

YOUNG Mi MINDS



Coronavirus: Impact on young people with mental health needs

Survey 2: Summer 2020

Foreword

Children and young people across the UK have had their lives turned upside down by the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost every young person has had to adjust to dramatic changes in their education or employment, routine and home life. Some have experienced bereavement or other traumatic experiences during the lockdown period, while groups who were already marginalised or disadvantaged are now likely to become more so.

The findings in this report are the results of a second survey YoungMinds carried out into the impact of coronavirus on young people with a history of mental health needs. The surveys were conducted three months apart (the initial survey was over the first weekend of lockdown) and although the results reveal similar themes, there is a clear message that some of the pressures young people face have intensified, and that more are struggling to get the help they need.

In the last few months, many young people have found it hard to cope with social isolation, anxiety and fears about what the future holds. A smaller number have adjusted comparatively well to life under lockdown, but are now concerned about a return to the pressures of 'normal' life.

While overall the number of young people telling us that their mental health has deteriorated remains the same, more young people said that it was 'much worse' due to coronavirus. Access to support also appears to have become more difficult for some. Responses to this survey suggest that almost a third (31%) of young people who were receiving some form of mental health support immediately before the pandemic – including from the NHS, private providers, school counsellors and helplines - are no longer accessing it (5% more than our previous survey). We have also heard from young people who have urgently needed help but not looked for it, because of concerns about being a burden on services, uncertainty about what is available, or because of stigma.

Mental health professionals across all sectors have worked extremely hard to adapt their services, and a large number of young people who were receiving support face-to-face are still successfully receiving it through phone or video calls. But this is not the right approach for everyone. Many young people lack access to technology, are concerned about privacy or simply do not feel safe opening up online. While virtual support will continue to play an important role, face-to-face services must also reopen quickly where possible.

It is important to recognise the massive scale of the challenge ahead. As restrictions lift we cannot simply return to business as usual. Schools, universities and workplaces must adapt to a likely surge in mental health needs by looking at the whole culture of how they operate, as well as ensuring that excellent support is available for those who require it.

The NHS and voluntary sector must work together to scale up and coordinate the services they offer, and we also need the Government to place a greater emphasis on early intervention. The Government must also ensure that, in what will be a difficult economic climate, there is significant new funding available to prevent the pandemic from having lasting consequences on mental health. The wellbeing of children and young people should also be at the heart of all policy-making, so that decisions across Government have a positive impact.

While the future remains uncertain, we must see this as an opportunity to renew our mental health system and to challenge the inequalities that hold so many young people back. This means listening to young people, understanding the challenges they face at this critical time, and ensuring that they are fully involved in decisions that will affect their lives.

Emma Thomas, Chief Executive, YoungMinds

This report outlines the results of the second survey we have carried out with young people with a history of mental health needs during the coronavirus pandemic. The first survey was conducted with 2,111 young people with a history of mental health needs in March 2020¹.

This second survey was carried out between Friday 5th June and Monday 6th July, a period in which the Government announced measures to ease restrictions, including the target for schools to reopen to all students in the Autumn term. 2,036 young people aged 13-25 who have looked for mental health support took part. This included 1,081 young people who had accessed some form of mental health support in the first three months of the year. See Methodology section for more details.

Mental health impact

What impact has the coronavirus crisis had on your mental health?

41% agreed it had made their mental health much worse

40% agreed it had made their mental health a bit worse

5% agreed it had made no difference to their mental health

8% agreed that their mental health had become a bit better

3% agreed that their mental health had become much better

Previous results from March 2020

32% agreed that it has made their mental health much worse

51% agreed it had made their mental health a bit worse

9% agreed it had made no difference to their mental health

6% agreed that their mental health had become a bit better

1% agreed that their mental health had become much better

¹ youngminds.org.uk/media/3708/coronavirus-report_march2020.pdf

The vast majority of young people who responded to the survey believed that the coronavirus, and the restrictions put in place, had led to a **deterioration in their mental health**. The results correspond closely to the results of our previous survey, when 83% of respondents reported that their mental health had become worse. However, the proportion of young people who say that their mental health is much worse has increased from 32% to 41%.

The impact on mental health was usually related to **an increase in loneliness and anxiety**, and showed itself in different ways. Respondents with existing eating disorders reported relapsing or finding themselves further restricting their food intake. Some young people who already self-harmed reported that they were self-harming more during the pandemic.

