

The Impact of Coronavirus on Children and Young People's Mental Health

The New Normal



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No Limits (South)
Helping Young People Help Themselves
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**NO
LiMiTs**
Helping Young People
Help Themselves

The Impact of Coronavirus on Children and Young People's Mental Health – Part Two

Executive Summary

The data in this survey analyses 462 responses from 8–25 year-olds over an 8-week period from November 2020 – January 2021. A previous report (Part One) was published in August 2020, based on research in the first lockdown. It is therefore possible to draw comparisons between the impact of lockdowns and the effects of the 'new normal' on children and young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health.

Key findings from this research show that:

- 1 in 3 children and young people reported that their mental health got worse or continued to get worse when returning to school in the autumn.
- **82%** of all young people aged 15+ are worrying about their **long-term future**.
- **Almost two thirds of young people are worrying about:** their mental health.
- **81%** of young adults are worried about **not having enough money** to live on
- 36% of girls and young women feel they needed more support in returning to school, college or work compared with 24% of boys and young men.
- 10% of young people felt they had nowhere to go for support with their emotional or mental wellbeing.

Many children and young people have experienced profound social isolation during lockdown, which have impacted negatively on their mental wellbeing including their relationships and engagement with work / education. Young people want a sense of control over their lives, things to do, and meaningful connections with others.

Lockdown has not only had an effect on the **education** of our young people but also their **emotional** and **social** development. In order to support young people's reengagement, we need to be addressing the deficit in all three of these areas as we emerge from this third (and hopefully final) lockdown.

Background

During the first lockdown, No Limits' Early Help team asked children and young people how they were feeling about Coronavirus and the restrictions placed on their lives. This resulted in a report published in August 2020 highlighting children and young people's worries and anxieties about their immediate and long-term futures.

"I'm worried about not seeing people, losing that face-to-face contact. Feel a little helpless".

The research report found that only 26% of 15-25year olds were frequently feeling close to other people during that first lockdown period.

As children and young people returned to education in September 2020, they faced another transition to a 'new normal'. No Limits again went out to children and young people during that term, to ask how they felt, with a particular focus on how they found the return to education and its effect on their mental health.

Since that research was undertaken, we have experienced a raft of further restrictions including another national lockdown, with most children and young people returning to learning from home and facing more disruption to their education. It is hoped that this report, based on the research carried out when children and young people returned to school last autumn, may help us to understand their views at that time and inform our practice as we emerge from the third national lockdown into yet another 'new normal'.

It would be better if...

"someone actually checked up on us except of just focusing on education."

"teachers were more aware of students mental health within the classroom and if the school could teach more about coping skills for those who are anxious about being around possibly sick students and teachers."

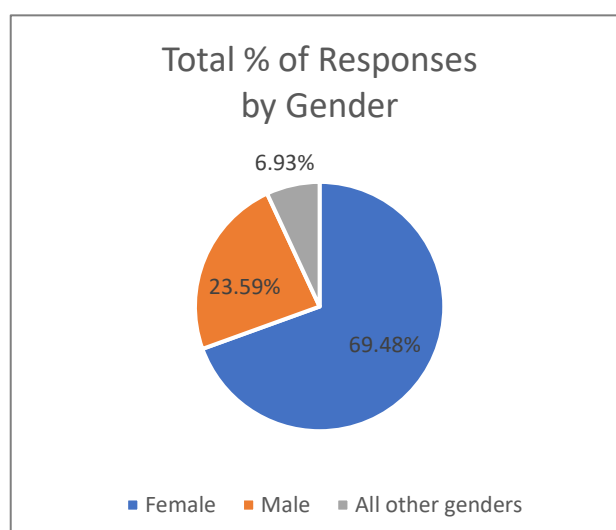
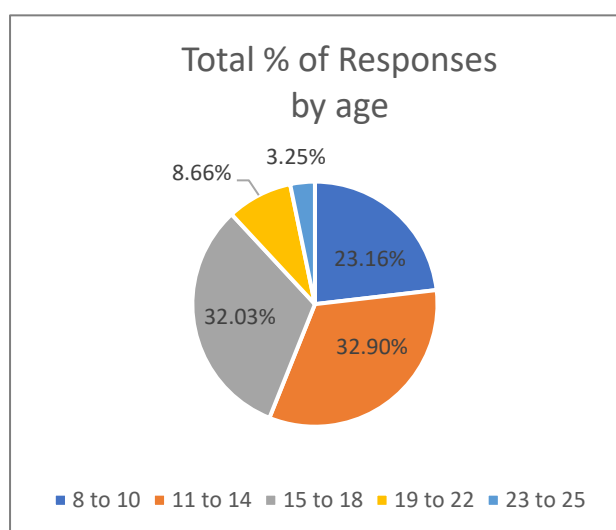
"the teachers had given us a day or 2 so we could catch up on all our work instead of completing something then being bombarded by a whole new set of things. The teachers could try to motivate us a little bit more but overall, I think they're doing a pretty good job."

