



Healthwatch
Together

Blackburn with Darwen,
Blackpool, Cumbria and
Lancashire working
in partnership



The impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on the LGBTQ community

July 2020

About Healthwatch and Healthwatch Together

Healthwatch was established in April 2013 as part of the implementation of the Health and Care Act 2012.

Healthwatch England acts as the national consumer champion for all local Healthwatch organisations, enabling and supporting individual Healthwatch to bring important issues to the attention of decisions makers nationally.

A key role of each individual Healthwatch is to champion the views of people who use health and care services in their area, seeking to

ensure that people's experiences inform the improvement of services. Healthwatch are constantly listening, recording and reporting on the views of local people on a wide range of health and care issues, ensuring that people are able to express their views and have a voice in improving their local health and care services.

Healthwatch Together consists of Healthwatch Cumbria, Healthwatch Lancashire, Healthwatch Blackpool and Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen, working in collaboration together.



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Rationale for research

This research project took place as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) and the subsequent lockdown that took effect in England in March 2020.

As a result, Healthwatch Together (HWT) quickly created a survey in response to the pandemic, with the aim of finding out how the people of Cumbria and Lancashire were coping during this difficult time. Over the last four months the survey has evolved and currently is on version 3.

Whilst designing version 2, in consultation with Dr Lewis Turner of Lancashire LGBT, we updated some of our demographic questions to account for the range of diversity within the LGBTQ community and in order to identify particular issues affecting them.

This report is based on the information provided by our LGBTQ respondents. It is intended to complement existing reports, particularly the summary reports of version 1 and version 2. But aims to investigate further the issues raised by LGBTQ respondents and to compare their experiences of the pandemic with those of the general population of respondents.

This summary report is not intended as a scientific study into the effects of the pandemic on the LGBTQ community, as there has been no methodological sampling or statistical analysis conducted. It is intended as an insight into the experience of some LGBTQ people who live in Cumbria and Lancashire and aims to provide a 'snapshot' of their lived experience during these unprecedented times.

LGBTQ respondents were selected from within the survey findings as those who identified as:

- + Transgender (trans woman or trans man)
- + Non-binary

- + Non-binary transfeminine
- + Gay female
- + Gay male
- + Bisexual
- + Asexual (under 'other' category)
- + Pansexual (under 'other' category)

All respondents to the survey were asked the same series of questions. A full list of the questions is available in the HWT Coronavirus Survey Summary Report v2, which is downloadable on both the HW Cumbria and HW Lancashire websites.



The impact of the pandemic on the LGBTQ community

“The crisis has laid bare the stark inequalities faced by certain demographics.”¹

“LGBT communities already face a wide range of health inequalities throughout their lives so will likely be disproportionately affected by the crisis in many ways.”¹

A study by the LGBT Foundation, from which the above quotes were taken, produced a report in May 2020 entitled ‘Hidden Figures’. It is the largest research project into the impact of the pandemic on LGBT people in the UK, to date.

The report found that LGBT people are at more risk of abuse and discrimination than the general population and they are also more likely to report barriers to accessing healthcare.

It also found that many gender identity services have suspended their services and gender confirmation surgeries (which can involve a wait of many years) have been cancelled or postponed as a result of the pandemic.

A report into the implications of Covid-19 for LGBTQ youth mental health and suicide prevention² found that

“An unintended consequence of physical distancing is the potential loss of the social connections that protect LGBTQ youth from suicidality.”

There are also risks for some LGBTQ people who have been forced to quarantine with family members who may not be accepting of them³. Being stuck at home with family can also be difficult for people who have not yet come ‘out’⁴. These findings were supported by the research conducted by Lancashire LGBT⁶. Calls to the UK LGBTQ+ helpline ‘Switchboard’ have gone up by 20% over the lockdown

period⁴.

The HWT Coronavirus research project was not designed specifically for any one group within the general population of Cumbria and Lancashire. The survey aimed to gather feedback about people’s experiences from anyone willing to complete the survey. However some of the findings are relevant to the points raised here and are able to offer further support to the findings identified by the ‘Hidden Figures’ comprehensive report, whilst highlighting any particular issues faced by LGBTQ people in Cumbria and Lancashire.