In other cases, however, young people also recognised **benefits to the lockdown**. 11% believed that their mental health had improved overall during this period, a slight increase from the previous survey, often because they had felt under pressure at school because of academic stress, bullying or other factors. Other respondents expressed ambivalence. Some said that after feeling particularly low when restrictions were first announced, lockdown has felt like a positive break. For these young people, adjusting to a return to 'normal' life may in itself lead to further difficulties.

Key themes include:

Loneliness and social isolation. 87% of respondents agreed that they had felt lonely or isolated during the lockdown period. While most had been able to stay in touch with friends to some extent, social contact was much harder than it would otherwise have been. Daily activities that previously acted as coping mechanisms – including seeing friends face-to-face or taking part in classes or regular activities – were extremely limited. Many young people reported that the extra time on their own had led to them overthinking things, and that they no longer had distractions that could alleviate emotional distress.

Some young people reported that being physically separated from their partners had had a particularly big impact on their mental health. A number of LGBTQ+ respondents said their dysphoria had got worse or that they felt that they were not able to be their real selves at home.

Loss of motivation and purpose. Many respondents reported feeling unproductive, especially those who were meant to be working or having exams. Some young people reported increased feelings of depression, including spending more time sleeping or in bed. Many respondents who are still at school or college reported that they lacked motivation to do the work that they were being set.

Anxiety. Young people reported an increase in anxiety, because of concerns about the virus itself, and especially about members of their family being infected. Some respondents said they did not feel comfortable leaving their homes having been inside for such a long time.

While many young people felt that the easing of restrictions would have a positive effect on their mental health, and were excited about seeing friends again, others were concerned about the possibility of a second wave of the virus. Many also had mixed feelings about a return to 'normal' life, especially with some restrictions still in place. School work was a source of anxiety for many, including the need to do home learning and worries about falling behind.

Coping mechanisms. Friends were seen as the most helpful form of support for young people, when it was possible to stay in touch with them. Young people also talked about the benefits of expressing feelings through writing (e.g. a diary or journal), exercise, seeing family, spending time online (talking to friends, playing games, being on social media), watching TV and reading.

I have been able to stay in touch with friends during the lockdown **71% agree, 16% disagree**

I have felt lonely or isolated during the lockdown **87% agree, 6% disagree**

I have coped well with the restrictions on movement. **33% agree, 43% disagree**

"I alternate between anxiety so bad I shake and cry and can't concentrate on anything and then depression so bad that I can't get out of bed. I'm also so scared of being infected (and then infecting others) that I haven't left my house in nearly 100 days."

"My anxiety levels are through the roof. It's incredibly difficult for me to get through the day without crying. I am ridiculously irritable and experiencing horrendous mood swings."

"Being in lockdown has made me feel trapped and I feel like I cannot talk about anything or express myself with my family so this pandemic has essentially forced me to suffer silently"

"At the start my mental health really declined, I was constantly anxious and I was really down with everything that was happening. But now I feel much more relaxed and my mental health has improved. I think the break from everything has actually helped."

"I can see glimmers of normality but it's a shadow of what it was and makes things seem stranger and more difficult than ever."

"It annoys me because they are starting to open shops and restaurants for delivery and opening schools for some children but they haven't even opened CAMHS [face-to-face] and on the news you never hear them talk about mental health or autism."

"Last week I saw my group of friends, we went on a cycle and it made me feel a lot happier as although we have been facetimeing at home before, it was nice to have conversations and catch up and laugh in real life."

"[The easing of restrictions] means I can see my closest friends which helps as they know what I'm going through."

Access to support

1,081 young people had been receiving some form of mental health support in the three months leading up to the crisis.

45% were receiving NHS support (e.g. through CAMHS or a therapist)

21% were receiving private counselling or therapy in their local community

7% were receiving support through a local charity, drop-in centre or youth club

39% were receiving support from a school or university counsellor

34% were receiving support from other staff at school or university

17% were receiving support from a helpline or text service

5% were receiving support from a local peer support group

15% were receiving support from an online service

3% were in inpatient care

Among these


31% said they were no longer able to access support but still need it

8% said they were no longer able to access support but do not currently need it

In our previous survey, 26% of young people who had been receiving some form of mental health support in the three months leading up to the crisis said that they were no longer able to access support.

