

Interim Findings

The youth arm of [Healthwatch Central West London](#), known as [Young Healthwatch Westminster](#), created a [mental health survey](#) to capture how young people think about their mental health, what causes them stress, their knowledge of local and national support, and of course, the impact of COVID-19 on their wellbeing. Young Healthwatch volunteers created the survey in its entirety by discussing the most pressing issues for them as young people. It is important to note that the survey was created before the onset of the pandemic and that COVID-19 questions were added so that we could gauge the experiences of young people amid the outbreak.

The survey is still live. We are continuing our engagement work through regular reporting of findings through a range of mediums, building our networks and support base of local contacts and by planning and delivering focus groups.

The following information is based on **144 responses** between the dates of **27.04.20 and 16.06.20** from young people aged 11-25 who live, work or study in Westminster.

The majority of respondents were female (73.57%), 33 of the 144 respondents identified as male, 2 identified as non-binary, 1 identified as transgender male and 1 selected 'Prefer not to say'.

In terms of ethnicity, 36.3% identified themselves as White British and 36% as BAME. BAME backgrounds include: Asian/Asian British - Bangladeshi, Asian/Asian British - Indian, Asian/Asian British - Pakistani, Any other Asian background, Black/Black British - African, Black/Black British - Caribbean, Mixed - White & Asian, Mixed - White and Black African, Mixed - White and Black Caribbean, Any other Mixed Background and some free text responses such as Kurdish, Turkish, Ashkenazi Jew, Albanian and Black/Black British - Ghanaian. 6% of respondents did not answer the ethnicity questions.

Of the 144 respondents, 44 were within the 11-13 age bracket, 58 were within the 14-16 bracket, 30 said they were between the ages of 17-18, 2 respondents were within the 19-21 bracket, 3 were in the 22-25 bracket and 7 declined to answer.

34 of the respondents told us they live in Westminster, while the rest came from London boroughs including Haringey, Camden and Brent.

Key findings

- 15% of young people from BAME communities said that COVID-19 has affected their mental health 'a lot', compared with only 9% of their non-BAME counterparts.
- One quarter of respondents from BAME communities reported losing a family member, neighbour and the corresponding emotional fallout compared with only 7% of young people from non-BAME communities
- In general, respondents reported feeling 'neutral' when asked how comfortable they are talking about their mental health. Interestingly, 'uncomfortable' and 'comfortable' responses have remained at a similar level (around 30%) since the survey opened
- Respondents overwhelmingly (82%) reported that they felt they could find mental health support if they needed it
- Patterns in our qualitative data have emerged of a lack of information and support around mental health during the COVID-19 outbreak from schools, with responses like 'I haven't seen anything' and 'there's nothing in schools' commonplace
- Exams, body image and school are the three most stressful facets in life for respondents
- 78% of young people believe there has been enough information on mental health support during the crisis, but the way in which this information is disseminated has been called into question
- We listed 8 national and local mental health support services and almost 35% hadn't heard of any of them
- Of the young people who had heard of 1 or more of the services (relating to the bullet point above), only 1% heard about it through their GP
- Respondents would go to family and friends for mental health support (58% and 61% respectively).
- Only just over 25% of young people would go to their GP for support with their mental health (The majority would go to a friend for mental health support)
- Over 60% of respondents had not heard of CAMHS (Children & Adolescent Mental Health Services), and for those who had feedback was mixed, from excellent to extremely poor
- There is evidence in the data to suggest that there is a significant stigma relating to the term 'mental health', and that this term is often conflated with 'mental *illness*'

Question 1

What does mental health mean to you?