The Survey:

The survey was distributed to children and young people across Southampton and Hampshire. A total of 522 responses have been received, although this number continues to grow. Although the survey's promotion has ended, children and young people continue to access the survey link and give their thoughts on the 'new normal'. By keeping the survey open it continues to give us insight into how children and young people have been feeling during different periods of time. The data in this survey analyses 462 of those responses over an 8-week period from November 2020.

The Demographics:

The survey was distributed to children and young people between the ages of 8 and 25. 65% of respondents were aged between 11 and 18 years. Most respondents were female (69.5%), the rest identified as male (23.5%) and non-CIS gender (7%).



The Findings:

Our initial report found that, during the peak of the first lockdown, 65% of children and young people (CYP) reported that their mental health had worsened because of it.

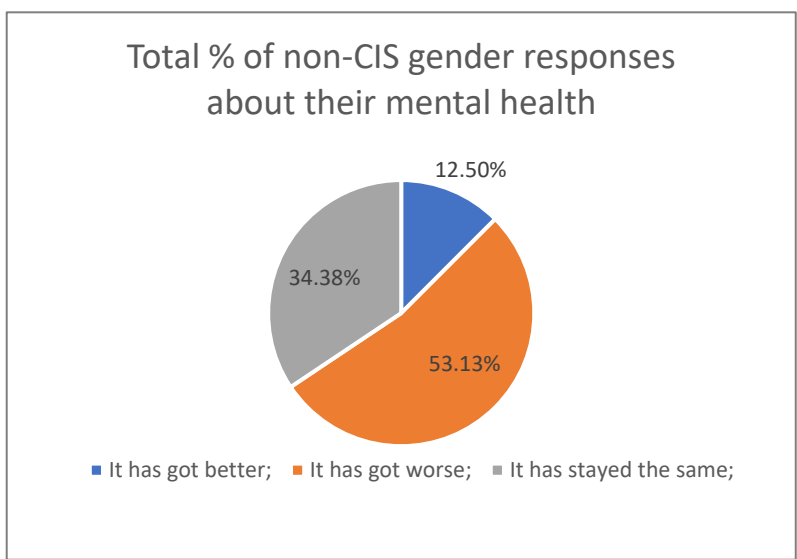
Returning to education had a more varied impact on young people's mental health, with 34% saying it had got worse and 29% saying it had got better. We were not able to map these figures onto each other in any way. However, the dramatic increase in numbers of young people presenting to our services with both mental health issues and in mental health crisis reflects an overall rise throughout the pandemic. This is backed by research from the Princes Trust and You-Gov¹ in January 2021 which

¹ https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/Document_Youth-Index-2020.pdf

reported the highest ever levels of anxiety in 16-25year-olds. More than half of those surveyed felt anxious 'always' or 'often'.

