



Family coping in The Netherlands during the pandemic.

# Covid-19 Family Study report: April 2020 – September 2020

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## Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on family mental health, child behavior, and parenting factors during the pandemic for two age groups of children (6-11 and 12-17) both over time and in relation to term-time school closures. We also report on families' worries about Covid-19 as well as how parents feel about schools reopening and what measures they would like to see in place when their children attend school during the pandemic.

## How to cite this report

Suggested citation (APA 7<sup>th</sup> edition):

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## Key findings

- The mental health of parents has gradually improved from April to September 2020, coupled with greater belief in their own parenting abilities and less use of physical punishment towards their children.
- Parents of children aged 6-11 years were most affected by the school closures – with higher scores for depression, anxiety, and stress, as well as more parent-child relationship problems when their children were at home during term-time.
- Children have shown resilience during the Covid-19 pandemic - with parents reporting decreases in children's emotional and behavior problems from April to September 2020 and no differences in emotional or behavior problems during school closures.
- The majority of children expressed worry to their parents about the government regulations surrounding Covid-19, but only a minority of children expressed worry about themselves or others becoming ill with Covid-19.
- The majority of parents (89%) felt that it was safe for their children to attend school after the summer school holiday 2020 and only a minority of parents would like to see facemasks worn by staff (14%) and children (7%) at school.

## Note on interpretation

Please note that the results presented in the current report are based on an opportunity sample that does not necessarily represent the Dutch population as a whole.

Survey response date was used as the independent variable to statistically assess change in measures over time. An alpha level of 0.05 was used to assess statistical significance. For visualization purposes only, monthly means<sup>1</sup> for each measure have been used to graph change over time. Fewer responses were collected in September 2020 than in other months, which can increase the influence of extreme values on the means and therefore extra care should be taken when interpreting graphical data for September 2020.

### Key dates

For context, below are some key dates for families in The Netherlands during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**12<sup>th</sup> March** – Dutch lockdown begins

**11<sup>th</sup> May** – Dutch primary schools partially reopen

**25<sup>th</sup> April – 3<sup>rd</sup> May** – Dutch spring school holiday

**2<sup>st</sup> June** – Dutch secondary schools partially reopen

**4-11 July – 16-30 August** – Dutch summer school holiday (depending on region)

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<sup>1</sup> The mean average of scores from all responses collected during a given month

## Summary of methods

### Study design and sample size

The Covid-19 Family Study is an ongoing longitudinal survey study of family coping during the pandemic. Parents (or guardians) of children aged 6-17 years completed the first survey between April 2020 and June 2020. Parents were invited to complete a follow-up survey at 6-weeks, 3-months, and 6-months after the first survey. Surveys were completed by only one parent per family with one child in mind – which remained the same across waves.

The current report is based on 3,672 completed surveys<sup>2</sup> collected between April 2020 and September 2020 by 2,467 parents at wave 1, 765 parents at wave 2, and 440 parents at wave 3. All parents resided in The Netherlands at the time of survey completion and responded in Dutch, English, Spanish, German, or Greek.

For the analyses children were divided into two age groups: 6-11 and 12-17 years. The analyses accounted for the survey having been filled in multiple times by the same parents where possible.

### Summary of sample characteristics

- Parent/guardians were aged 25-69 at wave 1 (mean age: 42 years)
- Most respondents are the child's biological mother (84%)
- Just 12% of respondents are single parents
- The majority of parents (66%) completed bachelor-level education or higher
- Only 2.5% consider themselves part of an ethnic minority group
- Most parents were working (85.5%) and almost half were working fully or partly working from home (49%)
- Children were aged 6-17 years (59% aged 6-11 and 41% aged 12-17 years)
- 51% of children were boys, 48% girls, and 1% non-binary/other/undisclosed
- Only 3% of children attend a special provision school
- 20% of children live with one of the following: learning difficulties, autism spectrum condition, attention-deficit (hyperactivity) disorder, conduct disorder, anxiety or depression

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<sup>2</sup> A completed survey reflects any survey where parents answered the demographic questions plus all items of at least one main measure.

