

# COVID-19: Children, young people and families

## June 2021 Evidence Summary

### Key messages

#### Introduction

This briefing is the sixth in a series of 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. It covers research published between October 2020 and May 2021. Most of the research covers the period during which COVID-19 prevention restrictions were eased until the end of 2020, but some present evidence from the second lockdown period in early 2021. As with previous evidence summaries, many of the findings below are based on non-representative samples and they cannot be generalised to the wider population. Caution should therefore be exercised in interpreting them.

#### General findings across all groups

The latest research continues to highlight the **on-going difficulties** children, young people and their families faced during the later months of 2020 and early in 2021. While findings include some positive experiences families have had over the past year, most continue to show negative impacts, particularly for some sub-groups. The key messages below state which country or countries research was conducted in.

- The latest available evidence from the second half of 2020 in Scotland showed that for some, particularly for older children and young people, effects on **anxiety and stress persisted** (CEYRIS 2, TeenCovidLife 2, INISS). In UK-wide research, young people with a history of mental health needs reported more substantial negative mental health impacts during the most recent lockdown compared with the first lockdown, and felt that these impacts will be long term (YoungMinds).
- The latest UK-wide evidence on **mental wellbeing** from Oxford University's Co-SPACE study found a sharp decrease in behavioural, emotional and attentional difficulties among primary and secondary school-aged children following the lifting of restrictions after February 2021. The level of difficulties experienced in February 2021 equalled the previous peak in June 2020.
- By comparing levels of emotional and behavioural difficulties among groups of children that had been prioritised for a return to school in June, with those who

had not returned until September, longitudinal UK research found that **negative mental health effects persisted** even when all children had returned to school (ISER).

- Recent Scottish evidence also continued to show lower levels of **mental wellbeing among parents** with young children. Parents in the CEYRIS 2 study reported lower than average mental wellbeing in the latest survey and Save the Children's qualitative research with low-income parents corroborated this. In the UK, mothers who were younger, never married, or from an ethnic minority were more likely to experience a sharp decline in their mental wellbeing than fathers and male non-parent respondents, though all groups experienced some decline overall (University of Edinburgh).
- The theme of a need for **more 'recovery' support** e.g. in schools and childcare settings, particularly for child mental wellbeing, continued to be expressed in the most recent Scottish publications (Save the Children, INISS, Family Fund, Who Cares? Scotland). There was also a desire for **clearer and more direct communication** with older young people on restrictions, changes and indirect impacts such as on education (Scottish Government working paper), as well as dialogue with parents (Connect and Save the Children).
- There was some evidence of **positive impacts of the pandemic on family relationships in Scotland**. Families with children with disabilities and families with lower incomes reported enjoying more time together (CREID and Save the Children). Among children under age 7 in Scotland, the CEYRIS 2 research found improved relationships with parents, carers, and siblings compared with the initial lockdown period. Save the Children's research also noted that some parents on low incomes enjoyed being more involved in their children's education.
- Evidence from prior to the start of the COVID-19 vaccination programme indicated a high desire among 12 to 17 year olds in Scotland to **accept a vaccination** if it were available to them (TeenCovidLife 2). However, other UK-wide research from late 2020 highlighted that vaccine hesitancy was highest among the youngest age groups surveyed (16 to 24 years olds) (University of Glasgow, ISER, Ipsos, PHS).

A number of findings from Scotland, the UK, and international sources continue to reinforce previous findings on how different **sub-groups of young people** are experiencing school, college, or work during the pandemic:

- Based on Scottish evidence from late 2020, **young people over age 18, young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or long-term illnesses**, and **young carers** continued to report consistently worse physical and mental wellbeing (Lockdown Lowdown). Across the UK in early 2021, **children and young people with SEND** and from **low-income households** also showed elevated behavioural, emotional, and attentional difficulties (Co-SPACE). The Co-SPACE study also found that during the first year of the pandemic, **younger**

- children** (4-10 year olds) experienced greater changes in their mental wellbeing (as reported by their parents/caregivers) than adolescents (11-17 year olds).
- The impact of the pandemic **on the wellbeing of girls** continued to be greater across the UK. In particular, older young girls reported more feelings of loneliness, sadness, anxiety, and worry (Girlguides, ImpactEd, and Agenda).
  - **Young people living in the most deprived areas of Scotland** were less likely to report good physical health, but reported no differences in mental wellbeing in late 2020 (Lockdown Lowdown). In early 2021, research by CPAG Scotland found that many low-income families in Scotland still lacked devices and sufficient internet connections needed for home learning and spent more on bills while their children were at home. However, they indicated that cash payments for free school meals were working for them. UK-wide research reiterated the way that low-income families faced increased income instability and food insecurity, and that these continue to be experienced along existing inequality divides (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Food Foundation, and ImpactEd).
  - Research with organisations working with **refugee, asylum seeking, and Roma families with children** carried out by Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland highlighted significant additional barriers, such as language barriers and poorer housing conditions, faced by these groups and how critical third sector services were for them.
  - Research with parents of **children with disabilities** found continued difficulties in accessing support and resources and reported that these children and their families continue to experience lower levels of mental wellbeing (CREID, Disabled Children's Partnership, Sibs, and NSPCC). Other research highlights the challenges parents faced with remote learning for children and young people, particularly for parents of children with SEND (Connect).
  - **Care experienced young people** – The Lockdown Lowdown survey found lower mental health and worse relationships in this group than for other respondents. Research by Who Cares? Scotland and CELCIS highlighted barriers continued to exist for employment, digital access, remote learning, and access to support. However, some respondents reported improvements in physical health.
  - **Minority ethnic young people** – The Lockdown Lowdown survey found that minority ethnic respondents felt less good about their physical health and were less happy being back at school and felt less safe there than white respondents. UK and international evidence continued to show the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on the wellbeing and experiences of young minority ethnic people (Children's Commissioner for Wales and the Evidence-Based Practice Unit).
  - **Vulnerable children and young people** – NSPCC data from UK helplines showed sharp increases in calls regarding abuse of children and requests for mental health support. UCL's regular survey, which includes questions on abuse, indicates that people living in households with children continued to report higher rates of physical or psychological abuse. International evidence from UNICEF

suggests that while reports and calls regarding violence against children may be decreasing or suggesting a mixed picture, self-reported surveys and injuries treated in hospitals suggest a pattern of increases in violence.

- **LGBTQ+ young people** – Studies in both Scotland and the UK (Lockdown Lowdown and Just Like Us) also continued to confirm more pronounced mental wellbeing impacts on LGBTQ+ young people, particularly Black LGBTQ+ young people.

### **Access to services and evidence-based responses**

- The PHS CEYRIS 2 survey found that a minority of parents of children aged 2 to 7 said they **had not accessed the services they wanted** during 2020, primarily those seeking dentistry services, health visitor services, and Family Support Workers. The reasons given were that parents thought the service was unavailable or that ‘they did not want to be an extra burden’ at the time.
- Scottish evidence continued to emerge around interruptions in services for some groups including care experienced children and those living with long-term illnesses or disabilities during the initial part of the pandemic. Research also highlights difficulties faced by these groups in accessing services remotely (Who Cares? Scotland and CREID).

### **Evidence Gaps**

Studies on the impacts of COVID-19 on children and families have begun to consistently reinforce one another within the evidence base. In the short term, it will be useful to monitor changes in outcomes for children and families as the period of lockdown that began in January 2021 concludes. This will be particularly important for the different sub-groups highlighted in this summary who have experienced the greatest impacts of the pandemic to ensure they are not ‘left behind’ by response efforts as restrictions ease.

As much of the research conducted in Scotland covered in this summary was collected during 2020, it does not cover the lockdown period during 2021. Several projects are, however, continuing to gather data at the time of writing this summary.

As noted previously, the extent and impact of COVID related bereavement – and other adverse childhood experiences – needs to be better understood. In the longer term, there is the on-going need for continuing cross-sectional studies to monitor the impact of the pandemic.

## Research Topics

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

This briefing covers a broad range of policy interests but focuses predominantly on social and emotional impacts of COVID-19 on children and young people aged 3-18, with a particular interest in children and families experiencing vulnerabilities, disadvantage or discrimination.

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

#### [Lockdown Lowdown: A survey of young people in Scotland about their 'new normal' lives as lockdown restrictions change – Demographic Exploration of Results](#)

Source: Scottish Youth Parliament, YouthLink Scotland, and Young Scot

Date: January 2021

This research funded by the Scottish Government and delivered by partners Young Scot, Scottish Youth Parliament, and YouthLink Scotland, assessed the impact of coronavirus on education, relationships, employment, mental and physical wellbeing, and access to information. This online survey follows on from the initial Lockdown Lowdown survey that was carried out in April 2020. The new survey ran between 28 September and 2 November 2020 and received 6,043 responses from young people aged 11-25 across Scotland. As this was an open survey, findings cannot be treated as representative of young people in Scotland. Most survey respondents were aged under 18 and around six in ten were female.

General findings from the survey were published in early December 2020 and were covered in the [December edition](#) of this evidence summary. This subsequent publication presents findings presented according to key demographic groups: age, gender, ethnicity, and Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). It also presents findings for young people with disabilities, young carers and care experienced young people, and analyses education findings by type of education and employment findings by full time and part time workers. Key findings:

- Overall, the analysis shows that **young people over 18, young people with a disability or long-term illness, and young carers had worse outcomes than other groups** across most questions. This included lower self-assessed physical and mental wellbeing; lower satisfaction with educational arrangements; lower percentages reporting good relationships with family and friends; lower levels of optimism about both current and future employment; and higher levels of concern about catching and transmitting COVID-19.
- **Girls and young women had worse outcomes across most questions** with the exception of perceptions of education. In particular, female survey respondents were about half as likely to say they felt good about their mental health as male respondents. Respondents who **identified as non-binary** had substantially worse outcomes across all questions, although the sample was very small making findings less reliable.