For almost a third of young people, being back in education was obviously better for their mental health, but for another third, the pressures of returning seemed to exacerbate their problems.

A significant difference was seen amongst those young people defining themselves as non-CIS gender. Amongst this group, 53% of young people felt their mental health had got worse since returning to education or work.

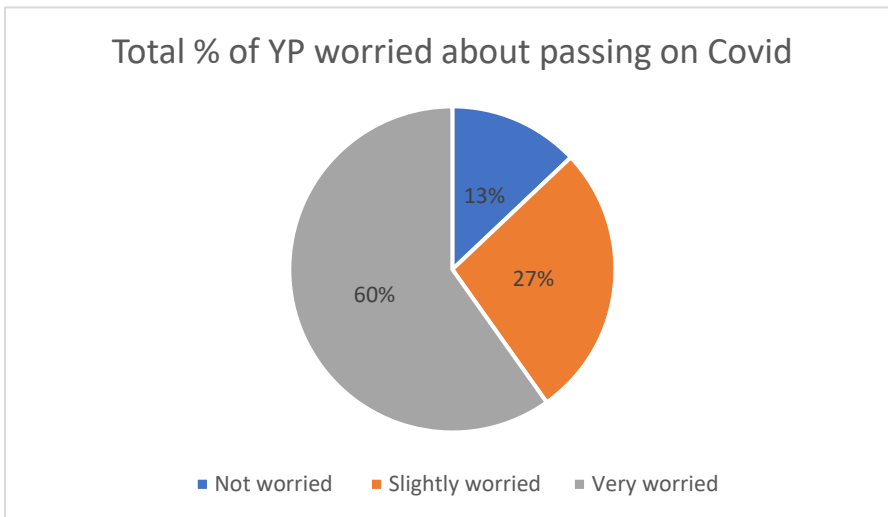


The analysis showed no difference between age groups. Both those under 18 and young adults aged 19+ experienced the lifting of lockdown as having similarly varied impacts on their mental health.

Worries:

Emerging to the New Normal added to Young People's worries. Particularly about spreading the virus to others and the safety of their family and friends.

87% of young people surveyed were worried about passing on COVID, with almost 60% being very worried about this.



66% of all young people were worrying about their **long-term future**.
This rose **to 77%** for those aged 11+ and **82%** for those aged 15+

Around 2 in 3 young people were worrying about:
their mental health (63.2%)
the mental health of someone they love (67.2%)

81% of young adults were worried about **not having enough money** to live on

Additionally, more than half of the young people surveyed (52%) were worried about whether they or their family had enough money. This figure varied dramatically across the age range, dropping to 28% of 8-10year olds, whilst 81% of young adults (aged 19-25) were worried about having enough to live on.

Impact:

We asked young people whether they felt COVID-19 had had a negative effect on their future life chances. Only 18% of young people were confident that it had not had a negative effect, 82% thought it would have a negative impact or were unsure.

Amongst young adults aged 19-25, 54% felt COVID had had a negative impact on their lives and 33% were unsure.

This is what they told us:

“Covid-19 has ruined my mental health and not only that, but it has pulled my relationship apart I not only have barely any trust, but I am finding it hard to look at myself in the mirror.”

“Already being from an ethnic minority, I am less likely to be given the same chances. Covid-19 will only extend this further in my opinion.”

“Everyone is trying to get a place in university who didn't go last year and everyone who doesn't have a job is trying to get one, so many people that have higher education and experience will always get picked over me.”

“I am unsure about my future career and education, our entire year had missed out on the only opportunity to support us with our career choices: work experience, and I am now as unsure as ever what the future could hold.”

“I know at this time I need to have a job because I don't have much financial support from my family, and I'd like to move out. Getting a job is such a big part of that and getting the experience while I am young. I feel like COVID has ruined it for me and I know it's hard to get a job, but it has made it so much harder now because I don't have experience as well. I feel like it's not helping me get out of a situation I don't want to be in and it's keeping me at home where I don't want to be.”

