COVID-19: Children, young people and families October 2020 Evidence Summary

Key messages

Over the last month, there has been a tightening of restrictions in response to a rise in COVID-19 cases and hospital admissions. At the same time, many children and young people are adjusting to changes in school and childcare settings. This briefing is the fourth in a series of high-level evidence summaries on the impact of COVID-19 on the wellbeing of children and families in Scotland, drawing on wider UK research where appropriate. As with previous briefings, the scope is fairly broad to cover a wide range of policy interests. This month, there are some new Scottish studies relating to particular groups of children and young people which will be of interest, including: children and families living in poverty; black and minority ethnic (BME) young people; and families impacted by disability. A summary of key themes and messages is set out below.

Mental wellbeing

- UK survey evidence suggests that key issues for young people as they came out of lockdown were concerns about COVID-19 transmission, adapting to COVID-19 measures in schools (physical distancing) and worries about future aspirations and longer term financial and job security. There are also reports of anxiety and fear associated with returning to 'the outside world' (YMCA survey).
- UK representative surveys using standardised measures of mental wellbeing continue to show little or only modest differences in mental wellbeing over lockdown compared to pre-lockdown baselines. However, this appears to mask differences in sub-groups – aside from known gender differences (girls continue to report lower mental wellbeing), wellbeing scores in one study (ImpactEd) were lower in pupils from lower income households, those with special educational needs and disability (SEND) and those with English as an additional language. This finding is consistent with findings from other studies previously reported (e.g. Oxford University's Co-SPACE Study).
- Data from the UK-wide Children's Society annual survey reports similar levels of family COVID-19 bereavement (8%) to that reported in a Scottish poll[1] which suggests that nearly one in ten children may have experienced bereavement due to COVID-19. A report from Barnardo's

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[1] "Coronavirus (COVID-19): impact on wellbeing – research". Further analysis shows that 8% of households with children reported a COVID-related bereavement (family or friends).

highlights the importance of identifying and supporting children who have experienced a bereavement, particularly those from communities with higher risk of mortality from COVID-19 including BME families and those living in areas of high deprivation.

Poverty

- There are a number of Scottish studies that indicate increasing concern about the impact of rising poverty on the wellbeing of children and families. The evidence suggests that worsening financial situations continue to have a detrimental effect on families' mental health, particularly those reliant on social security.

- In a University of Glasgow study of high poverty communities, services report an increase in new families in crisis, many of whom may not be known to services. A key lesson learned from lockdown was that 'vulnerable' families who were eligible for a place in the school hubs had not taken up the offer, in part due to a sense of stigma.

- Food poverty is highlighted in a number of Scottish studies with one survey by Includem reporting that nearly half of low income families surveyed struggle to put food on the table on a regular basis. A University of Glasgow study highlighted food poverty as an issue in deprived rural communities.

- Other common themes from wider UK evidence this month (consistent with previous briefings) were digital exclusion, overcrowding and/or poor quality housing and lack of outdoor space – all of which impact negatively on the wellbeing of families.

- There is some economic analysis from the Sutton Trust that suggests that without intensive support and addressing the digital divide, the long-term negative impact of school closures on earnings is estimated to be much higher for young people from less well-off backgrounds.

Play deprivation

- Emerging UK evidence suggests that some children may have experienced a sustained loss of play and regular peer interaction during the pandemic. Younger (primary) age groups appear to be at greatest risk of loss of peer interaction (both online and in-person), with new evidence from the UK-wide Co-SPACE Study suggesting that this did not recover in the summer when many restrictions were lifted. This evidence is consistent with Scottish evidence previously reported (Public Health Scotland CEYRIS survey[2]) and suggests that even after the lifting of restrictions children may still miss out on regular peer

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[2] http://healthscotland.scot/publications/covid-19-early-years-resilience-and-impact-survey-ceyris

interactions, particularly those directly impacted by COVID-19 (see below).

Shielding/clinically vulnerable children and families

- It is becoming apparent that children who are/were isolating or shielding (or living with a family member who is) may be an under-recognised group at risk of adverse impacts from COVID-19. Data from the Children's Society annual survey and Scottish survey data estimates[3] suggest that one in three children in Scotland may be at risk of potential adverse impacts due to increased risk of isolation.

- The most recent UK-wide Family Fund survey reports that, despite the lifting of shielding requirements, a third of families said they would not be changing their actions in line with the easing of restrictions due to their children's conditions.

- UK-wide research by the Royal College of Paediatrics & Child Health reports that some children who were shielding (in particular) felt forgotten during lockdown, and felt that the messaging and support services were inappropriate and aimed at the over 70s. Key priorities for young people who have been shielding were to provide mental health support as they reintegrate into society and better communication and messaging.

- One UK study of parents of children with cancer (the SHARE study) describes feelings of fear and anxiety during the pandemic, and the psychological, social and economic impact of isolation, with hospital no longer being perceived to be a safe place.

Children and families impacted by disability

- The most recent UK-wide Family Fund survey paints a worsening picture of the wellbeing of disabled and seriously ill children in the UK. Many families surveyed continue to struggle financially. Parental concern about the negative impact of COVID-19 on children's physical health, mental health and children's behaviour and emotions has remained very high, and in some cases increased over time. Although there has been some recovery in formal support, the evidence suggests that the majority of families surveyed are still not receiving the support they need, particularly in educational psychology, speech and language therapy and occupational therapy.

- Wider UK evidence shows that for some children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) school closures had a beneficial effect on their anxiety levels, with some parents considering home education as a long-term option. Key factors that helped children were a more flexible

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[3] "Coronavirus (COVID-19): impact on wellbeing – research". Further analysis shows that 32% of households with children lived with someone has a health condition that makes them vulnerable to COVID-19.

approach to learning, less social pressure and more child-led learning. That said, a UK survey by the National Autistic Society reported increased levels of anxiety in autistic children due to loss of routine, with some reports of problems in return to school arrangements.

Other key findings relating to specific issues and/or sub-groups:

- **Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Children and Young People** - Research by Intercultural Youth Scotland reports BME young people's feelings of disadvantage (compared to their white peers) in relation to their education in particular, and future opportunities as a result of COVID-19. Other key issues raised were worries about the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on BME people and the impact of police presence during lockdown, which it is reported limited opportunities for BME young people to exercise and socialise during lockdown. Elsewhere, findings from a large Welsh survey during lockdown reports that across most of the factors measured, BME children fared worse. This included play, outdoor exercise, food security, support, information, learning and mental wellbeing.

- **Care experienced young people** – as previously reported, the body of evidence continues to highlight care leavers as most at risk of mental health impacts due to experiences of loneliness and social isolation during lockdown which were exacerbated by lack of digital access. There is emerging UK evidence that kinship carers struggled significantly during lockdown, with one in four survey respondents worried that they will be unable to cope with a second lockdown (Grandparents Plus survey). As previously reported, there continues to be emerging (UK) evidence of a rise in reports of child on carer violence during lockdown.

- **Domestic abuse** – Scottish evidence reports that throughout lockdown services received reports of children being exposed to increased levels of abuse. There were some reports of children who had fled domestic abuse experiencing severe isolation and digital exclusion, with remote engagement with younger children being reported as very difficult. The most consistent finding throughout lockdown and Phases 1 to 3 related to domestic abuse perpetrated via child contact. There were reports of perpetrators using the restrictions as a justification for increased contact and women facilitating child contact outwith agreed conditions, in order to placate perpetrators and manage abuse.

- **Adverse childhood experiences -** the newly formed UK Trauma Council has published a report which sets out how the pandemic is impacting on children's experiences of trauma in terms of increasing the risk of ACEs (e.g. domestic abuse, bereavement, family mental illness, extreme poverty etc.) and limiting the ability of adults and services to

identify children and mitigate the impact of trauma. More evidence is needed on the extent to which children have been exposed to ACEs during the pandemic, and how those with prior experience of childhood adversity and/or trauma have been impacted.

- **Child exploitation/modern slavery** – For the first time, ONS modern slavery statistics report that more National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referrals were received for child potential victims than adults (over the period Apr-Jun), which is partially driven by an increase in the identification of 'county lines' cases. Research on looked after children in England and Wales suggests a move towards local recruitment of children by criminal gangs, rather than recruiting children in cities to travel long distances (Crest study).
- **Online safety and bullying** - There is some emerging UK evidence of an increase in online bullying during lockdown (YMCA survey). There are also indications of increases in online sexual abuse during the pandemic (based on data on UK-wide Childline and NSPCC helpline data). A NSPCC briefing suggests that this may be aggravated by children and young people using online platforms to counter loneliness without sufficient understanding of online risks.

Lessons learned and looking forward – common themes

Looking across the evidence, there are number of common themes that may be helpful when considering post-lockdown policy responses. These are set out below:

- **A targeted response** - overall, the evidence suggests the need for more targeted messaging and information and recovery planning (interventions) focused on the needs of specific sub-groups of children and families.
- **Trauma-informed approach** – drawing on evidence about the negative impact of lockdown on children and young people's mental health and the increase in adverse and/or traumatic experiences for some children, various reports call for more trauma-informed/nurturing approaches in schools in particular and a renewed focus on mental wellbeing especially for disadvantaged groups.
- **Friendships and relationships** – a recurring theme is the importance of re-establishing friendships, as well as the critical importance of positive and supportive relationships for children's wellbeing more generally. Having somewhere safe to meet with friends is highlighted in some of the evidence which, given the recent changes in restrictions and the onset of winter, may merit some attention.

- **Choice, participation and flexibility** - a number of reports this month highlight the importance of choice and participation for children's recovery and wellbeing, for example in healthcare settings (e.g. choice over mode of healthcare access). Research continues to voice a desire from young people for a more active role in recovery efforts.
- **Mitigating the impact of poverty** - Suggestions for addressing some of the concerns about poverty raised in this months' reports include school breakfast provision, basic needs such as food and digital access to be considered a human right and a package of financial measures such as a top-up payment until the Scottish Child Payment is operational and a government housing grant for families at risk of eviction.
- **Safety** – A number of studies point to the significance of safety for children's wellbeing in the current environment – in a clinical sense (avoiding COVID-19 transmission) but also in a physical sense (having a safe space to hang out with friends) and psychological sense (feeling safe).

Evidence Gaps

We are seeing some of the persistent evidence gaps closing as new research is planned or underway, and the body of wider evidence accumulates and converges. Going forward, there is a need for more longitudinal research in Scotland to monitor the impact of the pandemic in the longer term, particularly for disadvantaged sub-groups, as well as the need for a better understanding of the prevalence and experiences of COVID-19 illness, shielding/vulnerability and bereavement in families. As restrictions change, it is important to monitor how children and families are adapting and the impact this is having on different sub-groups. Going forward, research priorities should be focused on lessons learned, protective factors/assets and 'what works' to support targeted policy interventions.

Research Topics

Please use this contents page to view your particular area of interest.

NOTE - Many of the COVID-19 surveys are drawn from self-selecting samples (a sample that a participant volunteers to be part of rather than being selected). This means that the findings are not representative of the wider population and are likely to be biased in some way. Results of individual studies should therefore be interpreted with caution.

Further information about the scope and limitations of this evidence briefing are covered in the Scope, Limitations and Further Information section.

Scottish Evidence

1. General children, young people and parent/carer COVID-19 evidence and research

As of 4th October 2020 there have been 1154 children and young people aged 2-17 years in Scotland who have tested positive for COVID-19 since the start of the outbreak (source: COVID-19 Education Recovery Group: children and young people infographic 8 October 2020).

2. Impact on families

No new Scottish evidence to report this month.

3. Mental health and mental wellbeing

A number of ongoing Scottish surveys on the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing are currently in the field or at the analysis and reporting stage e.g. Lockdown Lowdown research (Young Scot, Scottish Youth Parliament and YouthLink Scotland), the Children's Parliament research, TeenCovidLife2 survey research (University of Edinburgh) and In Isolation Instead of School (INISS) research project (University of Edinburgh/Data for Children Collaborative with UNICEF). The findings of these will be reported in future briefings.

