

healthwatch

South Tyneside

Adult Mental Health and Mental Health Services in South Tyneside

July 2021



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Research objective

Healthwatch South Tyneside, in our role as the independent local champion for people who use health and social care services, commissioned MMC Research & Marketing to survey residents of South Tyneside. The aim was to develop an understanding of how, if at all, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on the mental health of adults in the area, and whether the experience of service users has been affected as a result of changes ensuring adherence to Government guidelines.

This report details the findings of this research project and the insights gathered will be used to feedback to local service providers, ensuring that the needs of the local community are listened to and addressed by those who are running mental health services in South Tyneside.

Methodology

In order to gather a clear picture of the pandemic's impact on the mental health of adults in South Tyneside and the services provided in the area, a quantitative methodology was chosen to capture the views and perceptions of a wider audience than a qualitative methodology would allow.

A 10-minute online survey was designed by MMC Research & Marketing, and Healthwatch South Tyneside liaised with the Research Team at Healthwatch England regarding the question set. The survey was disseminated via Facebook (organically and through paid sponsorship). Partners of Healthwatch South Tyneside such as the CCG, South Tyneside Clinical Commissioning team and Inspire South Tyneside were also encouraged to share the survey to broaden the reach. Communications promoting the survey offered respondents the opportunity to call a member of our team here at Healthwatch South Tyneside so they could complete the survey over the telephone, ensuring residents with lower confidence levels when it comes to technology could still take part.

The survey was conducted between Tuesday 4th May and Wednesday 23rd June 2021. A total of 196 South Tyneside adult residents took part.

Executive summary



46% of respondents explained that they would not consider themselves to be someone who struggles with their mental health. 26% had a formal diagnosis for a mental health problem (primarily Anxiety and/or Depression), and 28% disclosed that they sometimes struggle with their mental health.



58% of respondents rated their mental health and wellbeing as good (net score) in the 6 months prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and at the present time, 42% of respondents explained that they felt it was worse than before, but a similar percentage rated their mental health and wellbeing as about the same as before the COVID-19 pandemic began.



Since the start of the pandemic, 49% of respondents said they had had trouble sleeping, with 55% explaining that they had sought solace in food, either by comfort eating or restricting the amount they ate. A quarter of respondents admitted to drinking more alcohol.

In the last 6 months, over half of respondents said spending time with friends and family or exercise had supported their mental health and wellbeing.



71% of those who either struggle with their mental health or have been diagnosed with a mental health problem said they have used professional services such as a G.P. or counsellor to talk about their mental health and wellbeing in the past.

Amongst those who hadn't done this, barriers to seeking help were waiting list timings (29% of respondents said this) and discomfort at the thought of discussing topics of this nature with a professional (29%). 45% of respondents did, however, indicate that they didn't perceive themselves to require this level of support and had not sought it as a result.

Where respondents disclosed that they had sought professional help in the past, they were asked if they had been supported by specific mental health services in the last 2 years. 41% said they had reached out to their G.P., with a further 33% having been supported by Lifecycle Service.



Overall, 39% of respondents who had accessed G.P. services to support their mental health and wellbeing rated their experience as excellent. Around a quarter of those who had accessed services prior to and during the pandemic felt the changes made to service delivery to adhere to Government guidelines had had a negative impact. 42% of respondents felt a reduction in the waiting times for appointments would improve the service provided. (Please note, these figures have low base sizes)



50% of respondents who had accessed Lifecycle Service rated their experience as excellent. 11% of those who had accessed services prior to and during the pandemic felt changes made as a result had had a negative impact. 63% of respondents felt a reduction in the waiting times for appointments would improve the service provided and 29% felt the length of treatment should be reviewed. (Please note, these figures have low base sizes)

Analysis and reporting

The results have been analysed statistically and the following points should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings:

- Not all percentages will add up to 100% because of decimal point rounding or multiple-choice questions
- Findings based on small numbers (i.e. <5%) should be interpreted with caution
- Where respondents skipped a question, the base size will not equal the total number of surveys completed
- Where 0% is shown, answers were less than 1%

Respondent profile

This section of the report details the demographic breakdown of the 196 individuals who completed the survey.

Before continuing with the questionnaire, respondents were first asked to confirm they lived in South Tyneside by way of a screening question which ended the survey if they lived outside of the area. This was in place to ensure those surveyed were living in the geographical area covered and influenced by Healthwatch South Tyneside.

Gender

As a consequence of a primarily online methodology where sample demographics were allowed to fall out naturally, a higher percentage of females, 84%, participated in the survey, with 16% of males taking part. A 'prefer to self describe' option was provided to participants, but no one selected this. 1 participant declined to share this information by selecting 'prefer not to say'.

