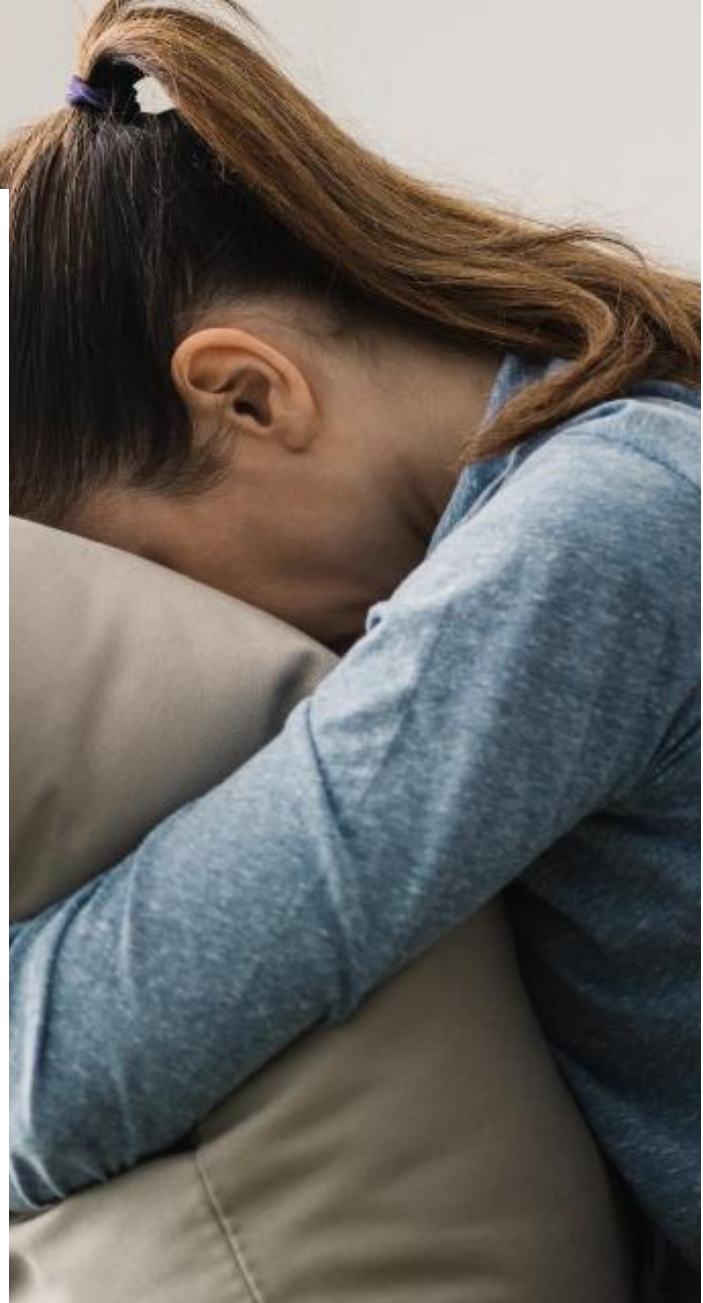


# The Impact of Coronavirus on Children and Young People's Mental Health

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**JULY 2020**

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**Helping Young People Help Themselves**

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

## Background

At the start of lockdown, No Limits' Early Help team produced a short survey for children and young people. The survey was created to gain an insight into how children and young people were feeling about Coronavirus and the restrictions placed on their lives. At the time, it was hoped the results would inform what support No Limits could offer and ensure it was tailored to their needs. The comments from the survey highlighted 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".***

By sharing the results of this survey No Limits hopes to inform a wider debate on how to understand the potential impact and how best to support children and young people during this time. It is worth adding that this survey was never intended to be analysed in such a way and the results are limited to the questions and a survey sample of 180 children and young people.

## The Demographics:

The survey was targeted towards any child or young person between the ages of 8-25 years. Most of those who took part in the survey were aged between 11-14 years. Most respondents were female (75%), the rest identified as male (22%), non-binary and unspecified (3%).

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## The Findings:

The survey found that, during the peak of the lockdown, 65% of children and young people (CYP) reported that their mental health had worsened as a result of lockdown. This reduced to 54% when lockdown restrictions started to lift. The conditions of the Coronavirus are so unusual, finding similar comparative research is a challenge. The Anna Freud Centre<sup>1</sup> has recently conducted a research review which found similar evidence from Australia, with half of CYP surveyed reporting that Coronavirus had negatively impacted their levels of stress and anxiety.

No Limits research shows that there is a significantly higher proportion of females 59% who feel their mental health has worsened compared to 23% of males and 75% of non-binary young people (non-binary only represented 3% of the total CYP surveyed).