This month marks the publication of the Scottish Government's transition and recovery plan for mental health, which includes a section on children, young people and families (Section 6).

4. Physical health and wellbeing

COVID-19 and Children's Play
Source: Play Scotland
Date: 2 Sep 2020

This briefing written on behalf of the UK Play Safety Forum covers the risk to children from **outdoor play deprivation**, the risk to children from COVID-19, the risk of transmission of infection to adults by children, and the transmission of COVID-19 via outdoor surfaces. The relevant findings are summarised below:

- The paper states that evidence on the risks posed by play deprivation is growing. The paper refers to a Canadian paper that describes a sharp reduction during COVID-19 restrictions in physical activity, outside time, and an increase in sedentary behaviour.
- The evidence on transmission of COVID-19 on outdoor playground surfaces is still inconclusive, with most evidence suggesting that the likelihood of transmission in this way is low.
- The briefing recommends that play providers should be aware of the risk averse nature of safety advice and consider this in deciding upon proportionate approaches aimed at providing the best outcome for children.

These findings, whilst informative, should be read in conjunction with the wider evidence base and COVID-19 restrictions in place in Scotland, which may be different from other countries. The PHS CEYRIS survey[4], for example, found that most children (81%) had played outside most days in the week before the Survey (July); although it also found that about a third of children spent less time outside than before lockdown. Additionally, the Survey found that a large proportion of children had, had no social interactions with peers during lockdown and as restrictions were eased (online or otherwise), and that only a third of children had visited a greenspace in the week before. This survey will be re-run in November to monitor the impact of return to school/childcare and new restrictions on children's play including outdoor play.

5.   Education, learning and employment

The COVID-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG) publishes a weekly snapshot of COVID-19-related data for children and young people, and the local-authority school-based workforce. The most recent CERG update (at the time of writing) was published on 8 October. The percentage of non-attendance openings recorded as pupils not in school for COVID-19 related reasons has increased from 1.6% on 11th Sep to 2.5% as of 6th Oct. This amounts to approximately 16,000 pupils who were not in school due to COVID-19 reasons.

6.   Children's rights and participation

No new Scottish evidence to report this month.

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[4] http://healthscotland.scot/publications/covid-19-early-years-resilience-and-impact-survey-ceyris

7. Children and young people with vulnerabilities and/or disadvantage

The next section covers evidence relating to children and young people whose circumstances may place them at increased risk of some of the negative impacts of the pandemic.

7.1 Poverty

[Poverty and the Impact of Coronavirus on Young People and Families in Scotland](#)
Source: Includem
Date: October 2020

This report is based on findings from a survey of 126 young people and families that Includem works with. Key findings are presented below:

- Families surveyed said that the five biggest areas of financial pressure were **food insecurity**, the cost of heating their home, transport costs, housing costs and accessing the internet.
- Two thirds of the young people and families reliant on social security said that they were in a worse financial position than they were pre-pandemic and half said their debt was greater.
- Nearly half of families surveyed (49%) struggle to put food on the table on a regular basis. This is particularly pronounced for families that rely on social security, 60% of which report struggling to pay for food 'about half the time', 'usually' or 'always'. A similar pattern was seen for heating costs and internet access.
- The impact of access to and cost of transport costs affects families' access to affordable food, and decisions about attending appointments and work.
- Three quarters of families said that their **mental health had deteriorated because of their worsening financial situation**. For those reliant on social security, the impact is even greater with 82% reporting that their mental health is worse now than it was a year ago.
- Recommendations include basic needs like food - and notably digital access – to be seen as a human right and other needs such as transport to take a rights-based approach. The report states that social security benefits should be sufficient for families to be able to meet all basic needs and that the Scottish Child Payment is needed now. It also calls for a government grant to meet housing costs for families at risk of eviction due to rent arrears.

Further recommendations on the need to address child poverty in Scotland are provided in a recent [Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) report](#).

[**Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland - The impact of COVID-19 on families, children and young people in Glasgow**](#)
Source: University of Glasgow
Date: September 2020

This report highlights the unequal impacts of COVID-19 and how these have been experienced by children and families in high poverty neighbourhoods in Glasgow.

The research involved 15 interviews with service providers in three high poverty neighbourhoods from April to June, and analysis of secondary statistical data. Key messages are:

- Many families previously in work have fallen into financial crisis as a result of the pandemic. There has been a rapid increase in the number of people now on Universal Credit across Glasgow and there are concerns that many of these **new families in poverty** are not known to public services. The report highlights the need to focus on supporting new families in crisis – who will need support in the short term to access and navigate public services – and outreach to connect to the support available.

- Accounts of the experiences of families under lockdown highlighted the interlinked pressures of trying to juggle working from home, with childcare, home-schooling and digital access.

- Participants reflected that the experience of lockdown differed greatly depending on housing situation. They were concerned that lack of private outdoor space combined with the inability of children to go out and play in the street, was influencing family wellbeing, as was not having enough rooms for family members to spend time on their own.

- Reduced access to health and social care services experienced during lockdown is likely to have **long-term health impacts** on some families and children living in areas of social deprivation.

- Families have experienced **increased anxiety** due to multiple stressors (e.g. financial, unemployment, home schooling, lack of childcare). The length of social isolation may have long-term effects on mental health and wellbeing.

- The loss of social relationships and support networks, both formal and informal, placed an additional burden on families during lockdown. Inequality in access to the internet was raised as a concern in terms of being able to access information and maintain relationships during lockdown.

- Single parents with children at home were especially vulnerable to loneliness during lockdown.

- Most interviewees were concerned about the potential for a rise in domestic violence.

- Interviewees highlighted that **many 'vulnerable' families who were eligible for a place in the school hubs** during lockdown had not taken up the offer, in part due to a **sense of stigma**.

- The findings from the research suggest that people who are marginalised on account of **disability, families with children with additional support needs, race and ethnicity, religion**, have faced additional challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic associated with loss of contact with key workers, disruption to routine and social isolation.

[Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland - Rural experiences of COVID-19: Insights from frontline practitioners](#)
Source: University of Glasgow
Date: 22 September 2020

This is the sixth in a series of emerging insights from research[5] that is taking place in **high poverty settings across Scotland** and seeks to understand how local responses are working in the current rapidly changing context and provide insights that can support the next phase of COVID-19 action at both local and national levels. This report presents the views and experiences of frontline practitioners working in rural communities. Key findings are:
- COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on some rural communities, particularly those who were already experiencing poverty or disadvantage.
- Financial pressures, challenges in home learning and added stress on mental wellbeing were amplified in some rural areas by limited access/reductions in public transport links and local support services and **stigma** often associated with poverty.
- **Food poverty** was an issue commonly raised in rural areas. Some of the challenges included stigma associated with food banks, difficulties with supermarket home deliveries that made accessing fresh food difficult for some families, especially those without access to a car.
- Practitioners reported that many families did not want to accept help (e.g. food deliveries) due to a fear of being judged by neighbours, although some areas reported as shift in attitudes to poverty as it became 'everybody's issue'. Some families had problems in redeeming children's food vouchers locally.
- Another issue highlighted was **transport difficulties and the sense of isolation** often experienced by individuals and families living in rural areas, particularly for those reliant on public services.
- Support will be required to reconnect families with local support services, with an emphasis on building children's confidence as they return to nurseries and school.
- Increasing understanding of the specific differences experienced by those in rural communities can support targeted recovery planning in these areas.

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[5] See https://childrensneighbourhoods.scot/home/covid-19/ (previous C&F briefings have reported on earlier insights)

Magic Breakfast YouGov Teacher Survey (Scotland)
Source: Magic Breakfast
Date: 12 Aug 2020

This survey assesses the impact of COVID-19 school closures on children's education and wellbeing. The survey was conducted between 20 and 29 June 2020 and was completed by 725 primary and secondary school teachers in England and Scotland, with 76 respondents from Scotland. The findings for Scotland are presented below:

- The majority of teachers surveyed think **coronavirus has negatively affected their pupils' educational attainment** (80%) and **their pupil's mental health and wellbeing** (75%).
- 62% of teachers surveyed think that there will be an **increase in children arriving at school hungry** (compared to the previous year).
- 71% of teachers surveyed think that **hunger will continue to affect their pupil's ability to catch up on learning lost** during COVID-19 school closures. This is not a new issue; however, with 63% of teachers surveyed thinking that hunger affected some of their pupils' ability to learn prior to COVID-19 school closures.
- The majority of teachers surveyed support programmes to ensure children have access to a free breakfast during term time and school holidays, which most respondents felt would help children catch up on learning.
- Teachers surveyed (all) felt that the pupils worst affected by COVID-19 were children with no or limited access to technology at home (68%), pupils with child protection services or social services involvement (62%), pupils with SEN (62%) and pupils eligible for FSM (46%). Other groups of note were pupils with a disability and pupils/families who are isolating/shielding.

| 7.2 | Children, young people and families impacted by disability |

A Disability Equality Scotland online poll was run at the end of August asking respondents if they had any concerns about the use of face coverings in schools and on school transport. 343 individuals responded, of which **87% had no concerns**. Concerns were reported around:

- stigma for those exempt from the regulations;
- the impact of face coverings on pupils with hearing impairments and others who rely on lip reading and facial expressions for communications;
- affordability and availability of face coverings; and,
- the lack of use or enforcement of face coverings on school transport, particularly when school transport is shared with the general public, which increases transmission risks.

7.3 Care experienced children and young people

Care experienced children and young people's mental health evidence summary
Source: IRISS
Date: 12 Oct 2020

This summary presents general evidence on the mental health of care experienced children and young people but also considers the impact of COVID-19, drawing on a range of UK evidence sources. Key messages are:

- The impact of the pandemic is particularly concerning given the high rate of mental health difficulties among care experienced young people and the circumstances in which care experienced children and young people live (e.g. living at home in difficult circumstances, care leavers with limited support networks).
- Social distancing and isolation exacerbate the loneliness and isolation already felt by many of those who do not have the usual family support networks. According to The Children's Society (2020)[6], **feelings of anxiety have increased during the lockdown** - by 45% for children living in care and by 86% for care leavers.
- **Staying in touch with parents, siblings and other important people** helps children develop a sense of identity and belonging and promotes healthy and stable relationships, but it's not always possible to do this digitally (Become, 2020).
- The views from care experienced young people (in Wales) highlight increasing anxiety around the lack of interactions with support networks, personal advisor / social worker or trusted individuals, and peers (Voices From Care Cymru, 2020).
- That said, anecdotal evidence suggests that not facing the pressures of being at school has left young people more able to manage stress and anxiety. Smaller class sizes and fewer school days, with a greater focus on well-being and creative activities, may have also resulted in more positive experiences of education. Some have found the **opportunity to build stronger relationships** with their carers and enjoyed more flexibility around care and support (The Children's Society, 2020[7]).
- **Lack of access to mental health services or support** is a long-standing issue that has been exacerbated by the outbreak. According to the Children's Society (2020)[8] placements have been made without ensuring access to mental health support, where services are available new referrals are sometimes not being taken, and thresholds for support have been raised.

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[6] Children's Society (2020) The impact of Covid-19 on children and young people briefing
[7] Children's Society (2020) Recovery Plan – Children in care and care leavers briefing
[8] Children's Society (2020) Recovery Plan – Children in care and care leavers briefing

- The evidence highlights the importance of **maintaining contact** between care experienced children and young people and support networks and family; ensuring provision of **digital access**; clear communication about any changes in support; and, prioritising safeguarding, safety and wellbeing, in particular the provision of **targeted interventions** for trauma recovery and mental health support.

7.4 Young carers

No new Scottish evidence to report this month.

