

Documents

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Age Differences in Hedonic Adaptation to Societal Restrictions? Positive and Negative Affect Trajectories During the First Wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic in 33 Nations

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Abstract

We examined age group differences in hedonic adaptation trajectories of positive and negative affect (PA/ NA) at different arousal levels during the severe societal restrictions that governments implemented to contain the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic (March to June 2020). Data from 10,509 participants from 33 countries and 12 weekly assessments were used (67% women, aged 18 to 85p, on average 318 participants per country (SD = 434) and 5.6 assessments (SD = 2.5) per participant). Multilevel models (level 1: assessments, level 2: participants, level 3: countries) were fit to examine trajectories of low to high arousal PA and NA during the phase of tightening societal restrictions, the phase of stable peak restrictions, and the phase of easing restrictions separately. During the entire study period mean levels of PA were lower in emerging and young adults (aged 18–44) than older adults, whereas mean NA levels were higher. During peak societal restrictions, participants reported increasingly more PA, especially high-arousal emotions ($d = .36$ per month vs. $.19$ unaroused). NA levels decreased over time, especially high-arousal emotions ($d = .35$ vs. $.14$ p/month). These hedonic adaptation trajectories were largely similar across age groups. Nevertheless, up to 30% of the participants increased in NA and up to 6% decreased in PA, against the general trend, demonstrating substantial individual differences in emotional adaptation. Finally, heterogeneity in the effects of time on affect was larger on the individual level than the country level. Emotional recovery trajectories during the first lockdown in the COVID-19 pandemic were virtually similar across age groups in 33 countries, across valence and arousal levels, suggesting age advantages in emotional wellbeing remain restricted to mean-level differences rather than emotion dynamics. © 2022 American Psychological Association

Author Keywords

COVID-19; lockdown; resilience; well-being

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