- **There were limited differences by ethnicity.** Minority ethnic respondents were less likely to feel good about their physical health, less likely to be happy to be back at school, and less likely feel that their educational establishment had reopened in a safe way than white respondents.
- **In terms of SIMD, findings were mixed.** Young people from the most deprived areas were less likely to report good physical health; to be happy about being back in education and to feel that education has reopened safely; and to be concerned about catching and transmitting COVID-19. However, there were no differences, or no consistent differences, by SIMD quintile on other questions including mental wellbeing, relationships and employment.
- **Care experienced young people** were less likely to feel good about their physical and mental health and their relationships than other young people. However, they were slightly more likely to feel good about their employment prospects.
- **Young people in school** were more positive about the current arrangements for their educational course than those in colleges, with young people at university reporting the worst perceptions. Young people in full time employment were more positive about their current and future employment prospects than those in part time employment.

### [COVID-19 Early Years Resilience and Impact Survey \(CEYRIS\) – Findings from Round 2](#)

Source: Public Health Scotland (PHS)

Date: 1 March 2021

The COVID-19 Early Years Resilience and Impact Survey wave 2 (CEYRIS 2) was conducted between 23 November and 7 December 2020. It was an open, online parent survey on the impact of COVID-19 and associated restrictions at the time of the survey on the health and wellbeing of young children (aged 2-7) and their families. It follows on from the first round of the survey that was carried out in June and July 2020. CEYRIS 2 received 5,684 responses (around half that of the first round). The sample was self-selected and cannot therefore be seen as nationally representative. Demographic characteristics of children in CEYRIS 2 were similar to those in CEYRIS 1 and to nationally representative samples from recent national surveys. However, household income of respondents in both CEYRIS surveys was higher than average. Additionally, both surveys also had higher proportions of children with long-term conditions related to learning, concentrating, or remembering; mental health, social, emotional or behavioural issues; and other long-term conditions or illnesses compared with nationally representative data. Each round of the survey had different respondents recruited and comparisons between rounds should be treated with caution. Key findings are summarised below:



- Parents were asked how their **children's behaviours and wellbeing** at the time of the survey compared with during the initial lockdown period. For a majority of children, sleep, eating behaviour, and ability to concentrate were rated as about the same, with the remainder roughly evenly split between those that rated these factors worse, or better, than during the initial lockdown. For behaviour and mood, around half of parents saw these as the same, three in ten saw these as having improved, while around a fifth reported they were worse. For physical activity, 34% of parents reported that their child's physical activity level was the same, 42% reported increased physical activity levels and 24% reported decreased levels.
- Over a third of 2-3 year olds (39%) and just under a third of 4-7 year olds (31%) displayed signs of **behavioural or emotional difficulties**<sup>1</sup>, as assessed by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ).<sup>2</sup> For children aged 2 and 3, the SDQ domain with the greatest proportion of children displaying some level of difficulty was peer relationship problems (37%).<sup>3</sup> For children aged 4-7, hyperactivity/inattention was the domain with the greatest proportion of children displaying difficulty (33%).<sup>4</sup>
- The questions on **school and/or childcare** found that over half of children had attended school and/or childcare on five out of the last seven days (predominantly 5-7 year olds) and 7% had not attended at all in the last week. Around two fifths of children had routinely attended indoor organised activities while these were permitted to run and about a fifth of children attended outdoor activities. However, half of the children had not been routinely attending organised activities. A higher proportion of 2-4 year olds were not routinely attending any organised activities, compared with 5-7 year olds.
- In terms of **play, learning and outdoors**, almost half of parents rated their child's imaginative play as the same as it had been during the initial lockdown period and almost half rated it as better. A large majority of children (82%) had done home learning activities most days and almost half (47%) had played actively inside on most days. Under half of children had played outside most days and only 13% had been to a park or other local greenspace.
- In terms of **social interactions**, just over half of children had not spoken to friends at all in the last week, while one quarter had spoken to friends most days.

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<sup>1</sup> In the previous round of the survey, parents reported 46% of 2-3 year olds and 36% of 4-7 year olds displaying signs of difficulties.

<sup>2</sup> SDQ is a measure of emotional, behavioural and developmental difficulties. A higher score indicates greater difficulty.

<sup>3</sup> In the previous round of the survey, 43% of 2-3 year olds displayed peer relationship problems.

<sup>4</sup> In the previous round of the survey, 41% of 4-7 year olds displayed difficulties with hyperactivity/inattention.

Around a third had spoken to extended family members most days, while 14% had not spoken to extended family members at all in the last week. Parents and carers were also asked to rate changes in the quality of their child's relationships with some of the people in their lives. A large proportion were rated as experiencing no real change. However, over a third were rated as having worse relationships with close family members with whom they did not live full time and with grandparents, while around a third reported improved relationships with siblings and with parents/carers.

- **Parents' and carers' wellbeing** as measured by the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing scale (SWEMWBS) showed a lower average score of 21, which was lower than the 2011 population norms based on which the scale was developed (24).<sup>5</sup> Minorities of parents and carers also said that they never or rarely feel relaxed, close to others, or optimistic.
- Parents and carers of 61% of the children in the survey reported that there had been no change to **household income**, while for just over a third of parents and carers (35%) household income had reduced because of the pandemic. The majority of parents and carers who reported reduced income said this had not impacted their ability to pay for certain essentials. However, for between a tenth and a fifth of parents and carers, the reduction in household income had impacted on their family's ability to pay for essentials, such as buying enough food (11%) and paying household bills (19%).
- There was some evidence parents **had not accessed the services they wanted**. For most services a minority of parents said they had not accessed the services they wanted for their children: between 3% for A&E, around a tenth for GP, 17% for the health visitor service, and a third for Family Support Worker. However, almost three quarters (74%) of parents who wanted to use a dentist, had not. The most common reason given was that they thought the service was not running. A half of those who wanted support to access food had not accessed it; most commonly, because they thought they were not eligible or did not know how to access it.
- In questions on **returning to school, nursery and other childcare settings**, overall, 5% of children had not returned since they had reopened. For those children who had not returned, parents said this was because they did not need childcare, they cannot afford childcare, or that they were concerned about their child becoming ill with coronavirus.
- The vast majority of parents whose child had returned to, or started, school/childcare were confident that settings were doing what they needed to

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<sup>5</sup> WEMWBS and the short WEMWBS are measures of mental wellbeing. A lower score indicates lower mental wellbeing. In the previous round of the CEYRIS survey, the average SWEMWBS score was 20 for all parents and carers.

reduce risk and that settings were helping children to settle in, and agreed that their child was happy to go into the setting and seemed to enjoy their time there. Just under 4 in 10 parents (38%) agreed that they were concerned about their child becoming ill with the virus, while 36% disagreed. Just under half (47%) agreed that they were concerned that their child would pass the virus on to someone else, while 28% disagreed.

- Overall, most parents (83%) reported that since schools/childcare settings had reopened, they were **able to access sufficient childcare** to allow them to resume their normal work commitments, while just over a sixth (17%) said they were still unable to access sufficient childcare. The most common reason for being unable to access sufficient childcare was 'loss of or reduction in informal childcare' (44%), followed by 'closure or restriction of afterschool and/or breakfast clubs' (29%) and 'formal childcare not available' (16%).
- In terms of **direct experience of COVID-19**, 31% of parents reported that their child had self-isolated for a short period while awaiting test results, while 14% reported their child had self-isolated for a longer period. The majority of parents agreed that their child seemed unfazed by others wearing a face covering. A fifth of parents reported that their child had experienced the death of a close relative or friend since the beginning of the pandemic – 5% had experienced bereavement related to coronavirus.

## [TeenCovidLife Survey 2 – General Report](#)

Source: The University of Edinburgh

Date: February 2021

The University of Edinburgh has published findings from its second TeenCovidLife Survey – an online survey of 12 to 17 year olds on how they were coping as measures after the first lockdown began to ease and schools reopened, and how they were understanding and adhering to COVID-19 guidance. This survey ran from 18 August to 10 October 2020 after schools had reopened and exam grades were released<sup>6</sup>, and was completed by 2,232 young people across all local authorities. 761 of these participants had also participated in round one. Sixty one per cent of respondents were female and 36% were male. This was an open survey and therefore should not be treated as representative of children of this age in Scotland. Each round of the survey had different respondents recruited and comparisons between rounds should be treated with caution. Further analysis of the findings may be available in future and access to the data is available from the Generation Scotland team. Key findings are summarised below:

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<sup>6</sup> [A separate report is available](#) on results related to young people's views on SQA results from August 2020.

- **Stress** – Almost half (48%) of young people have been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with almost a fifth (19%) reporting feeling stressed about COVID-19 all or most of the time.<sup>7</sup>
- **Health Advice** – Young people trust health advice 'a lot' from medical professions (65%) compared with guidance from the Scottish (32%) or UK (18%) Government.
- **COVID-19 Guidance** – The majority of young people say they adhere to COVID-19 guidance, with the highest compliance in the use of face coverings in enclosed spaces (94%) and lowest in maintaining distance with people outside of the household (65%).
- **Vaccinations** – Eight out of ten young people (82%) wanted a COVID-19 vaccine if one was offered to them.
- **Health impact of return to school** – Six in ten young people (59%) were extremely or very worried about the impact returning to school would have on their family's risk of contracting COVID-19.
- **Safe return to school** – Young people were divided over whether or not it was safe for them to return to school following the first lockdown. Almost a third (30%) of young people neither agreed nor disagreed it was safe to return to school, while slightly over a third (36%) did not think it was safe.
- **Loneliness** – A fifth (20%) of young people reported feeling lonely most or all of the time. This was a smaller proportion of young people as during lockdown (28%), but still higher than pre-lockdown levels.
- **Social media use** – Half of young people (50%) report spending less time on social media now compared with during the summer holidays.