7.5 Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) children and young people

Covid in Colour: The experiences of young Black and People of Colour Scots during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Source: Intercultural Youth Scotland
Date: Sep 2020

Intercultural Youth Scotland has published its report involving a survey of 63 young Black and People of Colour (POC) Scots aged 15-25+ (mostly female and under 18). The survey was conducted during the COVID-19 lockdown (May - June 2020) and aimed to explore Black and POC young people's experiences and perceptions of the impact of the pandemic on their academic achievements and mental wellbeing and its potential effects on their life opportunities. Given the small sample size, the findings cannot be deemed to be representative or generalizable to the wider BME community in Scotland.

Key findings were:
- The young people preferred to use the term young **Black and People of Colour Scots (POC)** rather than BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) which has sometimes been described to be reductive.
- A majority of respondents were worried about the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on black and POC people (54%)
- A majority of respondents expressed concerns about family finances and employment (57% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: 'I am worried about my family or guardian losing their job and struggling financially'; only 14% disagreed with the statement).
- Whilst a third (34%) of respondents stated that they were "coping well mentally with the challenges of lockdown", over a quarter (26%) did not.
- There were mixed findings in relation to young people having access to safe outdoor space during lockdown, with 31% stating that they did and 28% stating that they did not.

- More than a third of respondents (37%) reported **feeling uncomfortable with the increased police presence** during lockdown (26% disagreed).
- The vast majority of the respondents (75%) reported that it had been difficult to continue learning outwith the classroom environment, with half of respondents reporting difficulty in accessing the internet and learning materials.
- There was mixed evidence on school provision of support and guidance during lockdown, with about a third of respondents reporting some provision and slightly less reporting none. There was a similar mixed picture in relation to students having someone in school to talk to during lockdown.
- Almost half (45%) of the respondents agreed with the statement that they 'had less opportunities than my white counterparts, and COVID-19 has highlighted this' (26% disagreed with this statement).
- **68% of respondents believe that their education is at greater risk than their White counterparts due to COVID-19 disruption.**
- Four out of 10 respondents (41%) reported that they have had access to careers counselling services since the disruption of the lockdown while almost a quarter (24%) report otherwise.
- The report also covers experiences prior to lockdown in school. A majority of respondents (63%) reported that they have experienced or witnessed racism at their school, with more than a third stating that they had witnessed black and POC people being treated more harshly in the classroom.

Recommendations included:

In the short term -
- To address the consequences of increased police presence during lockdown for young Black & POC Scots. The report states that young people were scared to leave their houses and access open community spaces due to fear of prejudice, racial profiling and racial treatment from authorities. As a result, they had limited opportunities to exercise and socialise, which further affected their mental health.
- Appropriate risk assessments and race-informed, culturally responsive youth work support for pupils back at school should be carried out and revised according to the changing context of the pandemic.
- Transparency about how SQA grades were calculated and SQA and further education institutions to take into account predicted grades that may have disadvantaged students according to race, gender, disability, socioeconomic status, migrations status, inter alia.
- All education stakeholders need to prepare for equitable alternatives for possible future exam cancellations. Such alternatives should mitigate any additional disadvantages faced by marginalised groups.

In the longer term –

- Recommendations for structural change in Scottish society including addressing institutional racism (e.g. in education), providing race-informed services in particular more culturally-sensitive youth work, and more opportunities for further education opportunities and greater representation of BME young people in COVID-19 research (e.g. funded population level research into their experiences).

The latest report from **Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland** (see Poverty section) on the impact of COVID-19 on children and families in Glasgow reports that third sector organisations working with BME communities reported BME children and young people lacking digital access and having **increased caring responsibilities**.

7.6   Vulnerable children and young people

The Scottish Government continues to collect data on vulnerable children (and adults) from local authorities and Police Scotland on a weekly basis. View the weekly Scottish Government data charts on vulnerable children and adults.

7.7   Domestic abuse and violence against women and girls

Coronavirus (COVID-19): domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls during Phases 1, 2 and 3 of Scotland's route map
Source: Scottish Government
Date: 18 Sep 2020

This report outlines trends from qualitative evidence on the impact of COVID-19 restrictions from May to August on people experiencing domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women/girls in Scotland. It is based on weekly reports derived from telephone interviews with services and documentary evidence from organisations. Chapter 11 focuses on impact on children and chapter 12 focuses on child contact arrangements.

Key findings on impact on children:
- Throughout lockdown services received reports of **children being exposed to increased levels of abuse** due to: prolonged contact with perpetrators when they are not returned after contact; perpetrators' drug and alcohol abuse in the presence of children; the impact of the perpetrator's psychological abuse and monitoring behaviours on the non-abusive parent.

- There were some reports of **children who had fled domestic abuse** experiencing severe isolation and digital exclusion (impacting on learning and social contact).
- Most services communicated that **remote engagement** with younger children, particularly those aged eight and under, was very difficult. Some therapeutic services stopped all together (e.g. Cedar group therapy) whilst others adapted to provide one-to-one online support.
- Some services reported a cumulative effect for victims with caring responsibilities for **children with additional needs**. Victims reported struggling to keep children engaged and supported, particularly in cases where specialist support services were unavailable or additional support/special school places were limited.

Key findings on impact on **child contact**:
- The most consistent finding throughout the period of lockdown and Phases 1 to 3 related to **abuse perpetrated via child contact**.
- Domestic abuse via child contact took a number of forms. There were consistent reports of perpetrators using telephone and video-call contact with children to monitor victims (e.g. perpetrators instructing children to show them round the house during video-contact).
- Throughout phase 1 & 2 there were reports of breaches of Coronavirus restrictions and manipulation by perpetrators using the restrictions as a justification for increased contact (e.g. perpetrators used children's potential exposure to the virus as justification for their non-return following planned contact).
- **Access to services and justice** was problematic during phases 1 & 2 in particular. Guidance on child contact was ambiguous and there were some reports of women experiencing challenges accessing justice for ongoing harassment and abuse related to child contact.
- As **contact centres were closed** during phases 1&2, there were consistent reports from organisations across Scotland of women facilitating child contact outwith the conditions of agreements or court orders, in order to placate perpetrators and manage abuse.
- During phase 3, some services reported increased incidents of perpetrators attending victims' houses for handover and abuse being perpetrated "on the doorstep".

7.8   LGBTQ+ children and young people

No new Scottish evidence to report this month.

7.9 Children and young people impacted by the Justice system

The Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) is running a series of webinars. The first heard from CYCJ Associate Dr Anthony Charles (Criminology Lead for the Observatory on the Human Rights of Children in Wales and Co-ordinator of the Innovative Youth Justice Team at Swansea University) on how Wales is responding to the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people in conflict with the law (or at risk of being so).

As well as highlighting some unexpected benefits such as **greater engagement and levels of contact during the pandemic**, and emerging COVID-19-related challenges, Dr Charles also discussed Scotland and Wales' shared commitment to children's rights in youth justice and what both nations can learn from each other. He concluded by asking if the pandemic has led to the emergence of more meaningful forms of youth justice, and if this is an **opportunity to re-think the way we do things**. Watch the webinar here.

Families Outside, a Scottish charity that works on behalf of families affected by imprisonment, is running a short survey on video visits in Scottish prisons. Results are not yet available.

8. Impact on services

The impact of COVID-19 on families, children and young people in Glasgow
Source: University of Glasgow
Date: September 2020

This report highlights the unequal impacts of COVID-19 and how these have been experienced by children and families in high poverty neighbourhoods in Glasgow.
The research involved 15 interviews with service providers in three high poverty neighbourhoods from April to June, and analysis of secondary statistical data. Key messages relating to services are:
- Service professionals across sectors demonstrated their **compassion and energy to help communities** in Glasgow suffering the worst effects of the crisis. The positivity, energy and 'can do' attitude of third sector organisations during this pandemic was striking. The pandemic and lockdown resulted in an upsurge in volunteering and community mobilisation.
- Despite responsive operational partnership working, the potential for a cross-sectoral approach to emergency response planning and recovery between the public and third sectors planning was not fully realised. The

report states that the third sector were not fully recognised as providing essential public services during this emergency.

- For many organisations, a blended online and digital approach to service delivery will be required over the longer-term.

Some of the key future priorities highlighted in the report are:

- **Community-based mental health provision**, should be prioritised, particularly given the long waiting lists for NHS services. Wellbeing-focused activities delivered by trusted local organisations could prevent mental health conditions worsening and reduce pressure on statutory services.
- Some service providers were keen to sustain the momentum in volunteering/community action by encouraging more local self-help and community-led action. The wider evidence supports the need for a move to **asset-based approaches** building on these strengths for collective resilience. In the context of COVID-19 recovery, it is **important that vulnerable communities and groups are engaged** in the design and implementation of community recovery initiatives.
- A new type of strategic partnership is required between the public and third sector – including a shared mechanism for strategic emergency planning and a shared digital infrastructure to enable and support collaborative working, and recognition of the vital role that the third sector played during lockdown.

The Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland update on rural experiences of Covid-19 (see Poverty section) describes how local services worked hard to respond in innovative ways to the food and practical needs of rural communities during the lockdown and **formed new partnerships and networks** to strengthen local collaboration e.g. pop up food vans.

Research from across the UK

This section covers evidence that is not specific to Scotland. Many of the surveys and reports, however, cover Scotland and in some cases provide recommendations specifically for Scotland.

9.   General children, young people and parent/carer COVID-19 evidence and research

Co-SPACE Study – Supplementary Report 7 – Communication with Friends
Source: Oxford University
Date: 23 Sep 2020

This report presents data tables from survey questions about frequency of contact with friends outside of the home through a variety of means. It is based on data from over 6,000 parents/carers who completed baseline and/or follow-up questionnaires at various time points during the period of March to August. Further analysis is needed to understand better any differences by age, gender, income or SEN. Only the overall figures[9] are discussed below:

- Although it has increased since lockdown, **regular face-to-face contact was still very low in the summer with less than one in five children** (of parent respondents) regularly meeting their friends in person in August. For primary age children the increase was from 15% in Jun to 17% in Aug (it rose to 29% in July) whilst for secondary age groups it was 7% to 16% (15% in July).
- Other modes of contact (social media, phone, text, gaming) have decreased between the lockdown period and August for primary aged children (although but this shift is less obvious in older age groups.
- Not surprisingly, **usage of digital communication methods was significantly higher in secondary aged pupils** compared to younger children, with 73% communicating with friends via text during lockdown (this remained constant during the study period to Aug); 59% communicating via social media (reducing to 53% in Aug); 47% communicating via video (reducing to 34% in Aug) and 53% communicating via gaming in June (remaining constant during the study period).
- The low levels of regular contact across all modes of communications measured (digital and in person) for primary aged children suggest that this age group in particular may have **missed out on months of regular peer interaction** and all the benefits that come with that for wellbeing and development (particularly perhaps children without

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[9] It is not known whether any differences listed are statistically significant. As such, the findings should be interpreted with caution.

siblings). Further evidence is needed however to confirm this emerging finding.

The Children's Society Good Childhood Report 2020 (UK) was published last month. As well as presenting predominant trends in (subjective) well-being, the reports seeks to understand the experiences of children who have low well-being and what enhances and hinders children's happiness. The report describes how even **before the pandemic, teenagers in the UK were among the unhappiest in Europe**. Compared to 21 comparable European countries, children's well-being in the UK showed the largest drop in mean life satisfaction between 2015 and 2018 at both time points. This is particularly worrying given the current context.   The report cites findings from its annual survey (see next item).

Life on Hold: Children's Wellbeing and COVID-19 (UK-wide)
Source: The Children's Society
Date: July 2020

This report draws on data from the Children's Society's annual household panel survey which was conducted between April and June 2020 with just over 2,000 young people aged 10 to 17 across the UK (including Scotland), and their parent or carer. As well as including routine questions on children's overall well-being and their happiness with different aspects of life, a number of questions were included in our 2020 survey to gauge the impact of Coronavirus and the lockdown measures on children's lives. The research also included consultation with 150 young people aged between 8 and 19 years on how they felt about lockdown and the impact on their future.