In our survey with parents of children with mental health needs in May 2020, 25% of those whose children had been accessing some form of mental health support in the first three months of 2020 said that their child was no longer able to access support but still needed it. ²

² youngminds.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/press-releases/parent-survey-reveals-widespread-concerns-about-mental-health-impact-of-covid-19-on-young-people-s-mental-health



In unprecedented circumstances, mental health professionals deserve huge credit for continuing to provide support to young people where they can; in many cases, services that were being delivered face-to-face have been rapidly and successfully adapted so that they can be offered virtually.

Despite these efforts, our survey suggests that the coronavirus crisis has had a profound impact on young people's ability to access support. Almost one-third of respondents (31%) who were receiving some form of mental health support immediately before the pandemic – including from the NHS, charities and school and university counsellors – reported that they were no longer able to access support but still needed it.

This is an increase from our previous surveys with young people and parents, when around a quarter of respondents who had been accessing support stated that they were no longer able to. We also asked respondents who had not been accessing support immediately before the crisis whether they had looked for support subsequently. 21% of those respondents had looked for support, while a further 40% said that they hadn't looked for support but were struggling with their mental health.

Among those who had looked for help, experiences were mixed. Some said that waiting times had been shorter than normal, that their school had been helpful or that digital support they had been recommended (including websites and apps) had been effective.

However, others reported negative experiences of seeking support. Predominantly, young people reported concerns about being told to wait a long time for support or about being redirected between services.

Even before the crisis, mental health services across all sectors were often overstretched. While there are positive lessons to learn from how services have adapted, the increase in needs, combined with the loss of existing support in some cases, is likely to translate into intense pressure on the whole mental health system over the coming months.

Key themes included:

Virtual and digital support. A large number of young people said they were now receiving treatment on the phone or via video calls. Others were receiving digital support, through messenger services, online forums or apps.

Young people's experiences of virtual and digital support have been very variable. Some have found that it has been valuable and experienced smooth transitions, but others have found remote treatment less effective than face-to-face support. Many young people were uncomfortable talking about their problems while at home, because of concerns about their parents or others overhearing, while others felt it was more difficult to open up when conversations were not face to face.

Those receiving virtual treatment often spoke about that support being less than they were previously getting – for example, phone calls that were shorter than their counselling sessions had been previously.

Other young people lacked access to appropriate technology, or suggested that the increase in traffic to websites and helplines providing online support has led to longer waiting times than before the pandemic.

Disruption to services. Many young people described disruption to their support, through services abruptly coming to an end or a breakdown in communication. Some young people said that their counselling sessions came to an end before lockdown, or their referrals were cancelled as lockdown started. Others who were due to receive support or treatment said they had not received any updates, or had experienced cancellations at short notice.

Many support groups that had previously been meeting were now no longer able to, school counsellors were not necessarily able to continue to provide support online, and regular conversations with supportive adults, like youth workers, were more difficult to arrange.

For those in inpatient care, support had remained the same but with reduced visiting times and access to facilities. Some who had been discharged in the months preceding the pandemic have had some face-to-face sessions, phone calls or digital support, but there were also respondents who said that they had been left without support in their community

Young people who were looking for support expressed difficulties in getting appointments with GPs for support or to renew their medication. A number of young people outlined that they had turned to private support because they felt that support offered through the NHS was not appropriate for them.

Breakdown in informal support. Many young people also spoke about the challenges of losing access to informal support, particularly from friends or from trusted adults, including teachers. Friends were regarded as the single most helpful form of support.

“My mental health has deteriorated so much that I’m often not able to do my now online therapy session and I haven’t had contact with my psychiatrist since lockdown began.”

“My mental health nurse does as much as possible, and while I’m very appreciative of this I’m really struggling with this change [to remote support].”

“My level of care was suddenly cut off and I was told counselling services were further delayed because of lockdown. I did not feel able to go to A&E or anything because of the virus.”

“Unfortunately there is no way for me to do my therapy online as there is no place in my home I can talk about my problems without people hearing. This has meant I’ve had to go without therapy whilst my school offered no choice to go online.”

“Due to moving out of university accommodation, I have had to temporarily re-register at my local GP which slowed the process down. But I was able to speak to my GP very quickly... My referral to the local IAPT was dealt with surprisingly very fast.”

“I came out of inpatient care and when I reintegrated back into the community I had next to no support as many therapies that I did were cancelled due to the virus.”

