

Mental health and wellbeing update as at 31.10.20

Our COVID survey has been running since early May 2020. We produced an interim snapshot report based on data downloaded on 24.7.20. This report is an update on that report, with data downloaded on 31.10.20.

We have comments from people who have received previously, or are waiting for an assessment for, a diagnosis of a mental health condition. We also consider how the pandemic has affected the general mental health and wellbeing of people.

This report will follow the same structure as the first report, to make comparison easier. The graphs will include all data up to 31.10.20. The remainder of the report is looking at the free write answers in the survey and will only include data from the surveys completed between 24.7.20 to 31.10.20.

The first report can be read at

https://www.healthwatchtameside.co.uk/sites/default/files/mental_health_and_wellbeing_as_at_24.7.20.pdf

The survey is still open, and additional comments received may alter the overall picture. This will be noted in our final report after the survey closes.

Since the survey opened, we have twice updated the wording of the questions slightly, to allow for changes to the COVID rules and guidance. This is to allow people to comment on these changes. These included:

- Changes to lockdown and restrictions
- Shielding ended
- Social groups and activities closed then some opened again (and are now closing again)
- Bubbles introduced
- Test and Trace started
- NHS COVID app launched

If people completed the survey some time ago, they may now have different opinions, or additional comments they want to tell us. We are happy for people to complete the survey again.

The link for the online survey is www.healthwatchtameside.co.uk/covid-19-survey.

There is also a post pinned to the top of our Facebook page which can be shared www.facebook.com/HealthwatchTameside/

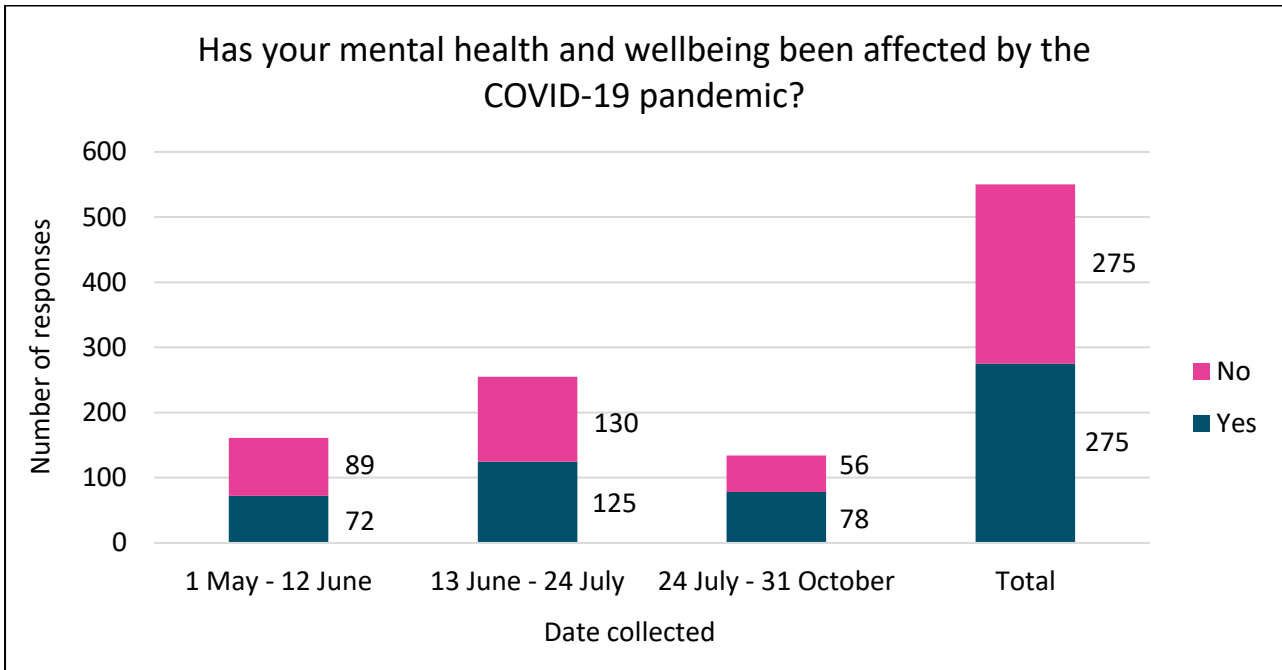
People can give us a call on **0161 667 2526** to request a paper copy and FREEPOST envelope, or we can call people back to fill in the survey over the phone with them.