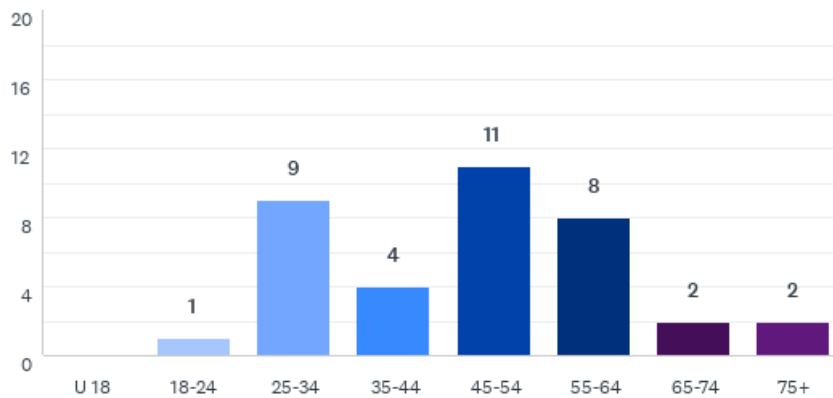
Demographics

37 people responded of whom: 30% were from Cumbria, 11% from Blackpool, 2% from Blackburn with Darwen and 54% from Lancashire (other).

68% said that they were in employment (either full-time, part-time or self-employed), 11% were retired and 8% were disabled and unable to work.

95% were white British, 1 person was white other and 1 person was of mixed race.

Q2 How old are you?



Gender identity

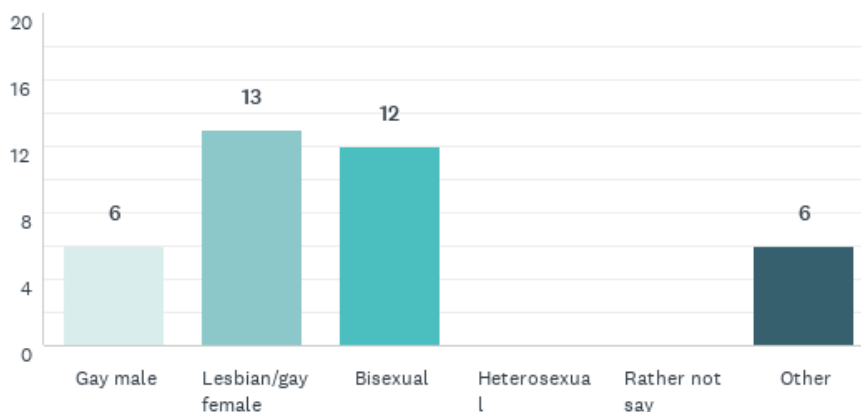
65% of respondents identified as female (including trans woman), 24% as male (including trans man).

86% told us that their gender identity was the same as on their birth certificate.

1 person identified as 'other' and 2 people told us they are non-binary.

14% of respondents told us that their gender identity is different to the one on their original birth certificate.

Q5 How would you describe your sexual orientation?