### [Working Paper: Covid-19 Mitigation Measures Among Children and Young People](#)

Source: Scottish Government

Date: 22 January 2021

This working paper summarised the currently available evidence base around mitigation measures for children and young people, including the use of face coverings in schools. It also highlighted forthcoming sources. It focused on wellbeing impacts on young people, understanding of restrictions, communications aimed at young people, and compliance and enforcement. Evidence to date is mainly qualitative in nature or drawn from non-representative surveys. A number of sources

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<sup>7</sup> Slightly more than a fifth (22%) reported feeling stressed during the first survey run between May and July 2020.

referred to in the Working Paper are summarised in this and previous evidence summaries. They include: [Lockdown Lowdown](#), [TeenCovidLife](#), and data from previous rounds of the CEYRIS survey. At the time of writing, the working paper is being updated with findings collected since January 2021. Key points from the Working Paper are:

### **Wellbeing impacts**

- There were no quantitative data available to date (as of January 2021) directly from young people on wellbeing impacts of COVID-19 restrictions, but qualitative research has consistently shown that young people generally were in favour of both physical distancing and the use of face coverings, and appreciate safety measures being taken, within educational establishments.
- Within focus groups with young people from vulnerable groups, conducted as part of earlier Lockdown Lowdown research, some disabled participants raised an issue about physical distancing making communication for deaf and partially sighted people more difficult. No negative impacts of face coverings were identified. The only concern around face coverings raised was by one young carer who felt unsafe due to lack of compliance within their school, and called for stronger enforcement.
- In YouGov polling conducted for the Scottish Government during September, a majority of parents of children under 18 were comfortable with the use of face coverings in schools and on school transport.

### **Understanding of restrictions**

- There were notable levels of confusion or lack of knowledge about current restrictions and rules among young people. In the recent Lockdown Lowdown survey of young people aged 11 to 24 (see above) more than half of respondents said that they knew what the rules were in general, but were not sure on all the details. A minority also reported in open response survey questions that they found the rules confusing.
- In terms of parental understanding, YouGov polling for the Scottish Government during October and November 2020 showed an increase in parents of children under 18 saying they were clear on what the guidance means for their children. However, there continues to be low awareness of the detail of the rules, and no evidence of consistently increasing awareness over time. No more than 4 in 10 parents at any time point were able to correctly identify the correct restrictions in any setting or age group. Levels of awareness were lowest for rules outdoors, particularly rules for children aged 12-17.

### **Communications**

- Qualitative research with young people points towards the need for more targeted messaging for children and young people. Research on communications carried out by Scottish Collaboration for Public Health Research

and Policy found that while young people agreed that messaging on social distancing was clear, they felt that messaging around the indirect impacts of COVID-19 for their age groups was unclear, particularly with regard to issues such as education. Older young people (16+) felt that government information and messaging was not relevant to them, on the whole, and that they would like to be addressed more directly. This was consistent with findings from the second Lockdown Lowdown survey and focus groups.

### **Compliance and enforcement**

- In terms of compliance, polling from the end of November found that 10% of parents of children under 12 and 20% of parents of children aged 12-17 said that their child had done something in the past week that was not within the restrictions / guidance. During October and November, around 4 in 10 parents said they had adapted guidance to suit their family's need. The main reason given was their child's mental health.
- There were no quantitative data available to date directly from young people on compliance, but qualitative research suggests there was a recognition by young people themselves that some young people were not complying with rules, particularly around social distancing. However, many young people perceived that other age groups were also not adhering to the restrictions, and that their age group was being unfairly judged by the media.
- Open text answers in the second Lockdown Lowdown survey and findings from the focus groups with vulnerable groups suggested that many young people would like to see stronger enforcement of existing rules and restrictions in general.

### **(Scottish and UK evidence) [The impact of COVID-19 on children and young people in Scotland: 10 to 17- year-olds](#)**

Source: Public Health Scotland

Date: 24 March 2021

This report is one of a series of papers by Public Health Scotland that considered the possible positive and adverse consequences of COVID-19, particularly infection control measures, on children and young people's development and wellbeing at different ages and stages of their lives. The report focused on children aged 10 to 17 years and assessed previously published information that **covers the period of March to December 2020**, prior to the lockdown initiated in early January 2021. It does not contain any new research and many sources have been summarised in previous editions of this evidence summary.

The following key impacts were identified in the report:



- **Young people’s relationships with their families** – The research reviewed here showed that families with young people may have experienced a range of ‘stressors’ including parents’ mental wellbeing, changing family financial situations, limited access to services, and struggling to continue education with schools closed. However, research with children aged 12-14 showed that the majority enjoyed spending time with their family and felt that they got along well together during lockdown.
- **Young people’s social development and relationships** – Recent surveys showed that young people between the ages of 11 and 18 were concerned about the impact of lockdown on seeing friends. While feelings of loneliness among 12 to 14 year olds were highest among girls during the initial lockdown in 2020. This had reduced by September 2020.
- **Digital connectedness** – While many young people increased their use of digital resources to remain connected and informed, this meant that young people relied on screens for schoolwork, socialising, and relaxation such as playing games or watching TV. Some studies (Scottish Online in Lockdown and Time for Inclusive Education) noted increases in bullying and prejudice-based activity online and that some groups faced inequalities of access to digital devices or privacy to use them.
- **Risk of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of young people** – From the evidence available, indications were that some children may have experienced increases in abuse since COVID-19 and have had fewer opportunities to safely raise this with someone.
- **Mental health and wellbeing of young people** – Recent evidence indicated that girls of all ages and young people in older age groups reported lower levels of mental health and wellbeing. Key themes highlighted by young people responding to the first Lockdown Lowdown and Scottish Online in Lockdown surveys included concerns about the physical and mental wellbeing of others, the impact on their own future and finances, and the negative emotional impact of school closures. Again, research highlighted the impact of existing inequalities for specific groups of young people.
- **Physical health of young people** – The report included findings that show that, while young people were concerned with their physical wellbeing, the majority felt they made healthy choices in their life. Other studies indicated difficulties for some in urban areas accessing outdoor space, increased difficulties for young carers in looking after their physical health, changes to sleep patterns, and impacts on young people from low-income families.
- **Access to and use of health and other services for young people** – The report drew on evidence highlighting increased in demand for mental health services and some of the challenges young people faced in accessing these such as lack of privacy, cancellations of face-to-face support, waiting lists for online services, and lack of clarity on where to obtain support. Young carers and



young people in the youth justice system have also been affected by changes in services due to the introduction of restrictions.

- **Young people's education** – The research summarised in the report noted concern among young people, particularly older young people, about the impact of the lockdown on their education and future careers. While children expressed happiness at returning to school after September 2020, they were also concerned about catching up with learning, exams, and school safety.

## 2. Impact on families

A number of findings from the [Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland](#) research in Section 7.1 cover findings on the impact on families, specifically in South Lanarkshire.

### ['Dropped into a cave': How families with young children experienced lockdown](#)

Source: Save the Children

Date: May 2021

Save the Children has published a report on the impact of the pandemic on families with young children living on low incomes in Scotland. The report was based on qualitative interviews with 18 parents across Scotland and thematically analysed their stories. The report also made a number of recommendations to prioritise the needs of low-income families with young children, protect incomes now and in the longer-term, guarantee holistic support for families, provide opportunities for children's play and relationship building, and to include families in the decision making process on recovering from the pandemic. The key findings from the report were:

- While the report highlights a number of specific challenges for families, it also concluded that they have been remarkably resilient.
- The pandemic was a **tipping point for those already in precarious financial circumstances** and a crisis for a family was often exacerbated by inadequate or gaps in support.
- Parents used **different strategies to cope with a lack of money** – cutting back on essentials, going without, or getting into debt.
- **Parents' wellbeing suffered** due to increased anxiety around money worries, the sacrifices they made, combined with a loss of support networks.
- **Practical and emotional support** was often considered to be as, if not more, important than financial support. The experiences of family support reported were mixed.
- **The importance of family and social networks** was a strong theme. Parents, especially new mums, felt isolated when social distancing restrictions and

lockdowns were in place. Keeping in touch online became a lifeline for maintaining these networks, but also brought with it additional costs.

- Most **parents enjoyed spending more time with their children** and felt their relationships with their children had been strengthened during lockdown. Some enjoyed learning more about how their children learn at school. However, many parents were overwhelmed by the pressures of ‘home schooling’ alongside the other challenges they were facing.
- The **support families received** to help with their children’s wellbeing at home varied greatly. While some parents felt support provided by schools and nurseries was not always sufficient or tailored to family circumstances.
- Parents expressed concern about the **impact of the pandemic on their children’s development**. They were worried that their children missed out on regular social interaction and expressed difficulties in providing varied activities for children given their particular circumstances.

### 3. Mental health and mental wellbeing

A number of findings from the [CEYRIS Round 2](#), [TeenCovidLife](#) and [Lockdown Lowdown Demographic Breakdown](#) research summarised in Section 1 above cover mental health and wellbeing.

#### [‘In isolation, instead of school’ \(INISS\): Vulnerable children’s experiences of Covid-19 and effects on mental health and education](#)

Source: University of Edinburgh, Scottish Government, and UNICEF UK

Date: October 2020

This report summarises research conducted to explore the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health and wellbeing of young people, particularly those preparing for examinations and vulnerable young people. The study included 759 young people completing an open, online survey and four focus groups with 45 additional young people between the ages of 14-20 years old from 17 local authorities. The survey used three sets of validated survey questions to ask about anxiety and depression, avoidance and intrusive thoughts about COVID-19, and general wellbeing.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> These are the Revised Child Anxiety and Depression Scale Short Version (RCADS-25), Child Revised Impact of Events Scale short version (CRIES-8), and the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS).

This research was funded by the NHS Scotland Chief Scientist Office as part of the Rapid Research in COVID-19 Programme. It also features in a [recent journal article](#) and potentially future publications.

Key findings included:

- 9% of young people met 'clinical threshold' levels for **depression**, 7% for **anxiety**, and 28% were categorised as having **elevated avoidance and intrusive thoughts and behaviours** in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Although only a minority of survey responders met clinical thresholds, between a third and two fifths of all young people surveyed reported that **school closure had negative impacts on their mental health and wellbeing**.
- 34% of survey participants reported that **feelings of anxiety became much or a bit worse**; 44% reported that **feelings of depression became much or a bit worse** since the start of the pandemic.
- Returning to school generally had a positive impact on wellbeing, though this was coupled with anxiety about COVID-19 related risks.
- Qualitative findings included mixed feelings around the cancellation of examinations in 2020, some stress related to learning at home, difficulty for some in maintaining motivation to learn, the increased and supportive role of social media, and some difficulty in accessing support from school during the first lockdown.
- Focus group participants responded that, among groups of their peers, the impacts on mental health were most severe for young people with pre-existing mental health conditions, those who receive additional support with learning, those living in households where there is violence and abuse, young carers, and members of other minority groups, such as LGBTQI.
- There were strong views on the need for greater mental health and wellbeing support in schools.