“I've lost even more motivation in life in general and my self-esteem has dropped even more. I feel these things interfere with the way I perform at school, therefore affecting my future.”

Impact by age:

Optimism about the future: We asked young people whether they were feeling optimistic about their futures. Of those aged 19 and over 44% said rarely or never. A further 33% said they felt optimistic only some of the time.

44% of young adults were never or only rarely optimistic about their future.

The younger age group did not fare much better with 38% of them never or only rarely feeling optimistic about the future.

Dealing with problems: The results showed that almost half of those aged 19 and above were rarely or never able to deal with their problems well. A further 30% suggested they were only able to deal with their problems well some of the time.

47% of young adults were never or rarely able to deal with problems well.

Amongst those aged 18 and under, 36% said they were not dealing with their problems well. A further 25% were only dealing with their problems well some of the time. This would suggest that young adults in particular have been struggling to deal with their issues.

Loneliness: 47% of young people aged 15 and above, rarely, or never felt close to someone with a further 27% only feeling close to someone some of the time. This leaves just 26% of young people frequently feeling close to someone. This figure was slightly lower for those aged 8-14, at around 34%. In support of these figures, the NSPCC says the amount of counselling for loneliness provided by its Childline service has risen by 10% since the start of the pandemic.²

We know that adolescence and young adulthood is a time where young people establish their identity as separate to that to their families. Belonging to a peer friendship group(s) and spending time with them is crucial to this development. Whilst all of us have missed contact with those outside of our immediate household, for young people, this period of isolation has directly impacted their social development, in turn contributing to the demise of their overall wellbeing.

Almost 1 in 2, 15-25year olds and **1 in 3**, 8-14year olds never or rarely felt close to other people.

² <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/about-us/news-opinion/2021/childline-press-release/>

Support:

We asked young people if they had had enough support to help them settle effectively back into education after the 6-month lockdown.

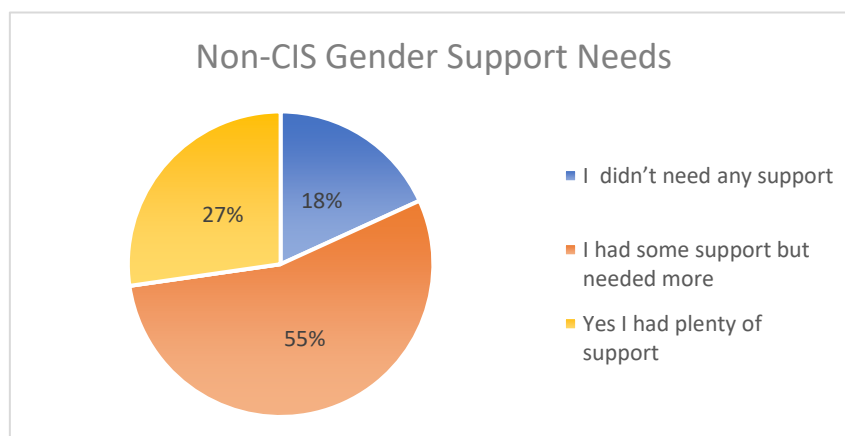
34% of young people felt they needed more support when emerging from the last lockdown

Support needs by Gender:

Overall, 34% of young people said they would have liked more support, although this rose to 55% amongst young people who identified as non-CIS gender.

55% of young people who identified as non-CIS gender needed more support when emerging from the last lockdown

This figure shows a clear need for extra support for young people identifying as non-CIS gender. Further to this, a higher percentage of girls and young women (36%) felt that they had needed more support compared with boys and young men (24%).

