

Family support & COVID.
Learning and responding from an European perspective

The impact of the pandemic on Dutch families: A positive message and a cautionary tale



Background

Family life has rapidly and drastically changed because of the pandemic:

- Prospect or reality of losing a loved one to covid-19
- Drastic changes in working situation
- Parents responsible for their children's schooling
- Limited help with childcare
- Isolated from friends and family



Longitudinal Survey Study

Survey questions: parent and child mental health, parenting factors, structure of family life

Parents of children aged 6 - 17 years

Recruitment through Dutch schools and social media



Sample

- 4,139 responses from parents/guardians aged 25-69 in the Netherlands
- 51% boys, 48% girls, 1% other
- Most respondents were the child's biological mother (84%)
- Most parents (66%) had completed higher level education
- Just 12% of respondents were single parents, 2.5% ethnic minority, 3% children attend special provision schools



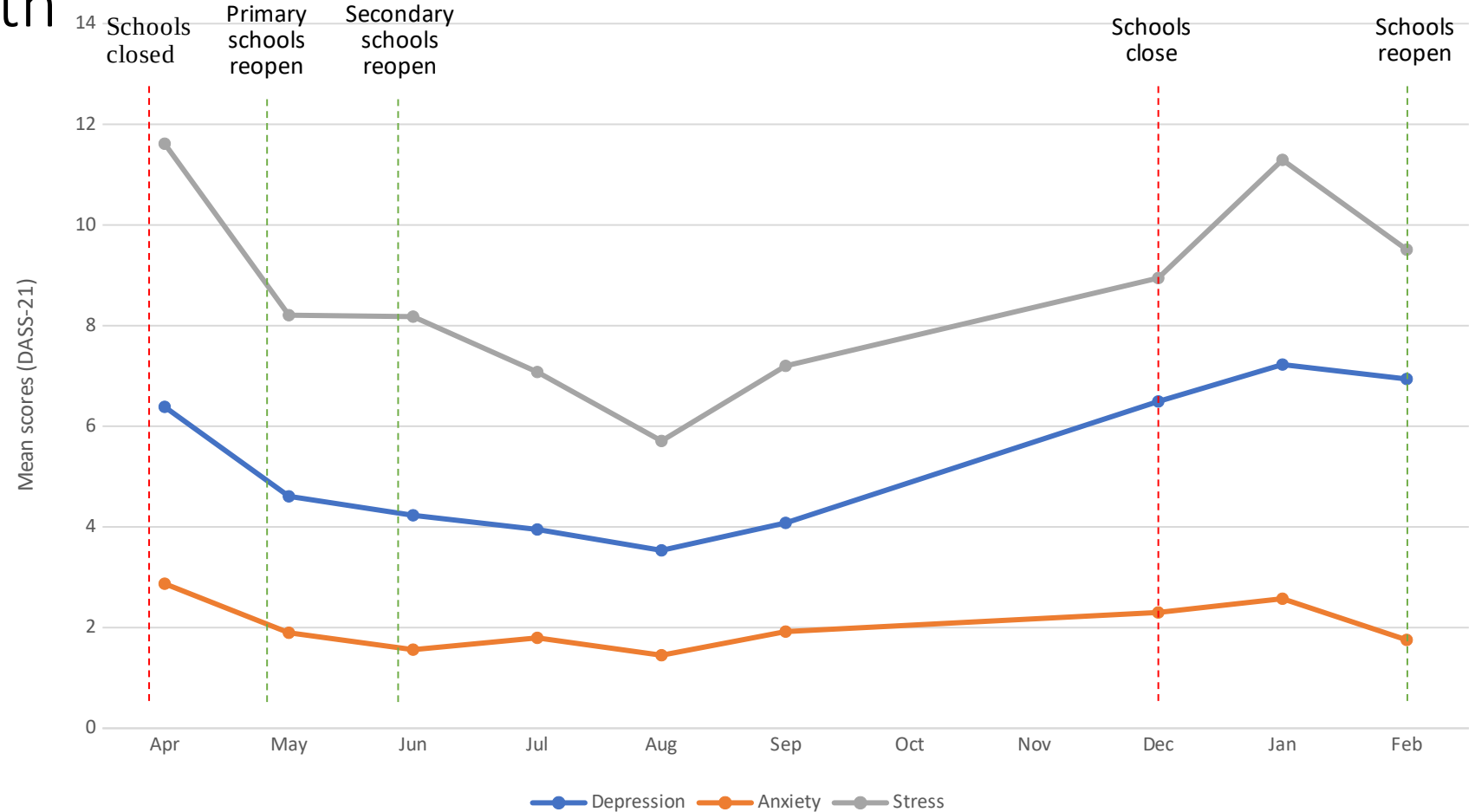
Family mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic...