Question 3

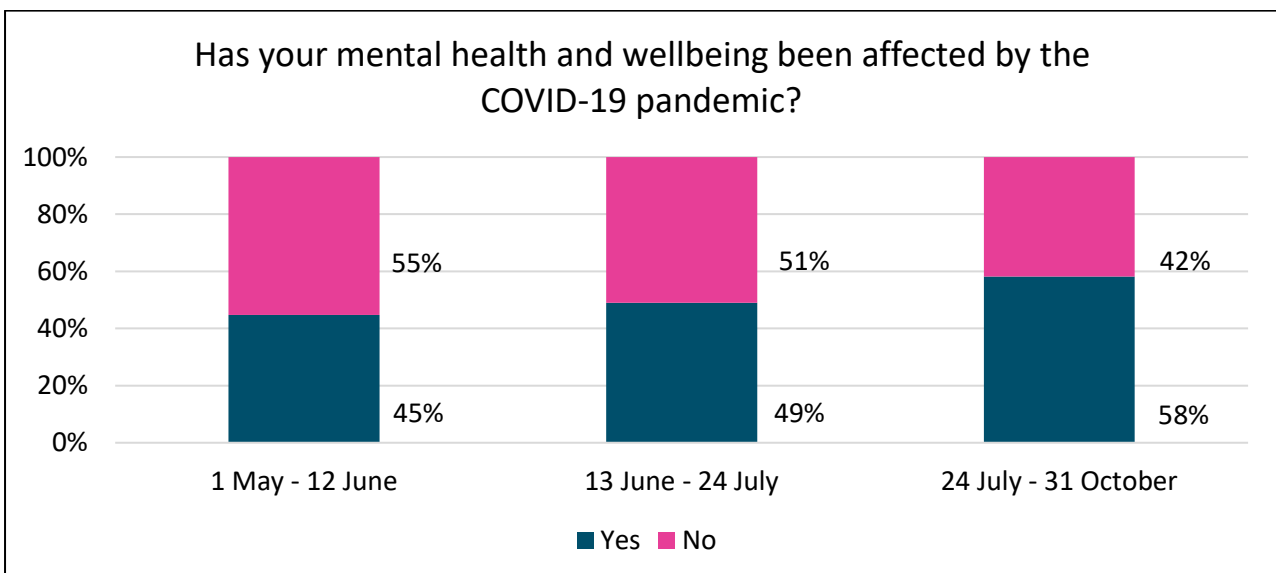
Has your mental health and wellbeing been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?

This question was answered by 550 people, of which 50% said they felt their mental health and wellbeing had been affected by the pandemic.

This graph shows how people answered the question at different times. We have used the same time periods as in the previous report and added the more recent data.



Different numbers of people completed the survey in each time period, so it is hard to see the trend in the responses. The next graph shows what percentage of people in each of these data collection periods answered 'Yes' and 'No'.



We can now see that the longer the pandemic has been affecting our lives, the higher the percentage of people saying their mental health and wellbeing is being affected. In the first 6 weeks of the survey, 45% of people answered 'Yes', but in the last 3 months, this has increased to 58%.

In the first report, there were several people who answered 'No' to this question, but went on to describe their feelings of loneliness, anxiety, low mood and/or depression, due to the pandemic. This has not happened in the survey responses in the last 3 months. The free write box has been left blank by most people who answered 'No'.

Most of the people who answered 'No' did say that they missed going out, seeing their families, and attending their social activities in another question.

The second part of the question was '**Please tell us more about this. Did you know where to get help? Was help available?**' 78 people included a comment in the free-write box during the last 3 months, although most did not answer the second part about getting help. In the first report, 204 people included a comment. Brackets after the bullet points below show the number of people in the first report who made the same comment.

Of those that did answer this second part in the last 3 months:

- 12 people knew where to get help if they needed it. (7 people)
- 2 people said they did not know what help was available. (10 people)
- 3 people said they did not think any help was available. (4 people)
- 3 people said they did not look for help outside of their family.
- 1 person said Mind in Ashton provided an excellent service.
- 1 person said they knew they could look online, but not how to actually talk to someone.
- 1 person knew they could get in touch with the GP but said you can't get to see one at the moment.
- Some people said they did not need to ask for help but did not say whether they knew what was available.

