



Coronavirus: the consequences for mental health in Wales

The ongoing impact of the coronavirus pandemic on people with mental health problems across Wales

July 2021

Contents

3 Foreword

4 Our findings at a glance

6 What did we do?

7 Who took part in the survey?

9 Research findings

9 **Section 1:** How has the coronavirus pandemic affected our mental health over the past year?

12 **Section 2:** What has affected people's mental health?

15 **Section 3:** How have people with mental health problems coped with the pandemic?

18 **Section 4:** How are people with mental health problems feeling about the future?

22 Looking forward: what needs to happen next

Foreword

No community left behind: planning for a brighter future

We're now more than one year into the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. The huge challenges we've all faced as a nation continue to resonate in every part of our lives.

In July 2020 we published a report exploring people's experiences of the early months of the pandemic and the impact on our mental health. This year we've done more research to understand the ongoing effects, and what we must prioritise as we plan and hope for a brighter future.

Vulnerable people have been hardest hit

This year's survey continues to paint a picture of existing inequalities exacerbated by coronavirus. While the struggles of the past year have been felt across all communities in Wales, those already vulnerable have often been the hardest hit. We urgently need to develop and improve mental health support for those living in poverty, people in racialised communities and young people.

We also know that many people already living with a mental health problem have seen their mental health worsen, and their needs become more complex through their experiences over the past year.

Many people are anxious about the future

There is still much uncertainty over what the coming months and years will look like, and how our lives will continue to be shaped by this pandemic. What we do know is that even with more vaccinations and restrictions easing, many people are anxious about seeing and being around other people. This needs to be acknowledged as government, health and care services and employers plan for the future.

The psychological impacts of grief, economic insecurity, loneliness, isolation and health anxiety are huge. These effects will continue to impact our communities far beyond the immediate future. Policymakers need to be prepared for greater, more complex demands on services that were already pushed to capacity.

Mental health must be more than a priority on paper. We can and must demand a fairer future where everyone receives the mental health support they need, and no community is left behind.



Our findings at a glance

“ I hope we come out of this a kinder, more considerate society, but I’m not sure that we will. I worry that many people will be traumatised and will fall through the cracks. ”

How has coronavirus affected your mental health?

That’s the question we asked people at the start of lockdown. Now, one year on, we’ve asked again to understand the ongoing impact of the pandemic.

We’ve heard from 756 people, both adults and young people. They’ve shared the personal impact of lockdown, how they’ve

coped, if and how they got support and how they think easing restrictions might affect their mental health.

This important research will help us understand people’s experiences and fight for what matters to them. It also gives us clear evidence to shape effective mental health services. Turn to page 22 to find out what needs to be done next.

What we found: key points

1

People who struggled before now struggle more

People who were more likely to struggle with their mental health before the pandemic have experienced the greatest impact. They report an increase in the severity of challenges they're facing now and concerns about the future. They urgently need tailored support.

2

Hope is here for many, but anxiety remains

Nearly half of those who took part in our survey in Wales thought their mental health would improve once restrictions eased. However, people are most worried about the transition to seeing and being near others.

3

Coronavirus has heightened inequality

We knew there was a connection between poverty and mental health before the pandemic. Coronavirus has heightened these inequalities. Our research shows people receiving benefits have been hit particularly hard and are experiencing increasingly severe and complex problems. This shows support is needed beyond mental health services.

4

Young people are finding it hard to cope

Young people who struggle with their mental health were more likely to be using negative coping strategies, like self-harm, than adults. Isolation and loneliness have made people's mental health worse – with young people particularly badly affected.

5

People urgently need more support

We urgently need investment in high quality trauma-informed support (support that recognises the impact of trauma) and people should be able to choose how they receive it. Much more work needs to be done to ensure support is available for young people, racialised communities, and those in poverty.

What did we do?

- We carried out **two surveys**, one with adults (aged 25+) and one with young people (aged 13 – 24) with experience of mental health problems living in Wales. The research was done between 25 March and 10 May 2021, ending as we started to emerge from lockdown.
- Our research explores the experiences of people with mental health problems rather than looking at how the population's mental health has changed overall.
- We can make some comparisons between this year's survey and last year's. But different participants have answered different surveys – so comparisons must be treated with caution.
- Eighty-three per cent of adults and ninety-one per cent of young people answering our survey have experienced mental distress or accessed mental health services. Most of those without lived experience care for someone with a mental health problem.
- We also carried out **qualitative research**, working with a young person with lived experience and training her to facilitate some of this research. In particular, we tried to get a better understanding of the experiences of people from racialised communities, whose voices are underrepresented in our survey results.

