



COVID-19 Survey Summary: December 31, 2021

The following is a summary of social, behavioral and economic survey research on COVID-19 released in the past week, as compiled for the Societal Experts Action Network ([SEAN](#)). Most surveys cited in this report are available in the [SEAN COVID-19 Survey Archive](#).

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Americans' happiness with the year past is up and sadness has ebbed compared with a year ago, with the two emotions now at parity. Still, more than a third of parents report more frequent stress than before the pandemic, and two in 10 say the same for their children.

Two other new reports focus on pandemic learning loss. One estimates that forgotten and forgone learning could reduce public school students' lifetime earnings by \$2 trillion in the United States; another pins losses at \$17 trillion globally absent steps to address the issue.

An abbreviated number of pandemic-related U.S. surveys were released this holiday week. We also include international surveys from Chile, the Philippines and Russia.

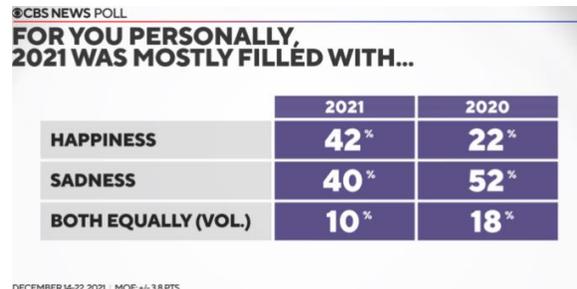
Virus Status

The United States hit a record for new daily cases, with the seven-day average up more than threefold since early December to [316,000](#) as of Dec. 29. Hospitalizations averaged [79,000](#) a day, rising but at a much slower pace and far below its peak last January.

The CDC reduced its estimate of the prevalence of the Omicron variant, now saying it accounted for 23 percent of U.S. cases in the week ending Dec. 18 vs. the 73 percent previously estimated. Regardless, that rose to [59 percent](#) in the week ending Dec. 25. Further revisions are expected.

Yearly Reflections

Looking back, Americans divide on whether 2021 for them was filled mostly with happiness (42 percent) or sadness (40 percent). Self-reported happiness is nearly double what it was at this time last year; sadness, down 12 percentage points.



Even with the latest surge of coronavirus cases, 71 percent feel mostly hopeful about 2022; one in five is mostly discouraged ([CBS News 12/14-12/22](#)).

Mental Health

In a mid-November survey of parents of minor children, 36 percent reported feeling stress more often now than before the pandemic, 32 percent said they felt anxious more frequently and 30 percent reported feeling irritated more often. One in 10 said they felt these emotions less often.

One in five reported their child experiencing more frequent stress, anxiety and irritation than pre-pandemic, about double the share saying their child experienced these feelings less often. Thirty-five percent of parents said they think more about their child's mental health; 27 percent said the same about their own mental health.

In terms of activities, 41 percent of parents said their child spends more time on screens, vs. just 8 percent reporting less screen time. Thirty-seven percent reported fewer social activities and 25 percent less exercise or outdoor play time; fewer reported these occurring more often.

Among those with children age 3-17, 58 percent agreed that their child struggled with being away from their friends. Among those whose child took online or remote classes, 51 percent agreed that this was "really hard" for them. Still, 84 percent said their child has shown a lot of resilience ([NAMI 11/9-11/17](#)).

Pandemic Learning Loss

Building on evidence of learning loss in previous studies, a new report finds that students started the 2021-22 school year with lower academic achievement than in 2019. Among third to eighth graders, median percentile ranks were 9 to 11 percentile points lower in math and 3 to 7 points lower in reading. Students in high-poverty schools and Hispanic, American Indian and Alaska Native and Black students were affected disproportionately. The sample included about 6.1 million students in 14,256 public schools who took reading and math assessments in fall 2019 and/or fall 2021.

An accompanying analysis estimates that the decline in math achievement, if permanent, would reduce expected lifetime earnings by about \$43,800 per student, or \$2 trillion extrapolated to all K-12 students in the United States ([NWEA 12/2021](#); [The 74 12/13](#)).

Another report estimates that in-person school closures affected 1.6 billion students globally at the height of the pandemic, with an average of 121 instructional days cancelled and 103 curtailed from late February 2020 to August 2021. A simulation model finds that in the worst-case scenario, forgotten and missed learning over the course of the pandemic may result in lost lifetime earnings of \$17 trillion for this generation of students.

The report gathers studies from "over 28" countries, citing increased inequalities in education for children from low-income households, girls and children with disabilities. It also cites "emerging

evidence” from some countries that learning losses were greater in math than in reading and were higher among younger students, who had less access to remote learning.