The remainder of the report will group the comments from the free-write answers to this question into themes, along with any from our other survey questions, which refer to mental health and wellbeing.

All the comments in this report are taken from surveys completed between 24.7.20 and 31.10.20.

Diagnosed mental health condition

12 people said they had a diagnosed mental health condition, either in answer to this question, or in other parts of the survey. Not everyone said what their diagnosis was. The types of diagnosis mentioned are:

- Anxiety
- Anxiety and depression
- Bereavement
- Depression
- Panic attacks

Comments about accessing mental health care include:

- Accessed care before the pandemic:
 - Back on anti-depressants.
 - I am aware I can re-refer for counselling if needed. Am using meditation recommended in counselling last year.
 - Online groups and support are not the same as face-to-face. I do lots of things on my own, I don't want to do more, that won't help me.
 - Pre-COVID had therapy. Started going out. Then lockdown started and have gone backwards.
- Healthy Minds waiting list:
 - On the list for over a year, wait now extended. Have been put on list for video therapy.
 - Person assessed in June and told no help available for at least 6 months (severe anxiety and clinical depression). Trauma of parent dying, but wasn't allowed to visit, or go to the funeral, due to shielding.
 - The long waiting list is now even longer.
- Phone calls:
 - 1 to 1 calls helpful, but not as good as face-to-face and groups.
 - Can't do phone so had to Skype therapy. Hard not having face-to-face.
 - Care co-ordinator phoned - not great.
 - Contact with Healthy Minds helped.
 - Daughter had a phone consultation. Has anxiety. Couldn't cope and put the phone down.
 - No help available except by phone.
- Unhappy with advice offered:
 - Support offered did not take into account circumstances. Told to get out and walk, but it was being out early in lockdown that was causing the increase in anxiety.
 - Double bereavement within a week due to COVID - GP said to give it time. Healthy Minds said death is a part of life and to move on as 'grief counselling is not a real thing'. No further advice about where to get help. Had to deal with house and look after family.

Some of the following comments are from people who have not stated whether they have received a diagnosis or not.

Comments from people who have not accessed mental health services include:

- Am not doing anything - mental health is worse.
- Anxiety triggered unhelpful coping strategies. Lost confidence. Trying to manage myself. Feel face-to-face support not available.
- Carer for family members with mental health issues. Appropriate support never available before COVID so coping is always a problem. Pandemic has made it harder to care for them.
- No help for people with healthcare related anxiety/phobias. Vicious circle.
- Not accessed help outside the family (3 people).
- Phone contact not appropriate, if it's available.