Points to remember:

- Despite extensive outreach and targeted promotion, both our adult and young people's surveys underrepresent people from racialised communities living in Wales.
- The sample sizes for young people and people from racialised communities are particularly low, which has at times prevented meaningful analysis.
- Participants were recruited by Mind and a number of other charities and voluntary organisations. This means they're more likely to be familiar with Mind, mental health and charities.
- This research was conducted with people with lived experience of mental health problems, not the general public. When we refer to 'adults' or 'young people' throughout the report, we refer to people with experience of mental health problems.

Content warning

Some of the quotes and stories in this report mention self-harm, domestic abuse, abandonment, racial trauma, suicide and disordered eating.

Who took part in the survey?

Adults

We surveyed

650

adults living in Wales
aged 25+

Young people

We surveyed

106

young people living
in Wales aged 13 – 24

78%

experienced mental
distress during or
before the coronavirus
pandemic

86%

experienced mental
distress during or
before the coronavirus
pandemic

43%

have a long-term
health problem or
learning difference

45%

have a long-term
health condition or
learning difference

Get advice and support

We have lots of useful advice and tips on mental health and coronavirus.

Click the links below to help you find support on:

- 1** [The pandemic and your mental health](#)
- 2** [Restrictions easing](#)
- 3** [The coronavirus vaccine](#)

Aged 11-24?

[We have lots of advice about mental health and wellbeing.](#)

Supporting a young person?

[We can help you support their wellbeing.](#)



Section 1: How has the coronavirus pandemic affected our mental health over the past year?

We asked young people and adults how their mental health has been affected by the pandemic since the first national lockdown in March 2020. We found that:

- Nearly two thirds (63%) of adults and more than two thirds (68%) of young people say their mental health has **got worse** since the first national lockdown. Nearly half (48%) of those adults and over half (51%) of those young people said that their mental health had got **much worse** since the beginning of the first national lockdown.
- More than one in six adults (18%) and young people (17%) said that their mental health had **got better** since the beginning of the first national lockdown.
- More than one in four (26%) of adults and over one in seven (14%) young people experienced mental distress for the **first time** during the pandemic.
- People living in a household receiving benefits have seen their mental health hit hardest by the pandemic.

“ I suffered with anxiety and mild depression in 2017, but had received therapy and was coping well before March 2020. Since the pandemic began these symptoms have returned. I was put on furlough and the time spent alone with my thoughts with no distraction has been very damaging. ”

Adult

The decline in people's mental health has become more severe over the past year

- Although the number of people who told us their mental health has got worse is consistent with what we found when we asked people how their mental health had changed last year, the severity of poor mental health has increased. Nearly a third (31%) of adults and over a third (35%) of young people have said that their mental health has got much worse. This is more than double the proportion of people that told us this last year (14% for adults and 12% for young people).
- Around two in five adults (42%) and over half of young people (53%) told us that their mental health was poor or very poor when asked towards the end of the third national lockdown, and as restrictions began to ease in April 2021.
- Despite a negative picture overall, over one in five adults (22%) and one in seven young people (14%) told us that their mental health had got better since the first national lockdown. This was reflected in our qualitative research, with those with social anxiety and autism in particular telling us that they enjoyed having time to recharge without social pressures.

“ Before March 2020, I had anxiety and depression. The past year has intensified those feelings. Perhaps I should contact my GP surgery, but I don't want to add to their already overburdened workload. ”

Adult

Some people have experienced poor mental health and accessed support for the first time during the pandemic

- Just over a quarter (26%) of adults and one in seven (14%) young people who took part in our research experienced mental distress for the first time during the pandemic.
- One in five (20%) adults accessed mental health services for the first time during the pandemic.

“ I never used to have down days or feel anxious – but since the pandemic I have had multiple low days and high anxiety days. ”

Young person

Lillian's story

Lillian is a carer living in South Wales who currently receives benefits. Although she sometimes struggled before March 2020, she has seen her mental health get a lot worse during the pandemic. During the past year she has gone through a divorce with an abusive ex-husband, looked after her adult sons as an unpaid full-time carer and been evicted from her house. She has received little support from family and friends as she doesn't want to burden them with her problems during a tough time. On top of this, as restrictions begin to ease, she finds the thought of going to the supermarket, meeting up with friends or family, and the risk of catching coronavirus very anxiety-inducing.