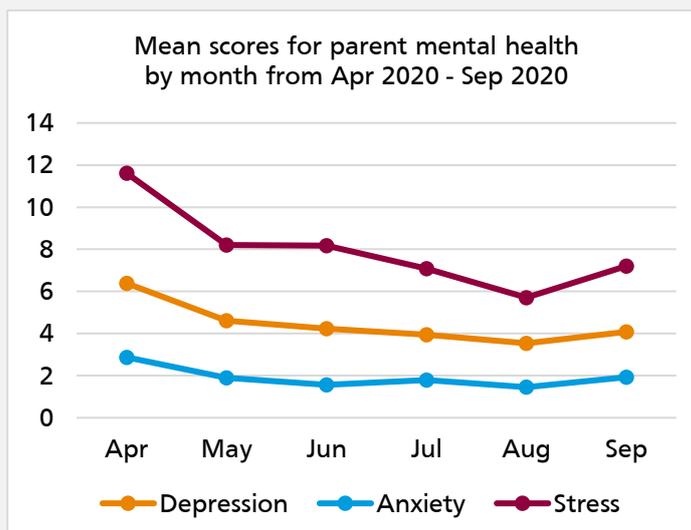
## Parent mental health

Parents reported on their mental health over the previous week via the DASS-21 (Lovibond et al., 1995). Depression, anxiety, and stress were measured on separate scales with scores ranging 0-42. Higher scores represent more depression/anxiety/stress on the respective scale.

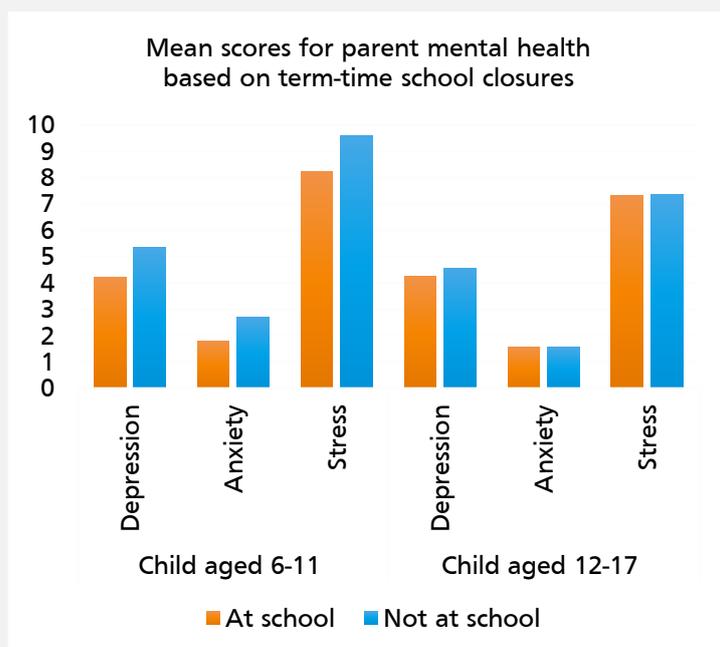
### Parent mental health across the pandemic

Parents' depression, anxiety, and stress scores significantly decreased from April 2020 to September 2020.

Decreases could reflect reduced pressures on families due to easing of the Covid-19 regulations or gradual adjustment to the new way of living.



### School closures and parent mental health



Parents felt more depressed when children were at home due to school closures than when children were at school.

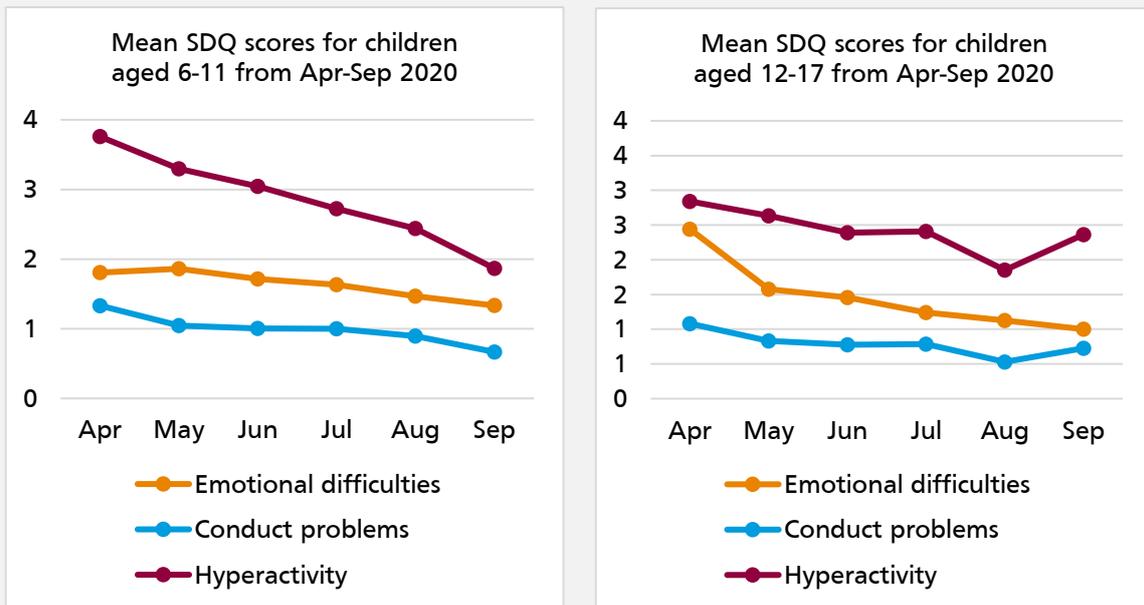
Parents of children aged 6-11 years also experienced more anxiety and stress during the school closures.