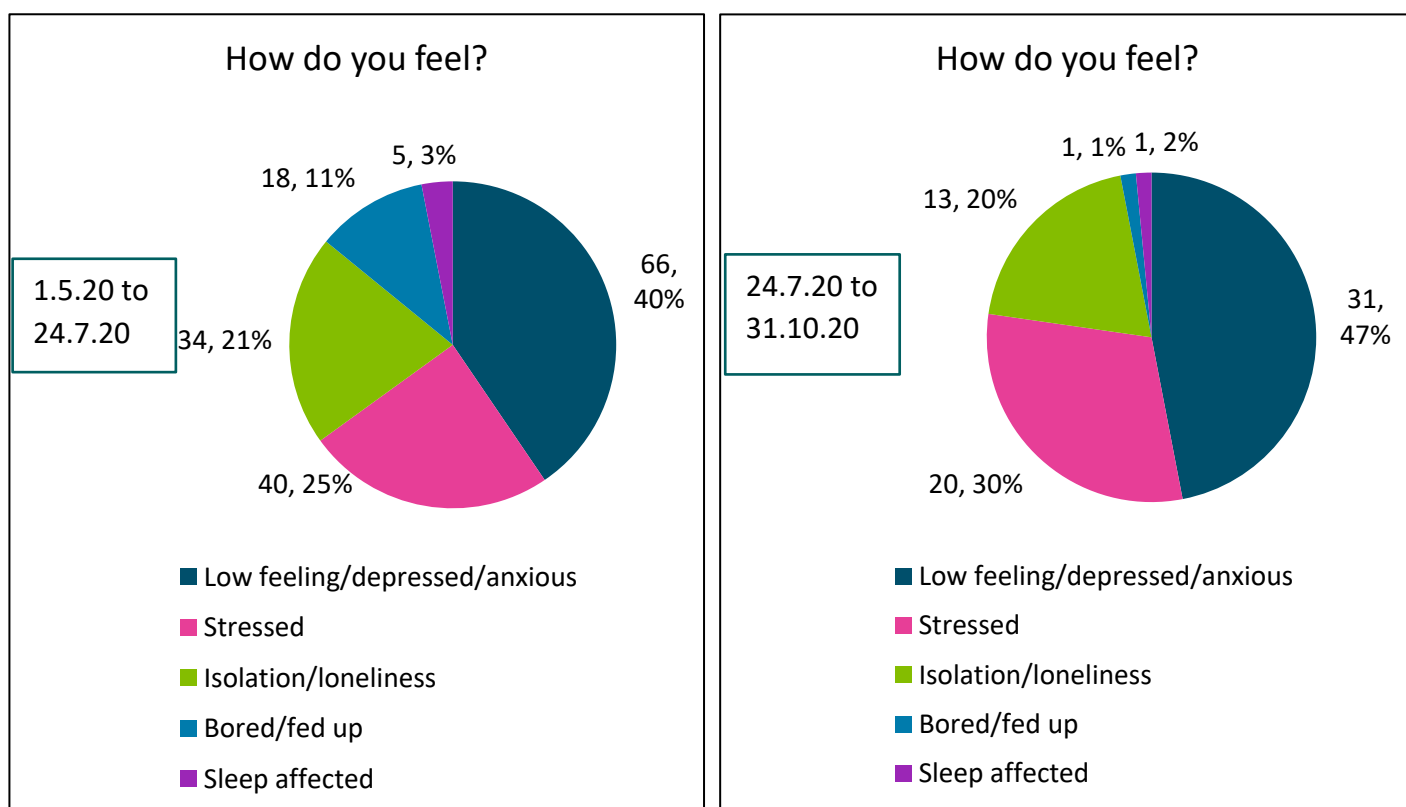
- Pregnant. Had postnatal depression previously. Told midwife this at booking appointment. Feel let down - seeing different midwives at each appointment. No information about care/planning. Husband not able to attend. Feel completely alone.

Some people feel the services available could be improved, or changed:

- Feel strongly current service not fit for purpose, even before pandemic. Worried many more people will suffer with their mental health and the service will not be able to help unless it is adapted.
- Massively overstretched and underfunded at the best of times.
- Need to look at alternative complementary therapies instead of prescriptive medical options.
- So much uncertainty. Needs to be opportunities for people to talk about pandemic experience openly and honestly. Community groups could offer mental health support in recovery and prevention. Value of connection, communication, and creativity in the community on mental health - needs to be recognised more and resourced.
- Worked in mental health for most of working life. Resources not now there. People are told to ring the Samaritans.

Undiagnosed mental health conditions and general wellbeing

Within the questions with free-write answers, people have commented on how the pandemic is making them feel. The comments are mostly negative. The following graphs show how the responses have changed over time:



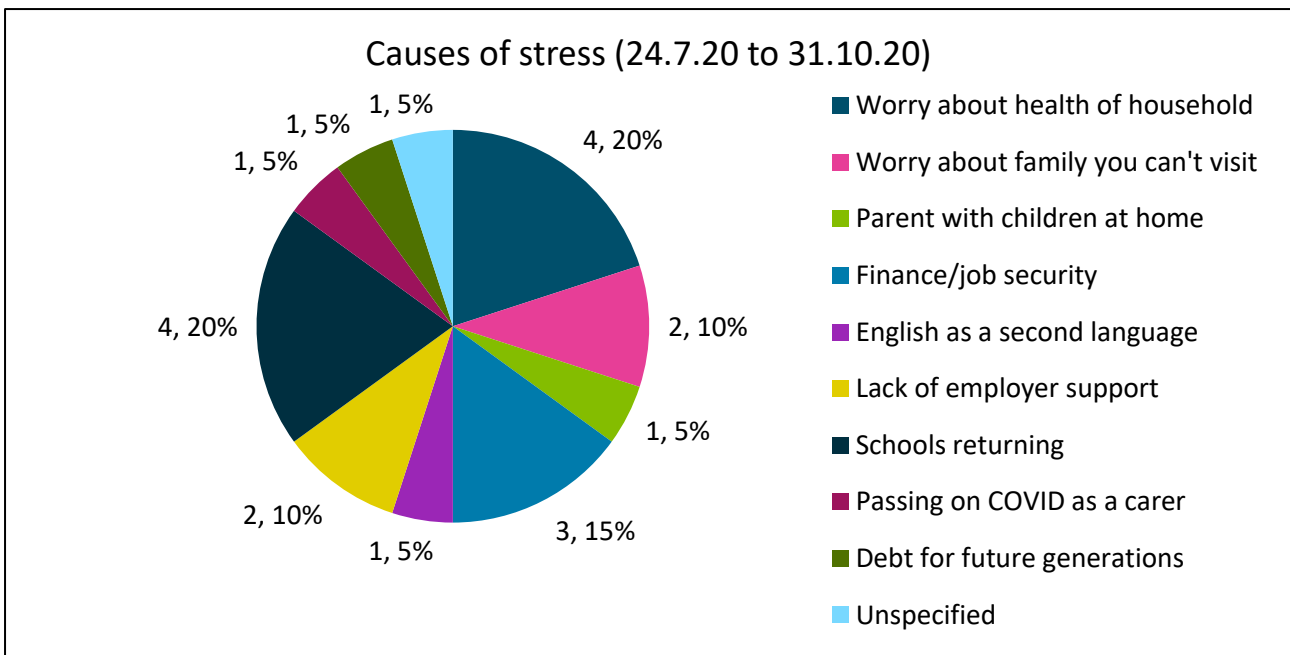
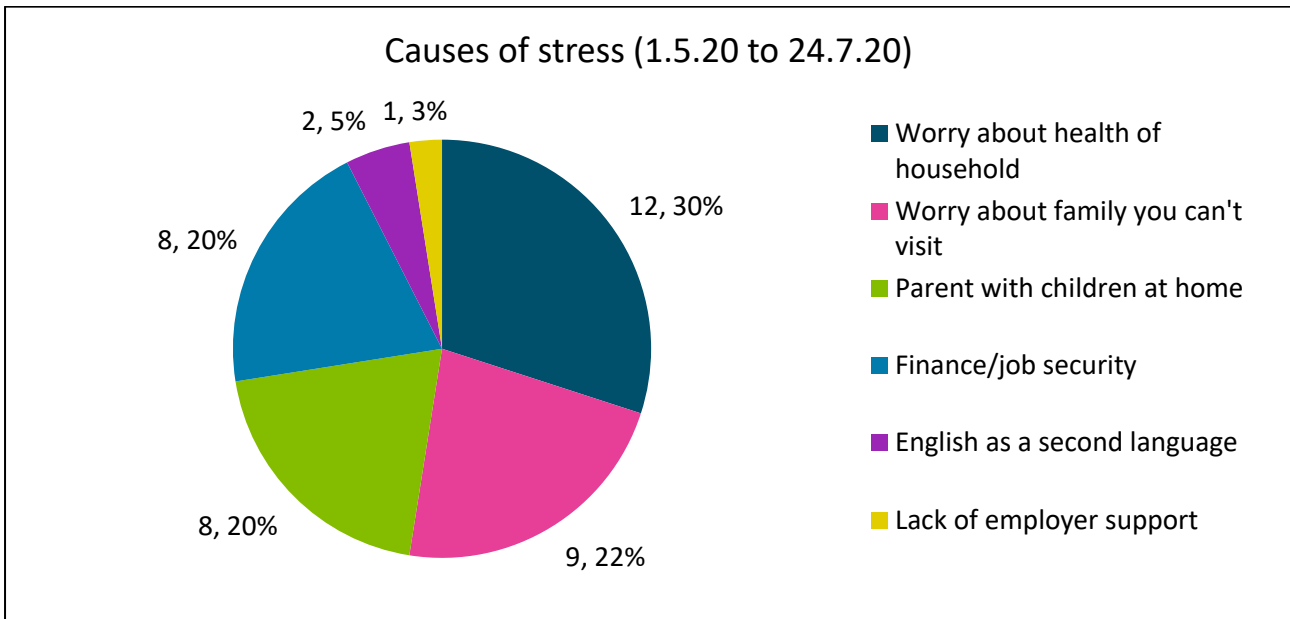
'Low feeling/depressed/anxious' includes low mood, feeling like a prisoner, being tearful and anger.

A higher proportion of people say they are feeling low, depressed, anxious, or stressed in the last 3 months, than in the earlier months.