Focus on: poverty

- People receiving benefits were more likely to experience poor mental health before the pandemic. They're now more likely to have seen their mental health decline, reinforcing mental health inequalities.
- Over half (59%) of survey participants living in a household receiving benefits currently have poor or very poor mental health (vs 34% of those not receiving benefits).
- Seventy-one per cent are feeling worse or much worse since the first national lockdown in March 2020 (vs 59% of those not receiving benefits). Forty-one per cent are feeling much worse (vs 26% of those not receiving benefits).

“ I am a student nurse and the [lack of] support available to us while on placement and the lack of pay we get has added to the stress of everything. ”

Young person



Section 2: What has affected people's mental health?



We asked people what had a negative or positive impact on their mental health in the last year. We found that:

- Lack of personal contact with loved ones, loneliness and worries about getting or spreading coronavirus made people's mental health worse.
- Loneliness hit young people's mental health hardest – nearly nine in ten (87%) young people said it made their mental health worse.
- Young people (70%) and people receiving benefits (47%) were most likely to say that thoughts about money had a negative impact on their mental health.

“ I spent five months living alone, and due to lockdown I spent most of my time completely isolated and alone in my flat. Though I'm living with my family again I still feel terrible and I try to avoid thinking about those five months because they took a huge toll on me. ”

Young person

Marcus' story

Marcus, a separated White man living in Swansea, has not seen his children since the pandemic began. His children live in another household with their mother. His daughter has a health condition so he has been anxious about passing on any illness to her. He has found isolation from his children has made his own mental health worse. However, he has found it easier than normal to open up about his mental health, particularly at work. He feels more people are speaking about mental health and loneliness during the pandemic, as everyone has experienced isolation.

Focus on: poverty

- Nearly half (47%) of those living in a household receiving benefits told us that their financial situation has made their mental health worse (vs 30% not receiving benefits).
 - Under three quarters (70%) of young people said that thoughts about theirs or their family's financial situation or jobs made their mental health worse. This makes them twice as likely than adults to say that thoughts about finances had a negative impact on their mental health (35%).
 - Thirty per cent say the safety of their house or neighbourhood has made their mental health worse (vs 12%). Nearly half (48%) say the condition of their house has made their mental health worse (vs 29%).
 - More than a quarter (30%) say the neighbourhood they live in has made their mental health worse (vs 15%) – making people receiving benefits twice as likely to see their mental health negatively affected by their neighbourhood during the pandemic.
- Being unable to find work and fears of homelessness due to not being able to access social housing have made many people feel hopeless and worthless.
- “ **I was made redundant from my career in October, which I had planned to do all my life, and had been doing for the past 13 years. I am finding it impossible to find part-time work, my Job Seeker's Allowance has now ended and I have no idea where my next pay cheque will come from. I am not entitled to any benefits.** ”
- Adult
- “ **My mental health [is] impacting my ability to work right now, I'm not able to get a job due to my Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder at the moment. It feels like I can't actually get any help financially and I'm stuck unemployed with no income.** ”
- Young person

New working arrangements have had a mixed impact on people's mental health

- While 44% said that working from home made their mental health worse, over a third (35%) said it made their mental health better.
- The picture is clearer for those having to go into work in person – over half (54%) said it made their mental health worse. However, one in six (17%) said it made their mental health better.
- While over a third (38%) on furlough said this experience made their mental health worse, more than a quarter (27%) said it made their mental health better.

“ I’m literally living by the week/ month not knowing where my financial help is coming [from] or how much it would be. I’m self-employed and the stress of not being given a reliable furlough alternative has been almost enough to push me over the edge. ”

Adult

Beyond the vaccine, there's no consensus on what's made adults and young people's mental health better

- Over three quarters of adults (76%) and young people (77%) said that knowing a coronavirus vaccine exists made their mental health better. Only eight per cent of adults and five per cent of young people said this made their mental health worse.
- Thirty-three per cent of adults and forty-five per cent of young people said that spending more time with people they live with made their mental health better. However, twenty-nine per cent of adults and thirty-three per cent of young people said it made it worse.
- Thirty-eight per cent of adults and forty per cent of young people said that being more aware of their personal hygiene made their mental health better (vs 15% of adults and 18% of young people who said it made their mental health worse).
- Thirty-five per cent of adults and twenty-nine per cent of young people said wearing a face mask made their mental health better. However, forty-two per cent of adults said it made it worse.
- Just under a quarter of adults (23%) and young people (24%) who are not at school or university said their financial situation has made their mental health better (vs 37% of adults and 48% of young people who said it made it worse).

Section 3: How have people with mental health problems coped with the pandemic?