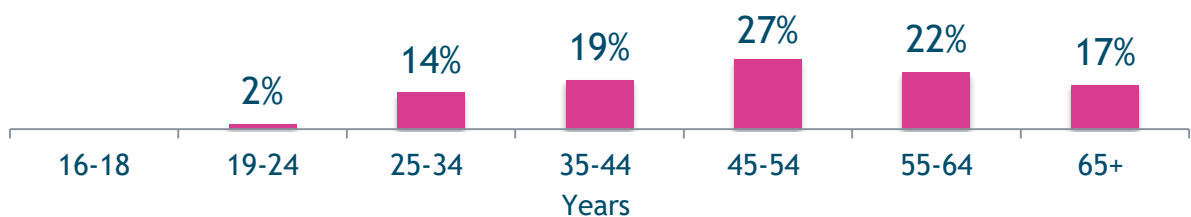


Q21: Please select your gender.

Base size: All respondents (196)

Age

A wide range of respondents were recorded in age groups over 25 years. Just 2% of respondents were aged between 19 and 24 years, equating to 3 people, and although those aged 16-18 years were eligible to take part, no one in this age group elected to do so. Again, respondents were given the opportunity to select 'prefer not to say', but all opted to disclose their age.



Q2: Please select the age band which applies to you.

Base size: All respondents (196)

Ethnicity

94% of those who took part in the survey were White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British. 3% of respondents were Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME).

Ethnic group	
White	
94%	English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British
1%	Irish
-	Gypsy or Irish Traveller
2%	Any other white background
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	
-	White and Black Caribbean
-	White and Black African
1%	White and Asian
1%	Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background
Asian/Asian British	
1%	Indian
-	Pakistani
-	Bangladeshi
1%	Chinese
-	Any other Asian background
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	
-	African
-	Caribbean
-	Any other Black/African/Caribbean background
Other ethnic group	
-	Arab
-	Any other ethnic group
2%	Prefer not to say

Q23: Which of the following best describes your ethnic group or background?

Base size: All respondents (196)

Health problems or disabilities

A total of 35% of respondents said their day-to-day activities were limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months, with 11% saying their activities are limited a lot and 24% saying their activities are limited a little.



Q24. Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?

Base size: All respondents (196)

Caring responsibilities

Around a quarter of respondents were carers and regularly looked after another person. 77% of respondents had no caring responsibilities.



Q25. Are you a carer? By this we mean that you regularly look after someone to help them with their daily life because they're ill, disabled, or can't manage without your support.

Base size: All respondents (196)

Children in the household

Over two-thirds of respondents had no children under the age of 18 living in the household. 27% of household included one or two children.



Q22. How many children under the age of 18 live in your household?

Base size: All respondents (196)

Mental health status and diagnosis

Mental health profile

Just under half of respondents said they would not consider themselves to be someone who struggles with their mental health. 26% had been diagnosed with a mental health problem, and 28%, whilst not having an official diagnosis, disclosed that they sometimes struggle with their mental health.

46%



I **would not consider** myself to be someone who struggles with their mental health

28%



I **sometimes struggle** with my mental health

26%



I have been **diagnosed** with a mental health problem

Q3: Which of the following statement best applies to you?

Base size: All respondents (196)

Mental health problems

Of those who had been diagnosed with a mental health problem (51 respondents), 78% had been diagnosed with Anxiety and 71% had a diagnosis of Depression.

- 78% Anxiety
- 71% Depression
- 24% Suicidal thoughts and feelings
- 14% Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- 12% Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- 8% Eating disorders
- 6% Bipolar disorder
- 4% Self-harm
- 2% Psychosis
 - Schizoaffective disorder
 - Schizophrenia
- 16% Other (responses include: Postnatal Depression, Disassociation, Panic Attacks, Emotionally Unstable Personality disorder (EUPD), Brain Damage and Autism)
 - Prefer not to say

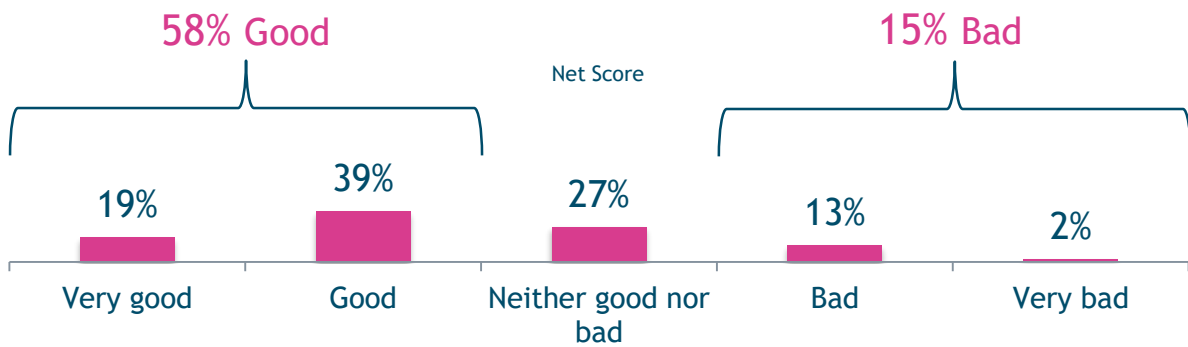
Q4: If you are happy to share this information, please can you tell us if you have experienced any of the following mental health problems?