#### 4. Physical health and wellbeing

A number of findings from the [TeenCovidLife](#) and [Lockdown Lowdown Demographic Breakdown](#) research summarised in Section 1 above cover physical health.

#### 5. Education, learning and employment

##### [Connect's Digital Survey Report](#)

Source: Connect

Date: February 2021

The latest Connect parent online survey ran from 25 November and 16 December 2020 and was completed by 419 parents across 31 local authorities. Questions related to the experiences of their children and young people from ages of under 3 to 18 and above. The survey includes questions on the use of digital devices at home and school in the period after schools reopened, access to digital devices, and support for parents. Key findings included:

- The majority of respondents (58%) had not been offered information or training about how technology is used in their child's school.
- Parents and carers provided a number of comments highlighting a mix of positive and negative experiences with remote learning. While some highlighted the benefits of remote learning in addressing their concerns over health risks, others cited specific circumstances of children with SEND that meant that in-person learning was preferred. Some parents commented that inaccurate assumptions were made that all children would be able to participate equally from home with access to devices, internet access, and knowledge to use them.

**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 27 May 2021. The update includes the percentage of non-attendance openings recorded as pupils not in school for COVID-19 related reasons and children attending a childcare setting with COVID-19 related absences.

## 6. Children's rights and participation

### **Lockdown Lowdown: A survey of young people in Scotland about their 'new normal' lives as lockdown restrictions change – Demographic Exploration of Results**

Source: Scottish Youth Parliament, YouthLink Scotland, and Young Scot

Date: January 2021

This report presents – as described [above](#) – findings from surveys with groups of young people that were carried out between September and November 2020. When asked if they felt **able to access their rights as a young person**, respondents in the most deprived areas, older young people, girls, people who identified as non-binary or in another way, people with a long-term illness or disability, young carers, and care experienced young people were all less likely to agree than respondents in other relevant comparable groups.

## **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**

A number of findings from the [Lockdown Lowdown Demographic Breakdown](#) research summarised in Section 1 above cover findings from individuals who lived in the most disadvantaged SIMD areas. The most disadvantaged in SIMD Quintile 1 were underrepresented in this survey's sampling. The report from [Save the Children](#) also focuses on families with low income.

#### **The Cost of Learning in Lockdown – Scotland Findings**

Source: Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland

Date: March 2021

Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) has published the Scottish results of its 'Cost of a School Day' survey carried out with parents and children in January and February 2021 during the second national lockdown period. The surveys gather the views of families in Scotland in order to understand their experiences of learning during lockdown, with a particular emphasis on the experiences of households living on a low income. The open, online surveys were completed by 1,122 parents/carers and 649 children and young people in Scotland. The survey covered 30 local authorities but the findings are not based on a representative sample. A third of parent respondents were from low-income households and over 20% of children said they received free school meals.<sup>9</sup> Key findings most relevant to wellbeing are:

- 35% of low-income families lacked essential resources for learning, with laptops and devices most commonly missing. Half of these families said they were not asked if they had what was needed to learn from home.
- 75% of families receiving cash payments to replace free school meals said this had worked well or very well; satisfaction levels were far lower for other methods. Anecdotal responses in the report suggested that parents felt the flexibility was beneficial to them.

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<sup>9</sup> Further demographic information of respondents was not included in the published version of the report.

- Low-income families said they were more concerned about money than spring 2020 and 90% reported spending more on essential bills while children were at home.
- Children and young people most wanted help with learning and finding a routine when they return to school.

### **Refugee, asylum seeking and Roma families during the COVID-19 pandemic: Insights from frontline workers in Glasgow**

Source: Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland (CNS)

Date: December 2020

This report continues the publications from CNS on the impact of COVID-19 on children within different communities in Scotland, particularly those impacted by poverty and from other vulnerable groups. Researchers conducted nine semi-structured interviews with frontline workers between May and June 2020 working in the third sector supporting migrant families<sup>10</sup> in Glasgow in service areas including: housing, health and social care, children and families, refugee support, and social enterprise. Families themselves were not interviewed directly due to the ethical concerns around creating additional pressures during the pandemic. The report included demographic information noting that about 75% of all asylum seeker, and refugee children in Scotland were living in Glasgow as of 2018/2019.

Key findings and recommendations included:

- Families without secure citizenship status faced various additional barriers compared with other families living in high-poverty areas during the pandemic.
- Higher levels of poverty left migrant families vulnerable to the economic impact of the pandemic. Insecure employment and a lack of access to social security resulted in significant loss of income for many families. This also resulted in some struggling to afford clothes for children, fuel, internet connections to support continued education for children, and personal safety items (masks and hand sanitiser). The 'digital divide' was noted particularly as having an impact on children's education among these groups, particularly for those families where language barriers existed.
- Food poverty was a recurrent theme for refugee and migrant families who initially may not have been able to access the social security system due to language barriers.

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<sup>10</sup> A full literature review on inequalities experienced by refugees and migrant families is [also available](#).

- Migrant families' experience of the pandemic was further compounded by poorer housing conditions, with a reliance on the private rental sector or home office asylum seekers accommodation.
- Social isolation, the disruption of routine and activity, and the loss of formal and informal support networks during lockdown period strongly influenced the mental health and wellbeing of migrant families and individuals seeking asylum. Frontline workers emphasised that some migrant families would have experienced other traumas prior to arriving in Scotland, compounding the effects of the pandemic on their mental health and wellbeing.
- Third sector organisations played a valuable role in supporting migrant families during the pandemic, including acting as an intermediary between families and statutory services.

### [COVID-19 Glasgow Research Briefing: Family Wellbeing in South Lanarkshire](#)

Source: Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland

Date: December 2020.

Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland (CNS), the partnership between the Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) and the University of Glasgow, has published its collection of resources exploring the impact of COVID-19 on families, children and young people across communities in Glasgow and South Lanarkshire. The resources include an in-depth research report and three focused briefing papers on: family wellbeing, local services responses and collaboration in South Lanarkshire. Previous insight papers have been included in previous evidence summaries. The report includes the following key findings:

#### **The socio-economic context of COVID-19**

- Many families previously in work have fallen into financial hardship as a result of the pandemic. There has been a rapid increase in the number of people now on Universal Credit in South Lanarkshire.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the sense of isolation that was already felt by many rural residents with reduced access to public services and the cost and reduced availability of public transport.
- A lack of digital devices and not being able to afford broadband or mobile data restricted the ability of some children to learn at home during lockdown especially in rural areas.

#### **Family wellbeing**

- In South Lanarkshire, some families felt the closure of schools was challenging due to the loss of the sense of community and support that schools provide. However, some children found benefits in the shift to home-schooling, as it removed the pressure of attending school.



- Financial insecurity, furlough and unemployment, coupled with home-schooling, the additional costs and stress of occupying children at home and the uncertainty over schools and childcare added to the anxiety felt by parents.
- Due to the ‘stigma’ around poverty in rural areas, some families were reluctant to accept support from food banks and charities.

### **Service responses**

- The response of third sector organisations in South Lanarkshire during this pandemic was described as ‘absolutely phenomenal’. Emergency food provision was organised within hours of lockdown being announced. Third sector organisations had to adapt rapidly and provide a different type of service to ensure that families were still receiving support under lockdown.
- Service professionals across sectors in South Lanarkshire worked hard to support with the community wellbeing helpline and the new coordinating groups set up to organise local service provision.

### **Collaboration**

- In some high poverty rural areas in South Lanarkshire, initial take up of emergency food provision was low. Local service providers worked in collaboration and re-designed food provision to overcome the stigma of poverty by providing mobile ‘food larders’.
- The pan-Lanarkshire Resilience Planning Group included third sector representation, which was a positive step towards strategic partnership working between the public and third sector.

## **7.2 Children, young people and families impacted by disability and serious health conditions**

A number of findings from the [Lockdown Lowdown Demographic Exploration](#) research summarised in Section 1 above and [Co-SPACE](#) research in Section 11 below cover findings from individuals who identified as having a long-term illness or disability.

### **[The impact of COVID-19 on children with additional support needs and disabilities in Scotland](#)**

Source: Centre for Research in Education Inclusion and Diversity (CREID),  
University of Edinburgh

Date: 19 January 2021

This journal article draws on evidence from a qualitative study of the experiences of 16 families in Scotland with children having additional support needs and disabilities (ASND) during June and July 2020.

Key findings included:

- Particularly in the beginning of the pandemic, there was **limited attention paid to the rights of children with ASND** as education and care services were suddenly forced to adapt to new restrictions.
- **Existing inequalities were exacerbated**, such as unequal access to IT, varying levels of support and differences in family resources.
- Most families mentioned the negative impact of the pandemic on the **mental health and wellbeing** of their children, while some mentioned challenges with **maintaining their children's regular exercise**.
- Families also reported **some positive experiences**, such as enjoying more time together and a release from school-generated stress.
- The **disruption in educational provision is likely to have a negative impact** on the educational progress and wellbeing of children with ASND, which will take determined efforts to rectify in the future.

### [The impact of COVID-19 – A year in the life of families raising disabled and seriously ill young children Scotland Findings](#)

Source: Family Fund

Date: March 2021

This research conducted by Family fund included a total of 1,248 families on low-incomes with disabled children and young people in Scotland. The research included an open, online survey, conducted through five waves of surveying between March 2020 and February 2021 and qualitative interviews with families. It was also part of a wider UK study, included below in [Section 15.2](#). The key findings from respondents in Scotland were:

- 80% of families reported that **overall support available to them had decreased** since the beginning of the pandemic. This compared with 75% of families in the UK-wide results.
- 78% of families reported that their **overall financial situation had worsened** as a result of the pandemic. This compared with 76% of families in the UK-wide results.
- 86% of families reported that their **overall health and wellbeing had worsened** since the beginning of the pandemic. This was 79% for the UK overall.
- 38% of families believe it will take **more than a year before their lives return to normal**. This was 42% of families in the UK-wide results.

### 7.3 Care experienced children and young people

A number of findings from the [Lockdown Lowdown Demographic Exploration](#) research summarised in Section 1 above cover findings from care experienced young people.