The level of knowledge and understanding of the term has been consistently high. The graphic below gives you an indication of the most prevalent responses:

good^{Emotional} think^{psychological} way^{emotional well} means^{keep}
Mental health means^{control} state^{happiness} someone
stable well^s mind^{physical} emotions^{thoughts} feel
things^{mental} people^{mental health} state^{mind}
mentally^{body} healthy^{look} person

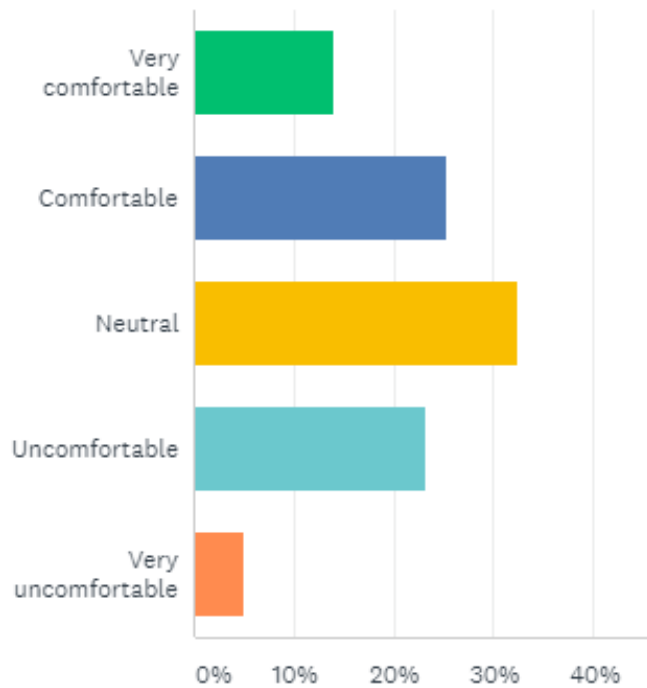
However, it is clear from the data that some respondents believe the term 'mental health' to be negative and synonymous with mental *illness*.

Survey responses:

- how you feel emotionally and your wellbeing and if your sick mentally
- mental health is when someone is not in the right state of mind
- People who have depression etc
- Depression
- mental health is when your mind can't be focused, or u go crazy in a way

Question 2

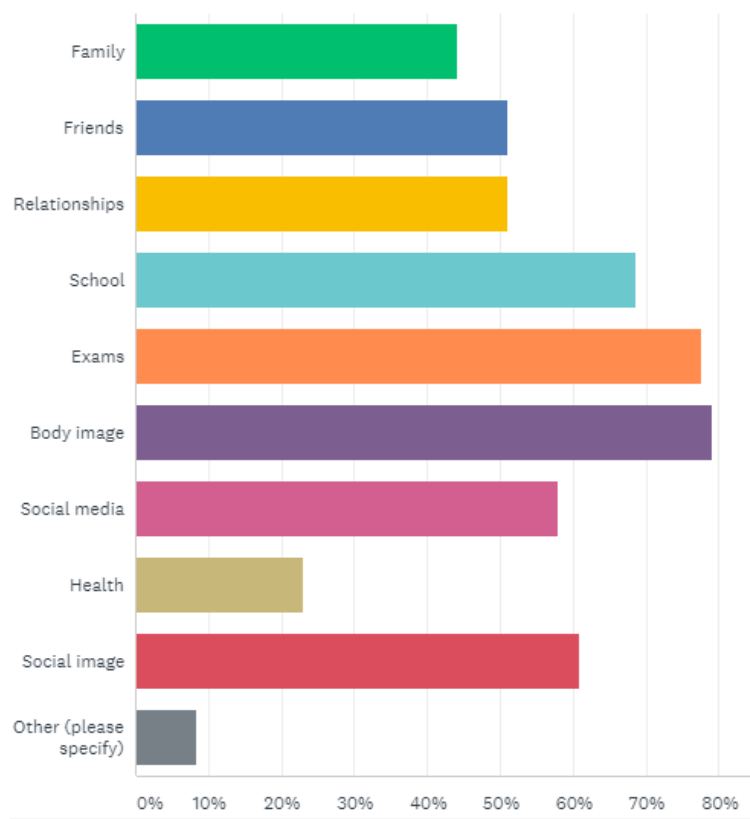
How comfortable do you feel talking about your mental health?