The proportion of people feeling isolated or lonely is similar in both graphs.

Only 1% of people say they are bored or fed up in the surveys completed in the last 3 months. This could be because lockdown was lifted, shielding ended, and people were less restricted in what they could do.

'Stress' can be broken down further into reasons behind the stress:

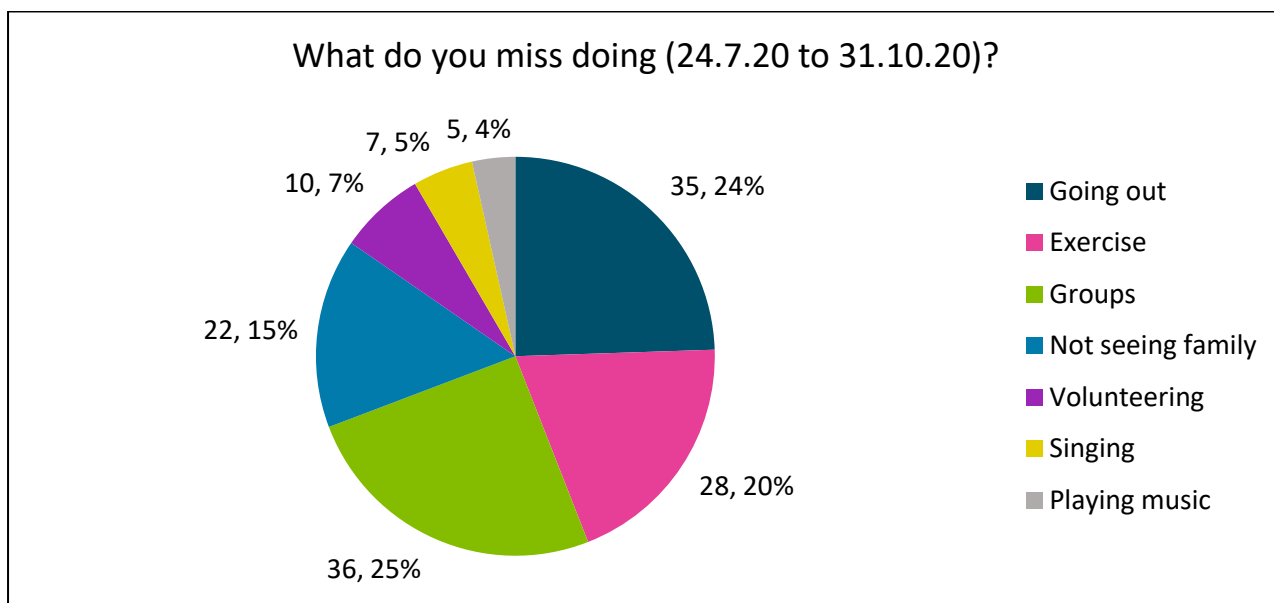
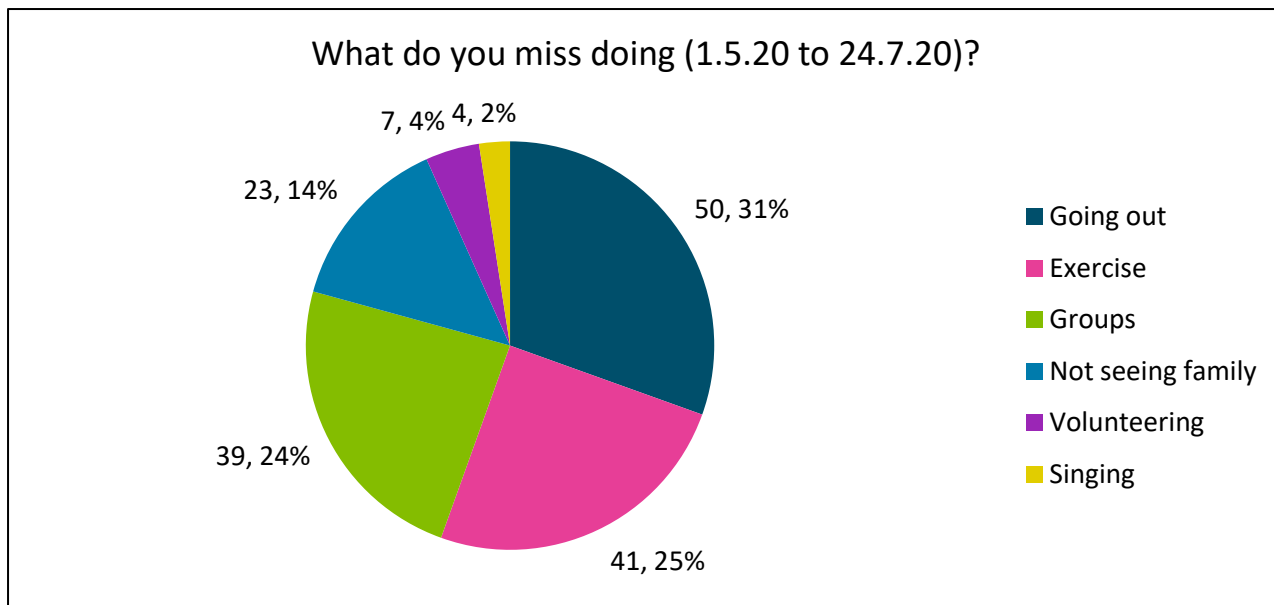