## Children’s emotions and behaviour

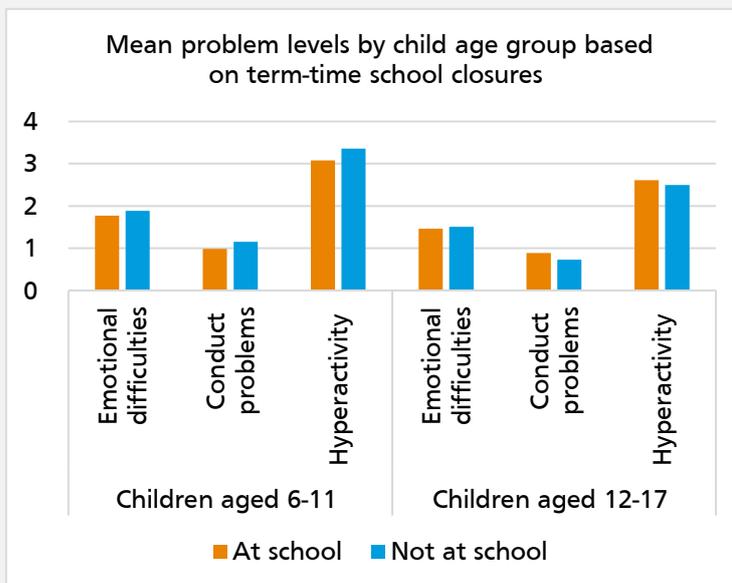
Parents reported on their children’s emotional and behavioural difficulties over the previous week using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 2001). Higher scores represent more parent-reported emotional difficulties, conduct problems, or hyperactivity on the respective scale.

### Children’s emotions and behaviour across the pandemic

Children’s emotional difficulties, conduct problems, and hyperactivity significantly decreased from April 2020 to September 2020 according to parents.



### School closures and children’s emotions and behaviour

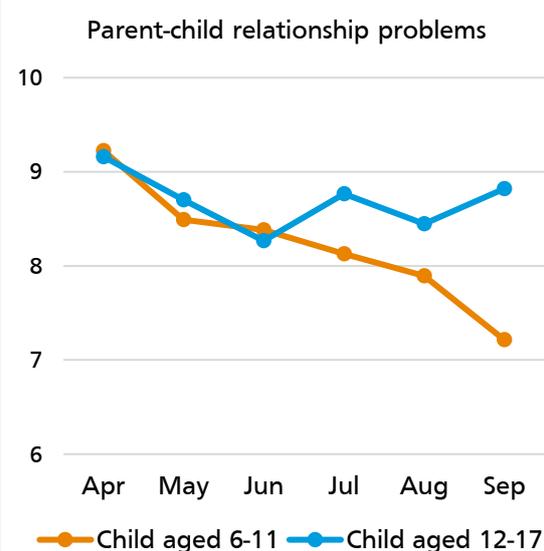
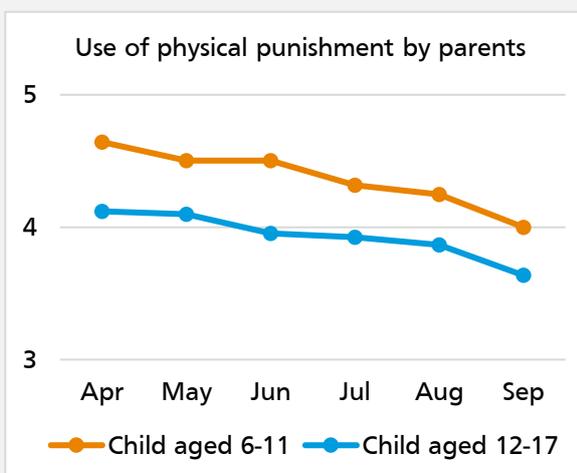


Based on parent reports, children’s emotional and behavior problems did not differ based on whether or not their school was closed.

## Parenting during the pandemic

Parents report a decrease in the **use of physical punishment** towards their children between April 2020 and September 2020. This trend did not depend on whether their children were attending school or at home due to the pandemic. The majority of parents reported that they never or almost never use physical punishment towards their children.