Mean mental health scores for parents April 2020 to Feb 2021

Parent mental health

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

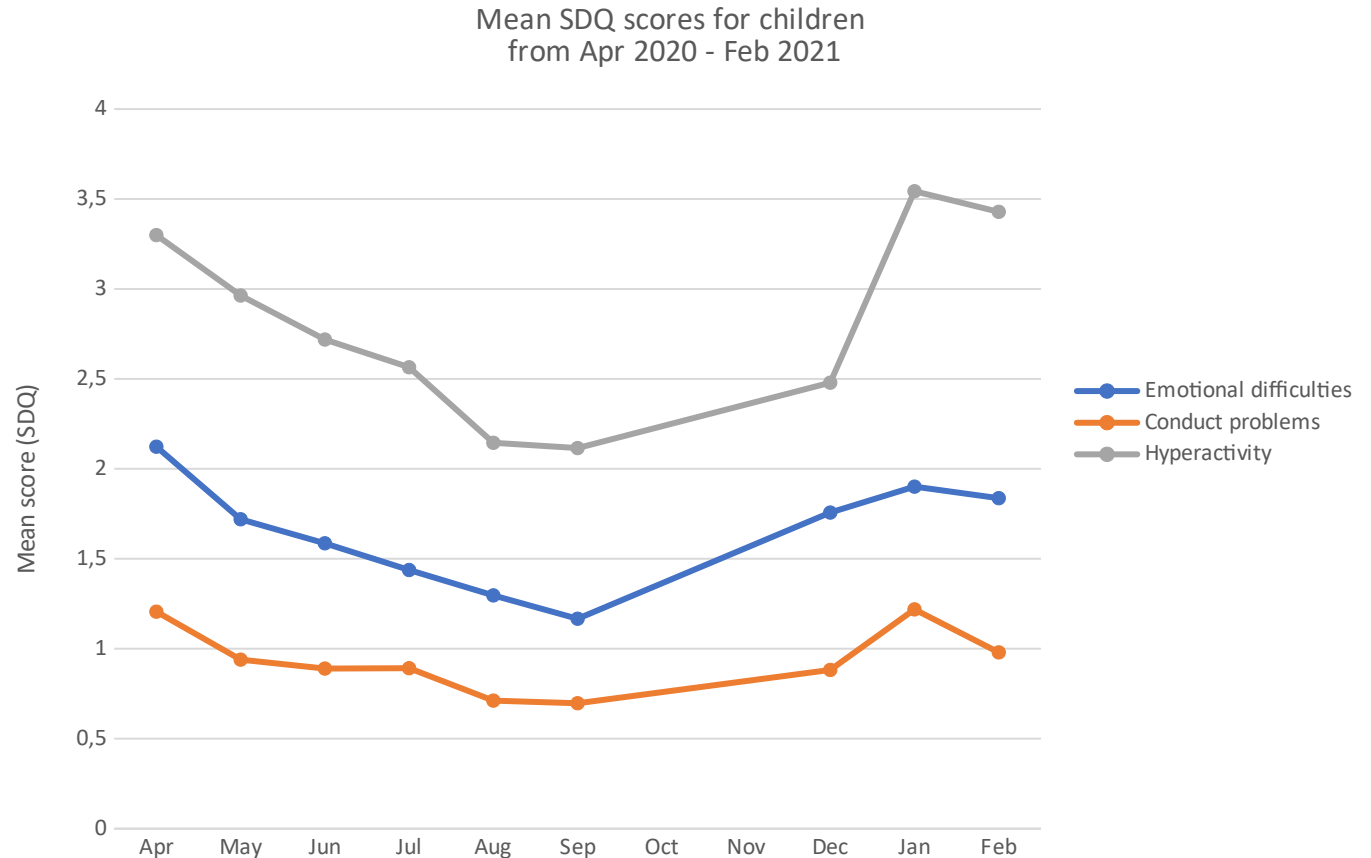
Scores **peaked** in January 2021 during term-time school closures.



Children's mental health

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

But **rose in January 2021** while schools were closed.

