financial stressors and symptoms of anxiety increased over time during the Covid-19 pandemic period. According to Chen and Lucock (2022), financial concerns due to adverse economic events associated with the pandemic such as job losses and the economic down-turn contributed to mental distress among young adults during the Covid 19 pandemic. 40 % of the respondents involved in the study developed mental health complications due to a worsening of their financial situation. Son et al. (2020) also noted that the adverse economic impacts of the pandemic contributed to the increased prevalence of stress, anxiety and depression among young adults. According to the findings of the study, young adults developed symptoms of depression and anxiety either as a result of the or their financiers losing their source of income. Thayer and Gildner (2021) and Hertz-Palmor et al. (2021) corroborate the findings of Essadek et al. (2023), Graupensperger et al. (2021), Chen and Lucock (2022) and Son et al. (2020) regarding the association between covid 19 related financial distress and mental health problems experienced by young adults during the pandemic.

Wathelet et al. (2023), Graupensperger et al. (2021) and Son et al. (2020) highlights the association between the fear of contracting Covid-19 and young adults experiencing mental health problems during the pandemic. Wathelet et al. (2023) cited exposure to Covid 19 as one of the main factors that contributed to international students developing PTSD during the pandemic. Based on the findings of Graupensperger et al. (2021), the fear of Covid 19 (illness-related stress) elicited symptoms of depression in young adults. Young adults involved in the study that had greater symptoms of anxiety felt more illness-related stress. The findings of Son et al. (2020) also revealed that a significant number of young adults developed anxiety, stress and depressive thoughts during the covid 19 pandemic period due to fear and worry about their health and the health of their close social relations in case of Covid 19 infection. The findings of Vilca et al. (2023) support the findings of Wathelet et al. (2023), Graupensperger et al. (2021) and Son et al. (2020) regarding the association between the fear of contracting Covid-19 and young adults experiencing mental health problems during the pandemic.

The reliability and validity of evidence in the reviewed studies highlighting causes of mental health issues experienced by young adults due to the Covid 19 pandemic is underpinned by the studies’ key strengths. Most of these key strengths are linked to their methodology design. The robust data analysis approach utilized by the studies is one of their key strengths that underpins the validity and reliability of their findings. The study by Wathelet et al. (2023) used odd ratios (ORs) at 95 % confidence interval (CI) to establish the association between different risk factors and young adults developing PTSD during the pandemic. Odds ratios are frequently employed in case-control studies or logistic regression to quantify the strength and direction of association between a binary outcome variable and one or more predictor variable. Essadek et al. (2023) used multi-variate analysis based on DAG to determine the association between different factors and mental health issues exhibited by young adults during the pandemic. Chen and Luckock (2022) uses multi-variate regression analysis to establish the association between lifestyle/living situation under Covid 19 to anxiety and depression. Both odd ratio analysis and regression analysis are effective statistical methods to determine the association between different risk factors and mental health problems developed by young adults during the Covid 19 pandemic. The study by Chen and Lucock (2022) analysed the exact proportion of respondents that developed mental health complications due to different risk factors. As a result, the study provides statistical insights on the proportion of young adults that may have developed mental health problems due to different risk factors. This is a major strength of the study’s methodology design. Graupensperger et al. (2021) considers the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic prevalence of mental health issues and therefore provides clear insights on how the pandemic-related stressors contributed to mental health issues among young adults. The sample sizes of the quantitative studies were adequate to enable generalization of the findings. All the quantitative studies had more than 300 participants.

The reviewed studies are subject to a number of weaknesses in relation to how they investigated the causes of mental health issues experienced by young adults due to the Covid 19 pandemic. The qualitative nature of the study by Son et al. (2020) and Blake‐Holmes and McGowan (2020) limits the extent to which the studies’ findings can be generalized (Levitt et al. 2021). This a major weakness of the study. However, it does not impact the validity and reliability of its findings. In the study by Chen and Lucock (2022), dichotomization of values during analysis of factors that link lifestyle/living situation under Covid-19 to anxiety and depression negatively impacted the accuracy of its findings due to the low range of outcomes. The values were dichotomized to 0 and 1. Use of a 5-point Likert scale would have provided more accurate insights by providing respondents with a broader range of choices.

**Theme 3:** **Adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies used by young adults to cope with pandemic-related mental health problems.**

The reviewed studies provide evidence of adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies used by young adults to cope with pandemic-related mental health problems. The adaptive coping strategies highlighted are; accessing social support, engaging in hobbies and relaxing activities and mindfulness acting. The maladaptive coping strategies highlighted are; substance abuse, internet addiction and abuse, social media abuse and sleeping for more hours.