We asked how people coped with the changes and pressures that they faced during the pandemic, and whether they had sought support to cope with the past year. We found that:

- Spending time outside is the most popular way to cope – around three quarters of adults (73%) and young people (75%) coped by going outside.
- Young people are most likely to be using negative coping mechanisms. Forty-five per cent of young people have self-harmed to cope, making them more than three times as likely to have coped by self-harming than adults (12%).
- Under three quarters (72% of adults in Wales and 71% of young people in England and Wales) will continue to get mental health support after the coronavirus restrictions ease.
- Those who needed support before the pandemic are most likely to continue getting support after restrictions ease.

“ I need the help I’ve been waiting for. Everything is on the phone and I can’t do that. I need face to face. ”

Adult

Top five most popular coping mechanisms for adults:

- 1 Spending time outside (73%)
- 2 Reading, watching TV/films or listening to music/radio (71%)
- 3 Connecting with friends, family or a partner online (62%)
- 4 Doing something creative (54%)
- 5 Meeting up with a friend or family member at a safe distance (51%)

Top five most popular coping mechanisms for young people:

- 1 Sleeping too much or too little (88%)
- 2 Reading, watching TV/films or listening to music/radio (80%)
- 3 Eating too much or too little (78%)
- 4 Spending too much time on social media (76%)
- 5 Spending time outside (75%)

“ [I] can't sleep at night worrying about the pandemic, and about my college grades, which have slipped tremendously. ”

Young person

Focus on: young people

- With the exception of drinking alcohol more than usual and gambling, young people are more likely to have used negative coping mechanisms when compared with adults.
 - Under half (45%) of young people who responded to our survey have self-harmed to cope with the pandemic, making them more than three times as likely as adults (12%) to cope in this way.
 - In addition to the coping mechanisms listed above, young people are more likely to be over-spending (48% young people vs 31% adults) and working or studying too much as a distraction (39% young people vs 21% adults).
- Young people and adults have used fairly similar positive coping strategies. However, young people are more than twice as likely to have coped via gaming (44% young people vs 15% adults).

“ I struggle to sleep, [and] either eat too much or not enough. [I've been] crying a lot. ”

Young person

Get advice and support

We have advice and support for young people about self-harm, including [how you can help yourself or support others](#).

Bailey's story

As the first lockdown began, 17-year-old Bailey, a transman living in South Wales, had to stop the intensive therapy that he was receiving for his anorexia because his day unit closed due to the pandemic. This left Bailey feeling “so much less equipped to stay strong and to recover.” A few months into the pandemic, after receiving one phone call a week from Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and being denied hormone blockers by his psychiatrist, Bailey experienced his biggest relapse and was hospitalised. Bailey is currently recovering back at home, and having regular in-person appointments with CAMHS.

Most people will still need support after the pandemic

- Just under three quarters (72%) of adults living in Wales who are currently accessing mental health services will need support after restrictions ease.
- Three per cent said they would no longer access support after restrictions ease. A further quarter were not sure.
- Those who had experienced mental distress for the first time during the pandemic were less likely to continue using services. Fifty-two per cent of adults who experienced mental distress for the first time will continue to access services after restrictions ease. Compare this with eighty per cent of those who experienced mental health problems before the pandemic.

What about young people?

When explaining how people have accessed services, we have only used adult statistics, as the sample size for young people accessing mental health services in Wales is too small to analyse.

“**I am concerned about feeling particularly socially anxious, more so than before. I am really worried about feeling isolated and alone.**”

Adult

Section 4: How are people with mental health problems feeling about the future?



We asked people how they felt about their future, and what support they might like to receive to help them with lockdown restrictions easing. We found that:

- Over half of adults (60%) and young people (53%) are worried about seeing and being near other people once restrictions ease.
- Under half of adults (45%) and young people (47%) think that their mental health will improve as restrictions ease. People receiving benefits are much less likely to think this will be the case.
- Both young people and adults prefer in-person support for the future.

“I now have people suggesting we go out for meals and drinks when this is all over. I really can’t do this, so in a way the ending of the lockdown causes more anxiety.”

Adult

The majority of people feel hopeful about the future and their mental health...

- The majority (45% of adults and 47% of young people) think their mental health will improve once restrictions ease.
- A similar proportion (38% of adults and 42% of young people) feel hopeful about their future. Young people are more likely than adults to feel they can achieve personal goals they set themselves before the pandemic (32% of adults vs 57% of young people).
- Thirty-nine per cent of adults and forty-five per cent of young people have picked up good habits or hobbies during the pandemic that they will continue.
- Under three quarters (70%) of young people told us that the pandemic has changed how they think about their own and other's mental health.