- 49% of parent respondents said that their income had been reduced and one in ten said that adults in household had lost their job.
- 32% of parent respondents said that members of the household classed as vulnerable. This is very similar to figures reported in a Scottish adult panel survey (see SG C&F July briefing).
- Nearly one in ten parent respondents (8%) said that they had experienced a close family bereavement. This is very similar to figures reported in a Scottish adult panel survey (see SG C&F July briefing).
- Despite concerns about education and family finances, only around half of parents felt the happiness of adults and children in the household would be negatively affected.
- Encouragingly, the majority of parents felt that children's happiness had only been adversely affected in two out of seven aspects of life examined (happiness with friends and how much choice they have in life).
- With the exception of not being able to see friends, the majority (over half) of child respondents felt they were coping ok with the changes

(scored above the midpoint on a scale of 0-10). Scores for girls were lower than boys', in particular in relation to seeing friends.

- Interestingly, most children reported coping ok with the various restrictions including washing hands (86% above midpoint); social distancing (78%) and socially isolating (69%).
- Children in relative poverty were more likely to indicate that they were very worried (23%) than peers who were not in relative poverty (15%). This is consistent with other evidence.
- In terms of general well-being, most children continue to be happy/ satisfied with their life overall and different aspects of life. However there were some shifts compared to last year:
  - Life Satisfaction Scale: 18% of children scored below the midpoint on a multi-item measure of life satisfaction and are therefore deemed to have low well-being[10].
  - Good Childhood Index: A shift was seen from previous years in relation to the area of life that children are least happy with – from school (pre-pandemic) to 'choice' (post-pandemic) which is not surprising given the enforced lockdown and associated implications. Low scores were also higher for relationships with friends.
  - WEMWBS: The average mental wellbeing score was very slightly lower than other studies have reported[11], and girls' scores were lower than boys (this was the first year this measure was included).
- The report calls for a more comprehensive national approach to collecting data on children's subjective well-being and a focus on wellbeing when children return to school, specifically: re-establishment of friendships, choice, a wellbeing focus on any learning catch-up plans to reduce anxiety and more rounded approach to supporting mental health which includes music, art, connecting with others and sport – all factors which children said had helped them during lockdown.

[COVID-19 Social Study Research Updates (UK Wide)](link)
Source: University College London (UCL)
Date: Weekly

As previously reported, weekly updates from this large survey-based study provide some interesting insights for households with children. Findings cannot be generalised to the wider population as the sample is not representative.

- People with children showed **slightly lower likelihood of strong intentions towards getting a COVID-19 vaccine** (Week 26-27 report).

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[10] In the previous five surveys, this proportion has ranged from 10% to 13%.

[11] The mean score was 47.7 compared to 48.8 as reported in previous studies e.g. NHS Health Scotland (2015) Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) User guide – Version 2. NHS Health Scotland.

- Decreases in depression and anxiety have occurred across every subgroup. However, depression and anxiety are still highest in young adults, people living alone, people with lower household income, people living with children, and people living in urban areas (Week 28-29 Report).
- People living with children have worried more about all factors (COVID-19, unemployment, finance and getting food).
- **Differences in life satisfaction have eased off for people living with children as lockdown has eased**. In contrast, loneliness levels are lower than 22 weeks ago and continue to be highest in younger adults, people living alone, people with lower household income, people living with children, people living in urban areas, and people with a diagnosed mental health condition.

[Childhood in the time of Covid (England)](#)
Source: Children's Commissioner for England
Date: 29 September 2020

The Children's Commissioner for England has published a report examining the impact of the coronavirus crisis on children and young people in areas including education, social care, health, youth justice, housing, and family life. The report includes specific recommendations in each area to help children recover from their experiences, and calls for: a comprehensive recovery package for children and young people; children to be put at the heart of planning for further lockdowns; and children's rights and protections to be upheld.

The report describes the wide-ranging impact of COVID-19 on children and families. It presents evidence on the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on children's lives, particularly vulnerable children (including children in care, children in custody and children with SEND) who are at increased risk of further inequalities. The report highlights the need to adapt our response to COVID-19 – lessening the burden placed on our most vulnerable children in the event of further lockdowns – and the need to address the underlying issues which made these children and their families vulnerable in the first place.

10.　Impact on families

No new evidence to report this month.

11. Mental health and mental wellbeing

Public Health England [COVID-19 Mental Health and Wellbeing surveillance report](#) (England)
Date: 8 Sep 2020
Source: Public Health England

The publication draws together and compares data from various evidence sources relating to mental health and wellbeing. It presents 7 chapters which will be updated regularly, including one on the experiences of children and young people (aged 4-19). The key findings from that chapter are presented below and echo those of previous SG C&F briefings:

- There is growing indicative evidence that coronavirus COVID-19 and associated interventions have likely had **an adverse effect on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people**.
- **Loneliness** has been a challenge for some children and young people, although some have reported benefits for their mental health and some studies show that children and young people report coping well. Experiences of loneliness appear to increase with age and is associated with increased anxiety. Whilst some children and young people have used social media to combat loneliness, some studies indicate a **digital divide** (e.g. for those living in 'low-income' areas) with some children and young people reporting not having access to or not using devices to communicate with friends.
- As reported in previous C&F briefings, key concerns for children and young people are worries about other people being at risk of COVID-19, education, and **worries about future**. There is also emerging evidence of **disrupted sleep patterns** for children and young people during the pandemic.
- Whilst some children and young people have experienced strains in family relationships during the pandemic, others have **enjoyed more time with family/carers**.
- While many children and young people have retained some access to mental health support during this period, a **lack of access to mental health support** has been associated with worse mental health and wellbeing for some children and young people.
- The latest evidence reviewed suggests that **vulnerable children** and other children and young people with challenging home environments, are more likely than others to have had experiences during the pandemic associated with a risk to mental health and wellbeing such as: loneliness, disruption to access to support, difficult relationships within the home, parental stress or poor mental health and a lack of access to the outside or natural environment.

- Emerging evidence on young people with **existing mental health conditions** suggests that the pandemic has negatively affected their mental health and wellbeing, but there are no robust comparisons.
- There is limited evidence available on the experiences of young people **in low income areas** – emerging evidence indicates a number of potential impacts, for example having less access to technology to stay in touch with friends.
- Access to support is widely reported as having reduced during the pandemic, whilst usage of online support is reported to have increased.
- The Xenzone Kooth service report relatively steady engagement with their online MH service across the pandemic period. Key presenting issues continue to be **anxiety and relationship issues**.
- The most recent data from Young Minds shows a continued trend of more parents seeking information and advice via email and online during the pandemic. They report that parents have been most likely to call about **anxiety, anger, behaviour problems and self-harm**.
- The chapter notes a number of evidence gaps which mirror those identified in SG C&F briefings. These include monitoring changes in children's mental health against a recent pre-COVID-19 baseline, representative evidence on the experiences and mental health of children and young people from particular sub-groups, access to or change in protective factors, and experiences of important pandemic related risk such as the experience of illness, bereavement or multiple parental stresses.

[Back on Track: Supporting young people out of lockdown](#) (England & Wales)
Source: YMCA England and Wales
Date: Aug 2020

The purpose of the 'Back on Track' research was to investigate young people's concerns as they **move out of lockdown and return to education**. The findings are based on a survey of approximately 1000 11-16 year olds living in England and Wales between 24-27 July. This was weighted by age, sex and region. Key findings are:
- The **top three worries about coming out of lockdown all related to the virus itself.** These were 'myself or my family catching coronavirus' (68%), maintaining social distancing at school (63%) and the future safety of the country (62%). Other concerns included **having a safe environment to see friends**, family employment and income, falling behind at school and anxiety about being in school.
- There were **high levels of loneliness** in young people during lockdown: nine-in-ten reported missing being face-to-face with people (92%), and three-quarters felt lonelier and more isolated during lockdown (77%).

- Three-quarters of young people (73%) **tired of being online all the time** (after 4 months of lockdown).
- Young people are struggling with school and their **aspirations for the future** are changing; 56% of respondents were worried about falling behind and 41% were worried about getting a job. A quarter agreed that the pandemic has affected their decisions on what they'll do when they finish school; a fifth agree that the pandemic has changed their career aspirations (21%).
- **Over a third of respondents were worried about 'having enough money to live on'** (37%); whilst a third disagreed with this statement (33%).
- More than two-fifths of young people reported that they were worried about their mental health or wellbeing as they come out of the COVID-19 lockdown (42%); 57% stated that their mental health had worsened during lockdown and 73% said that they felt more stressed during lockdown. That said, nearly half (49%) of respondents disagreed with the statement that 'I feel depressed or anxious' (28% agreed) and 57% stated that they were not that worried or not at all worried about their mental health or wellbeing.
- **Returning to life beyond the home** is promoting feelings of anxiety for some: 44% of respondents stated that they feel anxious about being in social spaces, and 36% feel scared of the outside world.
- Almost half of young people think involvement in **online bullying** has increased (48%), with just 6% thinking it has decreased (since schools closed).
- For many young people, the lockdown brought a chance to be with their family and practice self-care. **Almost all respondents reported having enjoyed spending more time at home** (93%), seeing more of their family (92%) and connecting with people online (90%). 82% of respondents have been able to take more time out to look after themselves, and 85% felt less school/exam pressure.
- That said, more than half of respondents (58%) feel that their **relationship with their family has become more strained during lockdown**. Local YMCAs have reported seeing a rise in the number of families struggling to cope living in cramped houses with limited digital access – often shared between siblings – and facing significant financial pressures.
- Top priorities for government (as chosen by young people survey respondents) were listening to what young people need, additional support to help people catch up with schoolwork, a safe space to meet friends, more support to help young people find jobs, and funding technology and internet access.

[**EIF poll shows parents' concerns about pupils' mental wellbeing and support for schools to do more (England)**](#)
Source: Early Intervention Foundation
Date: Sep 2020

A survey of over 600 parents, conducted by Ipsos MORI for has underlined ongoing concerns about children's mental health and wellbeing as they return to school.

- **Half of parents surveyed said they had concerns about their children's mental wellbeing** as they were returning to school or entering reception, including one in six who said they were very concerned.
- Reasons given for parental concern about mental wellbeing included children needing to adjust to changes in the school environment, to focus on school work, to reintegrate socially with other pupils and teachers, and manage infection anxiety.
- **Lower-income parents**, in particular, are more likely than better-off parents to be **concerned about their children's mental wellbeing as they return to school**. In the survey, 58% of those earning up to £20,000 were concerned, compared with 44% of those earning over £55,000.
- **Parents want schools to provide mental wellbeing support** - seven in 10 parents supported schools doing more to provide help on mental wellbeing.
- This research underlines the importance of **prioritising children's social and emotional wellbeing in any recovery plans** (alongside educational attainment), particularly those children from low income or disadvantaged backgrounds. The crucial role of mental wellbeing in learning and the widening attainment gap because of lost learning during lockdown also underlines this.

[**Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition Annual Report (UK)**](#)
Source: CYPMHC
Date: 28 Sep 2020

This report from a coalition of children's charities calls on the UK Government to **put mental health first for children and young people** and stop school exclusions this year. The report raises concerns about the growing levels of poverty and inequality and their impact on infant, children and young people's mental health. The report explores the impact so far of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's mental health and finds that the pandemic has heightened inequalities that were already there. The report emphasises the links between traumatic experiences that some children may have experienced during the pandemic (including **neglect, abuse and bereavement**) and behaviour. Gaps in digital access are highlighted in

relation to accessing online mental health services. It calls for a **moratorium on school exclusions over the next academic yea**r so that pupils have the time to adapt to changes and for a trauma-informed approach to addressing behaviour problems in schools.

