

Monitoring population needs and wellbeing using panel studies

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Background

In the current COVID-19 pandemic, the entire population is affected to some degree. Either by its direct effects or by its indirect effects. Furthermore, the pandemic is an ongoing crisis, with different periods characterized by higher or lower outbreak severity and corresponding restrictive measures. This changing severity, and the effect of the duration of the crisis itself on those affected, means that its impact on the population can change over time. Therefore, longitudinal monitoring among samples drawn from the entire population are needed. In this study we investigate the impact of the COVID-pandemic on levels of wellbeing and need for support among the Dutch population.

Method

During the current COVID-pandemic, several panel studies were used to assess the impact of the pandemic in the Netherlands. Consequences on (mental) health, wellbeing and the degree to which a need for (psychosocial) support and care exists within the population were studied. All panels were based on random general population samples. Measurements took place from the start of the first lockdown in the Netherlands (March 2020) until present (pre-pandemic measurements on mental health and wellbeing were available for one of the panels as well).

Results

Results show that on a group level, mental health is quite stable among the general population, even compared to pre-pandemic levels. Furthermore, only a small minority of respondents (2%-4%) indicated they needed care or support to cope with the consequences of the pandemic. This was also quite stable over time. There was a shift in the type of support among this small minority however. Results will be discussed in more detail during the panel session.

Conclusions

The results of these different longitudinal measurements show the value of longitudinal monitoring of wellbeing and need for support among the general population. With such a monitoring system policy makers can offer time-specific support and care. Furthermore, the insight gained in the effect of restrictive measures on wellbeing and needs allows policymakers to anticipate the care and support that will be needed during future periods of restrictive measures. Because these panels were either preexisting, or were drawn from a preexisting panel, it was possible to start monitoring soon after the start of the pandemic, which allowed the measurements to be used as rapid needs assessments.

Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on population mental health: International perspectives