#### [COVID-19 Recovery Planning: Views from our Care Experienced Membership](#)

Source: Who Cares? Scotland

Date: February 2021

This report is the result of the Annual Participation Programme run by Who Cares? for their Care Experienced members. 95 Care Experienced members participated, 17 of whom were under the age of 20. A large proportion of respondents did not report their age. Members responded through surveys, national and local workshops, and one-to-one discussions with Who Cares? staff. Given the small sample size, especially of those under the age of 20, and the range of data collection methods used, the findings below are interpreted as qualitative research. Findings specifically from younger care experienced people are noted below where the original report separates these. Key findings from care experienced people are:

- During the initial lockdown period, **communication was found to be confusing and overwhelming**. Participants spoke about family, friends and wider social network that helped them make sense of the information, but not all young people had someone supportive in their life. Digital exclusion was also highlighted as a barrier to accessing information.
- Care experienced people also highlighted the **interruption in universal services** they usually relied on, such as GPs, benefits advice, and legal representation. However, participants also reflected on the positive support provided by care providers and statutory services in new ways.
- A large majority of participants said that their **mental health had become worse during the pandemic**, and that they often felt worried, anxious, depressed, and lonely. The lack of support networks, both personal and professional affected young people in this group in particular. Positive impacts discussed were that people **appreciated their friends more** and that people felt more open to be able to talk about how they felt.
- **Experiences of physical health were mixed**. Some people reported eating better and exercising more; however, where physical health had worsened, this was often linked to mental health.
- The pandemic has **exacerbated an already challenging employment market** for care experienced people. They experienced redundancies and a lack of clarity around furlough for zero-hour contracts, leaving them reliant on a complex benefit system that could be difficult to navigate without support. Some care

experienced people faced financial hardship including severe food and fuel poverty.

- Lack of **digital access was a significant barrier** to accessing education, services and personal networks. While digital access enabled some services and aspects of care to continue, participants consistently stated that they prefer meeting and to receive support in person.
- Most participants found **remote learning very challenging**, although for some single parents it worked well as it allowed them to combine education with caring responsibilities.
- There was some evidence of parents **not being aware of their entitlement to access emergency education provision** for their children, or choosing not to because of perceived health risks.
- The travel restrictions put in place delayed changes in living arrangements for young people making transitions between types of care placement.
- In general, care experienced people that were also carers found managing their caring responsibilities extremely challenging in this situation.

The report made a number of recommendations based on what care experienced people would like to see in terms of support relating to: improvements in information available around support, tailored pandemic-related guidance for that accounts for specific circumstances of care, greater prioritisation of specific needs (especially mental health needs and education), financial support, support with finding secure employment, and reducing the digital divide.

### [The digital divide: The Impact on the rights of care leavers in Scotland](#)

Source: Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection (CELCIS), The University of Strathclyde, and the University of Edinburgh

Date: January 2021

This report builds on previous research conducted in March 2020 on the experience of care leavers' use of technology during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research used a mixed methods approach including an online survey and an online focus group, conducted between September and November 2020 with 24 survey responses and 4 individuals participating in the focus group. All respondents were between the ages of 15 and 29 years old. Key findings from the report included:

- **Access to digital devices was considered a critical need to care leavers** for most activities including accessing services (including social security, welfare payments, and food), socialising, and accessing employment and education.
- Most respondents had increased their use of technology during the initial lockdown. Responses indicated a mixed picture on impact of this increased use on wellbeing. While some felt it was helpful for maintaining a sense of normality, others expressed negative impacts on their wellbeing from overuse. Those

unable to access the internet at certain points reported that this affected their feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and vulnerability.

- The majority of respondents said they had not received additional help to stay online during restrictions.

#### 7.4 Young carers

A number of findings from the [Who Cares?](#) Research summarised in Section 7.3 above and from the [Lockdown Lowdown Demographic Exploration](#) summarised in Section 1 above cover the impact on young carers.

#### 7.5 Minority ethnic children and young people

This summary recognises that experiences of different groups will vary considerably for different ethnicities and be influenced by other intersecting demographics. Specific findings are presented where they are available from the original research.

A number of findings from the [Lockdown Lowdown Demographic Breakdown](#) research summarised in Section 1 above cover findings from minority ethnic individuals.

#### 7.6 Vulnerable children and young people

This section includes sources that look at evidence on Child Protection. For this evidence summary, most of the findings related to this group are drawn from sources that include responses from across the UK. Please see [section 15.6](#) below.

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.](#)

#### [Lockdown and Beyond – A COVID Insights Report](#)

Source: Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs

Date: December 2020

This report provided a summary of data gathered by Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs through their helpline. The **helpline experienced an 80% increase in contacts during 2020**, compared with 2019. Topics of concern raised in calls included concerns about having no money or food and requiring foodbank support, concerns about mental health generally, concerns about alcohol use, and concerns about drug use. While the report does not specify the extent to which children and young people were callers or the subjects of these calls, Scottish

Families staff during 2020 reported increased concern around the detrimental impacts to the wellbeing of children and young people in families affected by substance use.

## 7.7 Domestic abuse and violence against women and girls

### [Justice Analytical Services Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Data Report: April 2021](#)

Source: Scottish Government

Date: 27 May 2021

This report presented data on the impact of COVID-19 on the justice system during April 2021 and included data on people experiencing domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women/girls. The evidence was drawn from several sources within the justice system during the period April 2020 to April 2021. A key finding of relevance to children and families was that reported incidence of domestic abuse was down 6% since April 2020, and 8% since April 2019.

## 7.8 LGBTQ+ children and young people

A number of findings from the [Lockdown Lowdown Demographic Breakdown](#) research summarised in Section 1 above cover findings from individuals who identified as non-binary or in another way, though the number of respondents was very small.

## 7.9 Children and young people impacted by the justice system

No new evidence to report for this summary.

## 8. Impact on services

A number of findings from the [CEYRIS Round 2](#) research summarised in Section 1 above, from the [YoungMinds](#) survey summarised in Section 11 below, and the [Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland](#) research (South Lanarkshire only) summarised in Section 7.1 above cover findings on the impact on services, service responses, and collaboration efforts.

## Research from across the UK

This section covers evidence that is not specific to Scotland. Many of the surveys, however, are UK-wide and include Scotland. The geographic area or country of focus is included in brackets before the title of each report in the sections below.

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

#### (England) [School closures and children's emotional and behavioural difficulties](#)

Source: Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER), University of Essex  
Date: 15 March 2021

This report draws on the Understanding Society UK Household Longitudinal Survey data to examine responses provided to the validated SDQ scores from female parents/guardians of about 1,900 children between the ages of 5 and 11 in England only (see [Section 1](#) above for more on SDQ scores).

The primary purpose of the research was to assess a causal effect of the school closures on changes in emotional and behavioural difficulties. This research compared children who were prioritised to return to school in June 2020 (reception, year 1 and year 6, equivalent to P1, P2 and P7), and were thus eligible to an additional six weeks of school attendance, with those of a similar age who were not. This comparison is specific to the changes in COVID-19 restrictions in England. It provides a comparison between SDQ scores from surveys in July and September of 2020 and comparable time periods from surveys between 2009 and 2019.

Key findings from the report included:

- In July 2020, SDQ scores had risen substantially compared with before the pandemic among all children, but the increase was greater among children not prioritised for return to school. By September, when all children had returned to school, SDQ scores had fallen for all groups, but remained above pre-pandemic levels and the gap between priority and non-priority groups remained similar.
- This suggested that wellbeing impacts of school closures persisted over time and were not resolved simply by returning to school.

#### (UK) [Impacts of the first COVID-19 lockdown on learning, health behaviours, and mental wellbeing in young people aged 11 - 15 years](#)

Source: Institute of Applied Health Research, University of Birmingham  
Date: April 2021



This research project<sup>11</sup> focuses on both the short and long-term health, education, and wellbeing impacts of COVID-19 restrictions specifically on young people aged 11 to 15. The research recruited 687 young people aged 11-15 years in secondary education in the UK (94% of respondents were from England, 5% from Scotland, 1% from Wales, and none from Northern Ireland) to participate in an online survey in June - July 2020. The researchers plan to follow up with respondents to look at longer-term impacts in the future. The study includes differences by socioeconomic position based on the Family Affluence Score questionnaire. The survey [asked questions](#) on respondents' behaviours both during and prior to the first lockdown.

Key findings included:

- Almost all participants reported that they were not learning at their usual level. Participants from **less affluent families reported greater reductions in their level of learning** and were less likely to have access to their own computer or tablet for online schoolwork.
- Participants spent **low amounts of time on physically active activities** and high amounts of time on screen based sedentary leisure activity. Participants from less affluent families had lower physical activity levels during the lockdown, but reported similar changes to their physical activity levels as those from families that are more affluent.
- **Food insecurity increased** with the greatest increases seen in participants from the least affluent families.
- Average weekday **sleep duration increased** by one hour, and **sleep related difficulties reduced**.
- The majority of participants felt as safe or more safe, and as able to or more able to seek support, but less able to do enjoyable things and to achieve things during the lockdown, compared with beforehand.
- **Mental wellbeing** was lower among participants from less affluent families, but compared with participants from more affluent families, they were more likely to report feeling safer and being more able to seek support, have fun and achieve things during the lockdown than beforehand.
- Overall, the lockdown had a more **positive effect on the closeness of relationships with household members**, but a more negative effect on the closeness of relationships with friends and family members outside of the household.

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<sup>11</sup> The project is also known as the 'Short and long term impacts of Covid-19 restrictions on Older children's health-Related behaviours, learning and wellbeing Study' (CONTRAST).

**(England) [COVID-19 isolation having detrimental impact on children's education and welfare, particularly the most vulnerable](#)**

Source: Ofsted

Date: 15 December 2020

Ofsted published its third and final set of reports on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic across the sectors it inspects and regulates – from early years to post-16 education. This was based on nearly 2,000 visits to education and social care providers during the autumn term. Key findings included:

- Repeated isolation has chipped away at the progress pupils have made since returning to school in September.
- The effectiveness of remote education was varied and difficult to determine.
- Children arriving at secure children's homes are, in effect, put into solitary confinement.
- Many children with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) were not attending school, were struggling with remote learning and were at risk of abuse or neglect.
- Even more schools report at least one child now being home schooled. Many parents doing this said their children will not return to school 'until pandemic is over.'