Question 3

What do you think causes the most stress for young people? (Select all that apply)

The options below were selected solely by Young Healthwatch volunteers:



Question 4

If you feel comfortable, could you tell us more about why you chose the options above?

Clear patterns in the data emerged around the pressure from social media - and directly from peers - to look and behave and act in a certain way, combined with a familial and educational pressure.

Survey responses:

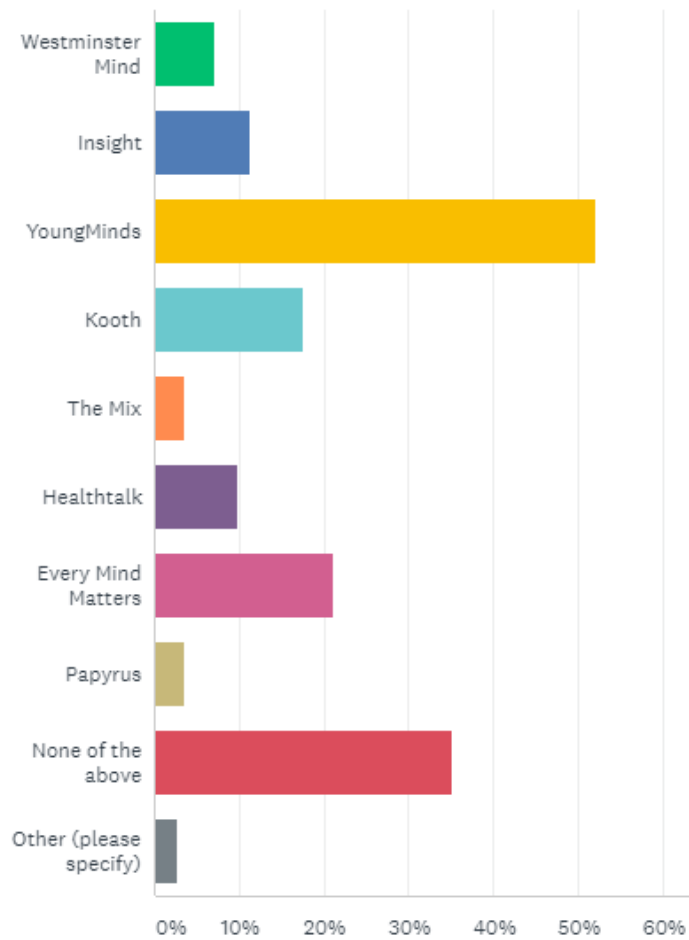
- In my experience, the pressure that I have put on myself that has led to my own issues with my mental health have stemmed from sources that tell you/lead you to believe that you are not good enough. That is almost always the case with social media but has also been family and exams for me.
- Constant comparison and need for everything to be recorded online otherwise it didn't happen is stressful and means that living in the moment is completely impossible
- In my opinion social media dramatically exacerbates negatives emotions and pressures regarding body image, because generally people only display the appealing and 'perfect' aspects of their lives online. In my personal experience, school and exams led to an inevitable level of pressure because I attended a same-sex academic school.

- I think the media makes it such a big issue and expectations of having to be great!
- Everything on social media is perfect
- Exams can cause me to stress out easily. Not me personally but many suffer with how their body image appears due to pressure on social media
- I personally find school very stressful. I'm not good at meeting deadlines and I don't have very high self-esteem, and I don't feel like I can meet the expectations that other people have in me or those I put upon myself. I have a bad habit of comparing myself to other people and particularly my younger sister, who is prettier, more popular and less inconsistent in her work. This causes the body image insecurities I have.
- I think school is too focused on exams that really don't mean anything except that you can memorise a textbook. And I think teachers are pretty useless at looking after us; they think their subjects and the homework they set us are all we have going on but some of us are dealing with a lot and the teachers just don't care and assume we're lazy or couldn't be bothered to do their stupid work.
- Body image the most as it is constantly being thrown at us, also school as I feel stressed about future
- Toxic friendships

Question 5

Which of these services have you heard of?

