

The Effect of the Pandemic on Junior High Students' Behavior

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Purpose

- When the researcher's junior high returned to in-person instruction, they observed an increase in fights and disregard for rules among the students.
- The purpose of this study is to investigate whether social isolation and group isolation brought on by the pandemic had impacted students' behavior.

Hypotheses

- Social isolation will have a positive correlation with disregard for social norms.**
- Group isolation (which would create more varied group culture) is correlated with an increase in conflicts between individuals from different groups.**

Background Research

- Impacts of Social Isolation (Gorvett, 2020)**
- When people who have been isolated interact with others, their perception of what happens can be distorted.
- Lonely people can have "an impaired ability to regulate their own thoughts, feelings and behavior. This skill is critical to the ability to comply with social norms." (p. 4, Gorvett, 2020).
- Social interaction is especially important for kids and teens, as they have to learn about social cues and expectations, and because social interaction is important for brain development.
- Face-to-face interaction is important for kids and teens; in online communication you cannot get all of the social cues such as body language or tones.
- Even if people feel that they enjoy being alone, there still will be some negative consequences on their social skills and identity.
- Group Culture (Fine, 1979)**
- Idioculture: "a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and employ as the basis of further interaction." (p. 734, Fine, 1979)
- Idiocultures can end up with very different values and social rules, which can cause conflict when the groups interact.
- Impacts of the Pandemic (Larsen, Helland, & Holt, 2021)**
- During the pandemic, "children felt less sad, scared/uneasy, angry and unsafe, but more lonely and had more difficulty concentrating or sleeping at night." (Results, para.1, Larsen, Helland, & Holt, 2021)
- During the pandemic older children were more affected by not being able to meet their friends than younger children.

Variables

- Social isolation:**
 - Two items in the parent survey & four items on the student survey
- Group isolation:**
 - Four items on the student survey
- Disregard for social norms:**
 - Four items on the parent survey, six items on the teacher survey, & four items on the student survey
 - Cronbach's alpha ranges from .742 to .803
- Out group conflict** (conflicts with people outside friend group):
 - Four items on the student survey
 - One item was deleted due to low Cronbach's alpha
 - Cronbach's alpha is .707
- In group conflict** (conflicts within friend group):
 - Four items on the student survey
 - Cronbach's alpha is .743

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on junior high school students. The author observed an increase in fights and disregard for rules among the students at their school. This study aimed to test the hypothesis that "social isolation will have a positive correlation with disregard for social norms," as junior high kids need interactions to learn about social norms and rules. The other hypothesis tested was "group isolation (which would create more varied group cultures) is correlated with an increase in conflicts between individuals from different groups." Three surveys (Student, Parent, and Teacher) were used to measure students' social and group isolation and behavior before and after schools returned to in-person instruction. 149 students, 34 teachers, and 125 parents were recruited through a junior high school in a Chicago suburb. The results showed a significant increase in disregard for rules and social norms. No significant correlations supported the hypotheses that social isolation or group isolation affected students' behavior. However, several significant correlations found that increased virtual contacts leads to increased conflicts and disregard for social norms.

Graphs and Tables

Figure 1. Mean of Each Item and Disregard for Social Norm on the Teacher Survey

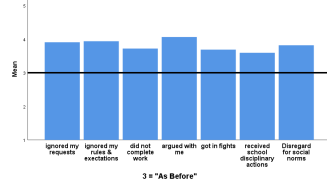


Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and % of Teachers that Answered Four or More

Variable	M	SD	% of teachers
1. Ignored my requests	3.82	0.87	70.59
2. Ignored my rules and expectations	3.85	0.82	70.59
3. Did not complete work	3.72	0.81	68.75
4. Argued with me	4.06	0.75	81.82
5. Got in fights	3.62	0.89	55.89
6. Received school disciplinary actions	3.56	0.66	58.82
7. Disregard for social norms*	3.82	0.51	N/A

*Disregard for social norms is a composite variable made up of items 1-6. A one sample t-test on disregard for social norms, with a test value =3 is statistically significant, $t(31) = 9.126, p < .001$

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations for the Key Variables in the Student Survey