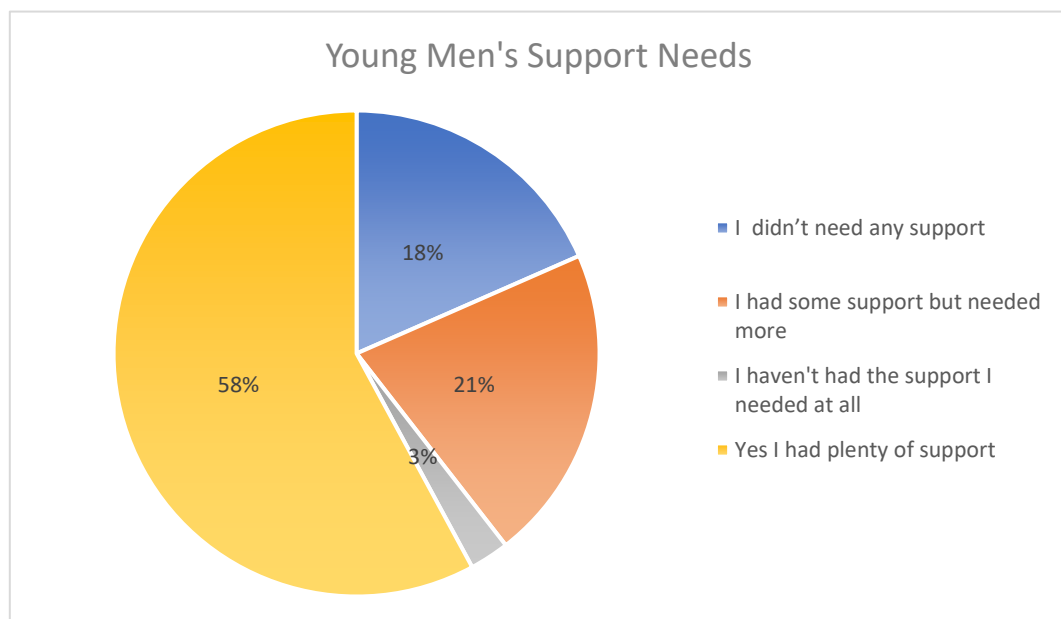
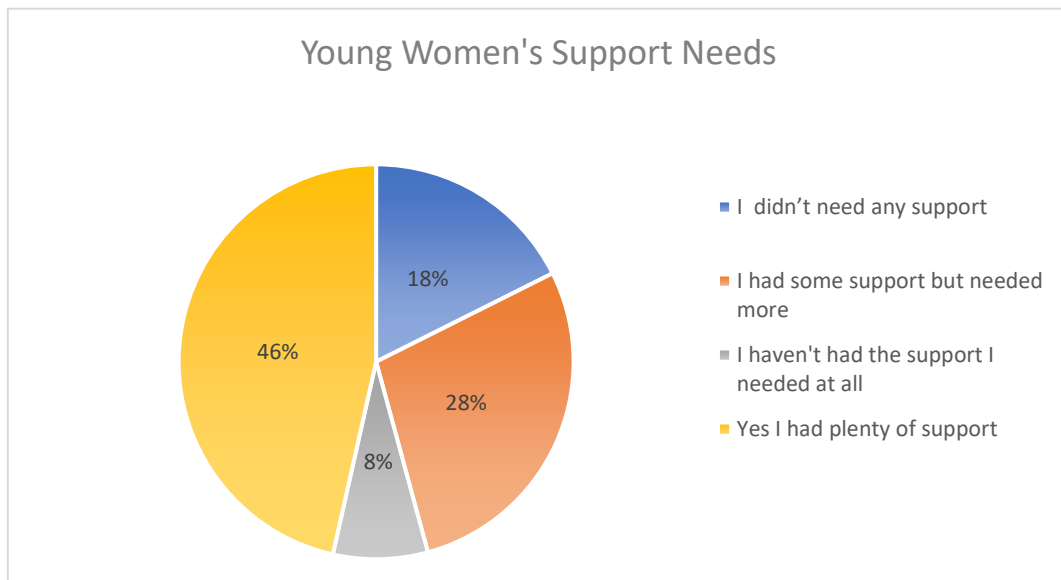


Initial findings from the Millennium Cohort Study Age 14³ Survey observed stark sex differences in wellbeing, with girls significantly more likely to report lower wellbeing than boys. When they categorised the wellbeing score into thirds, corresponding to high, medium and low wellbeing, they found that the lowest third consisted of 62%

³ Institute of Education (2008) [MenatHealthWellbeing-initial-findings.pdf \(ucl.ac.uk\)](#)

girls and 38 % boys, in contrast to the highest wellbeing group which had 43 % girls and 57% boys.