Bereavement (UK)

Barnardo's has raised concerns about the impact of bereavement and loss. Before COVID-19, statistics showed 1 in 29 5-16 year olds had been bereaved of a parent or sibling[12]. Although data is not yet available to show how much this number has increased due to the pandemic, given the number of COVID-19 deaths in the UK, it is likely that many children and young people will be experiencing bereavement.

Some communities will be especially impacted by grief and bereavement, especially those at higher risk of becoming seriously ill or dying from the virus, such as **Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities** or those **living in areas of high deprivation**.

Barnardo's recommends **ensuring schools are places of safety, offer a nurturing learning environment, and are linked to specialist services** that can support children and young people through this difficult time will be critical.

Further analysis of data from recently published Scottish research on adult wellbeing[13] during lockdown shows that **nearly one in ten households in Scotland with children (8%) had suffered a COVID-19-related bereavement at the time of the survey (Apr/May)**. This was previously reported in the SG C&F July (internal) briefing and is very similar to that reported in the Children's Society annual survey.

Co-SPACE Survey Report 05: Changes in children and young people's mental health symptoms during lockdown and patterns associated with key demographic factors
Source: Oxford University
Date: 11 Sep 2020

The latest report from the Co-SPACE team covers **parent reporting of child mental health[14]** over a one-month period in lockdown (baseline and one month follow up). This is not a nationally representative sample. Parents/carers who completed the one month follow up survey were more

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[12] Source: Child Bereavement UK: Office for National Statistics; National Records of Scotland; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
[13] https://www.gov.scot/publications/impact-covid-19-wellbeing-scotland/
[14] This report uses the Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to measure emotional, behavioural and restless/attentional difficulties. This is a well-validated questionnaire for symptom scores and categorisation of likelihood of mental health and behavioural disorders.

likely than those who did not to be female, have a higher than average household income, be a parent of a primary school aged child and to have reported that their child had fewer behavioural difficulties at baseline than those who did not complete the follow up survey. The findings are based on longitudinal data from 2,729 parents/carers who took part in both surveys.

- In **primary school aged children, there were mean increases in emotional, behavioural and restlessness/inattention difficulties**. The proportion of children likely to have significant difficulties (i.e., meet diagnostic criteria for a clinical diagnosis) in these 3 areas also increased, by up to 35%.
- In young people of secondary school age, there was a reduction in emotional difficulties, no change in behavioural difficulties and a slight increase in restlessness/inattention. The proportion of young people within this age range likely to have significant emotional difficulties did not change but did increase for difficulties with behaviour and restlessness/inattention. As respondents were more likely to have primary school aged children, however, this finding should be interpreted with some caution.
- For children and young people from low income households, emotional and attention difficulties (and behaviour difficulties for primary school aged children) were consistently elevated compared to those from higher income households, with around **two and a half times as many children experiencing significant problems in low income households**.
- There were similar levels of emotional, behavioural and restless/attention difficulties for children and young people from single and multiple adult households, but **primary school aged children from single adult households were reported as having more emotional difficulties** than those from multiple adult households throughout lockdown**.

[**Children's views on well-being and what makes a happy life, UK: 2020**](#)
(UK-wide)
Source: Office for National Statistics
Date: 02 October 2020

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has published analysis of UK children's perspectives on their well-being and what makes a happy life. Whilst this research does not address the coronavirus pandemic directly, it can help inform recovery approaches aimed at improving children's wellbeing. Ten focus groups with 48 children and young people aged between 10 and 15 carried out between September 2019 and February 2020 (before lockdown), including focus groups held in Scotland. **Feeling loved and having positive, supportive relationships are the top priorities for children to have a happy life**. Children also see feeling safe as an essential element of their happiness, alongside personal expression, school experiences and family

finances. Key factors for future happiness and wellbeing included peace, child empowerment and having a say in decisions that affect them, and addressing climate change.

12. Physical health and wellbeing

[COVID-19 &Us - views from RCPCH &Us](#) **(UK wide)**
Source: Royal College of Paediatrics & Child Health
Date last modified: August 2020

RCPCH &Us is working with young people to reflect on their experiences of COVID-19 and the lockdown. The work began in May and will continue through this year. Insights from the research will inform recovery planning. To date the research has involved 60 young people from all four UK nations who have participated in focus groups in May and June 2020 - exploring healthcare experiences during lockdown, including virtual services. The common themes were:

- Burden – associated with making tough choices about accessing healthcare, confinement at home and increased anxiety.
- Choice – appreciation of being able to access health services in person, on the phone or online, and **would like this choice to continue**.
- Resilience – requests for **more mental health support, dedicated school time to reflect on the experiences and increased support around loss**, both for bereavement but also missed milestones.
- Planning – to include children and young people in recovery planning, to consider how services will resume, and wanting school plans to take into account the impact on futures and missed experiences.
- Messaging - frustrations about being missed in the messaging and confusing messages from government, including differences across nations. Suggestions included **using more short videos, peer to peer information sharing and developing children and young people-focused advice and shielding messaging.**
- Confidentiality: Accessing health services from home has resulted in privacy issues for some young people – suggestions included creating a code word for children and young people to share with health care professionals.
- Being forgotten: At times children and young people have felt that their needs have been ignored. This view was shared by **children and young people shielding in particular who felt all information/support services were aimed at over 70s** (see below).

The research includes workshops with children, young people and young adults from a range of backgrounds, including those with long term conditions, from vulnerable groups or with specific health care experiences such as LGBTQ+ young patients. Some common themes from the workshop with young people who have been shielding are:

- Support the mental health of young people who have been shielding as they integrate back into not-shielding;
- Improve communication and messages shared about how to shield and what needs to happen when;
- Make sure support services recognise under 25s are shielding too, so might need extra support. For example, online shopping slots were available for over 70s at the start of lockdown.

[COVID-19 and children with cancer: Parents' experiences, anxieties, and support needs](#)
Source: [The SHARE Study](#) (Southampton University)

This is the first study to report experiences of parents of a child with cancer during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data is drawn from a parent online survey conducted in April 2020 (171 parents completed the survey). The study demonstrated that the majority of parents are worried about SARS-CoV-2, and worried about transmitting the virus to their child. **Hospital was no longer felt to be a safe place**, and parents were worried about suboptimal cancer care. Parents describe **fear and anxiety** and the psychological, social and economic impact of isolation as a family.

13.   Education, learning and employment

[Co-SPACE supplementary report 6 - Young people's concerns about school](#) (UK-wide)
Source: Oxford University
Date: Sep 2020

This report provides cross-sectional data from 987 parents/carers of young people (aged 12-16) and 284 young people (aged 12-16) who completed the Co-SPACE survey within August, either as part of the initial survey or the monthly follow-up surveys. This report also provides longitudinal data from 142 parents/carers of young people (aged 15-16) who completed the survey in July and a follow-up survey in August. This is not a nationally representative sample and therefore cannot be generalised to the wider population of all young people. Key findings:
- Young people aged 15-16 were more worried about academic pressure than children aged 12-14. This was consistent across parent-reported and self-reported data.
- Over half of the 15-16-year olds reported feeling worried about the impact of COVID-19 on their job prospects and the economy.
- From July to August, parents/carers reported an increase in young people's worries about their job prospects and the economy.
- A higher percentage of 15-16-year olds from **low income households** (<£16,000 p.a.) were reported to have substantial worries about the

academic pressure and lack of support in school work at this time, compared to higher income households.

['Lockdown lessons: pupil learning and wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic'](#) (England)
Source: ImpactEd
Date: 14 Sep 2020

ImpactEd's published a second interim summary (May-July 2020) from this longitudinal research project, featuring analysis of responses from 11,400 young people from May to July. A full report will be published later this year which will combine findings from the research throughout lockdown with survey results and school data about pupils as they return to the physical classroom. The survey uses validated scales for wellbeing but is not representative. Early key findings include:

- Young people were positive about returning to school. However, **girls were more concerned about school returns** and reported lower wellbeing and higher anxiety throughout May-July. Throughout lockdown and into the summer holidays girls have reported consistently lower wellbeing scores compared to boys.
- That said, levels of **overall pupil mental wellbeing remained stable as lockdown progressed**, though this varied by pupil groups.
- Comparing pupil data from May, June and July with national data taken from before the lockdown shows **little difference in mental wellbeing on average over lockdown**. The average wellbeing score for pupils in the July sample was 24.1, higher than our pre-lockdown benchmark of 23.6 and unchanged from the score in June.
- However, this **masks differential effects in sub-groups**. Aside from gender differences, other pupil groups whose wellbeing was affected include people eligible for Pupil Premium, those with SEND, and those with English as an additional language.
- Young people eligible for Pupil Premium consistently reported lower levels of learning persistence throughout the summer. Overall, their scores are 5% lower. This is a consistent gap in each of the three months that this report covers.

Coronavirus: challenges facing schools and pupils in September 2020 (ENGLAND)
Source: National Foundation for Educational Research
Date: 01 September 2020

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) has published a report on the challenges facing schools and pupils in England in September 2020. Findings from the report, based on interviews from around 3,000 school leaders across 2,200 primary and secondary schools, include: an estimation that **the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers had**

increased by 46%; 53% of teachers in the most deprived schools report that their pupils are four months or more behind their studies, compared to 15% in the least deprived schools; and teachers estimate that **44% of their pupils are in need of intensive catch-up support**.

[Lost Learning, Lost Earnings](#)
Source: The Sutton Trust
Date: October 2020

This study combines an analysis of the Labour Force Survey, the lost learning due to school closures between March and July 2020, and the unequal experiences depending on socio-economic background to estimate the potential impact on earnings and employment later in life. The analysis finds that school closures are likely to have substantial negative labour market impacts for those from less-well off groups, their chances of social mobility, and on the economy in general.

- It is estimated that, compared to a normal year, secondary school children from a high socio-economic groups experienced an average loss of learning of 21% of the 2019/20 school year, compared to 34% for those from low socio-economic groups.
- The **long term negative impact on earnings**. In net present value terms, the impact would be £3,870 for men from low socio-economic groups, compared to £1,570 for men from high socio-economic groups. For women, the corresponding estimates are £3,800 and £710, respectively.
- This means that total net economic loss for just this one year group in England would be at least £1.5 billion.
- The report recommends **targeting resources at disadvantaged pupils, in particular addressing the digital divide**.

14.   Children's rights and participation

[Young people's views on their role in the COVID-19 pandemic and society's recovery from it](#) (Larcher V, Dittborn M, Linthicum J, et al)
Journal: Archives of Disease in Childhood
Date: 31 August 2020

This short study sought to explore how young people see their role in the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings are drawn from a focus group with 15 Children's Hospital Young People's Forum members in May. The main themes and conclusions are summarised below:

- Awareness of pandemic's impact on others: participants showed mature awareness of the effects on broader society, especially the elderly, socially disadvantaged and parents.

- Perceived impact on their own lives: principal concerns were the educational and practical implications of school closures and social isolation, including impacts on **educational prospects**.
- Views about school reopening: young people understood the broader rationale for school reopening and were generally positive about it, but expressed **concerned about their safety and that of others**.
- Communication issues: **a need for clear, concise, understandable information readily accessible for young people was expressed**. Up to now, they felt passive recipients rather than participants.
- As per previous C&F briefings, **young people want to be active participants in the recovery**, but require appropriate information and a means by which their voices can be heard.

15. Children and young people with vulnerabilities and/or disadvantage

There are a range of briefings on the Children's Commissioner for England website relating to vulnerable groups including [children in care](#), those in custody, children with disabilities, those at risk of abuse and those without a permanent home. The CCE has also [conducted surveys on child wellbeing](#) in March and June.