Base size: Those who have been diagnosed with a mental health problem at Q3 (51)

The COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on mental health

Mental health and wellbeing - prior to the pandemic

In the 6 months prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, over half of respondents rated their mental health and wellbeing as good, with 15% rating it as bad.

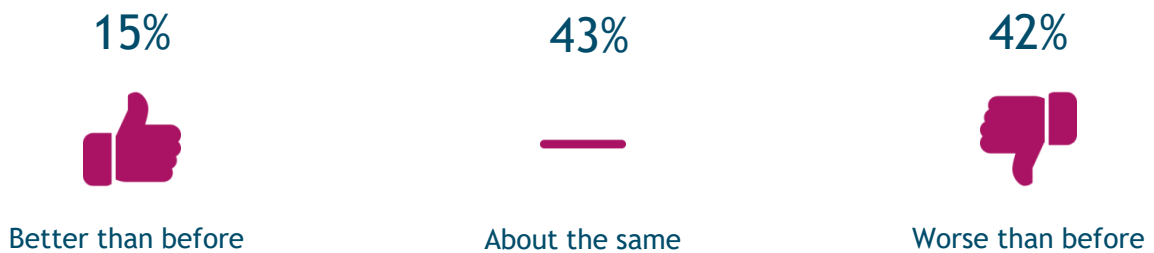


Q5. In the 6 months prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very bad and 5 is very good, how would you have rated your mental health and wellbeing?

Base size: All respondents (196)

Mental health and wellbeing - currently

When asked how their mental health and wellbeing at the present time compared to before the start of the pandemic, 42% of respondents said it was worse than before, with a similar percentage rating it as about the same. Just 15% of respondents said their mental health was better than before the COVID-19 pandemic began.



Q6. At this present time, would you rate your mental health and wellbeing as better than before the start of the pandemic, worse than before or about the same?

Base size: All respondents (196)

Reasoning behind current mental health status

Having rated how they thought their mental health and wellbeing had changed compared to the 6 months prior to the pandemic, respondents were asked to provide context for their answer and a selection of responses are shown below.

Better than before

“COVID brought to a head and ended an unhappy relationship. It’s been a tough year but I’m coming out of it happier than when I went into it.” **Male, 45-54 years**

“I could see friends and family regularly and this was good for my mental health.” **Female, 45-54 years**

“Lockdown put things into perspective, and I had to challenge my thoughts.” **Female, 25-34 years**

About the same

“Have been able to rely on support of family and friends, access to physical activity and secure employment to ensure the pandemic did not have a negative impact. Have also been able to manage my finances effectively.” **Male, 35-44 years**

“Still managed to volunteer and get out which helped me a lot. Also, my children came back from foster care which helped me stay sane.” **Female, 25-34 years**

“I have been very fortunate as I have worked all of the way through the COVID-19 pandemic, having support and company from my work colleagues. There may have been a different outcome if I had had to stay at home throughout.” **Female, 55-64 years**

Worse than before

“Generally feeling unmotivated and of low mood, not being able to go out and see people/do things makes evenings and weekends feel dull and pointless.” **Female, 25-34 years**

“Isolation due to lockdown. Worry about catching, dying from Covid. Anxiety with travelling, shopping and other rules attached to this.” **Male, 55-64 years**

“I have had no support from any medical professional for either my mental health or metastatic cancer. The lack of support and attitude of G.P. practices has forced my mental health into decline... Considering the pandemic has been a medical issue the very services you should be able to rely on have been... aloof at best.” **Female, 45-54 years**

Q7. When compared to the 6 months prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, you said you would rate your mental health and wellbeing as [pull through response from Q6]. Please can you tell us why that is?

Base size: All respondents (196)

Supporting mental health and wellbeing

Coping mechanisms

Since the start of the pandemic, around half of respondents said they had experienced trouble sleeping or had been comfort eating or not eating enough.