“I got a lot of support from a few teachers at my school and trusted them with what I was telling them. Now I can no longer speak to them and have been isolating myself from speaking to anyone else..”

“I have downloaded a mood tracker app, which provides insights and online help where needed based off of my answers to the questions I am asked. I have also tried out ‘Kooth’, although I haven’t had a conversation with anyone through Kooth yet. I have found both to be very helpful.”

Barriers to looking for support

1,081 young people had been receiving some form of mental health support in the three months leading up to the crisis.

The NHS and voluntary sector providers have worked hard to promote the message that they are open for business, and encouraged young people and parents to access mental health support. However, reports suggest that there has been a significant decrease in referrals. This is despite the likely increase in needs.

We asked young people who believed that they needed support, but who hadn’t looked for it, what had stopped them. Common themes included:

- Anxiety about talking on the phone or via video calls, with a lack of privacy at home and wanting face-to-face support.
- Not wanting to burden the NHS or not knowing where to look for support.
- Feeling that they didn’t deserve help, or not wanting to admit they needed help
- Not wanting to burden family or friends, or not wanting parents to know
- Feeling it was harder to reach out for help in their particular living situation as they did not want the people they lived with to know about their mental health needs.
- Not thinking they were unwell enough
- Feeling ashamed

We asked all respondents to the survey about their confidence in talking about their mental health and knowing where to turn. Half of respondents (50%) did not feel confident about talking to someone about their mental health if they needed to, while more than a quarter (29%) did not agree that there was someone in their life they were able to talk to.

This is a reminder that there is still a huge amount of work to do to tackle stigma, promote emotional literacy, ensure that young people know how to help each other, and make sure that trusted adults can spot the signs of mental ill health and provide appropriate support.

"Don't know who to talk to/ what the benefit of talking to them would be. Scared to be shot down because everyone is having a hard time right now."

"Embarrassment that I'm struggling again when I was doing so well before lockdown."

"I didn't know where to look, and was worried that I wouldn't be deemed 'bad' enough to get help"

"There's nowhere to turn to. I've been on an NHS waiting list for a therapist for months and because of the lockdown it's pushed it back even further."

"Whenever I have tried to get support, my trust has been broken, or I don't have the money to pay for private healthcare, or 'I'm not bad enough' for CAMHS."

I feel confident about talking to someone about my mental health if I need to.
32% agree, 50% disagree

There is someone in my life that I feel able to talk to about my mental health.
56% agree, 29% disagree

I know how to help friends who are struggling with their mental health.
60% agree, 20% disagree

Looking to the future

We asked respondents what they expected to be doing in the Autumn, and how they felt about returning to school, college, university, a workplace or about their other plans. We also asked what support would be helpful from these institutions, or from the Government, to support better mental health during this time.

45% will be continuing at their current school or college

15% will be starting at a new school or college

9% will be starting at university

8% will be continuing at their current university

13% will be continuing work and/or looking for work

2% will be taking time away from education or work

5% didn't know

School and College

Many young people who were continuing at school said they were excited to see their friends face-to-face, have their routine back, continue their studies and return to 'normality' after months of being at home. Some young people who had struggled to access technology at home welcomed the idea of being able to learn in a classroom setting again, while others were looking forward to receiving personal support from teachers.

However, there was also a huge amount of anxiety at the thought of going back to school. This was particularly in relation to the impact lockdown had had on school work, with many worried they had fallen behind. Some young people wanted to retake the year, while others felt unprepared for their exams, or concerned about their grades or how they would cope with the academic pressure again. Some said that home learning had been preferable to being in a school environment.

Many respondents also talked about the fear of becoming ill or giving the virus to their family members. Some, who found school hard because of bullying or difficult relationships, did not want to go back to school at all.

It was also clear that many young people felt nervous about how school would be different with social distancing in place and whether their friendships had changed after a prolonged period of absence.

The main concerns that young people expressed:

- Anxiety about school work
- Pressure of exams
- Adjusting to a routine again
- Impact of social distancing
- Getting the virus or giving it to someone else
- Loneliness and loss of friendships
- Decline in mental health
- Taking public transport

Things young people were looking forward to:

- Seeing friends
- 'Normality'
- Routine
- Getting support from teachers
- Carrying on with studies

"I find it worrying not knowing how things will change or what to expect. I am also worried about using public transport to get to and from school."