In 2019, No Limits<sup>2</sup> completed a youth loneliness survey, which indicated that 38% of CYP felt most isolated at home - a situation which most CYP found themselves restricted to during the lockdown. Of those surveyed who felt most isolated at home, 50% were in the 18+ category. Knowing this helps to create a picture of the circumstances CYP may find themselves in during the lockdown. CYP without strong support networks and family are likely to struggle the most. The youth loneliness report also found that 33% of CYP felt that loneliness leads to mental ill health with 34% feeling that mental ill health leads to loneliness, and 16% believing they occurred together. The report findings highlighted a strong link between mental ill health and those who reported loneliness. This suggest that the lockdown may have been particularly challenging for those who already have a diagnosed mental health condition.

The lockdown survey asked CYP whether they 'feel optimistic about their future'. 72% answered 'some', 'none' or 'rarely any of the time'. This was consistent between both males and females.

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<sup>1</sup> Cortina et al (2020) Emerging evidence: Anna Freud Centre- available at: <https://www.annafreud.org/media/11992/coronavirus-emerging-evidence-issue-2.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> No Limits (2019) Youth Loneliness in Southampton Report

Figure 1 and 2 below show that the highest percentage of males and females did not feel optimistic about their futures.

Figure 1

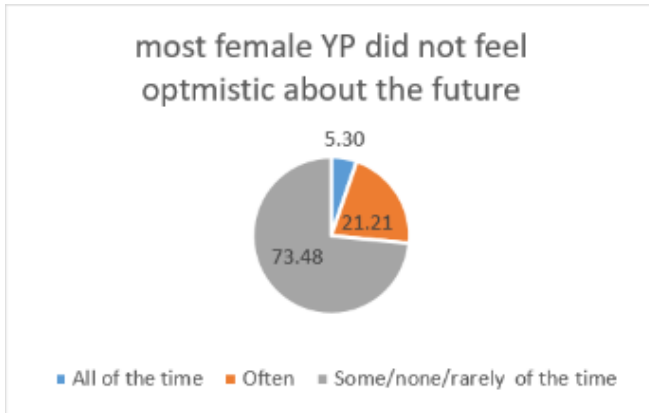
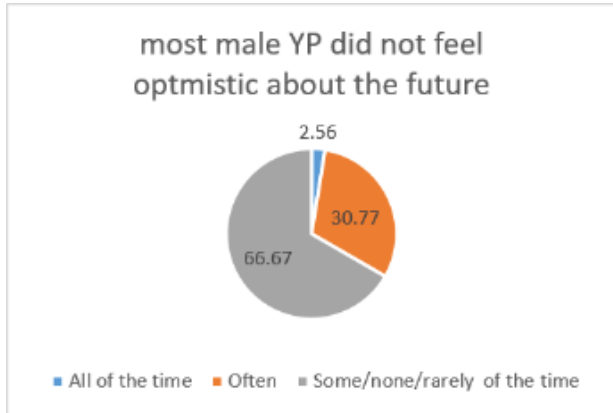


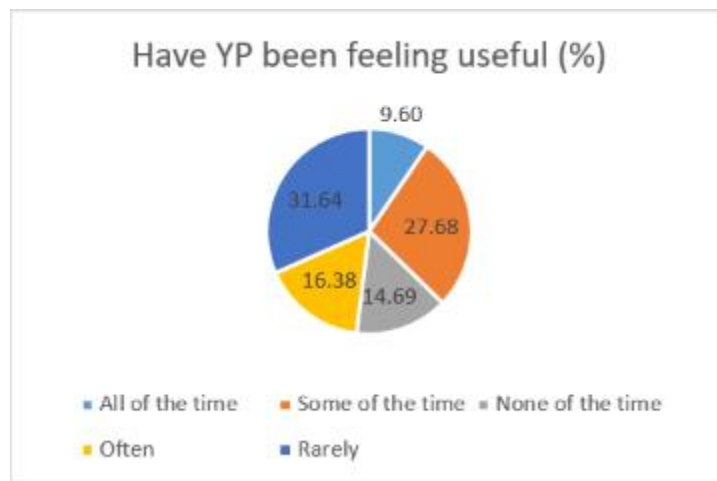
Figure 2



***‘Long term future is a big concern. I’m very worried about what career prospects will be’.***

When asked ‘have you been feeling useful during lockdown’ only 26% of CYP said they have been feeling useful ‘all the time’ or ‘often’. Figure 3 shows the percentage of CYP who have been feeling useful during the lockdown.