The report urges broader efforts to measure learning loss, identify disparities and create a baseline for recovery efforts. Its authors stress in-person school reopening as a priority and outline accelerated learning strategies ([UNESCO/UNICEF/World Bank 12/6](#)).

Other International Results

In Chile, where coronavirus cases are on the [decline](#) after a brief November surge, concern about catching the virus is down 15 points since early November to 36 percent, nearly matching its pandemic low of 34 percent in early October. Seventy-nine percent approve of the government’s handling of the coronavirus, up 19 points since late October to a high in weekly data since April 2020 ([Cadem 12/21-12/22](#)).

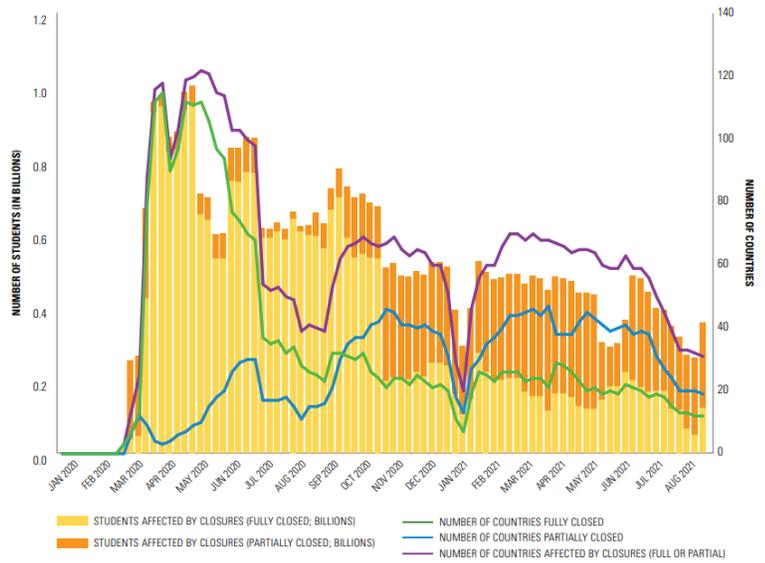
In the Philippines, 65 percent expected to have a happy Christmas, up from a record low of 50 percent last year but still 14 points short of its 2019 level. Forty-two percent said Christmas is not as happy now compared to pre-pandemic times, while 26 percent said it’s happier and 25 percent saw no difference.

That said, 93 percent of Filipinos say they’re entering 2022 with hope rather than fear, similar to its pre-pandemic level, 96 percent in 2019 ([SWS 12/12-12/16](#), [SWS 12/12-12/16](#)).

Seventy-two percent of Russians say 2021 generally was difficult for the country, far surpassing the 19 percent who thought it was generally good or successful. Still, that 53-point margin eased from 80 points last year. Fifty-three percent say the past year has been difficult or bad for them personally, down from two-thirds last year; 45 percent say it’s been generally good or successful, up from about a third in 2020 ([VCIOM 12/24](#)).

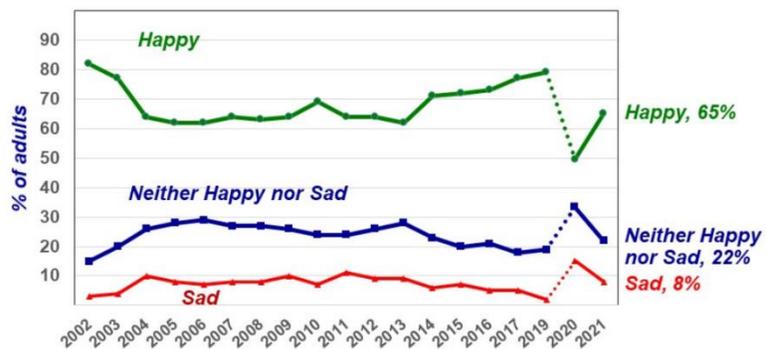
Asked in an open-ended question what positive changes they expect for the country in the next year, 22 percent mention improvements in the coronavirus situation, far surpassing other items.

FIGURE 2. Hundreds of millions of students in low- and middle-income countries have been affected by full and partial school closures since the start of the pandemic



Source: authors' calculations using UNESCO school closure database.

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PHILIPPINES, 2002 - 2021**



Asked about negative developments that could occur in 2022, 21 percent mentioned inflation; 9 percent, a new coronavirus strain ([VCIOM 12/25](#)).

Another Russia survey similarly finds the coronavirus, vaccinations and restrictive measures most commonly cited as the main event of the year, selected by 49 percent from a list of 21 items (with multiple responses accepted) ([Levada 11/25-12/1](#)),

Additional U.S. and international poll results are available at the [COVID-19 Survey Archive](#).

Summary for SEAN by [Langer Research Associates](#).