

Left unchecked: why maternal mental health matters

A Berkshire West perspective

June 2023

healthwatch
Reading

healthwatch
West Berkshire

healthwatch
Wokingham Borough

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Introduction

In their review of what people had told them about maternity services in 2021/22, Healthwatch England (HWE) found that feedback from patients about maternity care, including support for maternal mental health was worsening.

This, together with evidence from the National Childbirth Trust that mental health is not routinely discussed at postnatal checks, led Healthwatch England to undertake a further look into people's experience of maternity services in 2022.

"We wanted to know if the changes we helped bring about are improving mental health support for new parents. Through this project, we sought to understand whether postnatal consultations are taking place and whether they provide mothers with a meaningful opportunity to discuss their mental health and access follow-up support from specialist services if needed."

Healthwatch England, March 2023

As part of their project, Healthwatch England conducted a national survey from October to December 2022. At the same time, the three Healthwatch in Berkshire West (Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham Borough) felt it was important to understand the local picture and how it compares to the national situation.

We therefore conducted the same survey, adding a question so people could tell us which of the three areas they lived in. The results are captured here as an addendum to the main report, noting that our survey responses have also been included in data for the main report.

Healthwatch England's briefing report, with findings and recommendations, can be found here:

[Left unchecked – why maternal mental health matters.](#)

Methodology

Healthwatch England conducted a national survey from 31 October to 12 December 2022. They distributed the survey through local Healthwatch and wider networks to explore people's experiences of mental health support during the perinatal period.

Before sharing across Berkshire West, we added an extra question so people could indicate whether they were a resident of Reading, West Berkshire or Wokingham Borough. We shared our survey on our website, social media channels and local networks.

The survey covered the following:

- People's experience of maternity services
- Access to and experience of postnatal consultations
- Access to and experience of specialist perinatal services.

A demographic breakdown of our respondents can be found on page 9.

Note: 26 people responded to our survey of whom 19 (73%) were residents of Reading. Further Berkshire West residents may have responded to the national survey so are not captured here.

Key findings

Care and support provided is having an impact on mental health. 37% of people we heard from experienced negative impacts on their mental health due to the care and support they received during labour and childbirth. This compares to 42% nationally (HWE 2023).

Mental health is not routinely discussed at postnatal checks. Nearly half (46%) of the people we heard from said that mental health was either not mentioned or not discussed enough at their postnatal check. At nearly half, this compares with the national findings of 22% (HWE 2023).

Care is inconsistent for pre and postnatal mental health difficulties. Over half the people we heard from experienced mental health difficulties. One third of these people were not offered information or a referral.

Next steps

Healthwatch in Berkshire West have shared the results of the national and local surveys with the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB) who are responsible for NHS service delivery across Berkshire West. In response, the Head of Midwifery, Maternity, Neonatal and Women's Services has told us:

"The BOB Local Maternity and Neonatal System (LMNS) is currently mapping the provision of perinatal mental health services, from universal such as primary care and health visiting, to specialised services delivered by Community Health Trusts and inpatient provision. Perinatal mental health is a key focus for the 3-year Single Delivery Plan published by NHSE 20th March 2023 and the LMNS workstreams will integrate the concept of mental health as a continuum, included in every element of perinatal care by 'making every contact count', and as an opportunity to open the discussion about mental health in a holistic way. This work will be monitored through the LMNS Board and into the ICB via the Population Health and Patient Experience Committee."

Deep dives on antenatal screening and postnatal care are taking place at the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust. Healthwatch in Berkshire West have been invited to be one of the stakeholders to help review the evidence and formulate action plans.


We welcome the commitment and will report on progress in six months (Autumn 2023).

During the project, and as noted in the Healthwatch England report (p3), MBRRACE-UK published their [Saving Lives, Improving Mothers' Care report for 2022](#). This showed that in 2020 women were three times more likely to die by suicide during or up to 6 weeks after the end of pregnancy compared to 2017-19; this is 1.5 women per 100,000 giving birth ([MBRRACE-UK 2022](#)). We will review the 2023 report at the same time as following up on local actions in Autumn 2023).


Survey results

- 26 people responded to our survey.
- 19 residents of Reading
- 2 residents of West Berkshire
- 5 residents of Wokingham Borough

Thinking about the care and support you received during labour and childbirth, what impact did it have on your mental health?	
There was no impact	7 (27%)
It had a positive impact	9 (35%)
It had a negative impact	10 (38%)



The care I received during pregnancy was excellent from the community midwives. It was after the birth in the postnatal ward where the care I received impacted on my mental health.



Any concerns I had were taken seriously by staff	
Strongly agree/agree	13 (50%)
Neither agree nor disagree	3 (11%)
Disagree/strongly disagree	9 (35%)
Not applicable	1 (4%)

At the postnatal check-up, thinking about the time your GP spent talking to you about your mental health and wellbeing, did you feel it was

(24 responses – 2 did not have a postnatal check-up)

The right amount	5 (21%)
Not enough	10 (42%)
Not mentioned	7 (29%)
Too much	1 (4%)
Prefer not to say	1 (4%)



At no point did GP ask about maternal mental health, or domestic situation (eg partner's mental health)



Which of the following best describes your experience whilst you were pregnant and after birth?

I experienced an episode of a mental health problem that I had previously recovered from	5 (19%)
I experienced mental health difficulties for the first time	8 (31%)
I experienced mental health difficulties in addition to my current mental health problems	2 (8%)
I did not experience any mental health difficulties	11 (42%)

Of those who experienced mental health difficulties:

- 5 (33%) were given information or signposted
- 4 (27%) were referred for support
- 6 (40%) were not offered either

Of the 4 who were referred for support:

- 3 waited 1-2 weeks for an appointment 2 of whom reported that their symptoms remained the same and 1 could not recall.
- 1 waited 4-6 weeks for an appointment and reported that their symptoms got worse during this time.

Results by location

Thinking about the care and support you received during labour and childbirth, what impact did it have on your mental health?

	Reading	West Berkshire	Wokingham Borough
There was no impact	4	0	3
It had a positive impact	6	1	2
It had a negative impact	9	1	0

Any concerns I had were taken seriously by staff

	Reading	West Berkshire	Wokingham Borough
Strongly agree/agree	8	1	4
Neither agree nor disagree	3	0	0
Disagree/strongly disagree	7	1	1
Not applicable	1	0	0

At the postnatal check-up, thinking about the time your GP spent talking to you about your mental health and wellbeing, did you feel it was

(24 responses – 2 did not have a postnatal check-up)

	Reading	West Berkshire	Wokingham Borough
The right amount	4	1	0
Not enough	7	1	2
Not mentioned	5	0	2

Too much	1	0	0
Prefer not to say	1	0	0
No check	1	0	1

Which of the following best describes your experience whilst you were pregnant and after birth?

	Reading	West Berkshire	Wokingham Borough
I experienced an episode of a mental health problem that I had previously recovered from	3	0	2
I experienced mental health difficulties for the first time	6	1	1
I experienced mental health difficulties in addition to my current mental health problems	1	0	1
I did not experience any mental health difficulties	9	1	1

Demographics

100% of respondents were White (25 White British, 1 White Other)

100% of respondents were women.

2 said they had a disability, a long-term condition and are neurodivergent.

2 considered themselves to have a long-term condition.

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