**(Wales) [Coronavirus and Me: a second nationwide survey of the views and experiences of children and young people in Wales](#)**

Source: Children's Commissioner for Wales

Date: 24 February 2021

The Children's Commissioner for Wales has released findings from the second Coronavirus and Me survey looking at the views and experiences of children and young people in Wales during the Level 4 lockdown in Wales in January 2021. 19,737 children and young people, aged 3-18 responded to the survey. The findings included negative emotional and mental health impacts, worries about falling behind with education, and missing friends and school. The report also highlighted how disabled children and young people were more worried, more likely to feel sad, and more likely to feel unsafe. Children and young people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups (this was the terminology used by the survey) were also more likely to feel lonely and to feel unsafe (see [section 15.5](#) below).

**(England) [Childcare use and perceived impact on child development for families of 0-4 year-olds during COVID-19](#)**

Source: Ipsos MORI (for the Department for Education)

Date: 18 March 2021

Ipsos MORI have published research from two rounds of surveys collected between November 2020 and January 2021 on behalf of the Department for Education on the use of childcare and perceived impact on child development. The surveys were conducted with a representative sample of 1,000 English parents of children aged 0-4 through an online survey. Key findings included:

- Nearly three-quarters of parents whose child used formal childcare before COVID-19 reported that their child was using formal childcare in January 2021.
- A sixth reported that they intended to use formal childcare as soon as the national lockdown restrictions are lifted; around a tenth were not planning to use formal childcare again until at least March 2021 (even if restrictions were lifted).
- Among parents whose child was not receiving formal childcare in January 2021, the most common reasons were that the parent never used formal childcare, the childcare available was too expensive, and childcare was not needed as the parent(s) was on maternity or paternity leave.
- Parents whose child was not using formal childcare in January 2021 were asked what would encourage them to use formal childcare over the coming months. Parents most commonly cited the end of the national lockdown, followed by childcare at reduced or no cost, when older/vulnerable relatives had been vaccinated, and when they/their immediate family had been vaccinated.
- More than half of parents whose child used formal childcare before COVID-19 reported that the overall disruption to childcare/school settings since March 2020 had harmed their child's social and educational development.
- Around two-thirds of parents were concerned about the impact of the current national lockdown on their child(ren)'s social and educational development.

## 10. Impact on families

(UK and England) [Parental experiences during the pandemic: What can we learn from survey data?](#)

Source: University of Edinburgh, Childcare and Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 project

Date: 17 March 2021

The Childcare and Wellbeing in Times of COVID-19 project has shared early findings in a blog by the project's research team. The mixed-methods research combines analysis from existing longitudinal surveys with qualitative interviews and co-production activities to understand the impact of COVID-19 on families' wellbeing and childcare. The research includes data from the UK-representative Understanding Society longitudinal study from January 2017-June 2019 and a COVID specific sweep in July 2020. It also includes data from the Next Steps study,

representative of a cohort of 16,000 individuals born in England in 1990. The authors note that these findings are from the early stages of the pandemic and will continue to explore them further. A full report is expected to be published in October.

Findings so far included:

- Among Understanding Society respondents, one in four parents at age 30 had experienced a **drop in their mental health** on a standardised health questionnaire,<sup>12</sup> compared with one in five non-parents.
- **Women with children were the most likely to experience a decline** in mental health. There was no significant difference between women and men without children.
- Female parent respondents who were younger, never married, or from an ethnic minority group were more likely to experience this decline than other groups.
- Among Next Steps respondents, 59% of female parents self-reported that they felt more stressed during the pandemic than before, compared with 41% of male parents, 45% of female non-parents, and 28% of male non-parents.

## 11. Mental health and mental wellbeing

(UK) [Report 10: Children and adolescents' mental health: One year in the pandemic](#)

Source: University of Oxford

Date: 5 May 2021

**Oxford University's Co-SPACE** (COVID-19: Supporting Parents, Adolescents and Children during Epidemics) study is tracking changes to mental wellbeing using SDQ scores over the course of the pandemic and has published its tenth report. This was based on data from an open survey with over 8,700 parents/carers and over 1,200 adolescents aged 11 to 16 who were recruited through social media, partner organisations, networks and charities, the media, and targeted online advertising. Findings were not nationally representative and 6.6% of the respondents live in Scotland. Key findings included:

- Parents and carers reported a **sharp decrease in behavioural, emotional and attentional difficulties** among primary and secondary school aged children **as restrictions have eased since February 2021**.

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<sup>12</sup> The Understanding Society survey used the General Health Questionnaire set of 12 questions and a change of 5 or more points was used to indicate decline in mental health.

- Parents and carers reported the **highest level of behavioural, emotional and attentional difficulties in June 2020 and February 2021**, when restrictions were highest.
- Overall, **younger children (aged 4-10) have had greater changes in levels of behavioural, emotional, and attentional difficulties** throughout the pandemic; levels of **difficulties among secondary school aged children (aged 11-16) have been more stable**.
- Patterns of parent/carer reported behavioural, emotional, and attentional difficulties over time have been **relatively similar for boys and girls**.
- Overall children have experienced **reductions in mental health symptoms as restrictions eased in March 2021**, however **children with SEN/ND** and those from **low-income households** have continued to show elevated mental health symptoms.
- The pattern of **adolescent self-reported mental health was consistent** with parent/carer reports.

Emerging Minds has launched a further project called the Co-RAY project ([Covid-19 response: Mental Health resources for and by Young People](#)). Working with a range of mental health organisations, this 18-month project aims to make sense of the research and support young people themselves to develop and share resources that will be helpful for other young people. The project will also share existing evidence based resources.

**[\(UK\) Barnardo's warns of lasting impact of pandemic on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing](#)**

Source: Barnardo's

Date: May 2021

Barnardo's has undertaken a wide range of research throughout the pandemic as part of its 'Big Conversation' campaign. During 2021, the organisation has completed a second YouGov online poll of over 4,000 children and young people aged 8-24, however full sampling details were not provided. This blog post summarises forthcoming findings. The blog highlights that the number of 16-24 year olds reporting **struggling with their mental health and wellbeing** has increased from last year suggesting mental health and wellbeing has worsened despite the recent positive news about the vaccine rollout and the lifting of restrictions. Young people reported **stress** has increased the most since before the pandemic, with 58% reporting a rise, compared with 43% last year. **Loneliness** was next at 56% (up from 48% last year), followed by **worry** at 54% (up from 48% last year) and **sadness** at 52% (up from 46% from last year).

**(UK) [Coronavirus: Impact on young people with mental health needs](#)**  
**[Survey 4: February 2021](#)**

Source: Young Minds

Date: February 2021

This report outlines the results of Young Minds' fourth online COVID-19 survey with young people aged 13-25 with a **history of mental health needs**. 2,438 respondents completed the survey. The majority of respondents identified as female (79%), and 88% said they were White British. Just 6% of respondents were from Scotland and the sub-sample is not representative. This survey was conducted 26 January – 12 February 2021 during the national lockdown. The report notes that it was too early to draw definitive conclusions about the long-term impact, many remained concerned about the future. Key findings included:

- 75% of respondents agreed that they were finding the **current lockdown harder to cope with than the previous ones**.
- 67% believed that the pandemic would have a **long-term negative effect on their mental health**.
- 79% believed that their **mental health would improve once most restrictions are lifted**.
- The **most common pressures** during the period of lockdown in 2021 were loneliness and isolation, concerns about school, college, or university work, and a breakdown in routine.
- Among young people who believe they have needed mental health support during the pandemic, 54% said that they have received some form of support (e.g. through NHS mental health services; school or university counsellors; helplines; charities). 24% said that they have looked for support but not accessed any; 22% said that they had not looked for support.
- Among respondents who were at school or college, 55% said that there was a counsellor or mental health support team available in their school, 23% disagreed.
- Among respondents who were at school or college, almost half (48%) did not think that their school was focusing more on wellbeing and mental health than usual.

**(UK) [Back in lockdown: Girls' and young women's hopes and fears for the future](#)**

Source: Girlguiding

Date: 16 February 2021

Girlguiding has released new research looking at how girls and young women aged 4-18 in the UK were coping during the latest national lockdown and with the changes

that have occurred in their lives over the past year. Findings from a survey of 1,900 members included: 53% said the pandemic and latest lockdown **have negatively affected their mental health**, with older girls being the most affected; 42% of girls said they were **feeling more lonely**, 43% **more sad**, and 44% **more anxious** and worried than during the first lockdown in March 2020.

**(UK) [Voices from Lockdown: One Year On: A way forward for women and girls](#)**

Source: Agenda

Date: 22 March 2021

Agenda has published a report on how the pandemic has affected women and girls. The report brings together three surveys conducted with 196 responses from 150 women and women and girls' organisations carried out since the first national lockdown. Findings included: of the 10 specialist girls' organisations surveyed, 10 said anxiety was very common among the girls they were supporting and 9 out of 10 identified self-harm as very or quite common; 31% of all women and girls' organisations saw an increase in poverty and destitution in those they supported since the start of the pandemic; 56% of services identified financial problems and poverty as a key driver of mental health issues for women and girls; and 100% of organisations reported the complexity of women and girls' needs has increased.

**(England) [Bullying during the coronavirus pandemic](#)**

Source: Anti-Bullying Alliance

Date: February 2021

The Anti-Bullying Alliance has published findings from a survey of 406 pupils (the majority were in secondary school), school staff, and parents and carers in England about bullying and relationships, carried out during the week 1-7 February 2021, when some children were in school but most were taking part in learning at home. Findings included: 68% of young people said they **felt less connected to their friendships** than before the pandemic; 75% of young people learning from home were **not given opportunities to communicate with other pupils** during online lessons, and where they were allowed to use the **chat functions these were often used to say unkind and bullying things**; and children and young people **reported bullying** about their home life and access to technology.