Agyapong et al. (2023), Becares and Kneale (2022) and Son et al. (2020) provide insights on the how young adults sought social support as an adaptive coping strategy to cope with covid-19 related mental health problems. The findings of Agyapong et al. (2023) revealed that young adults exhibiting initial symptoms of anxiety and depression during the pandemic were more likely to subscribe/enrol in social support programs than those who did not exhibit the symptoms. In the voluntary enrolment support program considered by Agyapong et al. (2023), 56 % of the study participants who had enrolled in the program likely had major depressive disorder (MDD) while 46 percent likely had general anxiety disorder (GAD) following assessment. They therefore enrolled in the support program as a coping strategy. Based on the study outcomes of Becares and Kneale (2022), social support played an instrumental role in helping young adults in the UK to cope with the mental distress resulting from lockdown restrictions. The study noted that young adults from sexual minority groups were exposed to more severe mental health issues due to lesser social support in comparison heterosexual young adults. 34 % of the respondents involved in the study by Son et al. (2020) stated that regular communication with their close social relations was one of the main ways through which they dealt with pandemic-related stress. Some of the participants explicitly stated that they used meeting applications such as Zoom to connect with family and friends (Son et al. 2023). The findings of Szkody et al. (2021) and Tindle et al. (2022) corroborate the findings of Agyapong et al. (2023), Becares and Kneale (2022) and Son et al. (2020) pertaining to the utility of social support as an adaptive coping strategy to cope with pandemic related mental health problems.

Son et al. (2020) and Scafuto et al. (2023) provide evidence on how young adults engaged in mindful acting and relaxing activities/hobbies as adaptive coping strategies to cope with pandemic-related mental health problems. The findings of Scafuto et al. (2023) revealed that there was a negative and statistically significant correlation between mindful acting and perceived covid-19 related stress and anxiety. In the context of study by Scafuto et al. (2023), mindfulness acting entailed the conscious choice to regulate and moderate one's behaviour. In the study by Son et al. (2020), 29 % of respondents involved in the study coped with pandemic related stress using positive coping methods linked to mindfulness. Some of the methods they used include; meditation and breathing exercises, spiritual activities such as praying, positive reframing and maintaining routines. Son et al. (2020) revealed how young adults engaged in relaxing activities/hobbies to cope with pandemic related stress. 30 % of respondents involved in the study stated that they engaged in physical exercise to cope with pandemic related stress and 21 % of them said they enjoyed streaming services and browsing on social media as a coping mechanism. Other activities that the participants engaged in to cope with pandemic related stress were; playing with pets, journaling, listening to music, reading and drawing (Son et al. 2023). Extensive evidence from existing studies corroborates the findings of Son et al. (2020) and Scafuto et al. (2023) on how mindful acting and practices linked to mindfulness can be used to cope with stress. Studies like Donald & Atkins (2016) show mindfulness training reduces stress symptoms, while Ramasubramanian (2017) observed enhanced coping skills and resilience in young adults. Additionally, Zandi et al. (2021) found mindfulness training effectively lowered stress and exam anxiety while boosting happiness in students. This suggests mindfulness can be a valuable addition to coping strategies for stress and related mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. The findings of Nazeer and Sultana (2014) corroborate the findings on Son et al. (2020) on how individuals can engage in hobbies/relaxing activities to cope with stress.

Chen and Lulock (2022), Petrovic et al. (2023), Scafuto et al. (2023) and Son et al. (2020) provide evidence on negative behaviours developed by young adults to cope with covid-19 related mental health problems. According to Chen and Lulock (2022), a significant number of young adults engaged in tobacco and alcohol abuse in response to pandemic related stress. These findings are in line with the findings of Son et al. (2020) which indicated that 23 % of the respondents involved the study relied on negative coping mechanisms to cope with pandemic related stress. Some of these negative coping mechanisms were; ignoring news about the pandemic, sleeping for more hours, drinking alcohol and smoking. Vanderbruggen et al. (2020) and Guignard et al. (2021) corroborate the findings of Chen and Lulock (2022) and Son et al. (2020) by highlighting the increased incidence of alcohol and tobacco abuse during the covid 19 pandemic period due to pandemic related stressors. 17 % of the 353 young adults involved in the study by Petrovic et al. (2023), there was increased problematic internet use, problematic social media use and uncontrolled online shopping. Increased social media use was more frequent among respondents that reported high levels of pandemic stress than among respondents that reported lower levels of stress. It predicted more severe depression symptoms. Increased online shopping predicted more severe anxiety symptoms (Petrovic et al. 2023). In the study by Scafuto et al. (2023), there were positive and statistically significant correlations between perceived covid-19 related stress and anxiety on one side and internet abuse and addiction on the other. The findings of Petrovic et al. (2023) and Scafuto et al. (2023) highlighting increased internet addiction and abuse among young adults due to covid-19 related stressors are consistent with the findings of Ballarotto et al. (2021) and Masaeli and Farhadi (2021).

