



The Virtual Experience*

* This is NOT stress-free.

Online

Digital footprints have increased drastically during the pandemic.

Data from GlobalWebIndex (GWI) indicates that 58% of internet users aged 16-24 across 17 countries are spending longer on social media - far greater than any other age group. This is no surprise to us.

Social media app usage has risen from 20.8% of total mobile app use in Jan 2020 to 24.1% in March 2020.

Many young people turn to social media as a **coping mechanism**, to help them overcome the impacts of isolation, to stay connected with friends.

For many, their days begin and end on their phones.



Routine

Study routines are repetitive and students feel demotivated.



Many feel demotivated when they wake up, see their laptop on their table, and know they have to endure yet another day confined within their bedroom.

Young people's lives feel repetitive and some report being trapped in a **never-ending loop**: wake up, check phone, attend Zoom, check phone, sleep, repeat.

This routine can lead to long-term behavioural changes in young people, with adverse consequences on their social skills and increased risk of mental health problems. Compared to pre-COVID-19, many young people report a decrease in physical activity within their routines and an increase in **unhealthy eating to cope with social distancing and isolation**.

Study

As a result, students find it hard to keep up with lectures, coursework and deadlines.

52% of students struggle with online learning, and three-quarters of this group say it is due to a **lack of motivation** (ONS).

Learning continuity harmed by lack of study space and tech access.

- 58% of poorest students in the UK do not have access to their **own study space** (IFS).
- 14% of poorest students do not have **access to tech** necessary for online learning (IFS).



Jobs

Students face a tighter labour market and find it harder to find a job.

There has been a plunge in **vacancies** since March 2020 (ONS)

WAGE SCARRING: Graduating into unemployment is associated with lower long-term earnings.

Gregg & Tominey (2004): 12-15% **wage penalty** at age 42.

Barnette & Michaud (2017): 14.7% **lower life-cycle wage growth**.

Uncertainty

As a result, students feel very insecure about their future.

Jobs: Precarious labour market conditions have dealt a blow to young people's belief in their own agency and participation choices, leaving many who are **transitioning to work uncertain and pessimistic** about the future.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) reports that 38% of young people are uncertain of future career prospects. The **youth are disproportionately represented in worst-hit jobs** such as support, services or sales roles; 1/6 have had to stop working since the onset of the pandemic.

School: For those that are still in school or transitioning to HE, the ambiguity over **how and how fairly GCSE or A Levels would be assessed** is also a big source of stress and anxiety.

Isolation

Overall, students experience higher levels of isolation, anxiety and stress.

School closures during the pandemic has further isolated a **lonely generation**.

A survey by Young Mind shows that 87% of respondents report feeling lonely or isolated, and 58% cite a growing sense of isolation as having the biggest negative impact on their mental health. **Children in poverty** whose families cannot afford access to laptops, phones or internet, and **children in care** whose contact with social workers have been drastically reduced, are vulnerable.

Loades et al. (2020) notes that prolonged periods of loneliness is associated with higher rates of depression and anxiety in the long run. **Symptoms may last as long as a decade**. Evidence suggests that young people who are lonely might be **three times more likely to develop depression** in the future.

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