Lower wellbeing scores in young women are likely to contribute to a greater need for support, perhaps not met as easily on the return to education as those of young men.



Support Needs by Age:

42% of young adults (aged 19-25) felt they needed more support when emerging from the last lockdown.

There was a notable difference between age groups. Of those aged 14 and under 34% felt they needed more support. This dropped to 25% for 15-18year olds and rose considerably to 42% of those aged 19+. This would suggest that more support was given to those young people between 15 and 18, many of whom would have been doing their GCSE and A level exams. Evidently older young people transitioning to higher education or work were not as easily able to access that support.

When asked what extra support they would have liked. The main themes were:

- less pressure to be up to scratch and back to normal straight away.
- more support for work they had missed or not understood.
- more opportunities to talk about their feelings and support with their mental health.

They said:

“For the transition from home to school to have been more gradual so we were eased into a semi-normal routine.”

“Not going straight back and taking it step by step and help with questions.”

“Mental health taken into more consideration to remove stress from students and teachers.”

“Maybe discussion on how I/others feel about the pandemic to help with our feelings and mental health.”

“More leniency with deadlines for work. A room to take my mask off in (I can get overwhelmed by wearing it all day)”

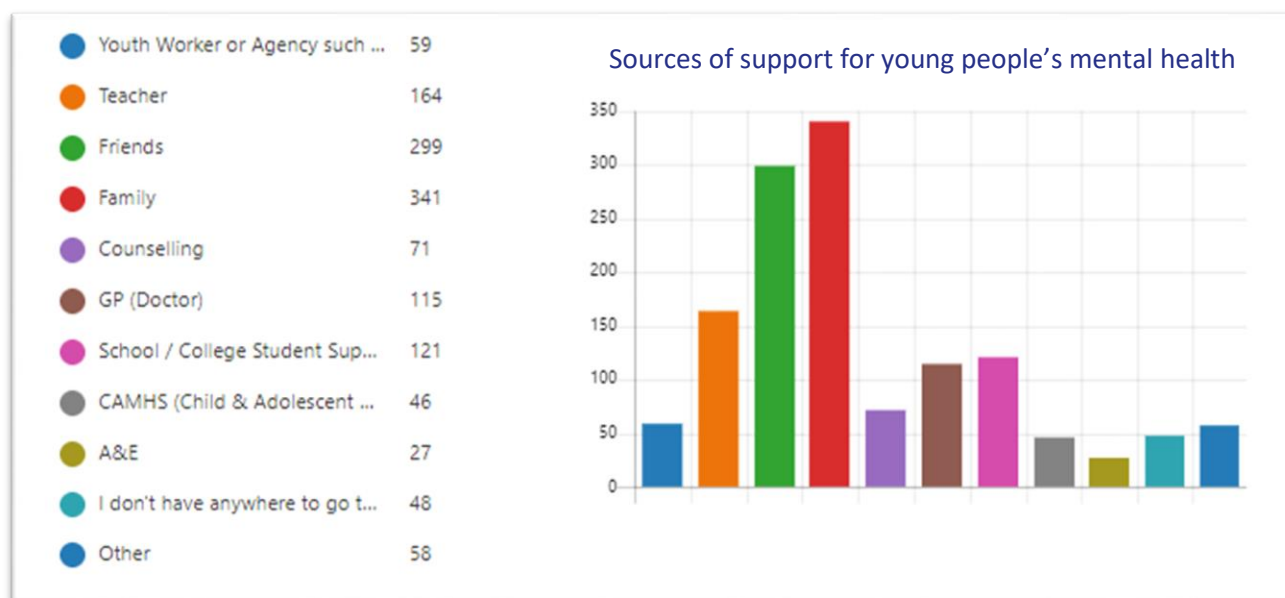
“More information on how the work that was missed would affect future learning and being told what was going to be put in place for us to catch up”.