Other:
Asexual and pansexual

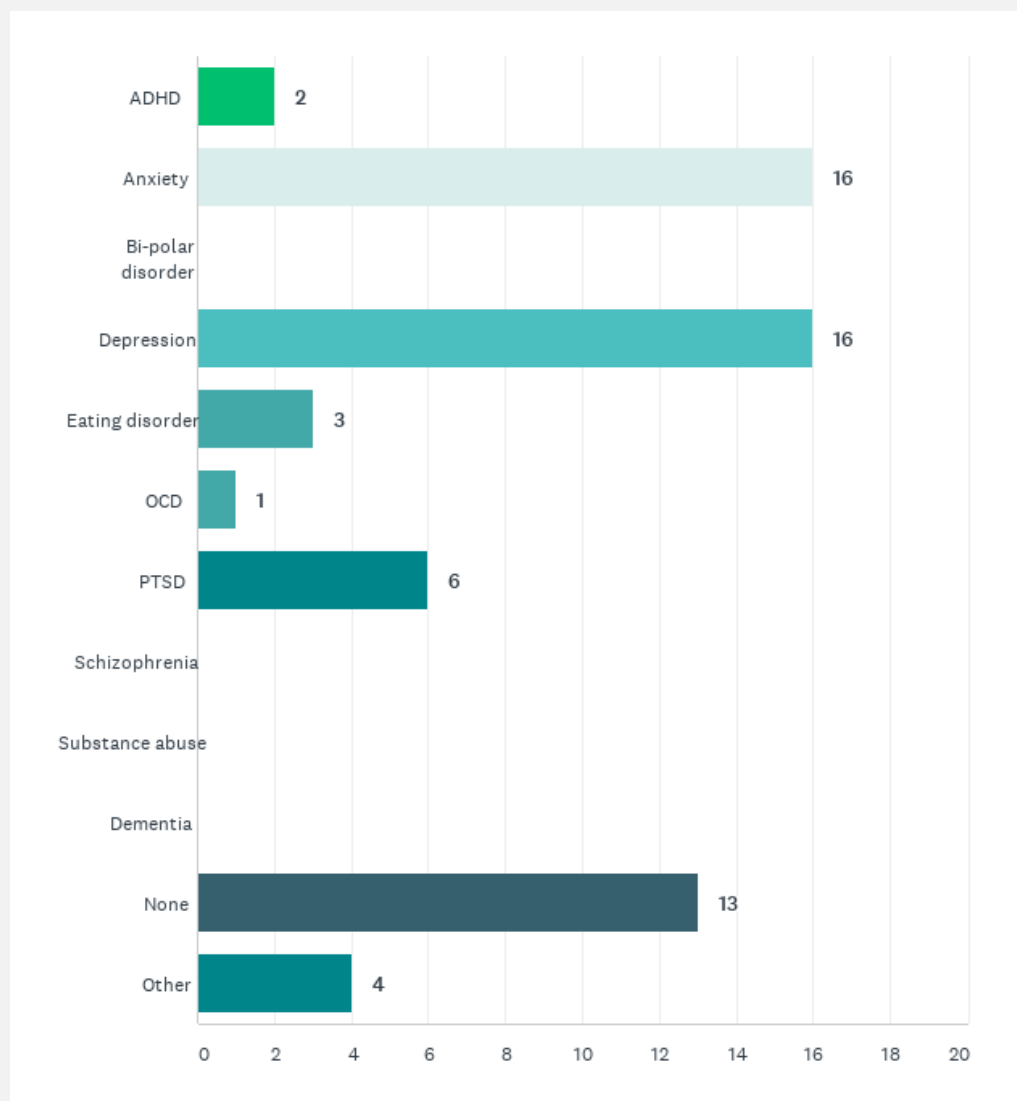


The impact of the pandemic on mental health

When asked how they would rate their mental health prior to the pandemic the average score for all respondents to this survey was 78 (good to very good). For the LGBTQ community it was 60 (18 points lower) with three people giving their score as less than 20.

These ratings were on a scale of very poor (0) to very good (100).

Have you been diagnosed with, or do you feel you suffer from any of the following:



“Using Minds Matter for weekly counselling sessions. Increased depression medication.”

“Cannot manage to get appointment with GP.”

“I had been feeling particularly well prior to lockdown and over the years I have fine-tuned the art of noticing when my mental health is declining and I have put into place lots of coping mechanisms. I have definitely needed these more during lockdown and I have noticed that my mental health has been declining much more rapidly.”

“Just get through one day at a time as best I can and self-harming when unable to cope with thoughts.”

65% of respondents from the LGBTQ community told us that they suffered with mental health issues, this is in comparison with 32% across all respondents.

When we asked LGBTQ respondents what impact they felt the pandemic has had on their mental health with 0 being no impact and 100 being a huge impact, the average score was 54. In comparison, the average score across all respondents was 37.

57% of respondents said they were unable to access support for their mental health.

For those who had managed to access support, the majority (53%) relied on friends and family, 25% used self-support and 8% accessed online counselling.



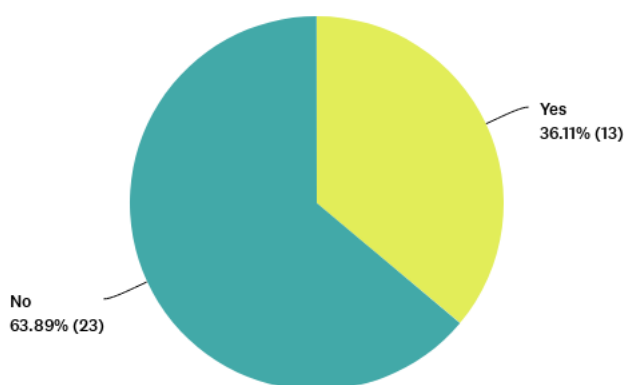
The financial impact of the pandemic

73% said that they have not been affected financially.