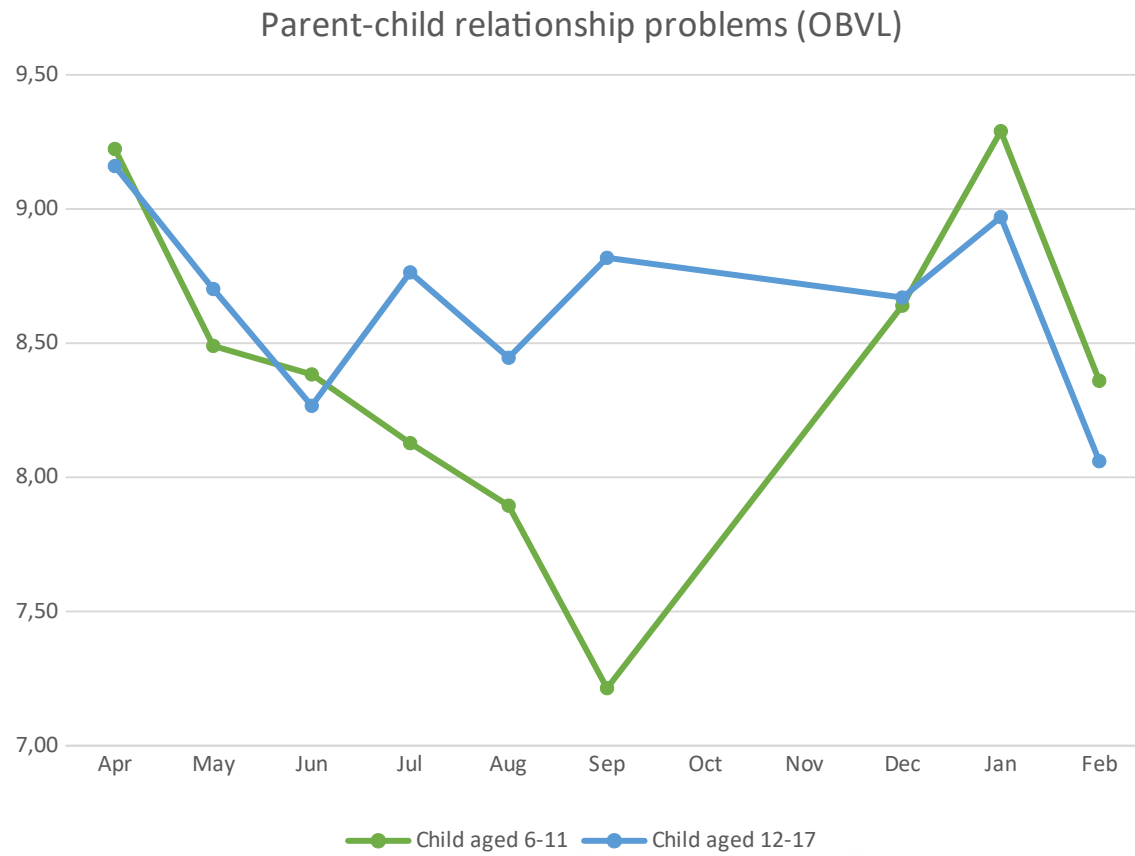


Interim summary

- Dutch parents ‘bounced back’ after the first lockdown
- Restrictions continue to affect family mental health, which declined in the second lockdown

Parenting during the Covid-19 pandemic...

Parent-child relationship problems



For children aged 6-11 years, **parent-child relationship problems decreased from April 2020 to September 2020** according to parent reports.