"I am looking forward to getting my routine back and seeing my friends and getting more help for my work, but I am anxious about going back because lockdown has caused me to fall quite behind in some of my subjects and there are a lot of tasks I haven't completed due to my mental health."

"I'm really anxious but I really want to see my friends. My biggest concern is that there will be so much pressure to learn so much in a short amount of time and that the education system doesn't change any of the exams so we still have to learn everything."

"I want to do well and I'm working at a pace that I'm able to, which is a bit slower than college set but I can't go any faster as I can feel overwhelmed. I'm excited but nervous too as I'm not sure how well I've grasped everything in my harder subjects and without proper first teaching of some topics, it might be harder to get good grades. I hope the exam boards will take this into account."

"Studying is increasingly harder as lockdown continues. I find it extremely difficult to work from home."

Starting at a new School or College

For those starting at a new school or college, a recurring theme was an increase in anxiety because of the cancellation of transition days, with many young people who would otherwise have been excited feeling like they were arriving unprepared.

Some felt like there would be a better pastoral system for them at their new college or they were looking forward to their learning being less structured and based around what they viewed as arbitrary goals.

Conversely, some young people felt that they would have less support than they had at their former school. Some were worried that they would not be getting the same experience as they would in other circumstances.

"It's scary moving schools anyway but it's worse without an induction day or course guidance meeting especially if we go back to a socially distanced building."

"Very excited and looking forward to the next stage in life. But sad as I know it won't be the same experience as without a pandemic."

"I'm terrified. My parents are both at high risk and I'm petrified of returning to school and catching the virus. I'm also scared of meeting my new classmates and the possibility of not being out as trans before I start."

"I feel frightened because no one else from my previous school is going there and I feel like I'll be alone and have no one to talk to and I don't like talking to teachers or asking for help. I also feel like I won't like it there being on my own and my anxiety will get the better of me."

Support from School or College

We asked young people what support schools and colleges should offer. Respondents emphasised the importance of various forms of pastoral support, including easier access to mental health support, and having someone they could talk to if they needed to. Some respondents referred to hiring more mental health professionals, so that teachers would not be expected to take on this role. Many respondents wanted regular check-ins on how they were feeling over the coming term.

Many respondents believed that their school cared more about academic performance than their mental health, and wanted more focus on wellbeing, and for schools to have realistic expectations on what students could achieve following the lockdown. Some young people called for time to settle back into school, so that they could ease into learning and catch up with friends without intense academic pressure.

Some respondents' responses highlighted more structural problems they see within the educational environment – teachers who don't have time to, or don't want to, listen to students' problems, and feelings of being ignored or undervalued.

In addition to this, a lot of answers highlighted the fatalism that young people are feeling around the possibility of getting help in school/college. Respondents said they didn't know what could be done to help, or that they already felt that school and college staff would do nothing.

Other suggestions included:

- Have a range of ways to check in with students to ask them how they feel: privately in a one-to-one setting when they return to school, over email, on the phone, or anonymised surveys
- A gradual return, including more social time, potentially by extending social time at lunch; a slower pace of learning, and support with workload
- Information before school reopens about what it is going to be like
- Lessons and resources on mental health, and open discussions to help students with their mental health
- Easy-to-access mental health support within the school, and signposting to support elsewhere
- Peer-to-peer mental health advice and support
- Check-ins with students with a history of mental illness
- Break-out spaces for young people when they feel overwhelmed
- Many young people specifically brought up the lack of induction days and that this would be detrimental to them this year.

"I think they should have a support team and make people more aware they can access it. They should also question and have regular check-ups to see if the pupils are okay"

"Make sure students have access to counselling if needed, and also discuss any concerns they may have about moving schools beforehand"

"Check in on their students if their results are slipping or they notice a change in attitude or behaviour instead of just assuming the student is becoming lazy. Also include all students and don't each student the same opportunities."

Starting University

Although there were some young people who were excited and optimistic about starting university, many said they felt anxious and apprehensive, both in terms of their studies and the likelihood of having a full university experience. Young people expressed apprehension about what Fresher's Week would be like in the current context, and about forming friendships. There was also a great deal of confusion and a feeling of being unprepared for what to expect.

"I was really excited before lockdown because it meant I could have freedom and make lots of new friends. Now I feel a little bit hopeless and sad because there will be no Freshers week, no face to face lectures and the amount of people we can meet is limited ."