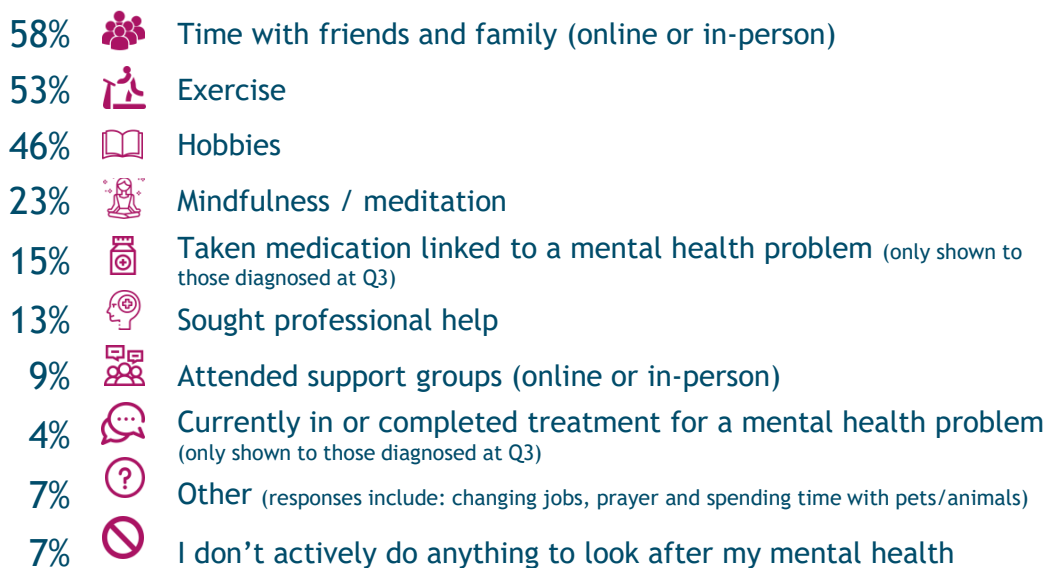


Q10. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, which, if any, of the following have you found yourself engaging with?

Base size: All respondents (196)

Beneficial actions

In the last six months over half of respondents said spending time with friends and family or exercise had supported their mental health and wellbeing.



Q8. In the last 6 months, which, if any, of the following have you used to look after your mental health and wellbeing?

Base size: All respondents (196)

Professional help

Those who had sought professional help in the last 6 months were asked which services they had used. The full list of services is shown below, with GP frequently mentioned and secondary care services referenced but in ways that imply a potential lack of understanding as to who is responsible for providing said service.

Professional service	Gender	Age
Via G.P.	Female	19-24 years
A counselling practice got in touch with my workplace offering 6 weeks of free talking therapies support so took them up on that.	Female	25-34 years
Flagg Court Health Centre and Bensham Hospital	Female	25-34 years
I had Counselling from South Tyneside services by Helen Graham - 10 out of 10	Female	25-34 years
In the house	Male	25-34 years
Lifecycle, STARs (South Tyneside Adult Recovery Service), Friends / Family	Female	25-34 years
My G.P., I was advised to take a sick note. Work gave me numbers for the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) service for professionals but despite referral twice I was never contacted.	Female	25-34 years
Talking Therapies	Female	25-34 years
Via the NHS Mental Health team	Female	25-34 years
With my CPN nurse at the mental health care team and the CRISIS team.	Male	25-34 years
G.P.	Male	35-44 years
Grace House	Female	35-44 years
Lifecycle	Female	35-44 years
Through my G.P.	Female	35-44 years
Been to my G.P.	Female	45-54 years
Doctors	Female	45-54 years
I rang my consultant at SRH regarding a blood test as my thyroid can cause anxiety if bloods are not controlled properly. Blood result was within range. I rang my G.P. and G.P. started me on hormone replacement treatment. My anxiety and depression are now controlled.	Female	45-54 years
Workplace counselling	Male	45-54 years
Doctor	Female	55-64 years
G.P. and colleagues	Female	55-64 years
I started binge eating so when I went for my diabetes check I told the nurse how I felt, and she referred me for counselling	Female	55-64 years
My doctors	Female	55-64 years
Professional counselling services, G.P. practice, ADHD assessment team.	Male	55-64 years
CNTW Trust	Female	65+ years
Talking Therapy	Female	65+ years
WHIST South Shields	Female	65+ years

Q9: You said you've sought professional help for your mental health and wellbeing in the last 6 months. Please can you tell us where you sought help?

Base size: Those who have sought professional help in the last 6 months at Q8 (26)

Mental health services

Discussing mental health

Of those who either struggle with their mental health or have been diagnosed with a mental health problem, 71% said they have used professional services such as a G.P. or counsellor to talk about their mental health and wellbeing in the past.



Q11. Have you ever used any professional services to talk about your mental health and wellbeing? By professional, we're referring to services such as your G.P., or counsellor.

Base size: Those who have been diagnosed or struggle with their mental health at Q3 (106)

Unsurprisingly, amongst those with a diagnosis (51 respondents), the number who had talked to a professional service about their mental health increased from the combined total of 71% to 84%, whilst just 58% of those who sometimes struggles with their mental health (55 respondents) said they had talked to a professional service about what they were experiencing.

Barriers to seeking help

When those who had not talked to a professional service about their mental health and wellbeing were asked why, 45% explained that they didn't think they were in need of that level of support. 29% indicated that waiting list timings were off-putting, and a further 29% shared that they were uncomfortable at the thought of discussing the topic.

- 45% I don't think I'm in need of that level of support
- 29% I'm uncomfortable at the thought of sharing this with anyone
- 29% I've heard the waiting lists for free services are really long so there doesn't seem much point
- 13% I haven't heard good things about the help you can get from professionals
- 10% I'm worried about having something related to mental health on my medical records
- 6% I don't know where to go
- 6% I can't afford to pay for counselling etc.
- 10% **Other** (responses include: worried about existing strain on services, tried to access help but still waiting and concerns around sharing in a group setting)

Q12. Which, if any, of the statements below describe why you haven't used any professional services to talk about your mental health and wellbeing?