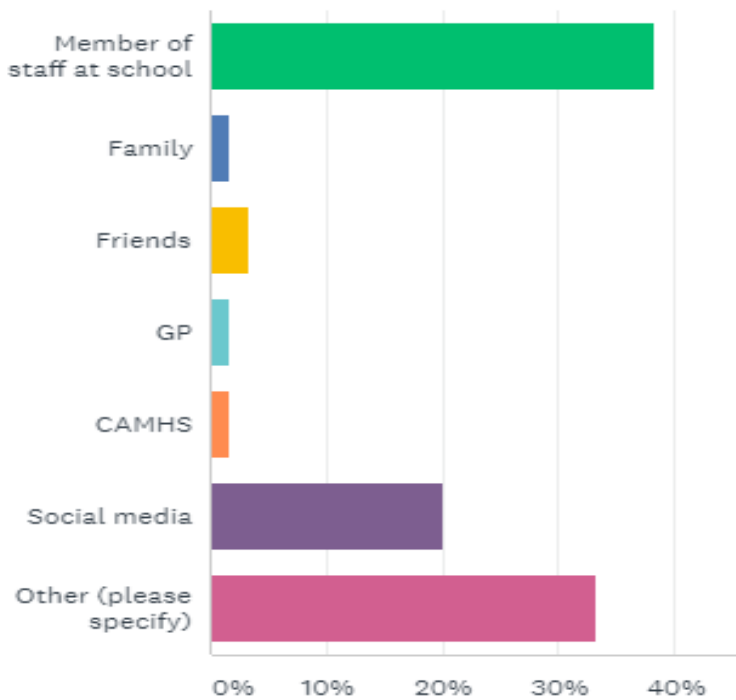
The options below were selected by Young Healthwatch Westminster after an online search of local and national support services.



Question 6

If you have heard of any, where did you hear about them?

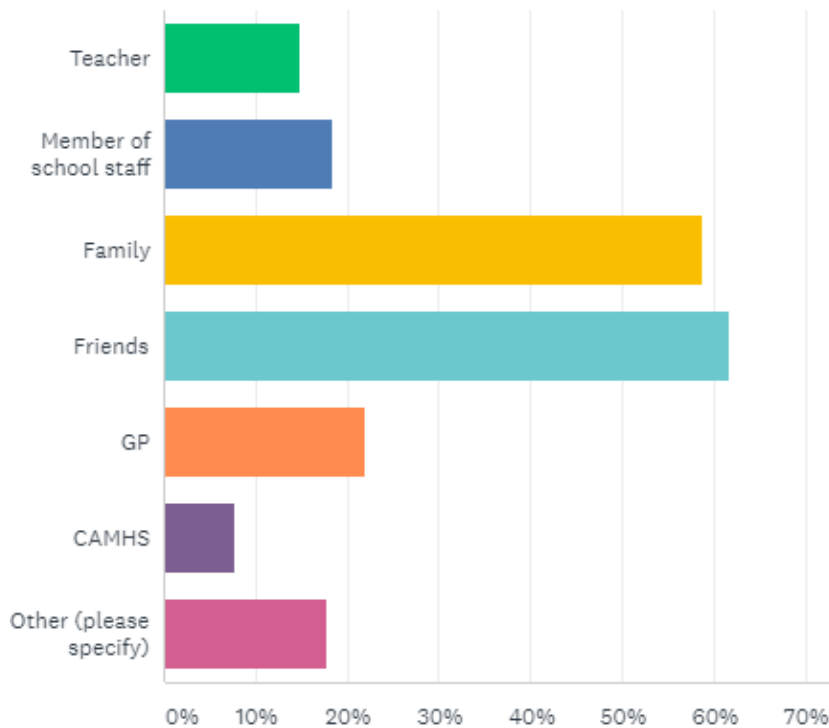
The 'other' responses below range from hearing about the service at work, to seeing an advert, but not being sure where.



