



Impact of Covid-19 on children and young people's mental health: results of survey with teachers and school staff

YoungMinds carried out a survey with 1,135 teachers and members of school or college staff between Friday 15th May and Monday 1st June. The survey was hosted on surveygizmo.eu and promoted through social media and charity mailing listsⁱ.

Teaching staff and support staff made up the most common groups of respondents, with 607 respondents reporting that they work in these roles. Other respondents included pastoral leads, members of Senior Leadership Teams, Headteachers, school nurses and school governors. There was a relatively even split of respondents from primary and secondary schools, at 40% and 35% respectively, with the remaining respondents working in FE colleges and early years.

Outlined below are some of the key themes which arose from the survey.

- 1. Most respondents thought additional pastoral support would be important for young people's wellbeing when they return to school.**

When asked what measures would be most helpful for the mental health and wellbeing of young people on their return to school or college, **78% of respondents reported that additional pastoral support would be helpful**. In conjunction with this, **24% of respondents felt unconfident that their school or college was well equipped to support students on their return**.

The next most popular suggestion was a best practice guide on how to support mental health through the transition back to school, which **67% of respondents** agreed would be a useful resource.

Respondents also suggested a range of initiatives they felt would be useful for young people's wellbeing. Suggestions fluctuated from short-term ideas to mitigate against problems which are a direct result of Covid-19, to more long-term suggestions based around a restructure of the education system. Some of those mentioned most frequently include:

- More funding for mental health services

- Improved connection of schools with CAMHS / mental health workers for each school
- Dedicated training for teachers on mental health
- Revision of the exam system
- A 'recovery curriculum' so that all children are able to catch up without compromising their wellbeing
- A comprehensive restructure of the education system where learning is more important than assessment.

One respondent commented:

'Schools need to be able to focus on the wellbeing of the children and adults in school rather than the preoccupation of league tables and Ofsted. This could be an opportunity to return schools to focusing on the needs of the children and the trust in teachers to provide high quality education and pastoral support so that teachers can embrace being teachers rather than jumping through seemingly impossible hoops'.

2. Most respondents think that the changes that have been in place (i.e. schools being closed to most students) have had a negative impact on young people's mental health.

74% of respondents agreed that schools being closed to most students has had a negative impact on the mental health of young people. **5% of respondents thought it has had a positive impact.**

Many respondents emphasised that the potential of time away from the school environment to have an impact was dependent on a variety of factors. For the 74% of respondents who thought the time would have a negative impact, reasons given include:

- No access to provisions young people would usually receive through the school, both in terms of pastoral support and educational resources
- No access to specific provisions for disabilities
- Disadvantage through poverty
- The quality of the social experience at home
- Living conditions (for example, living in an overcrowded space or without access to a garden)
- Amount of time that parents have to spend with their children to help them learn or play
- How much an individual young person relies on school for pastoral care.

Many mentioned the impact of the return to school and how this would be challenging for students. Teachers and school staff were worried that younger children would struggle with social distancing.

A common comment was that some with existing mental health conditions, such as anxiety, may have experienced an improvement in their mental health, possibly because of less pressure from school. For those where this was the case and for others who have had a positive experience in general, going back to school might be particularly difficult.

One respondent said:

"I am unable to make a sweeping statement. Some families are thriving because the academic pressure from school has been lifted. But other children and families are missing the routine and structure and their friends. It's not the schools closing that is the problem - it's the situation families were in before which was always there but perhaps just feels magnified at the moment."

3. Lack of structure and routine and an increase in students' anxiety are among top concerns for teachers and school staff.

Of those surveyed, **88% of respondents thought that lack of structure and routine at home would have had an impact on student wellbeing**, followed closely by **79% who thought increased anxiety around the pandemic would have had an effect**.

The third most reported concern (**73% of respondents**) was young people spending more time in unsuitable home environments over the course of the lockdown period and as schools gradually reopen.

When asked to elaborate on this, respondents frequently cited:

- Lack of connection to peers and struggles with social interaction as a result of not having face to face contact
- Children and young people who were accessing support at school are no longer doing so, whether it's through counsellors or teachers
- Parents finding it hard to balance supervising the children in their care and working from home, leading to children and young people struggling with school work and regulating their emotional needs
- Students struggling to manage their own workloads, leading to stress and anxiety
- Many respondents stressed that they were particularly concerned for SEND students and those with additional learning needs, particularly with regards to an increasing attainment gap and the potential mental health implications of being out of school.

One respondent commented:

"There are a lot of children who would receive interventions in school to support their wellbeing. This, for some families, has not be able to continue. I also believe social connection for our children is important and some are not receiving this."

4. Teachers and school staff identified funding, guidance and training as most important for helping them in their roles as schools and colleges reopen to all students.

Teachers and school staff were asked to identify what specific measures would help them in their roles when schools reopened, both in a teaching capacity and in a mental health and wellbeing capacity.

Funding

Funding was one of the areas mentioned most frequently by respondents. With regards to where they would like to see extra funding, answers included:

- For general mental health support
- Teaching assistants to help in the classroom
- Trained mental health leads to liaise with teachers and school practitioners on identifying factors and measures to tackle mental health problems when they arise
- Increased capacity for CAMHS and quicker referral pathways.

Guidance for teachers

Guidance fell generally into two different categories – on practical areas such as implementing social distancing, how to organise the curriculum to minimise the effect of time away from school, and lesson plans; and guidance on how to provide support to students.

Suggestions of what could be covered in support-focused guidance included:

- How to deliver specific sessions to students on wellbeing, including ideas of resources to use
- Places to refer children most affected due to loss of family/ill health/mental health needs
- Lists of support available to all students

Training

Some respondents reported that they would like to have access to extra training in light of Covid-19. Suggestions of what kind of training would be useful ranged from training in general mental health support and how to provide pastoral care, to more specific ideas. These included training in CBT and in dealing with post-pandemic stress.

Protective measures

Some respondents also noted the need for protective measures for both staff and students in order for them to feel comfortable and prepared. Again, there were a range of both practical and pastoral measures suggested.

In terms of practical measures, some respondents mentioned smaller class sizes and PPE for teachers. Altered grade boundaries and extended deadlines for university applications were also mentioned, alongside more time to spend with students outside of lesson time in order to reacclimatise to the school environment.

5. Teachers and school staff are worried about the effect of the pandemic on young people's academic attainment.

When asked how concerned they were about schools being closed to must students having a detrimental impact on student attainment, **70% of respondents reported that they were 'quite' or 'very' concerned, while 13% stated they were unconcerned.**

Teachers and school staff were also asked if they felt online resources would be an adequate replacement for classroom-based learning throughout the duration of widespread school closures. **30% of respondents did not feel confident that students at their school or college had the physical resources necessary to complete online learning.**

Many respondents raised that they felt that the success of online learning was dependent on a variety of factors, including:

- Access to the necessary resources to complete online learning
- A suitable environment in which to learn
- The level of support parents and carers were able to offer with online learning
- The learning style of the individual young person
- Whether the young person's mental health and wellbeing needs were also being met.

One respondent said:

"I am confident that the work set by teachers has been of high standard. I am not confident that all students have been able to have access or would be willing to access the work."

¹95% respondents lived in England, 4% lived in Wales, and 1% lived in Scotland. Two respondents – 0.3% of the total percentage – lived in Northern Ireland.