Of those who had been affected, the main impact was caused by either being furloughed themselves or someone in the family being furloughed.

“We are actually in a much better financial position due to not having to commute, not being able to go on days out etc. but this has brought with it an immense feeling of guilt that I have benefitted in this way when so many others are struggling.”

Q18 Have you made any financial changes?



“I’m spending less on travel, but probably tempted to spend more on frivolities online to make myself feel better.”



The impact of the pandemic on pre-existing medical conditions

68% of LGBTQ respondents told us that they suffer from a pre-existing medical condition (unrelated to Coronavirus). In comparison, 50% of the ‘general population’ of respondents to this survey told us they had a pre-existing medical condition.

- 7 people had their medical appointments cancelled, 3 had their appointments rearranged.
- 5 were unable to get medical tests done.
- 2 were unable to access treatment.
- 3 people found it difficult/were unable to get the medication they needed.

“GP referred me to specialist 4 weeks ago due to suspected brain tumour, specialist made contact and stated I would be at least 8 weeks before they would bring me in for MRI scan.”

“Gender re assignment surgery cancelled until further notice.”

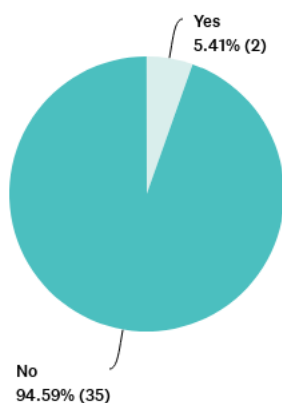


An increase in 'hidden crime' and domestic violence

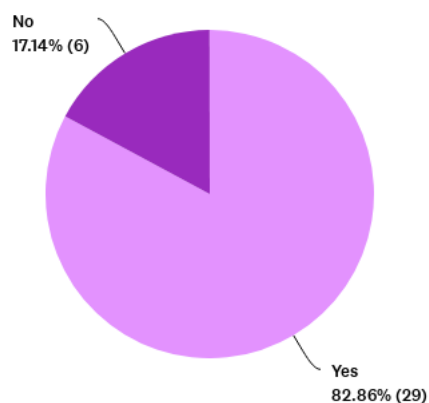
According to the report 'Hidden Figures'¹, there is:

“Little mainstream recognition of domestic abuse that occurs outside of opposite sex relationships.”

Q33 We are aware that there has been an increase of 'hidden crime' in households due to the pandemic. Do you feel that your safety has been compromised due to having to stay at home?



Q34 Do you know how to get help?



Both respondents who felt they were at risk of abuse also said that they did not know how to get help. Neither left any contact details to enable us to get in touch with them.

HWT did provide links to agencies and support services who can help those who are suffering from or are in danger of abuse. A new link has now been added to this list which will take people directly to the Stonewall website page for help and support specifically for LGBTQ people.



People's experience - in their own words

"I have really struggled with being so isolated during lockdown. We live away from family and don't have many friends (like many LGBT people) and this has had a significant impact on us. We are also now worried that when lockdown starts to be lifted, this will be restricted to the local area which means that our families will be able to spend time together without us as we won't be able to travel. I already felt on the 'outside' of my family before this and those feelings have been exacerbated.."

"I love not having to socialise with people - I never usually go out anyway but now I don't have to make excuses.."

"I had an excuse not to visit friends or family I would rather not see"

"Priorities. Sense of family and home. Letting go of socially accepted norms of society. Material things do not matter, family and friends are what matters. Health conscious - lifestyle changes to continue post pandemic Sense of belonging, strengthened me and my wife's relationship. Outside pressures felt different and able to concentrate on what matters to us. Social media is so negative, it's a way of bringing anxiety and worry straight into your home. Try to limit and be sensible with its use."



Summary

Demographics

The response to this survey from people who identify as LGBTQ were 70% from Lancashire and 30% from Cumbria.

Nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ were in work, either full or part time or self-employed. They were almost all of white British origin (with two exceptions).

Mental Health

On average, respondents rated their mental health prior to the pandemic as 60, which is 18 points lower than the general population of respondents. This was on a range from 0 (very poor) to 100 (very good). Meaning LGBTQ people who responded to our survey rated their mental health as worse than non-LGBTQ people.