The reasons for stress are more varied in the last 3 months, compared to earlier in the year.

Social activities

Question 4 asks ‘Face-to-face social groups and community activities were cancelled. Has this affected you?’

We have looked at the answers people gave to this question. Here are the types of activity in broad themes.



‘Going out’ includes shopping, meeting friends, university events, days out, going to the pub, eating out, going to the library, going to the garden centre, cinema, theatre, concerts, meeting up for computer gaming, and quizzes.

‘Exercise’ includes swimming, running, dancing, keep fit, going to the gym, long walks, golf, yoga, snooker, bowling, crown green bowling, curling, Zumba, Pilates, karate, and football. Some of these exercises were done in groups with friends (not included in the ‘groups’ theme) which added to the social aspect.

‘Groups’ include antenatal and postnatal peer support, community mental health peer support, carer support, church services and church-organised social activities (includes all

faiths), community centre groups, book clubs, luncheon clubs, PPG at GP surgery, health support groups, slimming groups, classes for hobbies and/or learning new skills, uniformed organisations for children, baby and toddler groups, and various social groups.

In the second graph there are some changes to the proportion of people missing different activities. People missing 'Going out' and 'Exercise' has reduced, as restrictions have eased, and places opened up again.

The proportion of people missing 'Groups' is about the same. However, more people are missing 'Volunteering' and taking part in musical activities.

5 people told us how family members who are taken regularly to groups for support had been affected. These included a Seniors Club, a day centre, The Shed at The Together Centre, and various unspecified support and social groups. The family member missed attending the groups, and the respite for the family disappeared.

Ways to improve mental health

We looked at what people said they were doing during the pandemic, to help themselves keep busy, and improve their mental health. The types of activities include:

- Activities online via Zoom including:
 - Choir
 - Church
 - Pub quiz
 - Unspecified groups
 - Virtual pub meeting for group of friends
 - Wine-tasting
 - Yoga
- Contact by phone or WhatsApp
- Crafts using online websites
- Gardening
- Shopping
- Sitting outside pub
- Walking or other exercise outdoors
- Wild swimming

People said that online groups were okay for now, but they are not the same as getting together face-to-face with other people.

Online support

Question 6 asks 'Since the beginning of the pandemic, have you done any of the following? (please tick all that apply.)' One of the options is 'Used a website or app for mental health support' and 12 people selected this option in the last 3 months.

We then asked, 'If yes to any of these, please tell us about your experience.' People told us about speaking to a GP, or about one of the other options, but few mentioned their experiences of the mental health website or app. What we were told included:

- Don't find web services easy as they are too impersonal. Wouldn't want to ring a helpline.
- Helpline was useful but the information and support was not acted on by Pennine Care.
- Tried the helplines but they refer you back to web pages.

Re-opening of groups

This question was not included in the survey when the first report was written. We asked **'Do you have any concerns about groups and activities opening again? If you have attended any groups/activities that have re-opened how was it?'** Most groups have not yet opened. Many people have concerns about attending anything yet. Here are some of the comments:

Groups that have opened:

- Attend church with social distancing.
- Choir now meet in COVID-secure setting - very different.
- Meeting fellow musicians - still very cautious.
- Restricted to 6 people. Not the same interaction.