The reviewed studies have a number of key strengths linked to their methodology design that underpin the reliability and validity of their findings relating to adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies used by young adults to cope with pandemic-related mental health problems. Chen and Luckock (2022) used multi-variate linear regression analysis to determine the association between behaviours such as smoking and drinking alcohol and pandemic related stressors to establish if the behaviours were used as maladaptive coping strategies. Linear regression analysis is an effective approach to determine the relationship between dependent and independent variables. Son et al. (2020) effectively analysed the proportion of respondents that utilized different adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies to cope with pandemic related stress. Through frequency distribution analysis, the findings of the study highlight the percentage of respondents that utilized different coping strategies. This is a major strength of the study that contributes immensely to the robustness of its findings. Scafuto et al. (2023) used valid and reliable tools to assess the state of mindfulness of young adults during the pandemic. The tools used were; Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) and the Mindful attention and awareness scale (MAAS). The validity and reliability of these tools is highlighted by Christopher et al. (2012) and Osman et al. (2016).

The reviewed studies are subject to a few weaknesses in relation to how they investigated adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies used by young adults to cope with pandemic-related mental health problems. The study by Chen and Luckock (2022) does not make adjustments to the prevalence of maladaptive coping strategies such as smoking and drinking alcohol by considering their prevalence within the study population before the pandemic. This may impact the accuracy of its findings if a significant proportion of the respondents that reported that they engaged in the negative behaviours during the pandemic were still engaging in them prior to the pandemic. It is difficult to generalize the findings of Agyapong et al. (2023) due to potential gender bias. As stated earlier, 70 % of the study sample was constituted of female participants.

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Appendix 1: Matrix of the Articles for Review

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Research, Authors,  Date | Location of Study | Research Methodology | Population and Sample Size | Main Findings | Strengths and Weaknesses of research / methodology | Implications for practice |
| Scafuto, Ciacchini, Orrù, Crescentini, Conversano, Mastorci, Porricelli, & Gemignani. (2023) | Italy | Quantitative survey using questionnaires | Young adults aged 18-30  N=31 | There were high levels of anxiety, stress, internet addiction (IA) and gambling among the participants, who presented low levels of resilience, the mindful skill of no-reactivity and socialisation. There were positive and significant correlations between Internet Addiction on one side and Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI-Y1) and Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) II on the other side. It was also found that Internet Use, Abuse and Addiction (UADI) negatively correlated with both RS-14 and Mindful Acting. Finally, no correlations were found between Gambling and IA. | **Strengths**: Provided an effective quantifiable cause-effect analysis on the effect of Covid-19 on the mental health of young people.  **Weakness**: The research sample is quite small, which makes generalisation of findings challenging. | The findings bring about the need to plan training interventions on coping strategies that are an alternative to internet misuse as an escape from social and environmental stressors. |

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| Authors, Date | Location of Study | Research Methodology | Population and Sample Size | Main Findings | Strengths and Weaknesses of research / methodology | Implications for practice |
| Agyapong, Shalaby, Hay, Pattison, Eboreime, Korthuis, Wei, & Agyapong (2023) | Canada | Quantitative survey using questionnaires | Adolescents and you adults who subscribed to the MoreGoodDays platform.  N=343 | The prevalence of anxiety and depression was relatively high among subscribers of MoreGoodDays, indicating the long-term effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. This ﬁnding has signiﬁcant implications in the broader context of mental health research and emphasises the need for more research into innovative mental health support for this cohort. | **Strengths:** The large research sample provided an opportunity for generalisability of the findings.  **Weakness**: Focusing only on the MoreGoodDays limits the applicability of findings to a smaller population who are tech savvy. | Government agencies and policymakers should prioritise and implement readily accessible interventions such as supportive text messages to support their psychological well-being. |