Question 7

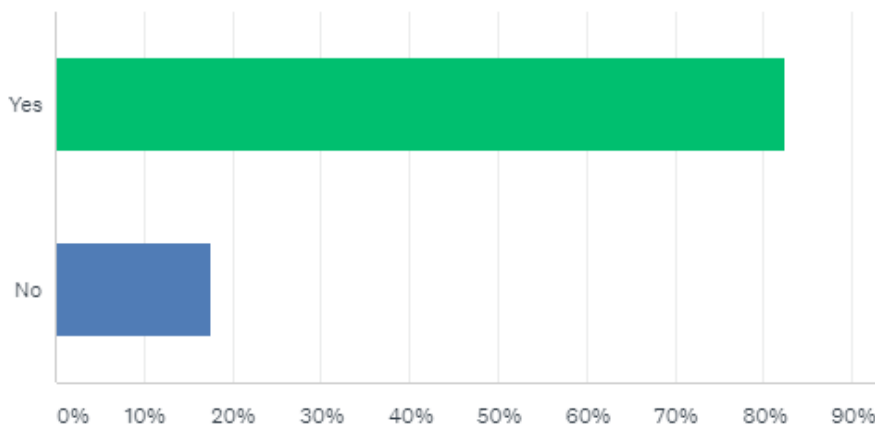
Where do you look for help and support with your mental health? (Select all that apply)

Again, the 'other' responses were largely 'myself' or comments equating to 'I don't'



Question 8

Do you think you would be able to get help if you needed it?



Question 9

If you answered no to question 8, could you tell us why?

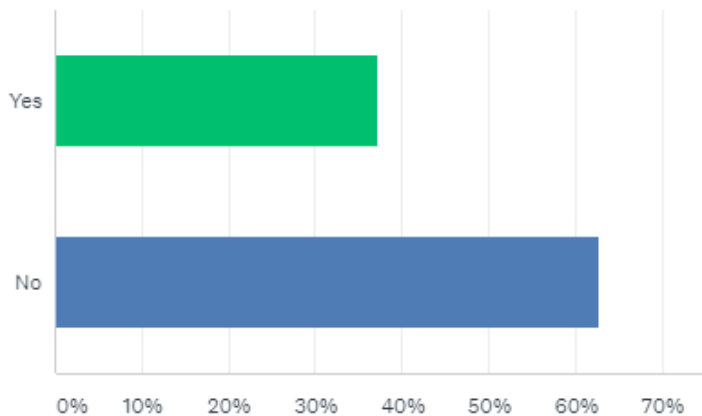
Patterns emerged in the responses around the barriers to asking for help, including concerns around not getting the treatment they feel they need and not knowing how to access help. This is in stark contrast with multiple respondents who reported the importance of having supportive networks in their lives who reported much fewer issues.

Survey responses:

- There is such a lack of availability/waitlist for all these services that it makes the person feel like even the help services don't have time for them and that it's not worth it
- Because my friends are there for me and so is CAMHS
- I find it very hard to talk about my emotions especially to friends but family too. My sister is struggling with mental health and it has taken months for her to gain significant and meaningful medical advice and support. It is not yet that effective and in lockdown, medical support is even less. So I'm not sure it would be easy to get effective help for people struggling with mental health at the moment especially
- I feel able to go to a therapist at school/ seek help from teachers
- I think I would get help but the extent of the help is one which is difficult. Someone might email or call back, make referrals to CMHT etc but then it takes so long for actual support like counselling or talking therapy to be put in place.
- Don't know how
- I honestly don't know how to seek professional help, from, for example, a therapist or such. I could probably look it up but as of now I have no idea
- I don't think I would be able to get help because a lot of people don't understand me and I'm very shy
- Sometimes I could feel like I could be burdening my family members with my difficulties due to the state of my mental health. And so in my opinion it feels quite selfish in a way when I try to talk to them about it but initially I shouldn't.
- Yes, because I am in the system, but I think it would be harder for a young person who is not.

