

Publication

COVID-19 pandemic and health related quality of life in primary school children in Switzerland: a repeated cross-sectional study

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Background: The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting containment measures had and still have a profound impact on everyday life. Both the fear of infection and the imposed restrictions can have biopsychosocial consequences. The aim of the present study was to analyze whether there is a difference in the health-related quality of life (HRQoL) of primary school children in 2014/15 compared to in 2020, the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods: The present study included 1,712 children aged 5 to 11 years who either participated in the baseline assessment of the SOPHYA cohort study in 2014/15 or were newly recruited during follow-up of the cohort in 2020. In both surveys, the children invited for participation were identified based on registry data. HRQoL was assessed with the validated KINDL-R questionnaire, which scores HRQoL along six different dimensions.

Results: The overall scores (82.4 [81.8; 83.0] vs. 79.6 [79.1; 80.2]), and in particular the emotional well-being scores (85.6 [84.6; 86.6] vs. 83.3 [82.4; 84.2]), were lower during the year of the pandemic (2020) compared to the survey year 2014/15. The highest decrease between 2014/15 and 2020 in the adjusted models was seen for the youngest age group (-3.9 points), followed by children from families with a high income (-3.2 points), girls (-3.1 points), Swiss citizens (-3.1 points) and children from the German-speaking part of Switzerland (-3.1 points). HRQoL was particularly low during periods with restrictions and at the height of the COVID-19 waves in 2020.

Conclusion: The SOPHYA-study showed that HRQoL, and especially emotional well-being, was lower in 5 to 11-year-old children in Switzerland during the first year of the pandemic compared to the results from the survey conducted in 2014/15. In the year of the pandemic, the scores were lowest at the height of the COVID-19 waves and their associated restrictions. As it cannot be distinguished whether fear of the disease itself or the restrictions caused this decrease in HRQoL, containment policies should keep COVID-19 infections as low as possible, but still enable children to profit from protective factors such as leisure activities, physical activity and social contact.

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