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| Authors, Date | Location of Study | Research Methodology | Population and Sample Size | Main Findings | Strengths and Weaknesses of research / methodology | Implications for practice |
| Essadek, Shadili, Barbosa, Assous, Widart, Payan, Rabeyron, Corruble Falissard, & Gressier(2023) | France | Quantitative survey using questionnaires | Young adults aged 18-25 living in Paris, France  N=823 | Of the 823 precarious youth, 45.93% reported significant symptoms of depression, 36.69% anxiety, 39% distress and 25.39% suicidal ideation. In the multivariate analysis based on DAG, food insecurity (less than one meal per day) was associated with depression, anxiety, distress, and suicidal ideation. | **Strengths:** The large research sample facilitates generalisability of the findings.  **Weaknesses**: The focus on only precarious youth limits the applicability of findings to the general French population. | Reducing food insecurity is essential to help reduce psychological distress. |

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| Authors, Date | Location of Study | Research Methodology | Population and Sample Size | Main Findings | Strengths and Weaknesses of research / methodology | Implications for practice |
| Petrović, Peraica, Blažev, & Kozarić-Kovačić(2023) | Croatia | Quantitative survey using questionnaires | Young adults aged 22.6 ± 2.1 years (n=353), early adults aged 32.1 ± 4.4 years (n=382) and middle-aged adults aged 49.0 ± 6.5 years (n=371). | Different effects of the pandemic and earthquakes on internet use could reflect a different effect of various stressors on Internet behaviour of young adults. Type of problematic Internet behaviour may predict for the type of mental health problem. | **Strengths:** The large samples from different age groups provide ideal data for generalisability.  **Weaknesses:** The cross-sectional design of the research precludes some causal conclusions. | Differences in the effect of the pandemic and earthquakes on Internet use could reflect the differences in the effect of various stressors on Internet behaviours and thus may inform policy on intervention |

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| Authors, Date | Location of Study | Research Methodology | Population and Sample Size | Main Findings | Strengths and Weaknesses of research / methodology | Implications for practice |
| Wathelet, Fovet, Jousset, Duhem, Habran, Horn, Debien, Notredame, Baubet, Vaiva & D’Hondt (2021) | France | Quantitative survey using questionnaires | French University Students (n=22,833) | 19.5% of French university students reported severe post-traumatic stress symptoms 1 month after the COVID-19 lockdown. Female status or non-binary gender, psychiatric follow-up history, exposure to a non-COVID-19-related traumatic event, having lived through quarantine alone, being a foreign student, poor quality of social ties, a low feeling of integration, loss of income, poor quality housing, low-quality of the information received, and a high level of exposure to COVID-19, were signiﬁcantly associated with the severity of PTSD symptoms. | **Strengths:** The large researchers established that their data collection instruments had high levels of validity and reliability.  **Weaknesses**: Even though the researchers used a validated diagnostic tool based on the DSM-5, unlike previous studies assessing the rates of PTSD in students, the PCL-5 only provides a provisional diagnosis of PTSD that should be conﬁrmed by a clinician. | The pandemic context and lockdown measures could have a traumatic nature in this population and as such stimulate debate on the nosography of PTSD. |

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| Authors, Date | Location of Study | Research Methodology | Population and Sample Size | Main Findings | Strengths and Weaknesses of research / methodology | Implications for practice |
| Graupensperger, Calhoun, Patrick & Lee (2021) | United States | Longitudinal quantitative study that used questionnaires. | Young adults aged 18 to 23 in 1st study sample (n= 767); 2nd study sample 5 years later (n = 594). | It was established that social/relational stressors were most strongly associated with increased symptoms of anxiety/depression, and financial stressors were most strongly associated with decreased satisfaction with life. Taken together, longitudinal evidence from this research indicated that COVID-19-related stressors, especially social/relational stressors, have direct and time-varying associations with mental health and well-being. | **Strength:** Being a longitudinal study that started before the pandemic, it provides an effectively comparative understanding of how stressors were affected by the pandemic.  **Weakness:** Selection of participants from one metropolitan area of the US limited generalisability. | There is a need to young adults with resources to cope with life stressors and to develop specific policies and strategies to negate the adverse effects of COVID-19 stressors on mental health and well-being |