15.1 Poverty

[Low-income parents relying on child benefit for household basics](#)
Source: Child Poverty Action Group
Date: 31 August 2020

The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) has released findings from a survey of 1,000 parents receiving child benefit in summer 2020. The findings were compared with the results of a similar survey conducted in 2012. The survey shows that child benefit is more likely to be used for food and baby products and less likely to be spent on clothing.
- 28% of parents receiving child benefit said they now spend it on day-to-day living/general expenses, up from 2 per cent in 2012
- 14% reported spending child benefit on bills, up from 4 per cent in 2012
- 33% are spending it on food in 2020, up from 26 per cent in 2012
- 15% of parents today spend child benefit on baby products/formula milk/nappies/wipes compared to 9 per cent in 2012
- Today just less than a quarter (23%) spend it on clothes/shoes for children (down from 51% in 2012).
- 37% said they couldn't manage without child benefit.

[POVERTY IN THE PANDEMIC: The impact of coronavirus on low-income families and children](#)

Source: Child Poverty Action Group & The Church of England
Date: August 2020

This report is based on findings from an online survey of 285 low-income families and in-depth interviews with 21 of these families between May and August 2020, and offers insight to the day-to-day challenges low income families are dealing with, as well as their strength and resilience in managing these matters. The research team is planning to go back to the same families towards the end of the year to see how their situation has changed.

- Overall, around 8 in 10 survey respondents reported **a significant deterioration in their living standards** due to a combination of falling income and rising expenditure. 76% of respondents said that they were finding coping financially quite or very difficult (2 in 5 said it was very difficult). This compares to 13% pre-coronavirus (based on findings of a pre-pandemic survey).

- Findings from in-depth interviews is consistent with other evidence - **low-income working households have been hardest hit** (lower income households spend a higher share of their income on essential services and items, the costs of which have increased as people spend more time at home). This was particularly the case for **single parents** who have to balance childcare with work. This group was also at higher risk of experiencing loneliness and social isolation.

- More than three-quarters of respondents said that the coronavirus has **affected their ability to pay for food and utilities**, and around half said it has affected their ability to pay for housing and child-related costs.

- Almost half reported **physical or mental health problems**. For many, this was **caused by worries about money**, the rising cost of food and utility bills, and not being able to buy their children what they need.

- The difficult living conditions that many families experience have been highlighted by the lockdown. Many families had **no outdoor space**, and others were painfully aware of the poor quality or **overcrowded accommodation** in which they were living.

- Some parents interviewed reported that their **children were suffering from mental health problems**, in particular teenagers or young adults.

- **Digital access** was also highlighted as a barrier to home learning for some families.

- **Government support** - the government financial packages (e.g. furlough scheme, increase in tax credits) have helped people but for many this was insufficient to protect them from financial hardship. Free

- school meal vouchers were highly valued by the parents who received them.
- Recommendations – the report recommends an increase of at least £10 per week in child benefit and child tax credits, extension of free school meals to those in receipt to tax credits and removal of benefits cap.
- The report warns that inaction will lead to further deterioration of family wellbeing as unemployment rises and the Job Retention Scheme is phased out.

[Childhood during coronavirus: protecting children from the effects of poverty](#)
Source: Action for Children
Date: 14 September 2020

Action for Children has published a report following an analysis of application forms submitted to their coronavirus emergency fund from March 2020 to July 2020.
37% of households were single parents and 19% of households had one or more children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), while 10% of households had one or more young carer. Findings from total of **2,760 grant application forms** include:
- 37% said that the pandemic had led to financial pressures due to the increased household costs.
- 30% of families were struggling to access enough welfare benefits to meet their daily living costs.
- **37% had one or more adults experiencing a mental health concern as a result of the pandemic**, while 23% had one or more children struggling with their mental health.
- **Two in five (40%) families were struggling to feed their children**
- A third of families (33%) requested help to afford resources for children's learning and play;
- **Nearly a third (31%) of families were lacking access to the resources necessary to educate their children at home.**

A survey of frontline staff found that 86% felt that the coronavirus crisis had left the family finances of the children they work with worse off, with the majority (66%) predicting this would get worse over the next 6 months. 78% reported that the pandemic was having a **negative impact on the mental health and wellbeing of the children** they support.

Specific recommendations for the Scottish Government were to provide low-income families with children with a £10 per week (per child) payment, until the new Scottish Child Payment is operational; and to protect the Payment's value on an ongoing basis.

15.2 Children, young people and families impacted by disability

The end of lockdown? The last six months in the lives of families raising disabled children – UK Findings
Source: Family Fund
Date: September 2020

The Family Fund, in its third survey over the course of the pandemic, has found that many families with disabled or seriously ill children continue to struggle due to a reduction in support, increased financial pressures and a negative impact on their children's health and wellbeing. The most recent survey ran in August 2020 and was completed by 2,557 families raising 3,204 disabled or seriously ill children across the UK, including Scotland. The key findings are summarised below:

- Half of families have **lost income** as a result of the coronavirus outbreak, and more than three quarters are experiencing increased household costs. Two in five families have seen their savings reduce, leaving seven in 10 families with no money to fall back on and increasing levels of debt.
- More than three in five families (62%) have experienced a **reduction in formal support** since the coronavirus outbreak, with little improvement over time (from a 65% decrease reported in Survey 1 to a 62% decrease in Survey 3). The most common types of formal support families are still going without include educational psychologists [69%], speech and language therapy [67%], occupational therapy [64%], and physiotherapy [61%].
- There has been some improvement in the level of informal support since the first survey, but it still remains significantly less than pre-pandemic for the majority of survey respondents (63% decrease reported in Survey 3). The main types of informal support families remain without include **recreational and play activities for their disabled or seriously ill children** [70%], respite [60%], transport [53%], and information and advice [50%].
- The survey suggests that the pandemic is having a **sustained negative impact on the wellbeing of disabled children**. Survey findings suggest that there has been a marked reduction in the physical wellbeing of disabled children over the course of the pandemic (from 26% negative impact in Survey 1 to 51% in Survey 3), whilst deteriorations in children's mental wellbeing and behaviour and emotions remain high (82% and 87% negative impact in Survey 3). These impacts extend to the whole family including siblings and parents.
- Even with the lifting of many restrictions, many families raising disabled or seriously ill children will be **continuing to restrict their day-to-day**

activities. A third of families (32%) said they will not be changing their actions in line with the easing of restrictions due to their children's conditions. Only just more than half of families (55%) had begun visiting friends and family and less than three in 10 families (28%) have had a day out together. This compares to three quarters of families (78%) who previously visited friends and family and half (47%) who took days out together.

- Addressing these health and wellbeing needs, as well as their growing financial and support needs are the most pressing priorities put forward by families. **Things that would be most helpful were a cash grant (59%), day trip or family break (58%) and food vouchers (53%).**

Public Health England's [COVID-19 mental health and wellbeing surveillance report](#) (see Mental Health section) describes the evidence to date with regards to **special education needs and disability**.

- Children and young people with SEN(D), and existing mental health issues, and their parents, have reported that COVID-19 has negatively affected their mental health.
- Although few studies compare their experiences to the wider population, those that do, find evidence that children with SEN(D) have experienced poorer mental wellbeing during lockdown than other children but not necessarily a widening gap over time compared to their peers.
- That said, in some surveys parents of children with SEN(D) report reduced levels of emotional difficulties and are reduction in emotional and conduct difficulties through the lockdown.

[**Special education during lockdown: Returning to schools and colleges in September**](#) **(England)**
Source: Nuffield Foundation & NFER & ASK Research
Date: 3 Sep 2020

An NFER study has found that leaders estimate that an average of **14% of pupils may not return**. The most common reason this was thought to be parental concern about safety. Almost all leaders felt that some pupils would find adhering to safe practice and social distancing difficult. This was reflected in the views of parents of children with special educational needs who were concerned about sending their children back to school or college in September because **their children are medically vulnerable or because their child's needs mean they cannot adhere to social distancing and safe practice**. The report calls for specific guidance for these settings, including **how to support children who do not return to school**, and additional resources to support safe practice. The study involved in-depth interviews and surveys of special schools and colleges in England and parents whose children attend special schools.

[**National Deaf Children's Society says just a third of deaf pupils will attend school if teachers wear masks in class**](#)
Source: National Deaf Children's Society (TES)
Date: 31 Aug 2020

A poll carried out by the National Deaf Children's Society among 800 parents of deaf children, shows that **just 36 per cent were likely to send their child to school if teachers were asked to wear face masks while teaching**. A further one in five (19 per cent) were uncertain about what they would do. The charity has now called on the government to ensure schools with deaf pupils have access to clear face masks.

More broadly, evidence suggests that **deaf children** are more likely to experience mental health issues[15] than their non-deaf peers. Research shows that deaf children are more likely to be isolated, bullied or abused (Wolters et al, 2011; Kvam, 2004), which can impact upon mental health. There is also literature on prejudice towards deaf children and their families and experiences of feeling stigmatised[16]. Research into factors affecting mental health of deaf children shows that early access to effective communication with family members and peers is desirable[17]. Dr Barry Wright (University of York), an expert on the mental health needs of deaf children has raised concerns about the impact of COVID-19 restrictions (physical distancing and wearing of face coverings) on the mental wellbeing of deaf children, which is exacerbated by isolation and communication problems. In a national newspaper article[18], he (and others) calls for healthcare and education settings to **consider the use of see-through face masks and face shields**, as well as access to good communication and to deaf peers through electronic means, or other special arrangements as restrictions are eased.

Coronavirus and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) education survey (England)
Source: Special Needs Jungle
Date: Survey conducted in June 2020

A survey of approximately 1000 parents with children with special educational needs and disabilities conducted during lockdown (June) describes a range of challenges encountered by parents, particularly around learning and lack of adequate support. Recommendations include a review into how local and national public services for children with special needs operated into lockdown (**to learn lessons for future crises**), research to ensure a better understanding of who needs to shield and how they can be easier to identify

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[15] Wright, B. (Aug 2020) Mental Health in Deaf Children. The Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health. https://www.acamh.org/app/uploads/2020/05/RD_Mental-Health-in-Deaf-Children.pdf
[16] See https://www.acamh.org/research-digest/mental-health-in-deaf-children/ for full references.
[17] Fellinger, J. et al (2012) Mental Health of Deaf People. The Lancet VOLUME 379, ISSUE 9820, P1037-1044, MARCH 17, 2012
[18] See https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/jun/07/lockdown-and-the-impact-on-deaf-children

and reach, and **return to school strategies for children** that may find it difficult. Other findings of interest are summarised below:

- The survey identified that **for some children with SEND, school closures have had a beneficial effect on their anxiety levels**. 37% of parents said their child's anxiety had increased, while a similar amount, 38%, reported their child's anxiety had actually reduced during lockdown.
- Reasons given for increased anxiety levels included concerns about COVID-19, disruption to routine, the breakdown of separation between school life and home life, and anxiety about the prospect of returning to school.
- A number of parents said their young person's school set so much work they experienced anxiety-driven meltdowns.
- Reasons given for decreased anxiety were a **less formal learning environment**, more inclusive way of learning, less pressure, better understanding of the child's needs, and **reduced sensory issues**.
- Some parents whose children were more settled during lockdown said they were now considering home education as a long-term option.

Education and Covid-19: Perspectives from parent carers of children with SEND **(Mostly England)**
Source: University of Sussex
Date: August 2020

These findings are based on a survey which was conducted in July and completed by 502 parent/carers, primarily from England, but across all regions of the UK. The aim of this research was to explore the experiences of parents of children with SEND during lockdown to inform return to school transition. Follow up research with some of these parents, will be reported on later this year, including parental recommendations for any future school closures or restrictions. Key findings are:

- Parent/carers had varied and diverse experiences during lockdown. Some had found schools to be incredibly supportive, whilst for other families it was a very difficult and isolating time.
- As seen in other SEND surveys, according to parent/carers, most of the children in the survey felt **less stressed and anxious** while at home during lockdown. This was due to being with family, less social pressure (e.g. bullying), more flexibility (e.g. to wear own clothes and take breaks when they want) and more child-led learning.
- During lockdown, **social interaction and communication** were the areas where parent carers felt their children had fallen behind.
- Parent/carers want a gradual and flexible return to school, with a focus on adapting to new routines rather than academic work. Friends and

social interactions (48%) were the most commonly noted positive aspect about going to school.