💬 **As the vaccines became available and this lockdown started to finish I started to feel more positive – coupled with the weather improving.** 🌀

Adult

...but many people don't think that things will get better

- One in five (19%) adults and young people (20%) don't think their mental health will improve once restrictions ease.
- Similarly, a third (34%) of adults and a third (31%) of young people don't feel hopeful about the future. More than one in five (23%) adults and one in five (20%) young people feel they cannot achieve their pre-pandemic goals.
- Over half of both adults (58%) and young people (51%) don't think we will live in a fairer society after the pandemic.
- People living in a household receiving benefits are much less likely to think that their mental health will improve once restrictions ease – just a third (33%) think this will be the case (vs 52% of those not receiving benefits). Only a quarter of those receiving benefits feel hopeful about the future, compared to forty-five per cent of those who don't.

💬 **There is too much information on the media that upsets and frightens me – it goes on and on and everything seems hopeless. Then what's on the TV is just the English rules, it makes it even more confusing.** 🌀

Young person

Lewis' story

During the pandemic Lewis, a young person living in South Wales, began to experience anxiety for the first time. Before the pandemic, he played a lot of team sports with friends. But his mental health got worse when this wasn't possible. As a naturally sociable person, he thought he would be really excited for lockdown to end – yet he now feels very anxious about socialising and being near other people again.

Being around others and catching illnesses are both young people's and adults' main concerns about restrictions easing

- Over half (60%) of adults and young people (53%) are worried about being near and seeing other people once restrictions ease.
- Half of adults (50%) and under half (46%) of young people are worried about catching coronavirus as restrictions ease.
- Over a third of adults (35%) and over a third of young people (38%) are worried about germs or catching an illness in future.



What support do adults want to receive after the pandemic?

- 1 More opportunities to socialise or interact with other people (45%)
- 2 Mindfulness or meditation (37%)
- 3 Information about specific ways to manage specific mental health problems as coronavirus restrictions ease (35%)

What support do young people want to receive after the pandemic?

- 1 More information and education about mental health in school, college, university or work (55%)
- 2 More information about how to process the memories and experiences of the pandemic (53%)
- 3 Counselling in person (50%)

Focus on: racialised communities

The sample size for people from racialised communities in Wales is not large enough to analyse. This data refers to people from racialised communities in England and Wales.

- People from racialised communities are slightly more likely to want information about how to process memories and experiences of the pandemic (46% vs 32% of White people) and information about how to cope with bereavement (21% vs 15%).
- People from these communities are more likely to want information about money and benefits (23% vs 14%) and housing (10% vs 6%) to help manage their mental health.
- They are also slightly more likely to want to be involved in co-developing new mental health support or information (31% vs 21%).



Looking forward: what needs to happen next

Coronavirus has robbed many of us of what we need to stay healthy – both mentally and physically. The severity and complexity of many people’s mental health problems has increased and lots of people who have been accessing support during the pandemic will continue to do so.

Our research shows that we have to ensure the pandemic’s after-effects don’t make life worse for people who were disadvantaged before it even started, and that people can access the right support that caters to new and complex mental health needs.

We want this research to change lives. That’s why we’re using it as evidence to shape services and fight for what you care about.

Here's what needs to be prioritised:

1

Supporting those who need it most

Some groups have been hit harder by the pandemic. We should work with young people, people in poverty and those from racialised communities to ensure they can get the support they need.

2

Understanding people's complex needs

Many people with mental health problems who were already struggling report new and complex challenges. It's essential that support is holistic and services are ready for the increase in severity of people's mental health problems. Services must also take into account the trauma that people have faced over the past year and how this might affect the support they need. This also means responding to pressing social problems.

3

Giving people choice

We must give people more choice over the type of support they would like, whether different types of talking therapies, medication, or creative therapies. It's also important that people have a choice about how they access support. It could be digital, on the phone, in-person, or a blend. People want to choose the kind of support they receive and how they get it. Find out more about our research into accessing services remotely and what this means for the future in our report [Trying to Connect](#).

4

Boosting self-referral

We must also ensure that people feel able and know how to refer themselves for the support they need, when they need it.



Join the fight for better mental health!

Campaign with us

mind.org.uk/CampaignWithUs

Donate to Mind

mind.org.uk/Donate

Volunteer with us

mind.org.uk/Volunteer

Mind.org.uk

 [mindforbettermentalhealth](https://www.facebook.com/mindforbettermentalhealth)

 [MindCymru](https://twitter.com/MindCymru)