24 people told us that they feel they suffer from a mental health condition, predominantly anxiety and depression (this is equivalent to 65% of LGBTQ respondents.) Similar results were found in the research project conducted by Lancashire LGBT, who found that 72% of the people they spoke to were concerned about their mental health⁶.

In comparison, only 32% of all respondents to the survey told us they suffer from a mental health condition. Evidence from other research has demonstrated that LGBTQ people have a higher risk of mental health issues due to discrimination and abuse⁵. This survey provides further evidence that more people within this community suffer from mental health issues, when compared to the general population of respondents. Although this survey is not able to provide evidence about why this is.

On average, LGBTQ people also felt that their mental health has been adversely affected by the pandemic to a much greater degree, with an average score of 54 (compared to a general population of respondents average of 37). These ratings were given on a scale of 0 (no impact) to 100 (huge impact).

Over half said they were unable to access support for their mental health.

Financial impact

73% said that they have not been affected financially as a result of the pandemic.

Pre-existing medical conditions

68% of LGBTQ respondents said that they have a pre-existing medical condition (compared to 50% generally).

Violence & abuse

There is concern over people who have reported they are at risk of violence, but are not able to get the help that they need. Two LGBTQ people told us that they feel they are at risk of violence within the home, they also told us that they did not know how to get help. Links to support agencies were included within the survey, this has been updated and now includes a link to Stonewall. Neither of the two people mentioned left their email address or other contact details, so we are unable to contact them and signpost them to places that can offer support. HW Cumbria and HW Lancashire have published a series of Q&A on social media, answering questions and providing support for issues raised through the surveys. Following on from this we will do a specific Q&A to signpost LGBTQ support for domestic violence and abuse.



Conclusion

These experiences are an historical record of what life was like for people living in Cumbria and Lancashire during these unprecedented times.

HWT would like to say thank you to all those people who took the time to complete our survey, to share their stories with us and to contribute to this valuable piece of social research.

As a Healthwatch it is important not just that we gather this data and record people's experiences and stories, but also that we do something with them. As one respondent pointed out, there *"...seems to be a lot of questionnaires about people's experiences and thoughts during these pandemics but no actions from it."*

We are working in together with the University of Cumbria to gather as much information as we can about people's lived experience during this time. As well as HWT producing a series of reports, we also share our findings with representatives from the local CCGs, County Councils and other relevant agencies and service providers. They are then able to use this feedback as we all move into the next stage of the pandemic and begin the easing of lockdown restrictions.

Specifically for the LGBTQ community it is possible to see from the findings of this survey, that they have experienced a greater impact on their mental health (on average) from the coronavirus pandemic and were also more likely (on average) to suffer poor mental health prior to the pandemic. Financially, the LGBTQ people we engaged with were slightly less likely to feel a financial impact.

It has been difficult for many people within the UK to access the social support that they usually rely on, during this lockdown period. For LGBTQ people who rely on "LGBT communities and spaces for vital support and understanding"¹ this can be particularly difficult, especially if they are trapped in a house with people who do not understand or support them.

There is help available. If you or anyone you know needs help, support or advice, there are a list of national agencies and services available on the [Barnados website](#) . Local organisations offering support include (web addresses provided on p13):

[Cumbria Pride](#)

[Lancashire LGBT](#)

[LGBTHQ Cumbria](#)

[Outreach Cumbria](#)



References

¹<https://lgbt.foundation/coronavirus/impact>

²<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/2020/04/03/implications-of-covid-19-for-lgbtq-youth-mental-health-and-suicide-prevention/>

³https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/COVID19%20_Impact%20LGBTI%20people.pdf

⁴<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/blog/how-coronavirus-has-affected-lgbt-community>

⁵<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-lgbt-people>

⁶<https://lancslgbt.org.uk/lancashire-lgbt-covid-19-lockdown-survey-report/>

Barnados list of agencies: www.barnardos.org.uk/blog/how-coronavirus-has-affected-lgbt-community

Cumbria Pride: <https://www.cumbriapride.org/>

Lancashire LGBT: <https://lancslgbt.org.uk/>

LGBTHQ Cumbria: <https://www.lgbthq.org.uk/>

Outreach Cumbria: <http://www.outreachcumbria.org.uk/>



Healthwatch Cumbria

People First Conference Centre,
Milbourne Street, Carlisle
CA2 5XB

Telephone: [0300 303 8567](tel:03003038567)

Email: info@healthwatchcumbria.co.uk