**(International) [Emerging Evidence: Coronavirus and children and young people's mental health \(Issue 7\)](#)**

Source: Evidence Based Practice Unit

Date: 21 April 2021



This was the seventh in a series of evidence reviews on the impact of the pandemic on children and young people’s mental health and how to support them with these challenges. Key sub-groups covered included children and young people with pre-existing health and education needs, children and young people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage and social care needs, and minority ethnic children – the findings for each sub-group are reported in the relevant sub-heading of this briefing below. This report covers academic research and grey literature between November 2020 and January 2021 and focuses on newly emerging evidence rather than recurrent themes covered in previous editions. A summary of key findings on the mental health challenges for children and young people is below:

- Evidence from Bangladesh during the pandemic indicates that the prevalence of suicidal ideation among university students aged 18-28 was 12.8%, but it was not possible to ascertain whether this was an increase, as the prevalence of suicidal ideation pre-pandemic varied greatly by study.
- A study from Italy indicated that more time spent in lockdown was associated with increases in the problematic “all or nothing” thinking style and a greater likelihood of experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms among university students.
- There was evidence that some groups of children and young people have experienced a disproportionate impact on their mental health during the pandemic. The current issue cited research that has found that girls and young people of colour may be particularly impacted.
- In the United States of America (USA), young people’s social media use was associated with worse mental health outcomes during the pandemic. A higher number of hours per day spent on social media predicted moderate-to-severe depression and anxiety in April to July 2020.

## **12. Physical health and wellbeing**

### **(UK) [Predictors of COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy in the UK household longitudinal study](#)**

Source: University of Glasgow, ISER University of Essex, Ipsos MORI UK Ltd, and Public Health Scotland

Date: May 2021

This research, conducted between 24 November and 1 December 2020, draws on respondents participating in the ‘Understanding Society’ survey and looks at the likelihood for vaccine uptake and reasons for hesitancy. The sample includes respondents who lived in households that had completed a recent wave of the main survey and participated in other ‘Understanding Society’ COVID-19 surveys. The final weighted sample size used in the research was 9,390. The sample was representative of the UK and included younger people aged between 16 and 24.

Crucially, this research was carried out prior to the first vaccination doses being received and prior to the lockdown initiated in January 2021.

Key findings included:

- While 18% of all respondents said they would be ‘unlikely’ or ‘very unlikely’ to get a vaccination, **hesitancy was higher in younger age groups** (26.5% in 16 – 24 year olds and 28.3% in 25-34 year olds vs 4.5% in those aged 75+).
- Hesitancy also was higher in women than men (21.0% vs 14.7%) and among Black (71.8%) and Pakistani/Bangladeshi ethnic groups as well.
- The main reasons provided for hesitancy were worry about unknown future effects of the vaccine, other reasons (not specified), and side effects.

### 13. Education, learning and employment

(England) [Lockdown lessons: pupil learning and wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic - final report](#)

Source: ImpactEd

Date: 08 February 2021

ImpactEd has published a report on pupil learning and wellbeing during the pandemic. The report draws from an open survey of over 62,000 pupils aged 6- to 18-years old across England enrolled in ImpactEd partner schools. The key findings included: children who had struggled the most during lockdown were not always children who had been previously identified as vulnerable; challenges with remote learning were felt more strongly by pupils from **disadvantaged backgrounds**; pupils in years 10 and 11 experienced the greatest challenges with motivation for learning; **girls experienced greater anxiety** about returning to school and more anxiety while in school; **pupil wellbeing was stable** during the first period of remote teaching.

(England) [The impact of Covid-19 on School Starters: Interim briefing 1, Parent and school concerns about children starting school](#)

Source: Education Endowment Foundation

Date: April 2021

The Education Endowment Foundation released a briefing paper reporting initial findings from a study on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the socioemotional wellbeing, language, and numeracy skills of Reception Year children in England. This research was based on surveys returned from 58 schools not participating in the Education Endowment Foundation’s Early Years trials, not Early Adopters of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, and had more than 15 children entering Reception Year. 673 parents, the majority of whom were mothers,

responded to a separate survey asking about the experiences of their children. The surveys were completed between October 2020 and 5 January 2021. Key findings included:

- 76% of schools (44 out of 58 schools) reported that children who started school in autumn 2020 needed more support than children in previous cohorts did.
- According to schools, children were struggling particularly with three areas of development: 1) communication and language development; 2) personal, social and emotional development; and 3) literacy.
- 56% of parents were concerned about their children starting school following the lockdown.
- A large proportion of parents who expressed concerns about their children's transition to school were particularly concerned about children's social and emotional development (33%) while far fewer were concerned about language and communication (3%).
- Once the school year started, most parents (96%) thought that their child had settled in well and 85% of parents did not report any concerns about how their child was coping in school.

#### **14. Children's rights and participation**

No new evidence to report for this summary.

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

##### **15.1 Poverty**

(UK) [Seeking an anchor in an unstable world: experiences of low-income families over time](#) and [Staying afloat in a crisis: families on low incomes in the pandemic](#)

**Source:** Joseph Rowntree Foundation

**Date:** 09 March 2021

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has published two reports looking at the experiences of 14 low-income families before and after the coronavirus pandemic. The reports find that: families on low incomes who were already facing constraints and instability at the start of 2020 were more vulnerable to the impacts of the pandemic; and the factors most likely to help families get by or improve their lives were: steady work, two wages in the family, reduced need for childcare as children got older, and support from extended family; access to furlough and having supportive employers were also important.

### **(UK) A crisis within a crisis: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on food insecurity**

Source: The Food Foundation

Date: 1 March 2021

To assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on food insecurity across the UK population, the Food Foundation commissioned seven nationally representative surveys with YouGov between March 2020 and January 2021, one of which was specifically focused on households with children. A further two nationally representative surveys were commissioned with Childwise to hear directly from children and young people about their COVID-19 food experiences. The purpose of this report was to present new data from the most recent surveys conducted in January 2021 and draw comparisons to evidence compiled periodically since March 2020.

Key findings included:

- Despite vital emergency measures in place, more people were considered food insecure at the time of publication than before the pandemic.
- Households with children have been hit hard, with many children still falling through the cracks in support. 12% of households with children have experienced food insecurity in the 6 months prior to January 2021.
- Existing support schemes have made a difference, but gaps have meant many people still struggle to eat adequately. Extremely clinically vulnerable people were more than twice as likely to be food insecure than average.
- COVID-19 has dramatically widened inequalities in food security and nutrition. Minority ethnic adults were twice as likely to experience food insecurity compared with White British adults.

### **(UK) A year like no other: youth homelessness during the COVID pandemic**

Source: Centrepont

Date: 20 April 2021

Centrepont has published a report looking at young people's homelessness during the coronavirus pandemic. Figures show that: the total number of calls to the Centrepont helpline in 2020/21 was 33% higher than the year before – up from 9,770 in 2019/20 to 13,019 in 2020/21; and 27% of those who provided information about their care status in 2020/21 were care leavers, compared with 19% in 2019/20.

## 15.2 Children, young people and families impacted by disability and serious health conditions

### (England) [Coronavirus: disabled children and young people](#)

Source: Disabled Children's Partnership

Date: 14 May 2021

The Disabled Children's Partnership has published a report on the impact of the pandemic on disabled children, their siblings and their parents. The report showed the findings from the third in a series of surveys of disabled children and their families. It found: a high proportion of disabled children and their families were **still experiencing severe levels of social isolation** despite the easing of restrictions; over half of families were **unable to access therapies vital for their disability**; 60% of families were **experiencing delays and challenges accessing health service appointments**; and that disabled children and their families were at risk of developing additional long-term health problems.

### (UK) [The impact of COVID-19 – A year in the life of families raising disabled and seriously ill children and young people](#)

Source: Family Fund

Date: 12 April 2021

This research conducted by Family fund included a total of 13,284 families on low-incomes with disabled children and young people across the UK. The research included an open survey, conducted through five waves of surveying between March 2020 and February 2021 and qualitative interviews with families. Scotland specific findings are included above in [Section 7.2](#). The key findings from UK respondents were:

- 75% of families reported the overall support available to them has decreased since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic.
- 76% of families reported their overall financial situation has worsened as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.
- 79% of families reported their overall health and wellbeing worsened since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic.
- Mental health of parents assessed using the WEMWBS questions decreased across the five survey waves, while loneliness increased until showing only a slight decrease between December 2020 and February 2021.
- 42% of families believed it would take more than a year before their lives return to normal.

### **(UK) [Lonely lockdown: life for siblings of disabled children in the UK](#)**

Source: Sibs, UCL

Date: 08 April 2021

Sibs, a UK charity supporting brothers and sisters of disabled children and adults, has published findings from a survey of parents to understand how the needs of siblings of disabled children were affected by lockdown. A survey of 640 parents found that: 81% said their **sibling child's mental health had worsened**; 43% of siblings were **providing more care in lockdown** and 40% of young siblings were feeling **isolated and missing support from family and friends**. An earlier survey carried out in May 2020 found that 75% of parents felt their sibling child's mental health had worsened in lockdown.

### **(UK) [The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on child welfare: d/Deaf and disabled children and young people](#)**

Source: NSPCC Learning

Date: February 2021

This briefing draws on data from Childline counselling sessions and NSPCC helpline contacts to summarise the impact of the pandemic on d/Deaf, disabled, and autistic children and young people. In total, the counselling sessions reached 119 d/Deaf children, 2,625 children with other disabilities, and 2,870 children on the autism spectrum. The briefing summarises anonymised quotes from helpline sessions into key themes. Key findings included:

- Coronavirus restrictions have caused **disruption to young people's routines**, which has been difficult for some children to cope with and adjust to.
- **Support services have been harder for young people to access** during the pandemic, with services either closed or severely reduced. Where services were transferred online, some young people found it difficult to access them, due to their disability.
- **Home learning** has also presented several challenges for some young people, including accessibility of online lessons and reduced additional support.
- Some young people have experienced **delays in being assessed for support** during the pandemic.
- After returning to school, some young people found they were no longer receiving the same level of support as they had been given before lockdown.
- The pandemic conditions have put **additional stress on families where a child is disabled**. Some parents have struggled to cope with the demands of caring for a disabled child with reduced support. Some children have also had to care for a disabled sibling during lockdown.

- Some young people reported being unfairly, and in some cases aggressively, challenged for not wearing a face covering, even though they were exempt from doing so.