Question 10

CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) is used as a term for all services that work with children and young people who have difficulties with their emotional or behavioural wellbeing. Have you heard of it?



Question 11

If yes, what have you heard?

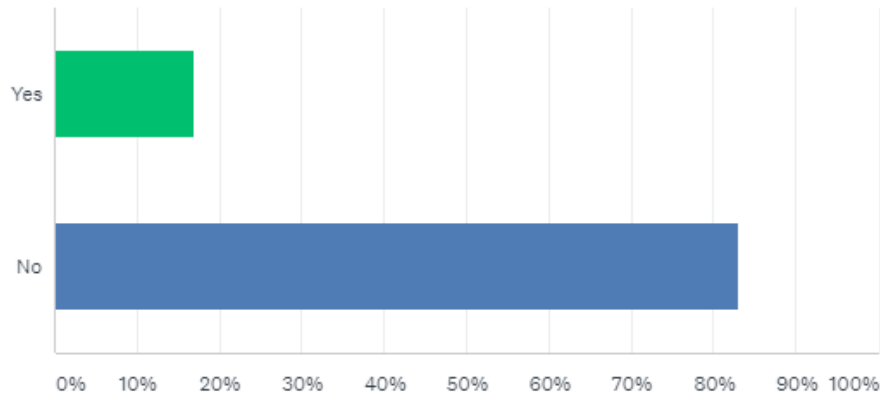
The patterns that emerged equated to respondents having some/superficial knowledge of the service, good/mixed or poor personal experiences (or hearsay) and some *extremely* poor reports.

Survey responses:

- That it's a place that helps people with their mental health
- Not very productive things. It takes a very long time to get seen and the staff are overworked so less able to invest in your 'case' as much as needed
- That it's invasive and unhelpful and should be avoided at all costs
- My experience was I was treated by them, they were awful. I have heard from others that the waiting times are years long and you have to be threatening suicide to get seen. That they don't care about you they just want to shorten the waiting time.
- Just what it stands for - it was recommended for me.
- It's a free mental health service for young people
- That they help children struggling with mental health
- Listening to my mum she says it's a wonderful thing however really underfunded and only can support the worst cases. Waiting lists are massive
- That CNWL CAMHS are one of the best
- Just the name

Question 12

Have you ever used CAMHS services?



Question 13

If yes, what is your opinion on it and why?

The patterns that arose largely corroborated those in the previous question.

Survey responses:

- It was helpful to get certain emotions off my chest and improved my mental health
- People feel that it is not a mental health institution but more like a government and police institutions.
- It was a terrible experience, they barely listen.
- I did not think it was very helpful, and a lot of my friends would agree with that. I don't think the opinion of CAMHS is good.
- A lot better than adult Mental Health Services. Adult M.H is less funded
- The whole process of getting an appointment can be quite slow and I hope that people who need urgent support would be seen to sooner. However, the actual sessions were useful, and the staff are very competent.
- It is very helpful for some people depending on the mental health problem, but some people have bad experiences.
- It's good but it's very slow
- Personally, I had no problems, but one of my friends had a really bad experience when she had to be inpatient
- They're helpful and make you feel comfortable

Question 14

How has COVID-19 affected you and your loved ones?

The responses to this question have been rich and compelling. The themes that developed related to reports of bereavement and/or illness, the struggles around not being able to visit friends or family who are ill, profound feelings of stress, anxiety and isolation, reports of difficulties while also recognising the positives, and concerns over jobs/money/education.