“It would have been nice not stick a load of tests in a few weeks and get us stressed.”

Accessing Mental Health Support:

We asked young people who they turned to for support with their emotional and mental wellbeing.

10% of young people surveyed felt they had nowhere to go for support or no one to talk to about their mental health and wellbeing.



By far the most popular support networks for young people were family and friends, with 74% of young people saying they would turn to their family and 65% to friends. This highlights the importance of educating parents on mental health and wellbeing.

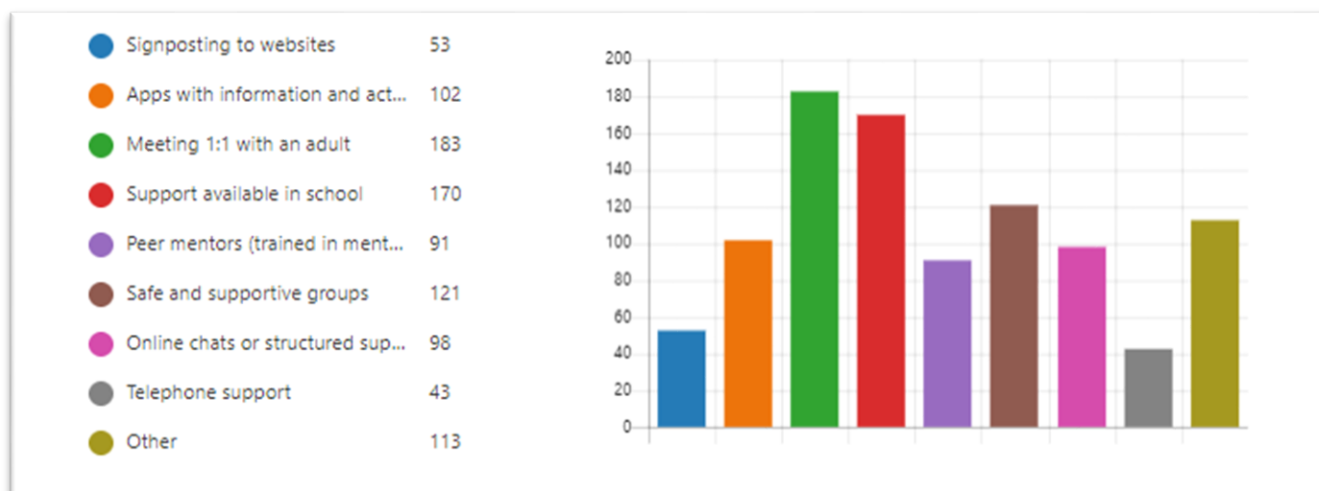
Whilst 74% of young people feel able to speak to their parents about their mental wellbeing, that leaves 26% who do not. Research shows that children in the poorest households are three times more likely to have a mental illness than children in the best-off households⁴. Parents struggling with multiple issues, often caused by or affected by poverty are likely to have less capacity to support their children who will therefore require more external assistance.

A concerning finding was that 10% of young people surveyed felt that they had nowhere to go for support with their emotional or mental wellbeing. Further research needs to be conducted to find out if these young people are struggling alone or do not feel they need any support as they are managing well.