Base size: Those who have never talked about their mental health and wellbeing with a professional service at Q11 (31)

Support from professional services

Those who had previously talked to professional services about their mental health and wellbeing were asked if specific publicly-funded services had supported them in the last 2 years. 41% said they had reached out to their G.P., with a further 33% having been supported by Lifecycle Service. 13% had accessed services that were not listed and when asked to share which services had provided them with support, services such as Women’s Health in South Tyneside (WHIST) and counselling sessions that were provided for via private health insurance and/or workplace insurance were disclosed.

- 41% G.P
- 33% Lifecycle Service (NHS Talking Therapies)
- 5% Initial Response Team (formerly Crisis Team)
- 5% Samaritans
- 5% CNTW
- 4% Mental Health Concern / Kind Mind Community
- 4% Listening Ear
- 3% Humankind
- 1% A & E
- 1% Mental Health Matters
- 1% Moving Forward South Tyneside
- 1% CREST
 - MIND
 - NECA
 - Emmaus
- 13% Other (responses include: WHIST (Women’s Health in South Tyneside), Creative Minds - North Star Counselling and private counselling sessions via health or workplace insurance)
- 25% None of the above

Q13. In the last 2 years, which, if any, of the following services have supported you with your mental health and wellbeing?

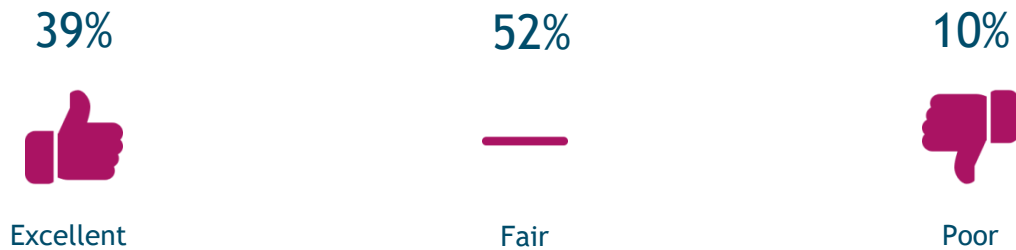
Base size: Those who have talked about their mental health and wellbeing with a professional service at Q11 (75)

Due to low base sizes for most services listed above, the final section of the report will focus on understanding how, if at all, the services provided by G.P.’s and Lifecycle Service were impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on GP service delivery

Service Satisfaction

When asked to rate their overall experience with their G.P. service, 39% of those who had sought help from their G.P indicated it was excellent, with around half rating it as fair. Just 1 in 10 respondents rated the service as poor.

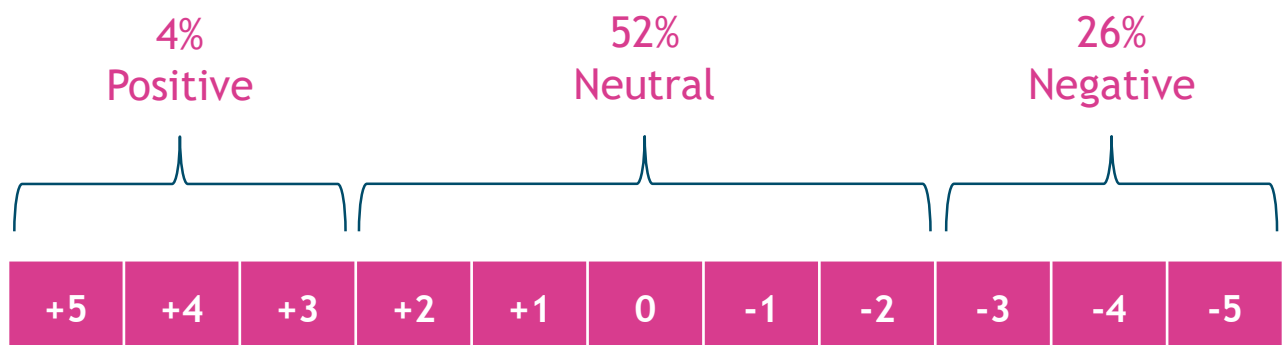


Q15. Overall, how would you rate your experience with G.P?

Base size: Those who had accessed G.P. services to support mental health and wellbeing at Q13 (31)

Pandemic's impact on service delivery

74% of those who had sought help from their GP had first interacted with the service prior to the pandemic. The respondents with prior knowledge and experience of the quality of service were then asked if any changes to service delivery as a result of adhering to Government guidelines had had an impact on the quality and they were asked to say to what extent. Around a quarter thought the pandemic had had a negative impact on the quality of the service provided by their GP.



17% said all their interactions with their G.P were prior to the start of the pandemic so they could not comment

Q16. Thinking of how, if at all, the pandemic and subsequent adaptations your G.P. has had to make in order to adhere to Government guidelines, please can you tell us whether you perceive these changes to have had a positive or negative effect on the quality of the service delivered, or if there has been no change at all?