(Alabama Parenting Questionnaire – corporal punishment scale; Essau et al., 2006)

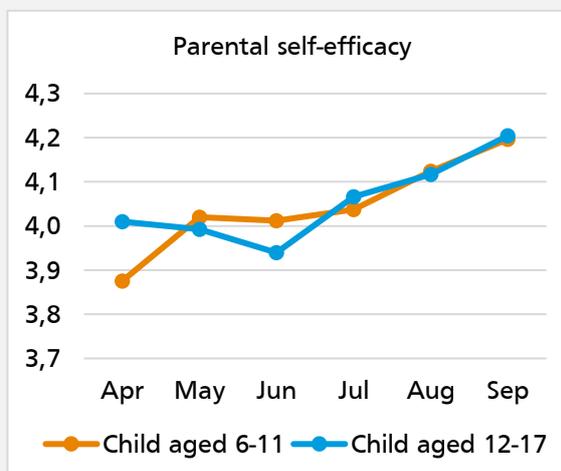


For children aged 6-11 years, **parent-child relationship problems** decreased from April 2020 to September 2020 according to parent reports. Parents of children aged 6-11 years also reported more relationship problems with their children during the school closures.

(Parenting Stress Questionnaire – parent-child relationship problem scale; Vermulst et al., 2015)

**Parental self-efficacy** (i.e., a parent's belief in their ability to perform the parenting role successfully) increased from April 2020 to September 2020. This trend did not depend on school closure.

(Me As A Parent – self-efficacy scale; Hamilton et al., 2015)



## Worries related to Covid-19

Parents were asked how often they worried about 7 factors relating to Covid-19 in the last week.

The factors were: 1) Myself becoming ill, 2) someone I know becoming ill (e.g. a family member or friend), 3) people I don't know becoming ill, 4) the government regulations (e.g. lock down measures, social distancing rules), 5) the financial impact on my household, 6) not being able to get enough food or household supplies, 7) the impact on society and the economy

Parents were also asked how often their children expressed worry about the same factors over the last week.

### Parents' worries related to Covid-19

The most persistent worries reported by parents were:

- The government regulations surrounding Covid-19
- The impact of Covid-19 on society and the economy

Almost 40% of parents reported having worried about the financial impact of Covid-19 on their household in the previous week. While, only around 10% of parents reported worrying about accessing food or household supplies due to the pandemic in the previous week.

### Children's worries related to Covid-19 (reported by parents)

The most persistent worry for children in both age groups was the government regulations, according to parents. Over half of children expressed worry about the government regulations to their parent in the previous week.

Parents reported that only a third of children expressed worry about others contracting Covid-19 and just a quarter worried about contracting Covid-19 themselves.

According to parents, children aged 12-17 years expressed more worry about the impact of Covid-19 on society and the economy (43%) than younger children (17%).

For both age groups, just a minority of children expressed worry about the financial impact of Covid-19 on their family (<5%) or about being able to access food or household supplies during the pandemic than older children (<10%).

## Parent's feelings about their child going to school

In August 2020, we asked 301 parents how they felt about their child returning to school after the summer school holidays and which Covid-19 safety measures they would like to see in place at their child's school. Parents could select safety measures from a prespecified list as well as suggest additional safety measures they would like to see in place. The prespecified list included: 1) Social distancing between children, 2) social distancing between staff and children, 3) staff wear facemasks 4) children wear masks 5) no sharing of learning materials (e.g. pencils) 6) classrooms disinfected daily.

- The majority of parents (89%) answered that they felt it is safe for their child to return to the school classroom after the summer holidays.
- Two thirds of parents indicated that schools should fully reopen after the school holidays, whereas just under a third of parents agreed they should reopen but with reduced class sizes to allow distancing.
- Only 0.3% of parents indicated that they believe schools should not reopen.

The top three measures chosen by parents from the prespecified list were:

- Social distancing between staff and children (68%)
- Daily disinfection of classrooms (59%)
- No sharing of learning materials (32%)

The least chosen measures were facemasks for children (7%) and facemasks for school staff (14%).

Parents also suggested the following Covid-19 safety measures:

- Well-ventilated classrooms and more time spent outside
- Social distancing between adults at the school
- Routine handwashing by staff and students
- Less mixing between class groups during breaks

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## Further information

The current report reflects interim findings from a subset of study data, which was selected and analysed based on the purpose of the report. The report is not intended to provide a summary of all results from the Covid-19 Family Study.

As of January 2021, data collection is still ongoing for the forth wave of the study. A further wave of data collection is scheduled to begin in April 2021. An overview of measures collected in the Covid-19 Family Study can found at <https://www.covidminds.org/longitudinal-studies>.

Does your organization have a question that could be answered using the Covid-19 Family Study data? Please [contact us](#).

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