Survey responses:

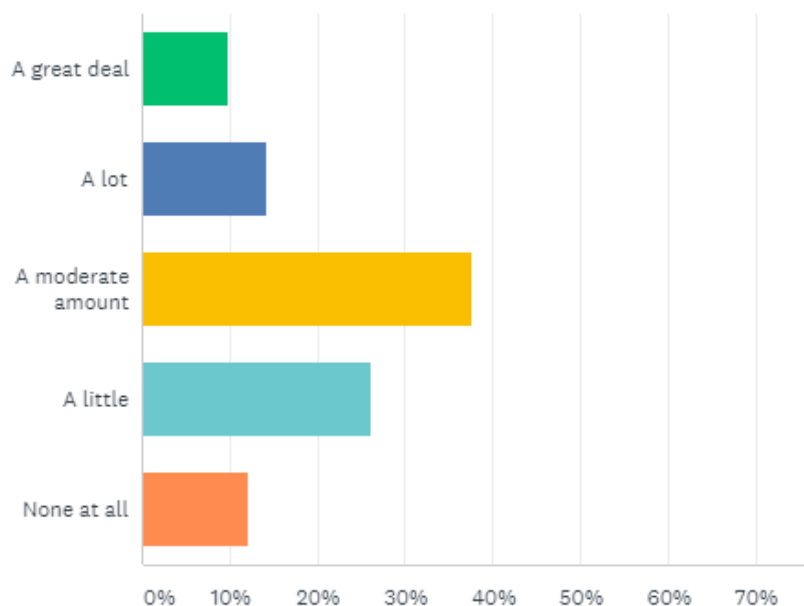
- It has affected us terribly as I can't see anyone I'm stuck at home can't see my twin sister as she is in a group home and in lockdown or my family either
- Lost my best friend
- Stress, because I can't have contact with the family I am not living with.
- We're closer than ever
- It has its ups and downs. Three members of my family have had previous mental health problems and have all gone through therapy. Flare ups of our anxiety and depression have been more frequent during isolation as our support systems aren't as easily accessible
- It has made it more difficult for me to connect with my friends and talk to them about problems- i feel less comfortable talking to my family about mental health
- I'm really not doing well and my grandma is dying
- Not a big effect, both my parents work from home normally, and my school and clubs are both continuing long distance. The only change we've really had is not having to travel loads every day
- It's made everything stressful, I miss my life
- Badly, being in an enclosed space with my emotionally abusive father isn't fun
- my family members who are living alone like my grandma are finding incredibly difficult on their mental health with the lack of any human contact or even human presence at all. My sister struggles with mental health and requires constant support and care from my parents. so its very hard for them anyway but now especially with the lack of focus of the NHS on mental health due to covid-19 means they people like my sister feel unsupported and anxious about this
- there is a history of mental health problems in my family- bipolar, eating disorders- it has been a struggle to have no distraction
- I've had a few friends and family who have died, otherwise it's hard to not see everyone more than i thought it would be. We may not be being as careful as we should be sometimes but we all need to work on that.
- I have lost my grandpa (not from Covid) and it hasn't been easy as I hadn't seen him for a month prior and it was unexpected so I didn't get to say goodbye. it has complicated many matters and it has taken time to sort out

issues such as the funeral. As well as that, my Dad is stuck in another country where planes have stopped so I have not seen him in 2 months.

- Can't see my family and friends. Effected my Masters. Finances and PhD options.
- Obviously, we're quarantining with our families globally, but I've been okay during quarantine but covid-19 has affected my education like going to college and seeing my friends by being in a different environment is nice but I can still do my work online

Question 15

To what extent do you feel that COVID-19 has had an impact on your mental health?



Question 16

If you feel comfortable doing so, please share what impact this has been. For example, positive or negative

The responses followed very similar patterns to question 14, but there is slightly more focus on school in this batch of responses.

