

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic and related public health measures disrupted the social and educational functioning of young people. Students and adolescents—at a key developmental transition—may be particularly vulnerable, as peer relationships, autonomy, and stable daily routines are central to well-being and academic motivation.

This dissertation aimed to synthesize scientific evidence on the impact of the pandemic on public health, society, and healthcare systems, and to assess how COVID-19 affected well-being, lifestyle behaviors, and educational functioning among young people in Poland.

A two-track approach was applied: (1) a systematic literature review addressing the pandemic's consequences for health and well-being and key mechanisms (including diagnostics, vaccination, psychosocial stressors, and nutritional status in relation to infection outcomes); and (2) two cross-sectional questionnaire studies: Study 1 among students of the Kalisz University (n=166) and Study 2 among education-related youth (n=442; including students of the Hipolit Cegielski Technical School Complex in Śrem and students from University of Kalisz). Self-reported outcomes covered general health, mental health (stress), lifestyle and health-related behaviors, economic impact, and educational functioning (motivation and study progress).

In Study 1, adverse outcomes were reported more frequently for mental health than for general health: 62.2% of university students reported worsened/markedly worsened stress or mental well-being, whereas 21% reported worsened general health (69% reported no change). In Study 2, lifestyle changes were heterogeneous: 44.0% reported no change, 37.0% reported decreased physical activity, and 19.0% reported increased activity. Dietary changes were similarly mixed (42.8% no change, 22.2% deterioration, 18.5% improvement; 16.5% uncertain). Declines in learning/studying motivation were common (32% in Study 1; 50.2% in Study 2), while formal learning progress appeared comparatively more stable. Health-risk behaviors showed overall stability (e.g., no increase in alcohol consumption: 90% in Study 1; 88.5% in Study 2). Negative financial impact was reported by 36% of university students and 31.2% of Study 2 respondents.

In the investigated groups, the pandemic's consequences were most evident in psychological and educational domains (stress and motivation), whereas lifestyle responses were selective and varied across individuals. The directional consistency of these patterns with international evidence supports practical recommendations for academic settings, including

regular monitoring of student well-being and motivation, anti-isolation measures, and standardized support under remote/hybrid teaching conditions.

Keywords: COVID-19; young adults; university students; mental health; stress; academic motivation; lifestyle behaviors; social isolation; remote learning.