- A focus on relationships, wellbeing and routine are vital components for the return to school. Parent/carers reported that a focus on mental health and wellbeing as a top priority for the first term of education.

[Left stranded: The impact of coronavirus on autistic people and their families in the UK](#) (UK wide)
Source: National Autistic Society
Date: 07 September 2020

The National Autistic Society has published a report on the impact of coronavirus on autistic people and their families, including children. Findings from the report, which surveyed 4,232 autistic people and families in the UK during June and July, include:

- 68% of family members said their **autistic child was anxious about the loss of routine** brought on by disruption to education.
- Seven in ten parents said their child had difficulty understanding or completing school work and around half said their child's academic progress suffered; 65% said **their autistic child couldn't do online work.**
- The withdrawal of services during lockdown has had a **profound effect on the mental wellbeing** of family members and children with autism.
- One in five family members respondents had to reduce work due to caring responsibilities, **reducing their household income**.
- As well as the loss of routine and structure, which are especially important for autistic people, the loss of social interaction was also keenly felt.
- **The return to school for some has not gone smoothly** with some schools refusing autistic children for risk reasons and others not putting in place the necessary individual plans.

"In normal times [my son] goes for respite 36 overnights a year which gives me a chance to sleep and usually attends a day service five days a week. I am now being told there will be no respite for the foreseeable. I can't go on for much longer in this situation. My son is unpredictable, he has severe meltdowns. I have no one. My mum died in February just weeks before lockdown. If I don't get a rest soon, I really don't know how I can continue."
Sylvia, parent in Scotland

Recommendations for Scotland are:

- Ensure that the Scottish Government's forthcoming review of social care and the pandemic includes the impact on autistic people and families.

- Implement the commitment to introduce a baseline of autism awareness within Initial Teacher Education.
- Move forward with plans for a national public awareness and understanding campaign due for the autumn.
- Take forward the recommendations from the Independent Review into Learning Disability and Autism within the Mental Health Act.

15.3   Care experienced children and young people

Young Lives in Lockdown (England and Wales)
Source: National Youth Advocacy Service

This study draws on data from NYAS' survey of care-experienced children and young people across England and Wales between the 15th April to the 7th of May (230 respondents).
- Factors such as reduced levels of contact are having an effect on the wellbeing of care-experienced children and young people. Half of children in care (50%) said they felt lonely more often during the lockdown. At the same time, one in five children in care (23%) had less contact from their social worker, and one in ten (13%) had not heard from them at all.
- Of the different care arrangements, **young people living in independent or semi-independent accommodation were at greatest risk of feeling lonely** more often (59%) and children in foster care the least likely to feel lonely (39%).
- A similar trend emerged for **care leavers, who overwhelmingly reported feeling lonely more often and anxious during the lockdown (86%)**, as well as saying that they were seeing their personal adviser less (43%). One in five care leavers said that they **did not have the technology they need to stay in touch** with friends and family during the lockdown.

Kinship Care

During kinship care week (5-11 October) findings from an annual survey of kinship carers in England and Wales were released by Grandparents Plus. This is described in a piece written for Research in Practice. Key messages and findings were:
- **70% of kinship care survey respondents found parenting as a kinship carer during the COVID-19 pandemic difficult or very difficult**, with half saying their children had also struggled.
- 82% of kinship carers said they don't get the information and support they need from their local authority.
- Previous worries have been exacerbated, including concerns about money (31%), feeling alone (32%), limited resources and space (23%)

and children's behaviour (26%) as well as lack of access to therapeutic support for their children.

- **Nearly one in four kinship carer respondents (24%) are worried they will be unable to cope with a second lockdown.**
- When compared to others raising children, they are more likely to be older, have a chronic health condition or disability, be single, live in poverty, unemployed, poorly housed and socially isolated. These factors place them at increased risk of negative impacts of coronavirus and related restrictions.
- **Barriers to virtual support approaches** include digital skills and confidence as well as access to smart phones/computers and internet data. However, virtual support by Grandparents Plus has developed over time using WhatsApp and Zoom. Benefits of this approach include increased access for those living in rural areas, who find travel difficult or are balancing work and childcare. Practice varies depending on local needs/preferences with some operating during the day and children sometimes participating and others operating in the evening after the children have gone to bed.
- The article reports an **increase in reports of child on carer violence and abuse**.
- One of key learnings is the **need for more information, advice and support for kinship carers**, and that virtual support can be part of the solution.

Read the survey findings of the Grandparents Plus survey.

COVID-19 series: briefing on children's social care providers, September 2020 (England)
Source: Ofsted
Date: Evidence from visits to children's homes between 1 and 11 September

The briefing, based on ungraded visits to 70 homes between 1 September and 11 September. The briefing reports concerns over a lack of **mental health support for children during lockdown** with young people reporting an increase in low mood, phobias and anxiety. However, it adds that **in some cases children experienced an improvement in their mental health** and had good engagement with mental health professionals (possibly due to better relationships with staff and children in the home and reduced anxiety about school or outside pressures). Some homes reported **improved relationships** between staff and children during lockdown e.g. fewer physical interventions. That said, relationships between children in some homes during lockdown were described as "difficult", with occasional reports of bullying and conflict between children. There were also reports of children going missing during lockdown.

15.4   Young carers

The [Barnardo's research](#) states that **the pandemic will increase the number of young carers, especially BAME young carers**, as parents, siblings and other relatives have been required to shield or have become ill from the virus. Lack of information (e.g. on whether a family member was on the 'vulnerable' list) was associated with **increased uncertainty and anxiety for young carers**.

15.5   Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) children and young people

Public Health England's [COVID-19 mental health and wellbeing surveillance report](#) (see Mental Health section) describes the evidence to date with regards to ethnicity. As per previous SG C&F briefings, the report states that there is mixed evidence on whether mental wellbeing varies by ethnicity during COVID-19. Some evidence suggests that young people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds have experienced a higher rate of mental health and wellbeing concerns, though other studies have not found this to be the case. As previously reported, data from Kooth service indicates increased risk for BME children and young people (see July & Sep SG C&F briefings), as does research from the COVID-19 Psychological Research Consortium's study (a non-representative study of 2,000 young people) which found that BME respondents had higher levels of anxiety and depression compared to White and Asian respondents. The report also notes that there is variation within children and young people from the same ethnic background, and that the findings of COVID-surveys are complicated by the increased profile of racism and anti-racism over the same period.

[Coronavirus and Me: Experiences of children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups in Wales.](#)
Source: The Children's Commissioner for Wales
Date: 30 September 2020

The Children's Commissioner for Wales has published a report looking at the systematic disadvantages faced by Black, Asian and Minority ethnic (BAME) children living in Wales during lockdown. Findings from a survey conducted in May 2020[19] of children and young people in Wales aged 3-18, of whom 1,496 were from a BAME background, include:

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[19] On 13th May 2020, the 'Coronavirus and Me' survey was launched to find out about the experiences of children and young people in Wales. This survey captured information about the lives of over 23,700 children between the ages of 3-18, and ran for a two week period during which restrictions to keep communities in Wales safe had been in place for two months.

- **Across most of the factors measured, BAME children fared worse**. This included factors such as play, outdoor exercise, food security, support, information, learning and mental wellbeing.
- 7-11 year old BAME children were significantly **less likely to say they felt happy 'most of the time'** and 12-18 year old BAME children were significantly less likely to say the **felt safe** 'most of the time'.
- BAME 12-18 year old respondents were significantly more likely to say they had been affected most by not being able to leave the house, and changes to physical activity and exercise. BAME respondents were **significantly less likely to say they had been exercising outdoors, across the age groups**.
- BAME 7-11 year olds were significantly less likely to say they were playing more often than before, and significantly more likely to say they were actually **playing less than before**.
- BAME respondents 12-18 were significantly more likely to say they were worried about getting behind with their learning.
- BAME respondents were significantly more likely to say they **needed help making sure their family has enough food**, across age groups.
- However, there were some responses from BAME children that could be seen as representing **more positive experiences**. These included learning new skills, time spent reading/writing, and indoor exercise (although these measures varied by ethnic group). For example, BAME respondents were significantly more likely to say they have been reading and writing (among 12-18 year olds), and cooking (among 7-11 year olds), during lockdown.
- There was mixed evidence of levels of worry about the coronavirus but overall, it does not appear that BAME children were more worried.

[Schools' responses to Covid-19 The challenges facing schools and pupils in September 2020](#)

Source: The Nuffield Foundation & National Foundation for Educational Research
Date: 1 Sep 2020

Teachers estimate that pupils are on average three months behind on their learning as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, with **the most deprived pupils and those from BAME backgrounds most likely to be affected**, according to new research from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). Almost half of pupils are **in need of intensive catch-up support**, with those from the most deprived schools and schools with highest proportions of pupils from BAME backgrounds in greatest need. This is based on a NFER school survey of 3000 school leaders and teachers in England. The findings were collected between the 8th and 15th July 2020.

15.6   Vulnerable children and young people

Beyond the pandemic: Strategic priorities for responding to childhood trauma
Source: UK Trauma Council
Date: 17 September 2020

A new and independent expert body, the UK Trauma Council (UKTC), has been established and published a report calling on a sustained response to childhood trauma. The body brings together 22 leading experts in research, policy and practice from all four nations of the UK. In its report, the UKTC identifies three ways in which the pandemic is impacting on the experience of childhood trauma:

- It increases the risk that more children will be exposed to trauma, including through **sudden bereavement or exposure to domestic violence**;
- It increases the likelihood that **those with prior experiences of trauma** (for example, because of abuse) will experience significant difficulties; and
- It **compromises the ability of adults and professional systems to** identify a struggling child and **mitigate the impact of trauma**, including mental health problems.

The report states that the full extent of this impact will take time to understand, as many children and young people's needs have been hidden within their homes during lockdown. As education settings open there will need to be a renewed focus on children and young people's wellbeing and mental health.

The UKTC makes four recommendations in response to the pandemic, which it addresses to government departments, professional bodies, and those developing policy and practice. These are to:
- Prioritise responding to trauma in national and local strategies;
- Invest in specialist trauma provision for children and young people;
- Equip all professionals who work with children and young people with the skills and capacity to support those who have experienced trauma;
- Shift models of help towards prevention, through research, clinical innovation and training.

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on child welfare: online abuse
Source: NSPCC
Date: September 2020

This briefing uses insight from Childline counselling sessions and NSPCC helpline contacts to highlight the impact of online abuse on children and

young people during the coronavirus pandemic. Key findings include:

- Since lockdown, the NSPCC helpline saw a **60 per cent increase in contacts from people with concerns about children experiencing online sexual abuse**.
- Childline has seen a **11 per cent increase in the number of counselling sessions about online sexual abuse**.
- The briefing describes a rise in the **use of online platforms by children and young people to counter loneliness** (sometimes for the first time), with some then being targeted by perpetrators of sexual abuse.
- For some children and young people, experiencing online sexual abuse can leave them frightened about using online platforms. This can give them extra challenges during the pandemic, when a lot of communication is taking place online. Others described suicidal ideations, self-harming and difficulties trusting other people after what had happened to them.
- Some parents and carers felt their child was **struggling to understand the severity of online risks** and described sophisticated systems that perpetrators use to sexually exploit children online.
- It can be difficult for children to report online abuse and ask for help for fear of judgement, blackmail or punishment, as well as feelings of shame and guilt.
- The briefing calls for Online Harms regulation across the UK which would include a 'Duty of Care' for online platforms, a regulatory body, and user advocacy arrangements.