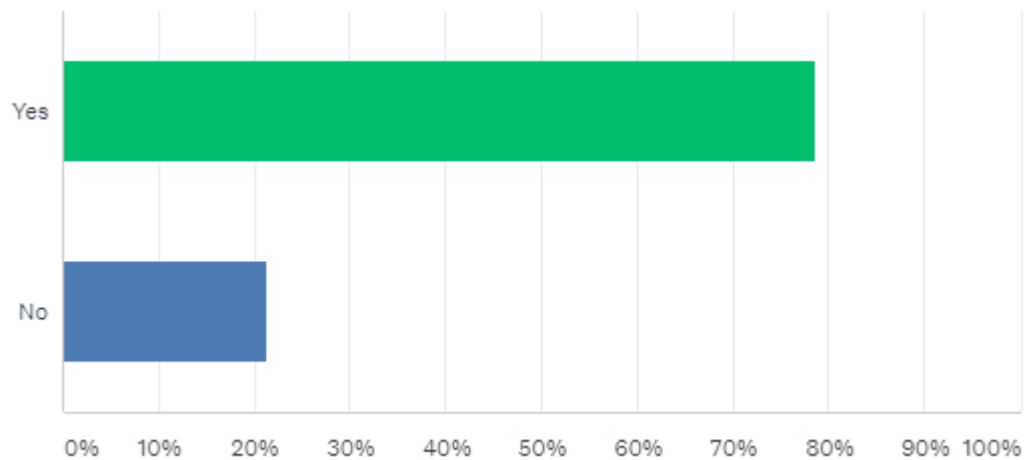
Survey responses:

- For me personally it hasn't really affected me so I'm alright but if one of my family members were to have it it might affect me quite a bit because I would be scared of what will happen and whether or not they would be ok

- I haven't been able to be around my friends who are people I could rely on to talk to about my mental health so that has had a small impact.
- negative, withdrawn a lot from social media, falling behind in school
- Positive: no more exams, staying at home with family, resting, cooking, etc...
- Positively, I've gotten closer with my family members (especially the ones I'm in quarantine with). Also, this has made me be assertive and attentive towards my friends and family who I can't see while checking up on them. Negatively, I'd say I've been quite moody being stuck indoors can change how you feel each day and not knowing when to finally go out without social distancing
- Loss of direction following exam cancellations, also summer plans got disrupted so that kinda sucked. It was worse when we first heard the news, now I'm dealing with it.
- It was positive then it turned negative and I had a panic attack because I was so stressed but I'm slowly getting positive again
- Initially positive because the stress of exams was lifted and I was able to slow down and enjoy life, but I've started really missing my friends and the freedom of 'normal' life.
- I haven't been able to see many of the people who i talk to about my problems or people I really care about and want to see. A positive aspect is that i haven't had to put too much focus on my studies.
- It's been negative as I've felt completely powerless
- Positive. I feel like I can finally do many of the things I wanted to do and live my life more. I know that it sounds a bit selfish because there are so many other people suffering terribly right now... But for me, I think I'm starting to just about figure out who I am..?!
- i have been able to reflect more on myself and my processes/ how i deal with problems. But in the process i have struggled with it- its quite lonely and high intensity being at home with a single parent

Question 17

Has there been enough information on how to get support?



Question 18

If no, what has been missing?

It is clear from the responses that there have been issues with the volume and quality of messaging from schools around mental health support. There are reports that information on mental health support from all sources has been insufficient, as well as a significant amount of ideas and suggestions for improvements.

Survey responses:

- There has been too much thrown at people and this is causing more people to worry. That is not a good way to respond to the virus. We should support each other when they say they need it. Not when some health service says they do.
- More support for people who are struggling with MH. Everyone is focusing on the virus and not on people's mental health
- I need answers, because there simply aren't any
- Specifics of where to go and what to do
- I haven't seen any information at all to be honest
- There's been plenty information
- There hasn't been real things to help. Just things like go for a walk or phone a friend which isn't a real way to feel better. It is very short term. I think more online counselling would really help
- Maybe a monitored hotline for kids to talk on together in a safe environment
- I don't really know. I haven't been looking for it. But with the amount of time I've been spending on social media recently, which has been growing

and therefore probably impacting my mental health, I would have expected to see something.

- The information, our school is really bad at it
- School guidance
- More support for people who are struggling with MH. Everyone is focusing on the virus and not on people's mental health.
- Where to get bereavement support. Where to get support for mental health specifically like who to contact first.
- How to properly get that support, like an email or phone number or something like that

For any queries, feedback or proposals for working with us, email:

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