### **(International) Emerging Evidence: Coronavirus and children and young people's mental health (Issue 7)**

Source: Evidence Based Practice Unit

Date: 21 April 2021

This report – as described in [Section 3](#) above – reviewed recent evidence on the impact of the pandemic on children and young people with pre-existing health and education needs. Key findings are:

- Available evidence from Italy, Turkey, Hong Kong, Germany, and the USA found some form of impact on the physical or mental health of children with migraines, multiple sclerosis, special education needs and/or acute or chronic diseases, eating disorders, and young psychiatric hospital patients.
- Among children with cancer aged 8-18 in the Netherlands, there was no increase in psychosocial stress.

#### 15.3 Care experienced children and young people

No new evidence to report for this summary.

#### 15.4 Young carers

No new evidence to report for this summary.

#### 15.5 Minority ethnic children and young people

A number of findings from the [Children's Commissioner for Wales](#) in Section 9 cover findings from Black, Asian, and Ethnic Minority (BAME) groups. Though the survey included a large sample size, it was not representative of the wider population of Wales. Key findings included:

- BAME children and young people were **more likely to feel lonely**; 7-11 year olds were **more likely to be worried in general and about Coronavirus**.
- They were **less likely to say they feel safe**; 7-11 year olds were **less likely to say they are happy** and were **less likely to say they are speaking with friends and family** to keep a healthy body and mind.
- BAME 12-18 year olds were **more likely to be doing indoor activities** (e.g. exercise, music, reading or writing, art, and learning a new skill).



- BAME children and young people were more likely to feel closing of public spaces (e.g. libraries, outside spaces, or religious or faith group spaces) has affected their learning outside school or college.
- There was little difference between 12-18 year old BAME and White Welsh or British responses around enjoying learning at their own pace, getting good support and feedback from teachers about work, or feeling worried about falling behind, qualifications, or not feeling motivated.

### **(International evidence) Emerging Evidence: Coronavirus and children and young people's mental health (Issue 7)**

Source: Evidence Based Practice Unit

Date: 21 April 2021

This report – as described in [Section 3](#) – reviewed recent evidence on the impact of the pandemic on minority ethnic children and young people (referred to as people of colour in the report). Key findings are:

- In a study in the USA, during the pandemic, young people aged 18-25 who identified as Black/African American experienced greater stress severity than those who identified as White or Hispanic/Latinx.
- A longitudinal study in the USA found that Hispanic/Latinx young people had higher levels of reported loneliness than White young people did during the pandemic. There was no significant association found between race and depression or anxiety symptoms among young people.

## **15.6 Vulnerable children and young people**

This section includes sources that look at evidence on Child Protection.

### **(UK) [Calls to the NSPCC helpline surge during the pandemic](#)**

Source: NSPCC

Date: 29 April 2021

The NSPCC has released additional figures specifically related to the concerns reported from adults to the helpline from the year between April 2020 and March 2021. These included:

- Adult health and behaviour (including worries about parental alcohol and substance misuse, domestic abuse and parental mental health), which increased 42% to more than 20,400 contacts
- Neglect, which increased 15% to more than 12,800 contacts
- Physical abuse, which increased 18% to more than 12,600 contacts
- Emotional abuse, which increased 40% to more than 11,600 contacts.

- An overall increase of contacts by 23% from the previous year. 47% of these led to a referral to an external agency.

**(UK) [Thousands of young people speak to Childline about mental health and abuse during the pandemic](#)**

Source: NSPCC

Date: 14 May 2021

NSPCC has released figures from the Childline service on the nearly 90,000 counselling sessions and NSPCC helpline contacts to **highlight the impact of mental health and abuse on children and young people** during the coronavirus pandemic. Of these counselling sessions, over 73,000 were about mental or emotional health and over 16,600 were delivered regarding abuse.

**(England) [Vulnerable children and young people](#)**

**Source:** Department for Education

**Date:** 28 April 2021

The Department for Education (DfE) has published data from the vulnerable children and young people survey of local authorities in England looking at the impact of the coronavirus on children's social care. Wave 22, from 22-24 March 2021, shows that: the total number of referrals during Wave 22 was 11% lower than the usual number at that time of year and the total number of children who started to be looked after reported in Waves 1 to 22 of the survey was around 29% lower than the same period in 2017-20.

**(England and Wales) [Child protection conference practice during COVID-19](#)**

**Source:** Nuffield Family Justice Observatory

**Date:** 14 December 2020

Nuffield Family Justice Observatory has published a report, based on research by King's College London, on the impact of coronavirus restrictions in England and Wales on child protection conferences (meetings where professionals and parents come together to identify and address serious concerns about child abuse and neglect). Findings from research with family members and professionals involved in child protection conferences (CPCs) between September and October 2020 included: CPCs were mainly conducted over video or by phone; professionals saw benefits and challenges to remote CPCs - with advantages including improved attendance and engagement by a range of professionals, whilst disadvantages included restricted opportunities for discussion and problems with technology; parents were much less positive about remote CPCs - reporting a lack of

information sharing prior to meetings and reduced ability to contribute to the conference itself.

**(International) [COVID-19 and violence against children: A review of early studies](#)**

Source: UNICEF

Date: June 2021 (currently available online)

This literature review on violence against children during the pandemic provided important insight into challenges, gaps, and possible reasons for emerging patterns in international data collection and research.<sup>13</sup> The main results included:

- Studies noted a decrease in police reports and referrals to child protection services, however this was likely to reflect reductions in ‘witnessing’ violence.
- There were mixed results on the number of calls to police or domestic violence helplines when looking at international data available.
- Based on studies in the UK and USA, results showed that child-abuse related injuries were increasingly treated in hospitals.
- Surveys, where they were used, consistently reported increases in family violence, even from parents and caregivers themselves.
- Regarding the nature and quality of the evidence base itself, there was a limited evidence base (only 48 recent publications were considered within scope for the review) which focuses primarily on physical and psychological violence at home, rather than other forms. The differences in methods and study design limit possibilities for generalisations of findings. Finally, administrative records are the main source of data, surveys and big data were less common. Only two surveys relied on representative sampling.

## 15.7 Domestic abuse and violence against women and girls

As previously reported, the [University of College \(UCL\) COVID Study](#) reports regularly on domestic abuse. The findings for [week 50-52](#) (published 25 March 2021) showed that self-reported abuse (physical and psychological) continued to be fairly stable. It was reported to be slightly higher in people living with children compared with those living with just other adults (under 10% for all groups). It remained higher amongst people with a diagnosed mental condition and was slightly higher amongst people with lower household income, and those with a physical health condition. Although a greater proportion of people from ethnic minority backgrounds

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<sup>13</sup> Studies not written in English were largely excluded from the review, see the ‘Methods’ section of the article for details.

consistently reported abuse over the course of the pandemic, abuse in this group had been decreasing since the start of the third lockdown and, at the time of publication, appeared to be similar to what it was amongst people of white ethnicity. However, it should be noted that not all people who experience abuse will necessarily report it, so these levels are anticipated to be an under-estimation of actual levels.

## 15.8 LGBTQ+ Children and Young People

**(UK) [LGBT+ pupils twice as likely to contemplate suicide](#) and [Black LGBT+ young people's mental health particularly impacted by pandemic](#)**

Source: Just Like Us

Date: 17 May 2021 and 23 February 2021

Just Like Us has published research on the mental health of LGBTQ+ children and young people. The research, which surveyed 2,934 pupils aged 11- to 18-years-old, of whom 1,140 identify as LGBTQ+, found that: 68% of LGBTQ+ children and young people have experienced suicidal thoughts and feelings, compared with 29% of young people who are not LGBTQ+; lesbian and transgender young people were most likely to experience suicidal thoughts and feelings; 89% of Black LGBTQ+ children and young people have contemplated suicide, compared with 67% of White LGBTQ+ young people; and LGBTQ+ young people were three times less likely to report feeling good about themselves than their non-LGBTQ+ peers.

Findings released in February included that Black LGBT+ young people were more likely to be worried for their mental health with 61% worrying about their mental health on a daily basis, compared with 56% of white LGBT+ young people; and were more likely to experience depression, anxiety disorder, and panic attacks than white LGBT+ pupils were. A full report on inclusive education and the experiences of LGBTQ+ young people is due in June 2021.

## 15.9 Children and young people impacted by the justice system

**(UK) [Coronavirus: impact of prison lockdowns on children with a parent in prison](#)**

Source: University of Oxford

Date: 17 March 2021

The University of Oxford Faculty of Law has published a study looking at the experiences of 70 children in the UK whose parents were in prison during the period April - June 2020 and the implications of national lockdowns in 2020 and 2021. The study found that children experienced **confusing and complex emotions when**

**face-to-face visits were stopped** and this has **negatively affected children's emotional, physical, and mental wellbeing**.

## **16. Impact on services**

**(UK) [Still here for children: sharing the experiences of NSPCC staff who supported children and families during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)**

Source: NSPCC Learning

Date: 14 December 2020

NSPCC Learning has published findings from a project in which 15 NSPCC staff working in a variety of frontline and strategic roles in Together for Childhood sites in Glasgow, Plymouth and Stoke-on-Trent kept reflective diaries of their experiences supporting children and families during the coronavirus pandemic. Findings included: working online enabled planned work to continue but created new barriers to access for some families; working together with partners helped NSPCC staff respond to the needs of local communities; and staff felt that children were more at risk of experiencing abuse at home and online.

A [briefing paper](#) from March 2021 from NSPCC highlighted three key lessons and reflections from their own local service response:

- Providing remote support using virtual and digital methods worked very well for some services and yielded benefits for children and families.
- Remote support was less suitable for high risk, complex cases.
- Hybrid models combining remote and face-to-face support have good potential, if they are child and family-led.

## **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 October and November (mostly). The following topics are generally excluded:

- Early years (0-2) 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.
- 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.

#### **Other briefings available in this series:**

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): impact on children, young people and families - evidence summary June 2020](#)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): impact on children, young people and families - evidence summary July 2020](#)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): impact on children, young people and families - evidence summary September 2020](#)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): impact on children, young people and families - evidence summary October 2020](#)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): impact on children, young people and families - evidence summary December 2020](#)

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