Variable	M	SD	N	Correlations						
				1	2	3	4	5	6	
1. In-person contact with friend group	2.21	1.21	148	—						
2. Virtual contact with friend group	3.43	1.34	145	-.10	—					
3. In-person contact outside friend group	2.03	1.21	147	.19	.16*	—				
4. Virtual contact outside friend group	2.54	1.33	145	.05	.38**	.24**	—			
5. In group conflict	2.61	.85	145	-.07	.20*	.15	.22**	—		
6. Out of group conflict	2.72	.83	147	.00	.26**	.19*	.22**	.52**	—	
7. Disregard for social norms	2.59	.86	143	-.11	.17*	.05	.14	.51**	.54**	—

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 3. Intercorrelations in the Student Survey Based on the First 73 Respondents

Variable	Correlations					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. In-person contact with friend	—					
2. Virtual contact with friend	.02	—				
3. In-person contact outside friend	.19	.14	—			
4. Virtual contact outside friend	-.03	.33**	.26*	—		
5. In group conflict	.03	.38**	.17	.32**	—	
6. Out of group conflict	.03	.46**	.19	.30**	.49**	—
7. Disregard for social norms	-.11	.29*	.05	.26*	.55**	.57**

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 4. Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations for the Parent Survey

Variable	M	SD	N	Correlations	
				1	2
1. Interacted with friends in-person	1.55	.86	125	—	
2. Interacted with friends virtually	3.64	1.23	125	.01	—
3. Disregard for social norms	2.79	.67	122	.03	.21*

* $p < .05$

Method

- Participants:**
 - 125 parents, 73 students, and 34 teachers were recruited through an e-mail sent by the principal of a junior high school in a Chicago suburb.
 - 4 days later, 76 more students completed the survey after a reminder during morning announcements and one or more teachers allowed students to complete the survey during class.
 - Total student participants: 149
 - 8.7% sixth grade
 - 22.1% seventh grade
 - 67.8% eighth grade
 - Total teacher participants: 34
 - 29.4% sixth grade
 - 29.4% seventh grade
 - 41.2% eighth grade
 - Parents were given an opt-out form to fill out if they wanted to exclude their child from taking the survey.
- Study Design:**
 - Correlational study
- Measures:**
 - Parent Survey
 - 7 items
 - Sample item: While school was virtual, my child interacted with their friends in-person...
 - Teen Survey
 - 15 items
 - Sample items: When school returned to in-person fully, I disagreed with people who are not part of my friend group...
 - Teacher Survey
 - 7 items
 - Sample item: When school returned fully to in-person instruction, my students argued with me...
- Each item in all the surveys is rated on a scale from 1 (a lot less than before schools switched to virtual) to 5 (a lot more than before schools switched to virtual) with the middle number, 3 (as before).
- For the complete surveys, please see Appendix B, C, D in the paper.
- Procedure:**
 - In the letters to the students, parents, and teachers (which also acted as informed consent/assent, see Appendix A), there is a link to the survey hosted on Survey Monkey.
 - Interested participants click the link, which takes them to the survey.
 - Each of the surveys took between 1 and 3 minutes to complete.

Results

- There was a significant increase in disregard for social norms since the pandemic.
- Hypothesis 1 had no significant correlations which supported it, and one correlation that directly contradicted it.
 - This correlation showed that students who had more contact with their friends virtually likely had an increase in disregard for social norms.
- Hypothesis 2 had some evidence supporting it.
 - A correlation showed that students who had more contact with their friends online likely had an increase in conflicts with individuals in other groups.
 - This support was weak, as virtual contact with friends was also positively correlated with conflicts within friend groups.
- Unexpected findings**
 - Correlations were found between virtual contact and disregard for social norms and all types of conflicts.
 - This means that students who interacted more online were more likely to have an increase in conflicts and disregard for social norms.

Discussion

- Limitations that Might Explain Why Hypotheses not Supported**
 - The Student Survey and Parent Survey received responses only from around 20% of each population, participants could have been students and parents whose child had few behavioral problems.
 - Some students may have underreported their behavioral problems.
 - Random responding, especially for those who participated after more encouragement.
 - This study was only preformed on one junior high school which was virtual for approximately eighteen months.
- Unexpected Findings**
 - Positive correlations between virtual contact and every type of conflict and disregard for social norms.
 - Students who interacted more online likely had more conflicts with friends and others, and would ignore rules more often.
 - This pattern of correlations is supported by both the Parent Survey and the Student Survey.
- Possible Explanations**
 - Interactions online can be less empathetic and more aggressive.
 - Students might experience more conflicts because they are applying social norms from virtual interaction to in-person interaction.
- Future Research**
 - As virtual interaction and technology become more prevalent in our lives, it is important to gain a better understanding of how interactions online work.

Reference

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