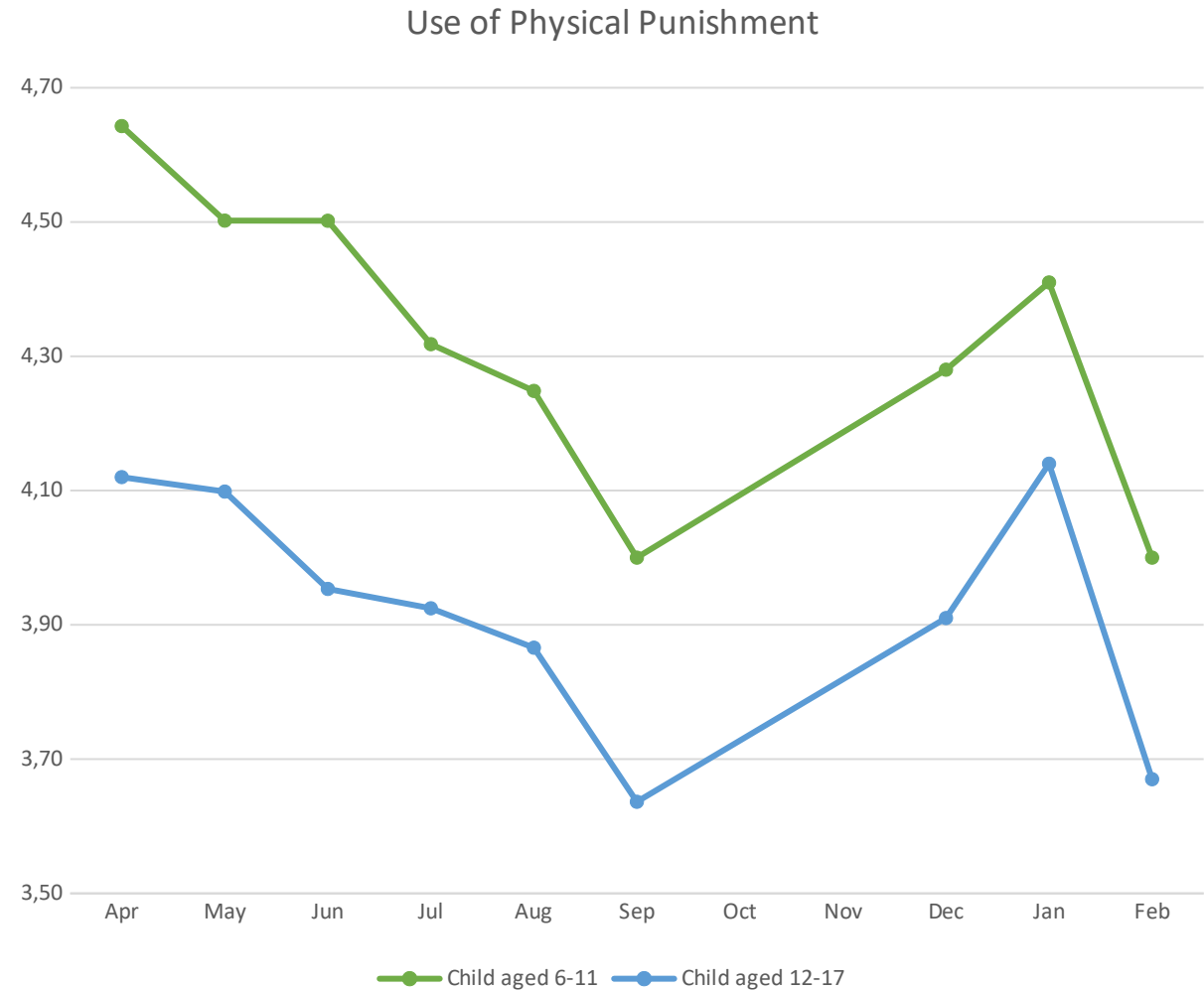
Parents of children aged 6-11 years reported more relationship problems if their children were not at school.

Parent-child relationship problems **rose in January 2021** with the school closures.