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on child welfare: physical abuse
Source: NSPCC Learning
Date: 02 September 2020

NSPCC Learning has published a briefing using insight from Childline counselling sessions and NSPCC helpline contacts to **highlight the impact of physical abuse on children and young people during the coronavirus pandemic**. Key findings include: a 22% increase in the number of counselling sessions provided by Childline about physical abuse, from an average of 420 sessions per month before pandemic restrictions were imposed to 514 sessions per month since lockdown; a **53% increase in contacts to the NSPCC helpline from people with concerns about children experiencing physical abuse**, from an average of 696 per month before lockdown to an average of 1,066 since lockdown.

Online grooming – rise in self-generated videos of children
Date: 07 October 2020
Source: UK Safer Internet Centre

The UK Safer Internet Centre (UKSIC) has revealed new data on online child sexual abuse material. The data, from the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), shows that in the first six months of 2020, 44% of all child sexual abuse content the IWF dealt with involved self-generated material, compared to 29% in 2019. Self-generated content can include child sexual abuse content, created using webcams, sometimes in the child's own room, and then shared online. In some cases, children are groomed, deceived or extorted into producing and sharing a sexual image or video of themselves.

ONS modern slavery statistics (April to June 2020) indicate an **increase (from last year) in child exploitation**, which is 'partially driven by an increase in the identification of 'county lines' cases'. **For the first time, more referrals were received for child potential victims than adults**. Just over a third (38%; 843) of the NRM referrals were for potential victims who claimed exploitation as adults (compared to 52% in the preceding quarter), whilst 58% (1,274) claimed exploitation as children. Between April and June, 409 referrals were flagged as county lines referrals, accounting for 19 per cent of all referrals received in the quarter. The majority (85%) were made for boys. Criminal exploitation accounted for 55 per cent of all referrals for children received by the NRM (93% male). However, 90 per cent of referrals for child sexual exploitation were for female potential victims. This data raises concerns about children being at greater risk of being groomed during lockdown.

Impact of Covid-19 on county lines (England and Wales)
Source: Crest
Date: May 2020

Research being undertaken by Crest for the Hadley trust on the **criminal exploitation of looked after children** in North Wales and Merseyside includes an article on the impact of COVID-19 on county lines. The research suggests that rather than reducing county lines activity, COVID-19 has led to criminal gangs adapting their methods of working e.g. by recruiting local young people to carry drugs, instead of recruiting young people in cities to travel long distances. The **move towards local recruitment** means that in assessing whether children are being exploited in county lines during lockdown, attention should be paid to both vulnerable children in the 'county bases' and **those going missing from the 'home bases'**. The article states that a reduction in missing incidents involving looked after children (compared to the same period in 2019) may reflect this move towards recruitment of local children.

15.7   Domestic abuse and violence against women and girls

[Contacts to NSPCC helpline about domestic abuse up by nearly 50%](#)
Source: NSPCC
Date: 2 Oct 2020

NSPCC helpline data reports a substantial increase in calls from people concerned about children living in homes with domestic abuse. Since the introduction of national lockdown measures, **the number of contacts from people concerned about children living in homes with domestic abuse rose by 49%**. There were 818 contacts in August. The charity is calling for the introduction of statutory (funded) recovery services for children living with domestic abuse.

15.8   LGBTQ+ Children and Young People

No new evidence to report this month.

15.9   Children and young people impacted by the justice system

[Living through lockdown: Reflections and recommendations from young people at risk of serious violence](#) **(England)**
Source: Redthread
Date: 28 September 2020

Three violence prevention charities, StreetDoctors, Redthread and MAC-UK have published a report following a survey of a small number of young people who use their services in England to find out how lockdown affected their lives and their communities. The survey ran between 6 May and 15 June 2020. Findings from analysis of 41 responses from young people aged between 14 and 25 include:

- Most survey respondents encountered difficulties during lockdown, with **isolation, boredom, and inability to access services**.
- Most felt that lockdown has **negatively impacted on their mental health**.
- Most felt that their **safety levels** have been maintained or increased over lockdown (mainly because they were at home); however, 17% said they felt less safe during lockdown. Of those that felt their safety has decreased, this was predominantly due to their fear of contracting coronavirus.
- **One in ten respondents have been directly affected by COVID-19, with a close friend or family member dying of the disease**.

- As well as the essential support of friends and family, over a third of respondents note the support of youth work and counselling services in getting them through lockdown.
- More than half of respondents identified specific **deficits in the support** they receive. As well as the support they would receive through school or college, health services, employment and social care were highlighted.
- Things that are important to young people include spending time with family and friends, being given opportunities to contribute to their local community through work or volunteering, support from social workers and youth workers, clear communication from policy makers and feeling safe on the streets.

The report includes a section on recommendations for planning for a local lockdown. These include consulting with young people to produce targeted messages around restrictions; ongoing opportunities for community engagement; schools to have the resources to support children during local lockdowns; clear digital engagement strategies to ensure consistency during lockdowns; funding for local organisations to support young people during lockdowns where schools and other services cannot; referral criteria for support services to be relaxed during lockdowns (particularly for those struggling with mental health problems); and, a long-term plan to ensure young people do not suffer disproportionately.

16. Impact on services

Planning children's services in times of local lockdowns (England)

Councils in badly affected areas in England have spent the summer putting in place **contingency plans for maintaining support for children and families** in the event of a second wave of COVID-19. For example, every child in touch with Birmingham Children's Trust has a risk assessment in place to inform decisions about contact. In Lancashire, the council is working with school leaders to ensure free meals are maintained if a child is unable to attend. And in Greater Manchester, the combined authority has provided laptops and wifi connections for vulnerable children if they are unable to attend school and agencies hold daily triage meetings to consider domestic abuse notifications and agreed response. **Priorities** include continuity of education for children in areas worst affected by the virus, particularly children living in areas of deprivation, and adequate testing regimes in place to avoid staff and child absences in schools in particular. Helpful adaptations include a continuation of flexible working practices and redeployment of the workforce and more proactive partnership working.

This is an edited excerpt from the [Children & Young People Now October](#) edition.

No child left behind: a public health informed approach to improving outcomes for vulnerable children (PDF) (England)
Source: Public Health England
Date: 02 September 2020

Public Health England (PHE) has published a report on public health approaches to improving outcomes for vulnerable children. The report looks at identifying and meeting needs, reducing risk and building protective factors. It also outlines PHE resources that can be used to inform multi-agency approaches to addressing childhood vulnerability. PHE have also published an additional report describing the extent and nature of vulnerability in childhood in England: No child left behind: understanding and quantifying vulnerability (PDF).

[Paediatrics 2040 - Reimagining the future of paediatric care post-COVID-19 (UK-wide)](#)
Source: RCPCH
Date: June 2020

This report summarises learnings from paediatric practice during the pandemic, focusing in particular on the elements of practice to keep and take forward into the future. It is based on rapid qualitative research with both paediatricians and children and young people across all four nations of the UK, along with a range of supplementary data[20]. 57 Young people aged 11-25 were involved through 9 online workshops representing 11 different youth organisations, 8 of whom were based in Scotland. The key findings are briefly summarised below:

- **Emerging priorities for children and young people** were health messaging (young people have felt excluded from COVID-19 messaging), not being forgotten (young people felt their needs have not been prioritised) and confidentiality (both in relation to remote and face-to-face support).
- Young people expressed feeling that they didn't want to bother the NHS, or to cause any fuss when there was a pandemic to consider, which aligns with the data around **delayed presentations**.
- Children and young people want there to be a **strong focus on wellbeing, resilience and mental health support** in recovery planning. A need for **support for bereavement** due to COVID-19 was identified, and resilience and wellbeing support in schools.
- The pandemic has created the conditions for practices previously thought to be unworkable - such as tele clinics and working from home

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[20] For example, the question "Do you have any examples of innovative practice happening in your service that we can share with others?" was shared on the child health services tool and responses analysed.

– to be possible. The use of new technologies will, however, need to be evaluated when thinking about how to sustain them. It will also be crucial to ensure that technology is safe and accessible for all.

- For children and young people, there were positives and negatives about **remote consultations** (phone/video). For some, it provided greater support and access (e.g. by removing transport barriers) whilst for others issues were raised around lack of privacy in the home and connectivity. Overall, however children and young people wanted the choice of delivery to be continued.
- **The increased use of technology** to interact with patients and families was valued. Local patient surveys have identified convenience, lack of need to travel and overall less time taken as key benefits.
- **COVID-19 has transformed all of our working lives** in ways we would never have imagined or predicted. New ways of working have helped the paediatric community support each other and allowed paediatricians to stay connected with their patients, supporting continuity of care and relationships.

The report identifies the key changes from this period that their members would like to hold on to and take forwards into the future. These include **increasing use of remote technology, particularly for triage and outpatient work** and recognising the importance of taking care of our staff wellbeing. This report is the first in a series of publications from the [Paediatrics 2040 project](#).

[**Guidance Of Good Practice Relating To Social Distanced And Hybrid Family Group Conferences**](#) **(England)**
Source: Research in Practice (Fulcrum Family Services)
Date: 2020

Research in Practice has published guidance on how to conduct socially distanced and hybrid family group conferences (combining physical attendance and video conferencing).

The Carnegie Trust has published its [Learning from Lockdown: 12 Steps to Eliminate Digital Exclusion](#) report. The report sets out a series of 12 recommendations calling for ambitious action from policy makers, practitioners, academics and industry to tackle this issue. The recommendations draw on learning and reflections from the coronavirus outbreak and lockdown period.

17. Scope, limitations and further information

This briefing document is intended to provide information and raise awareness on current and emerging published evidence on the impacts of COVID-19 on

children and young people, including those with vulnerabilities and/or those experiencing disadvantage.

Research scope and limitations

The scope of these briefings is very broad to cover a range of policy interests. It covers a non-systematic selection of evidence sources from Scotland and other parts of the UK published in September (mostly). In the main, however, the following topics are excluded:

- Early years and maternity;
- Most aspects of physical health, in particular COVID-19 infection and transmission in children and young people;
- A detailed coverage of the impact of COVID-19 on education and learning.

Please note there are limitations to the conclusions that can be made from the evidence presented for the following reasons:

- Much of the survey data lacks robust comparability to pre-lockdown baseline data due to questions asked or data collection changes.
- Few studies have used validated self-report measures e.g. of mental wellbeing (e.g. WEMWBS, SDQ).
- Results from different surveys and sources will not be comparable given the different sampling approaches, timing, jurisdiction and questions used in each survey.
- Changes in the different government guidance over the course of the pandemic and within different parts of the UK is also likely to impact on results.

This briefing is not an exhaustive overview or a critical appraisal or endorsement of the quality of research. A rapid review of academic literature is outwith the scope of this briefing.

Please note that some of these summaries have been drawn from the NSPCC Learning series updates (CASPAR weekly update) and the Care Inspectorate Children and Young People Bulletin series which readers may wish to subscribe to.

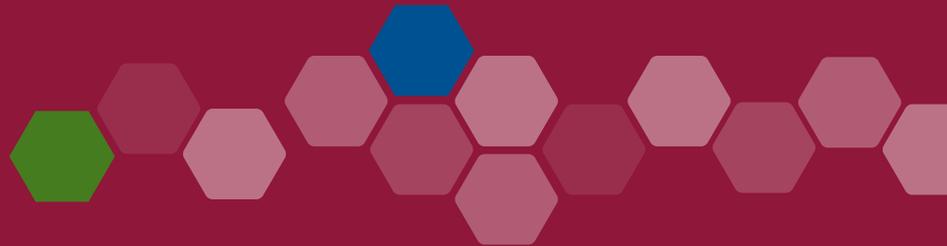**Children and Families Analytical Unit**, **Scottish Government**