Base size: Those who had accessed G.P. services prior to the start of the pandemic at Q14 (23)

Reasoning behind changes in quality of service

Having rated how they perceived the pandemic and subsequent adaptations made by their G.P.'s in response to Government guidelines to have affected the quality of service delivered, respondents were asked to provide context for their answer and a selection of responses are shown below.

Positive

"The ability to communicate with the G.P. in alternative ways (e consult, phone appointment)."
Female, 25-34 years

Neutral

"I have been able to access my G.P. when needed." Male, 45-54 years

"I dislike phone appointments and have anxiety on using the phone. All appointments being telephone appointments has been difficult." Female, 35-44 years

"I have to use an online app to contact the G.P. This is only available for a couple of hours in the morning." Female, 45+54 years

Negative

"Hard to speak to someone - feel like they don't want to see anyone in person." Female, 55-64 years

"I can't get a face-to-face appointment." Male, 35-44 years

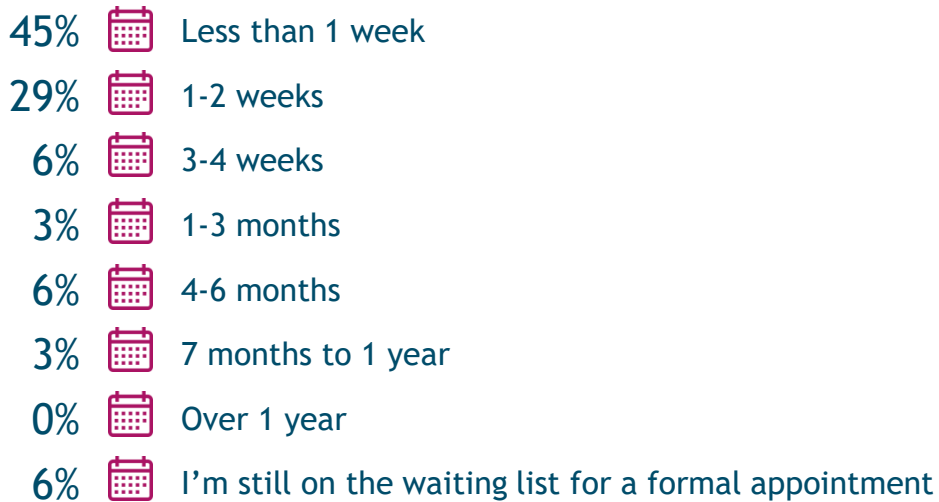
"Not being able to speak to one doctor and having to repeat myself every time to a different person." Female, 25-34 years

Q17. Please call you tell us why that is?

Base size: Those who had accessed G.P. services prior to and during the pandemic at Q16 (19)

Waiting lists

For GP services, 45% of respondents indicated that they had to wait less than a week for appointment, with a further 29% waiting between one and two weeks.

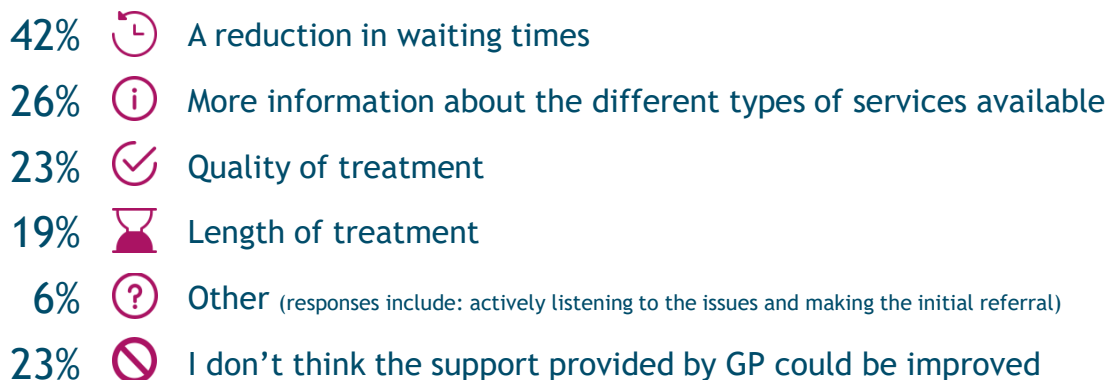


Q18. How long did you have to wait to see a professional to get the help you needed from G.P.?

Base size: Those who had accessed GP services to support mental health and wellbeing at Q13 (31)

Areas of Improvement

Despite most respondents waiting less than two weeks for appointment with their GP, the area for improvement selected by 42% was a reduction in waiting times. Around a quarter felt the quality of the treatment could be improved.