"Scared as no one knows about my struggles with anxiety apart from my school and I dont want to take up a valuable GP appointment as so many people have I much worse than me. I struggle with new things so I think I will find it really hard."

Continuing at University

Many students who were already at university were excited about restarting their course, but were uncertain about what university would look like and how they would continue their studies online. Some were keen to get back to 'normality' and go back to studying but there were others that were very worried about their own health and whether their housemates will follow social distancing rules.

Other themes that emerged:

- Lack of mental health support at University
- Uncertainty about what it would be like
- Lack of information about whether courses would be online or 'blended'
- Financial concerns particularly with the cost of tuition fees
- Motivation to work from home / online
- Concern about being behind or losing interest in course following the pandemic

"I'm anxious because it is going to be done online. Video calls make me very anxious so I am going to struggle with this"

"I can't wait for life to get back to normal . For me, knowing the plan and having routines is really beneficial to my mental health and I feel my education is better on campus. Online uni was hard to concentrate on and we weren't given the same quality of teaching. I miss the library and the on campus study areas."

"Really confused. I want to continue into my third year... but I don't see why I'd pay £6000 for accommodation and £9250 fees just for online work. The uncertainty is really stressful."

Support from University

Respondents suggested that universities could provide a range of support, including regular check-ins as people adjusted. Some wanted more communication from their university about their plans and more promotion of support available on campus.

The majority wanted increased access to counsellors, with some suggesting a mandatory session for every student.

Other suggestions included:

- Support during Fresher's week
- Support to adapt to online learning
- Support for students transitioning to different years
- Clarity on what university will be like in September
- Awareness of workload

"Ensure support systems have sufficient funding, and advertise them as much as possible. If students have a history of mental health, recommend and try to set up communication before 1st term."

"Be clear and honest about exactly the sort of university experience they will be offering. Not just telling us about the learning and cancellation of lectures but keeping us informed about accommodation and things like that too."

Employment

A number of young people that responded to the survey highlighted that concerns about work were impacting on their mental health. These included:

Home working. Some young people said that a lack of routine when working from home affected their performance, compared to being in an office environment.

Job instability. Some respondents worked in industries that had been impacted by the pandemic, such as the retail or hospitality industries. They told us that they are feeling concerned about their future employment prospects

Concerns about the labour market. Many young people expressed anxiety about whether they would be able to find a job. This was either because they were looking for a job before the pandemic or because their employment had been impacted. Recent graduates were concerned about not being able to get experience in the area of work that they were hoping to go into.

Concerns related to the spread of the virus. Respondents expressed concerns about the spread of the virus when they returned to work, including a fear of putting others at risk. Young people wanted protection from the virus when they were working, for example in healthcare and retail workplaces, and from exposure on public transport when travelling to work.

'I was fairly new to a job when lockdown began. I'm scared I've 'forgotten' how to socialise as I really struggle with social interactions anyway, scared I won't remember how to do every aspect of my job and worried that I'm going to lose my job'

'Feel scared that I might lose my job. Or that if the pressure continues I won't be able to cope with working' 'How can I prove myself in a virtual interview to obtain a position in Autumn? Am I needed? Will I be stuck working somewhere that puts me at risk if I cannot continue my job in my current profession?'

'Being a recent graduate you need to find experience in your chosen field pretty quickly. I need experience to progress to get to where I want to be. I can't get experience because companies cannot afford to take on new staff, & the health risk of volunteers means they aren't being considered either'

'Disheartened, looking for work before the lockdown wasn't going well, and now that so many places are struggling financially I don't see it going any better after'

'I use public transport to get to work so that would be my main concern, but I would like to get back into the office for some normality. I think if workplaces can get all staff tested then we should be ok to return to work'

Support from workplaces

Respondents had a wide range of suggestions for how the Government and workplaces could support their mental health, including:

- Toolkits or guides about how to deal with employment post-covid
- Discussions with employees about when and how they feel comfortable returning to work
- Choice around whether to return to the office or keep working remotely
- Access to mental health support (e.g. counsellors)
- More regular check-ins
- Mental Health Awareness training or support session for managers
- Offer a refreshment day for anyone (especially new staff) who feels they need a memory jog about their work and responsibilities

'I think that workplaces should discuss with employees what they feel comfortable with in the workplace. Returning to work will mean different things for everyone so for me, I don't have many concerns, but for someone whose job is public-facing it might be much more anxiety-provoking.'