We then asked young people what type of information and support they would find most helpful to support their emotional and mental health. As seen in the chart below, young people valued a wide variety of information and support. Obviously, some methods of delivery work better for certain young people than others. However, it is noticeable that meeting 1:1 with an adult and having more support available in school were significantly more popular than the other options. The whole survey was based

⁴ Department of Health (1999b) *Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation*.

around emerging from lockdown, with the vast majority of young people surveyed returning to education, so within this context it is understandable that these support mechanisms are valued.



The type of support requested by most young people was meeting 1:1 with an adult and having support available in school.

Data Comparison - June to December:

Analysis between the first survey completed in June 2020 and this survey shows there was a very slight decrease in young people feeling optimistic about the future. This is likely due to the length of time the pandemic has continued for and a further national lockdown, during this second survey.

Young people reported being less optimistic about the future and less able to deal well with problems.

There was a 10% increase in young people who felt they were less able to deal with problems well. Those who said they rarely or never dealt with problems well rose from 28.5% in the first survey to 38.36% in this survey. This is an interesting finding. It is not possible to know whether the return to the new normal made it more difficult for young people to deal with problems well, or if it was just the extended time that young people have been facing restrictions of one type or another. Either way, young people feeling unable to deal with their problems well leaves them feeling out of control and therefore more likely to experience low wellbeing.

Summary:

While it is too early to be sure of the long-term impact, young people who responded to this survey were concerned about their future and their longer-term opportunities. Some young people are likely to require a lengthy period of readjustment, while others may need less support adjusting to the new normal. An overwhelming number of young people were concerned about the impact of the pandemic on their loved ones and their ability to access education or work. It is hoped that these worries will start to subside as we move through the stages of the government's road map, which will see educational establishments and places of work reopen.

Many children and young people have experienced profound social isolation during lockdown, which may have impacted negatively on their mental wellbeing including their relationships and engagement with work / education. Common themes are that young people want a sense of control over their lives, things to do, and meaningful connections with others.

The survey showed that, for some, returning to education or work was a relief and helped to improve their mental health, whilst others struggled even more. Emerging from this lockdown we need to be aware that young people have spent a significant period of their young lives in uncertainty, which is known to be a factor in poor mental wellbeing. Although the vaccine rollout may reduce some concern over catching COVID, most young people won't be vaccinated for a while yet, and the toll the virus will take on the economy and young people's opportunities is nowhere near finalised.

Adolescence is a developmental stage where spending time with peers is crucial for young people and for some this comes more easily and naturally than others. The lockdowns and social restrictions have not only had an effect on the education of our young people but also their emotional and social development. In order to support young people's reengagement, we need to be addressing the deficit in all three of these areas as we emerge from this lockdown.

Recommendations:

- Further research amongst the 10% of children and young people who feel they don't have anyone to talk to about their mental health – ensure they are able to access appropriate support.
- More support for children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing is made available, particularly through schools and through 1:1 support, as we emerge from the current lockdown. Attention should be paid to the fact that young women, and particularly non-CIS gendered young people may require more support.
- Teachers are supported to understand the effects of the pandemic on children and young people and to 'check-up' on their wellbeing as well as their academic work.
- Evidence continues to point to the need for more targeted messaging for children and young people around Covid-19, particularly as lockdown eases and guidance becomes more nuanced.
- Opportunities for children and young people to re-connect in supportive environments will be crucial for their future wellbeing.
- Anecdotal evidence from A&E departments across the country, including from our own service in UHS, shows that children and young people are being admitted for self-harm and suicide attempts on a daily rather than weekly basis and at a much younger age. This is further evidence of the need to conduct more research amongst the 10% of young people who had nowhere to turn for support with their mental health.
- This survey highlighted differences amongst the responses of young people dependant on gender and age. It did not however explore the responses of other marginalised groups such as BAME communities, young carers or young people in care. Such research may help support to be tailored to these groups of young people who we know suffer higher rates of poor mental health.
- As we emerge into a new society where virtual interactions have become a crucial and central way of conducting our lives, it will be important to engage young people in the development and delivery of services 'post-COVID' and using this to inform our practice.