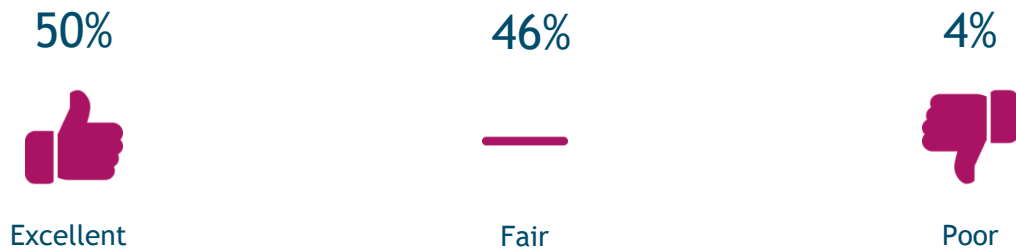
Q19. Which, if any, of the following ways do you feel the support provided by G.P. could be improved?

Base size: Those who had accessed G.P. services to support mental health and wellbeing at Q13 (31)

The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on Lifecycle Service's delivery

Service satisfaction

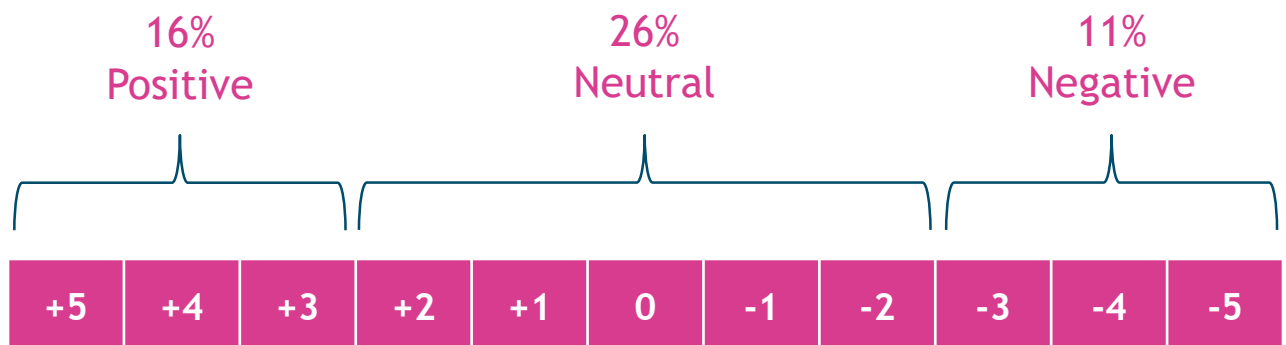
When asked to rate their overall experience with Lifecycle Service (NHS Talking Therapies), half of those who had sought help from Lifecycle Service indicated it was excellent, with 46% rating it as fair. Just 4% rated the service as poor.



Q15. Overall, how would you rate your experience with Lifecycle Service (NHS Talking Therapies)?
Base size: Those who had accessed Lifecycle Service to support mental health and wellbeing at Q13 (24)

Pandemic's impact on service delivery

79% of those who had sought help from Lifecycle Service had first interacted with the service prior to the pandemic. The respondents with prior knowledge and experience of the quality of service were then asked if any changes to service delivery as a result of adhering to Government guidelines had had an impact on the quality and they were asked to say to what extent. 11% thought the pandemic had had a negative impact on the quality of the service provided by Lifecycle Service, but please bear in mind this equates to 2 respondents.



47% said all their interactions with Lifecycle Service were prior to the start of the pandemic so they could not comment

Q16. Thinking of how, if at all, the pandemic and subsequent adaptations Lifecycle Service has had to make in order to adhere to Government guidelines, please can you tell us whether you perceive these changes to have had a positive or negative effect on the quality of the service delivered, or if there has been no change at all?

Base size: Those who had accessed Lifecycle Service prior to the start of the pandemic at Q14 (19)

Reasoning behind changes in quality of service

Having rated how they perceived the pandemic and subsequent adaptations made by Lifecycle in response to Government guidelines to have affected the quality of service delivered, respondents were asked to provide context for their answer and a selection of responses are shown below.

Positive

“Wider range of appointment types”
Female, 25-34 years

“Excellent service.” Female, 45-54 years

“Helen Graham was amazing 10 out of 10. She went above and beyond. I felt so stupid, and she restored my faith within myself.” Female, 25-34 years

Neutral

“Longer waiting times.”
Male, 35-44 years

“They gave me options to still receive treatment by video call or phone.”
Female, 35-44 years

“I did the therapy over the phone which was better than face-to-face for me, I could talk easier.” Female, 55-64 years

Negative

“I feel a huge part of counselling is interacting with someone on a personal level, this has been taken away when you could no longer meet in person. I know sessions have been moved online to video calls and telephone, but this just isn't the same. I would rather be talking to someone face-to-face.” Male, 25-34 years