'They should understand that this will have had an impact on many people's mental health, of all ages, and that in returning to work some might struggle more than others. They should be open to accepting that some people might just not be able to face coming in some days and give the option to continue working from home or starting later if that helps'.

'Access to in-house counselling. Frequent 1:1 support with supervisor or line manager or teacher. Information to all students/ employees etc. on how to access mental health support (self-help info and info on accessing therapeutic intervention). Offer chance for young people to be involved in decision making- and actually listen to them. Gradual return to schools/ work, with support to manage the added pressure. Peer mentor schemes and groups'.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have a lasting impact across a number of areas of young people's lives, whether that be related to their education, their experiences with work, their home life or their relationships. Additionally, many young people have undergone traumatic experiences during lockdown, struggled to cope with the loss of social connection, or have had reduced access to their support systems. Even for those who have adjusted well to the restrictions, the return to a 'new normal' may bring profound challenges.

While restrictions on movement are easing, our survey suggests that the pressures facing young people with mental health problems remain significant. Given the vast economic and social repercussions of the pandemic, the impact of COVID-19 is likely to be felt for years to come. As our survey shows, young people with existing mental health needs feel anxious about the uncertainty that this brings.

Many young people told us that they do not feel confident about talking to someone about their mental health, or that they have faced barriers to accessing support during the pandemic. Equally, there may also be young people who, as a result of the pandemic, are struggling with their mental health for the first time. Young people belonging to groups that are already marginalised, or disadvantaged may be particularly at risk.

Before the pandemic, there were welcome changes to young people's mental health, such as those outlined in the NHS Long Term Plan and the Green Paper on Children and Young People's Mental Health. Despite this, young people's mental health services remained overstretched in many areas, and it is now likely that more children and young people will require access to support for their mental health over the coming months. Therefore, we are calling for the Government to commit to a recovery plan for children and young people's mental health to ensure that young people are able to access support when they need it. This should include:

Ring-fenced funding for mental health in schools, colleges and universities to enable them to provide mental health support to all young people who need it.

A transition period of at least one academic term for schools, colleges and universities in which allowances are made for the effects of trauma or emotional distress; this means reviewing behaviour policies, attendance policies and accountability measures, including suspending the reintroduction of fines related to attendance.

Support for the NHS to cope with a rise in demand for mental health support, enabling face-to-face support to resume widely where possible, and committing to accelerating the mental health ambitions of the NHS Long-Term Plan.

A wellbeing campaign that is co-produced with, and targeted towards, children and young people, to help them support themselves and find effective help when they need it

A long-term cross government strategy on young people's mental health that prioritises early intervention in our communities, with clear funding in place, working alongside the voluntary sector to address the inequalities and pressures that affect young people's mental health.

Methodology

This report outlines the results of the second survey we have carried out with young people with a history of mental health needs during the coronavirus pandemic. The first survey was conducted with 2,111 young people with a history of mental health needs in March 2020.

This second survey was carried out between Friday 5th June and Monday 6th July 2020, a period in which the Government announced measures to ease restrictions, including the target for schools to reopen to all students in the Autumn term. 2,036 young people aged 13-25 who have looked for mental health support at some point in their lives took part. This included 1,081 young people who had accessed some form of mental health support (e.g. through the NHS, a school or university counsellor or a helpline) in the first three months of the year. The survey was completed online and distributed through YoungMinds newsletters and social media.

Among the respondents, 43% reported to be aged 13-16; 36% reported to be 17-19; 13% reported to be 20-22 and 8% reported to be aged 23-25. 9% of the young people that responded to our survey said that they had been advised to shield during the pandemic and 29% of the total respondents told us that they had a long-term illness or disability that impacts on their ability to carry out day to day tasks. The majority of respondents identified as female (81%), and 86% told us that they were White British. Based on this, the sample cannot be considered representative. Additionally, as the survey was completed online, some young people without appropriate access to technology are less likely to have completed it. However, the results provide a valuable snapshot of young people's experiences and concerns at a particular moment in time, in a fast-changing situation.

Additionally, responses to the survey were anonymous and only demographic information was collected. Therefore, we are not able to assess changes in support on an individual basis. Rather, the comparisons in the report are made to identify how the impact of the pandemic has changed over time, how access to support has developed, and how young people with mental health needs feel about the future at this critical time.



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