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| Authors, Date | Location of Study | Research Methodology | Population and Sample Size | Main Findings | Strengths and Weaknesses of research / methodology | Implications for practice |
| Son, C., Hegde, Smith, Wang, & Sasangohar (2020) | United States | Qualitative study using semi-structured interviews | Students in a large public university in the United States  N = 195 | Due to the long-lasting pandemic situation and onerous measures such as lockdown and stay-at-home orders, the COVID-19 pandemic brought about negative impacts on the mental health of young adults in higher education. | **Strength:** Semi-structured interviews facilitate obtaining of in-depth insights into the effects of covid-19 on the mental health of young people.  **Weakness:**  The sample used is from one large university, and findings may not generalise to all college students | The findings of our study highlight the urgent need to develop interventions and preventive strategies to address the mental health of college students |

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| Authors, Date | Location of Study | Research Methodology | Population and Sample Size | Main Findings | Strengths and Weaknesses of research / methodology | Implications for practice |
| Chen & Lucock (2022) | United Kingdom | Quantitative survey using questionnaires. | Students from a university in the North of England  N = 1173 | The study found high levels of anxiety and depression, with more than 50% experiencing levels above the clinical cut offs, and females scoring significantly higher than males. The survey also suggested relatively low levels of resilience which was attributed to restrictions and isolation which reduced the opportunities to engage in helpful coping strategies and activities rather than enduring personality characteristics. Higher levels of distress were associated with lower levels of exercising, higher levels of tobacco use, and several life events associated with the pandemic and lockdown, such as cancelled events, worsening in personal relationships and financial concerns. | **Strengths:** The large research sample provided data that is generalisable because even though the sample was from one university, the characteristics of university students in the UK are mostly the same.  **Weaknesses:** This was a one-off, cross-sectional survey over one month, four months into the pandemic so the study was not able to report on changes over time, and crucially, whether the high levels of anxiety and depression were transitory or longer term. | Younger adult students may be particularly prone to experiencing high levels of anxiety and low mood during a pandemic and as such, it is important to provide support to reduce the likelihood of longer-term problems. |

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| Authors, Date | Location of Study | Research Methodology | Population and Sample Size | Main Findings | Strengths and Weaknesses of research / methodology | Implications for practice |
| Bécares & Kneale (2022) | United Kingdom | Longitudinal quantitative survey using questionnaires. | People across the UK who were born between 2000 and 2002.  N = 2211 | This study shows alarming inequalities in the self-rated health, mental health, and availability of social support among sexual minority youth compared to heterosexual/ straight youth experienced during the height of the first COVID-19 lockdown restrictions in the UK. Sexual minority young adults in the UK have been detrimentally impacted by the coronavirus pandemic, experiencing inequalities in mental health, self-rated health, and social support when compared to heterosexual young adults. | **Strength:** Being a longitudinal study that started before the pandemic, it provides an effectively comparative understanding of how stressors were affected by the pandemic.  **Weakness:** The researchers were unable to directly explore how other intersectional factors amplified or reduced the associations between sexuality and mental health. | There needs to be a stronger provision of safe spaces in the community and in institutions, as well as policies that address marginalisation and harassment. |

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| Authors, Date | Location of Study | Research Methodology | Population and Sample Size | Main Findings | Strengths and Weaknesses of research / methodology | Implications for practice |
| Blake-Holmes & McGowan (2020) | United Kingdom | Longitudinal qualitative research using interviews | Young carers and young adult carers in the UK  N = 177 | The level of care that young carers are required to provide had increased as external agency support for their families had been withdrawn while their own coping strategies had been challenged, through school closures. These restrictions had a significant impact on every aspect of their lives, from their ability to meet their own mental health needs to managing the requirements of home schooling | **Strength:** Semi-structured interviews facilitate obtaining of in-depth insights into the effects of covid-19 on the mental health of young carers.  **Weakness:**  Due to the speed of this project and the lockdown restriction in place, the sample size was limited and findings may not be generalisable across the whole population | The needs of young carers should be acknowledged within the political agenda, especially at times of crisis. It is crucial that health and social care services increase their capacity to identify and support young carers and that work is done within educational settings to provide a flexible response to individual needs. |

**Appendix 2: PRISMA Chart**

Records identified through database searching  
(n = 871)

## Screening

## Included

## Eligibility

## Identification

Additional records identified through other sources  
(n =233)

Records after duplicates removed  
(n = 965)

Records screened  
(n = 965)

Records excluded for unavailability of full articles  
(n = 772)

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility  
(n = 193)

Full-text articles excluded for not focusing on young adults  
(n = 183)

Studies included in quantitative synthesis (meta-analysis)  
(n = 10)