Figure 3



***‘I feel that the impact on young people has been slightly neglected in the news, particularly regarding future prospects for those of us who are considering what our career paths will be’.***

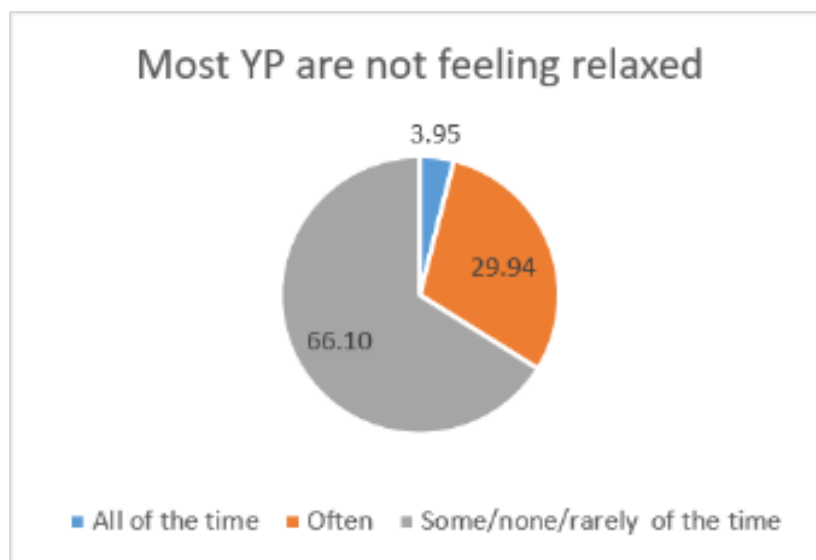
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When CYP were asked whether they were ‘feeling relaxed about the lockdown’ 72% of females answered ‘some’, ‘none’ or ‘rarely any of the time’. Whereas 57% of males suggested they felt relaxed ‘all of the time’ or ‘often’. This is representative of other non Covid-19 related research<sup>3</sup> which suggest that females are twice as likely to develop anxiety disorders and feelings of unease, such as worry or fear which have an impact on their daily lives.

### ***‘Will it ever end’***

Figure 4 represents the collective views from both males and females showing that overall 66% of CYP are feeling relaxed ‘some’, ‘none’ or ‘rarely any of the time’.

Figure 4

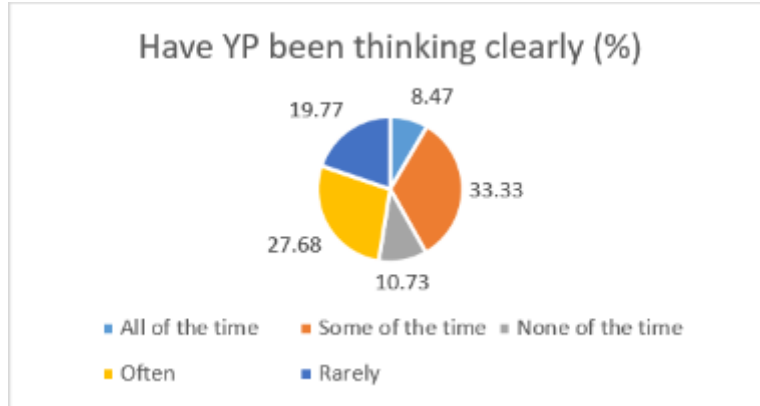


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<sup>3</sup> NHS (2016) Women are more likely to suffer from anxiety <https://www.nhs.uk/news/mental-health/women-are-more-likely-to-suffer-from-anxiety-than-men/>

The survey asked whether CYP felt they were able to 'think clearly during the lockdown' 64% answered 'some', 'none' or 'rarely any of the time'. Figure 5 represents the percentage of CYP and whether they feel they have been thinking clearly.

Figure 5



***'Understanding and help from adults, perhaps teachers to keep schoolwork on track, as I'm struggling to keep up with it all'.***

Further to the quantitative responses the survey asked several questions. The survey asked, 'what support, if any, would you benefit from during this time'. The below word cloud has been generated, which highlights the most popular words used.



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Common themes were around:

- More support from education; tutors/ teachers, less workload and more video calls
- Opportunities to talk to someone even if it is virtually
- Support with the future and understanding what has happened.

***I would really like to have more of an idea of what is happening in the future in a more kid-friendly way, for example, the latest news we heard from Boris Johnson should be put into a language that children understand.***

A lot of school aged CYP mentioned schoolwork and felt the pressure to complete workbooks with little guidance. Most CYP felt that regular facetime opportunities with their teachers would have helped. Along with less work being set and more opportunities to engage with learning digitally rather than through workbooks and 'homework'.

Most CYP wanted someone to talk to for support with a lot of CYP citing friends and family as useful support mechanisms. Some CYP mentioned other professional support stopping abruptly and felt they were not informed about what was going on.







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Access to support for some has been difficult especially for those who are digitally excluded. This survey is a good example of how some CYP miss out on opportunities to participate as they do not have the technology available to them.

This report has indicated that CYP have struggled with the restrictions placed on their lives with over half of those surveyed reporting a negative impact on their mental health. Many of the CYP have been concerned about their education, the amount of work set and the stress of not knowing what implications the lockdown restrictions would have on their future or education. CYP are reporting that for some their education settings are not offering the frequency and types of support they would like, and they are feeling isolated from other support networks.

No Limits aim to work with education providers, other agencies and CYP to ensure they are aware of what support is available to them and where and how they can access it. We are yet to see what long term trauma this pandemic may have had on CYP's lives. The local authority, health and voluntary sector will need to pull together and scale up resources to meet the likely surge in CYP needing support over the coming year and beyond.