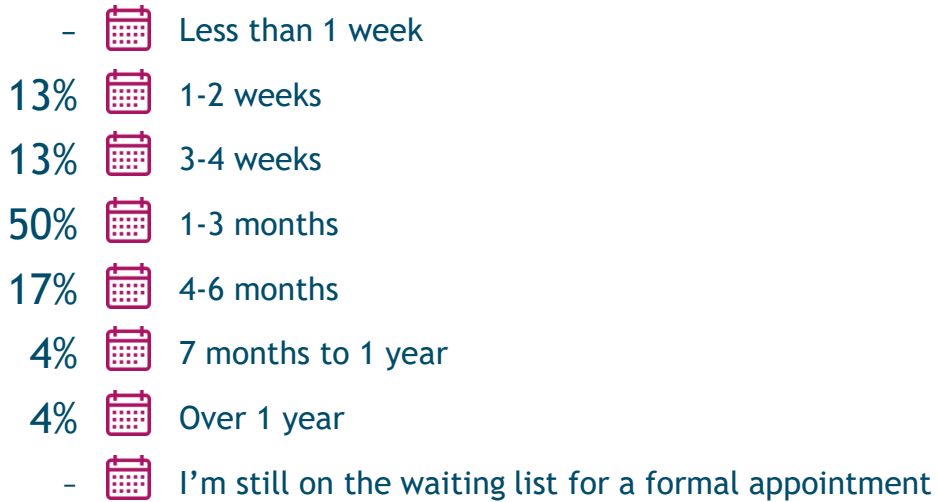
“No face-to-face appointments.”
Female, 55-64 years

Q17. Please call you tell us why that is?

Base size: Those who had accessed Lifecycle Service prior to and during the pandemic at Q16 (10)

Waiting lists

For Lifecycle Service, waiting times were longer than those for G.P. appointments, with 50% of respondents indicating they waited between 1 and 3 months to get the help they needed.

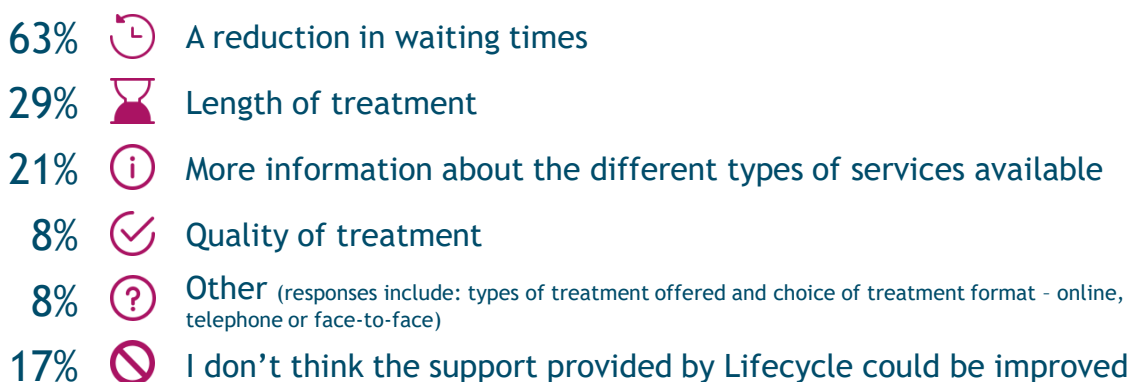


Q18. How long did you have to wait to see a professional to get the help you needed from Lifecycle Service (NHS Talking Therapies)?

Base size: Those who had accessed Lifecycle Service to support mental health and wellbeing at Q13 (24)

Areas of improvement

Around two-thirds felt the service provided by Lifecycle could be improved by reducing the waiting times. 29% also indicated that the length of treatment was an area that should be reviewed.



Q19. Which, if any, of the following ways do you feel the support provided by Lifecycle Service (NHS Talking Therapies) could be improved?

Base size: Those who had accessed Lifecycle Service to support mental health and wellbeing at Q13 (24)

Key messages

The key messages which came from the respondents to the survey included:

- 42% felt their mental health had deteriorated during the pandemic
- Reasons given for this included boredom, isolation/loneliness, fear of catching Covid and anxiety about travelling, shopping, adhering to rules
- 55% said there had been a negative impact on their diet; either comfort eating or not eating enough
- 49% reported trouble sleeping
- 25% increased alcohol consumption
- One of the key barriers to seeking help was waiting list times (29%)
- 26% wanted more information about the types of services available
- 63% wanted a reduction in waiting time for the Lifecycle service, with 50% waiting one to four months and 17% four to six months to get the help they needed.

Recommendations

The lessons that could be taken forward for planning for a future pandemic, with earlier implementation where possible, could therefore include:

- Anticipating increased demand for mental health services.
- Ensuring adequate resources are in place to meet this increased demand, in circumstances which could include lockdowns.
- Improving online self-help resources, to include advice on diet/healthy eating, sleeping, appropriate alcohol consumption etc and increasing awareness of these resources via comprehensive signposting.
- Reviewing the current waiting times for the Lifecycle service and identifying how these could be reduced, with treatment duration to be flexible to take into account of individual needs.
- Identifying positive changes to services that have resulted from the pandemic, such as increased virtual consultations and enabling patients to choose the format of consultations where possible.
- Urging employers to provide counselling services for their staff.

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