Groups that have not opened:

- Closed since March - no prospect of opening.
- Feel Be Well exercise classes will not resume which would be very sad.
- Group for vulnerable people unlikely to be open for a very long time.
- Group mothballed until February. Worried people won't come back, and the group won't survive.
- Hope baby groups open soon.
- Not certain when luncheon club will get going. The diners are looking forward to it. For some it is the only time they go out in a week.
- Tried to keep the group going online, but others didn't have the tech or didn't want more Zoom activities.

Concerns:

- Do not feel it is time to restart face-to-face activities. Will continue being cautious (3 people).
- Have concerns about returning to gym so have taken up outdoor exercise.
- Have less concern about Brownies opening, compared to pubs.
- Mental health relies on community e.g. clubs, events, gatherings. Need to be supported and re-introduced when able.
- Pubs have opened but my group of friends don't feel safe meeting in person yet.
- Worried about returning due to caring responsibilities
- Worried that groups for toddlers won't start back up if organisers haven't received any income through the pandemic.

General comments

These comments are from the answers to the questions about mental health and wellbeing and also the more general questions.

Mental health and wellbeing:

- Emotional impact on grandchildren noticeable.
- Shielding and isolation:
 - Anxiety/depression worsened during isolation.
 - Being isolated at the beginning was hard. A lot easier now I can form a bubble with my family.
 - Had to isolate until July, dreaming of freedom in August, then local lockdown came.
 - Have dementia diagnosis and completely isolated. I won't have anyone in my home. My daughter is my main carer but she doesn't live with me and is shielding.
 - Living alone and shielding was very hard.
- Things affecting mental health and wellbeing:
 - Children are affected by my own stress levels.
 - Financial worries.
 - Lack of going outside caused increased pain from arthritis. Affected ability to stand so cooking less enjoyable meals. No longer want to go out at all.
 - Media predictions make anxiety worse.
- Times when wellbeing has been affected:
 - Feel anxious again now numbers are increasing, in case return to full lockdown. Don't know how I'll cope with stricter measures.
 - Hard in the beginning until could go for a walk and go shopping at separate times. Fine after that.
 - Nothing major. When things started to ease but still couldn't do the things I enjoy, that's when impacted negatively.
 - OK while the sun is shining. Not looking forward to winter (2 people).
 - Only been affected since September/October. OK until then. Try and occupy mind with positives.
 - Really difficult looking after a toddler and a baby without support, especially when partner at work. A little easier when could go out more than once a day or could meet people outside.
 - Too cold for family to stand on pavement now and chat while we are in the garden.
 - When it started and they were saying a lot of people were dying, sat at home on my own. Started thinking about my past life, and things preyed on my mind (2 people).
- Ways to improve wellbeing:
 - Getting outside most days really helps.
 - Have managed mental health by having a media and social media blackout.
 - Have seen friends while out walking and shopping.
 - Social interaction vital for my wellbeing (2 people).

Concerns:

- As a carer and a healthcare professional, am worried about passing on COVID.
- Coped with lockdown. Recently worried about schools opening and the lack of social distancing.
- Hope schools are understanding of children with mental health issues and know the signs to look out for.
- Keep walks short. Afraid to venture further.
- Lost weight - worried about contamination on food wrappings or on food that can't be heated.
- Shopping is a nightmare. I only go to a few shops.
- Toddler's behaviour and wellbeing a concern during lockdown. Didn't understand why couldn't see grandparents, or go to activities and groups, or go to nursery.

Social activities:

- Dancing at home not the same as interacting with others.
- Doing meetings all day for work. Too mentally exhausted to do online activities for me.
- Enjoy online classes, groups, and church services but not the same as being there in person (7 people).
- Miss singing in a group - massive benefits to wellbeing. Very annoyed you can go to a pub and socialise but singing and music making mostly disregarded.
- Miss social interaction of volunteering (2 people).
- Not easy for everyone to access free online alternatives to exercise and other groups.
- Please start small groups again. These are my lifeline.
- Would like to be updated about mental health social groups opening up again.

General:

- Excellent support from employer.
- Have been to 2 funerals since March. One an undiagnosed mental health condition leading to suicide. The other a close family friend - possibly avoidable with more support from the GP during shielding.
- Stuck to first lockdown rules due to health.
- Unhappy with the way Pennine Care treat front-line staff regarding isolation, etc. compared to people working from home.
- Within my job, instead of seeing people face-to-face, I feel like I work in a call centre, a role I would never apply for.