Pandemic depression and anxiety: Heterogeneous associations with the childhood sociodemographic environment and beyond

Dean Pucciarelli1 and Charles Trautmann2

1Affiliation not available
2Yale School of Medicine

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Abstract

There is increasing evidence that childhood socioeconomic status (SES) is associated with various health conditions in adulthood. Here, we examine the extent to which childhood SES is associated with COVID-19 pandemic anxiety and depression. Participants (n = 212), recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk, were assessed for depression and anxiety in February 2022 for both the current context and retrospectively for April 2020. Participants also reported childhood SES and current demographics. Consistent with past research, we show a strong, positive correlation between early and late pandemic depression and anxiety. Paternal unemployment in childhood was associated with increased anxiety and depression; maternal occupation was not. High household education in childhood was generally associated with greater anxiety and depression, similar to past studies examining current education levels and depression. However, the shift from high school to post-secondary degrees (trade school and associate’s) was associated with decreased anxiety and depression, which may reflect “essential work” careers, and therefore indicating a dualism. Growing up in crowded, deindividualized spaces was associated with lower anxiety and depression, suggesting better conditioning for the imposition of COVID-19 quarantines. Pandemic-related unemployment was associated with an increase in anxiety and depression. Strong political views, regardless of ideology, were associated with increased anxiety. Finally, overall anxiety and depression in our sample decreased during the pandemic by 6.6% and 7.9% respectively. Our work suggests a complex relationship between SES, demographics, and anxiety and depression during the pandemic. These findings emphasize the importance of exploring the dynamics between early SES and mental health in adulthood, particularly during extended societal stressors.

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Dean M. Pucciarelli B.A.1,2 & Charles H. Trautmann Ph.D.1

1 Department of Psychology, Cornell University
2 Department of Neurology, Yale School of Medicine

Authors Note: Dean M. Pucciarelli is a Postgraduate Research Associate in the Department of Neurology at the Yale School of Medicine and former undergraduate at Cornell University.

Charles H. Trautmann is an Adjunct Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at Cornell University. We have no known conflicts of interest to disclose. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Charles H. Trautmann, Department of Psychology, 220 Uris Hall, Ithaca NY 14853. Email:cht2@cornell.edu

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**Contributions**

**Dean Pucciarelli:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Artwork and tables, Manuscript - Original draft, Manuscript - review. **Charles Trautmann:** Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Resources and software, Project supervision and validation, Manuscript - review.

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