Physical punishment

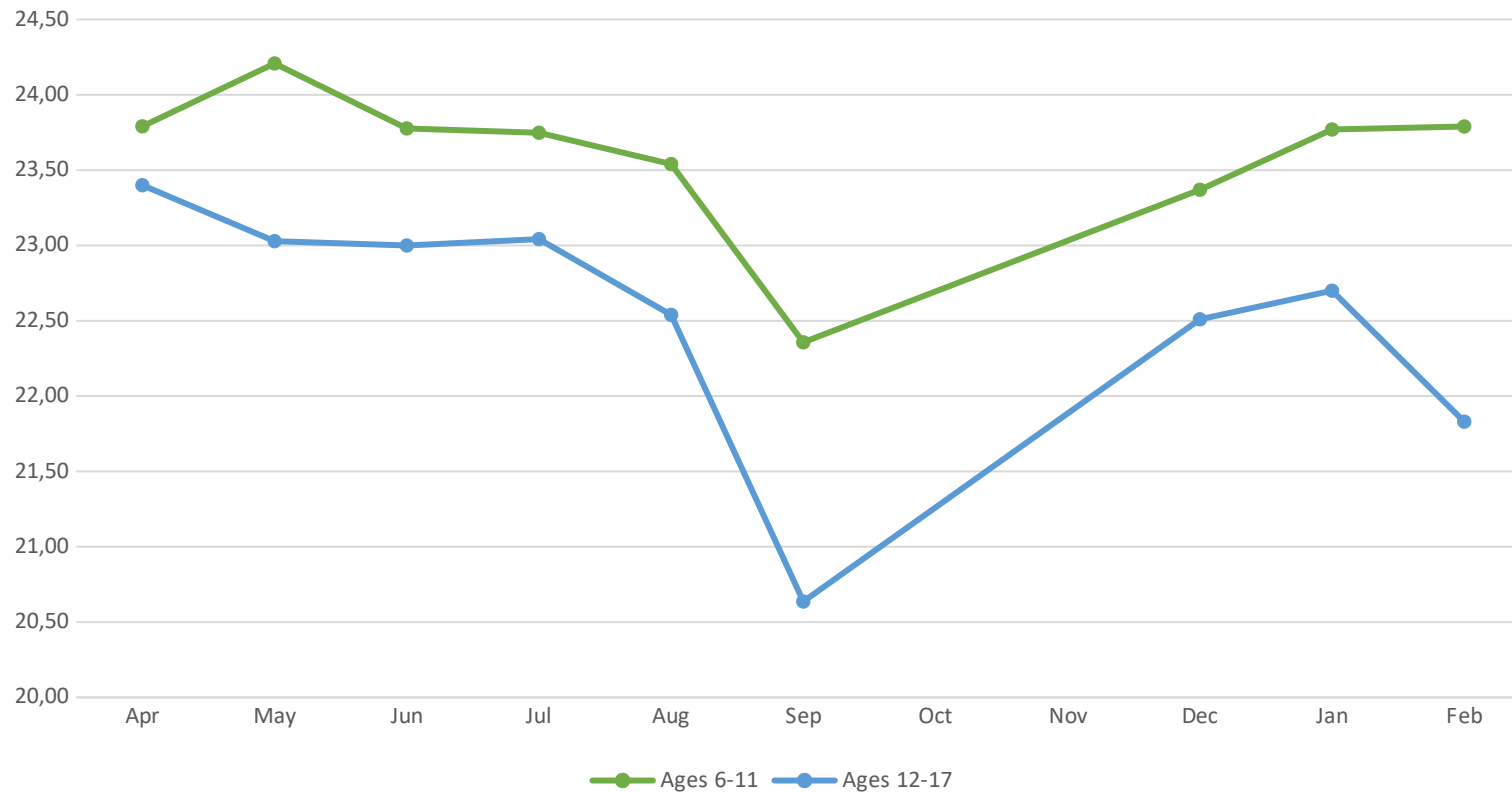
Parents reported a decrease in the **use of physical punishment** towards their children between April 2020 and September 2020.

Use of physical punishment **rose in January 2021** when schools were closed.



Positive parenting practices

Positive parenting practices (APQ)



Positive parenting practices appear to decrease from April 2020 to September 2020, but this was not statistically significant.

Parents of children aged 6-11 years reported more positive parenting if their children were not at school.

Interim summary

- Some parenting factors have changed during the pandemic.
- School closures may impact parenting of primary school children more than teens
- For younger children, child-parent relationship problems increase during school closures but so does positive parenting

How do we support parents?

A quarter of parents reported that they would like more support.

Majority choose **more online information to support home teaching, parenting skills, and mental health**, above networking platforms, live chat, and telephone support.

In the open question, parents asked most for:

- More support from schools (e.g. teaching tools, clear instructions, teacher contact)
- Help with childcare (e.g. daycare and tools to balance time)
- General information about Covid-19



Brighter side

- 83% of parents report normal to high resilience (BRS score ≥ 3)
 - 14% high resilience (BRS > 4.3)
 - Associated with more parental self-efficacy and less physical punishment use
- ~10% of parents experience post-traumatic growth (PTGI score > 3)
 - Higher post-traumatic growth predicted increases in positive parenting



Summary

- The government restrictions around Covid-19 continue to affect family mental health and parenting practices
- Family support should remain a priority and accessible online information platforms could play an important role
- Parent's perceived resilience and post-traumatic growth during the pandemic may have positive effects for some families and could be targeted in intervention
- Further research is needed in marginalized groups to see if the same trends apply and identify specific support needs



Thank you for listening

A big thanks to all those that made the Covid-19 Family Study possible!

Nicole Creasey

PhD candidate

University of Amsterdam

n.l.creasey@uva.nl

Twitter: [@NicoleCreasey](https://twitter.com/NicoleCreasey)

Covid-19 Family Study news on twitter: [@cov_familystudy](https://twitter.com/cov_familystudy)

Study report : Creasey, N., Lalihatu, E., Leijten, P. and Overbeek, G., 2021. *Covid-19 Family Study report: April 2020- September 2020*. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4423235>