COVID-19: impact on mental health

29th January 2021

**Title:** Young people’s mental and emotional health: Trajectories and drivers in childhood and adolescence

Education Policy Institute | 27th January 2021

Based on data from the Millennium Cohort Study, this report reveals insights into the determinants of young people’s wellbeing, including how it is affected by their relationships, background, and use of social media.

The study examines the personal experiences of young people in England, at age eleven, fourteen and seventeen. The research shows that while the wellbeing of all young people declines by the end of their teenage years, there is a strong gender divide within this: girls see far lower levels of wellbeing and self-esteem than boys – driven by a sharp fall of both during mid-adolescence.

Girls experience more depressive symptoms than boys – such as feeling worthless or hopeless – while they are also more likely to feel unhappy about their physical appearance. The proportion of girls that feel unhappy about their appearance rises considerably between age 11 and 14, from 1 in 7 to around 1 in 3.

Social media also plays a key role for the generation of “digital natives”, with the new findings showing that very frequent use has an adverse effect on the wellbeing of boys and girls, along with the self-esteem of girls.

Based on the new findings, researchers determine that the experience of the pandemic is likely to continue to exacerbate existing mental health and wellbeing problems among young people. National estimates show that 1 in 6 young people now have a probable mental illness – up from 1 in 9.

Full report: [Young people’s mental and emotional health: Trajectories and drivers in childhood and adolescence](https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/EPI-PT_Young-people%E2%80%99s-wellbeing_Jan2021.pdf)

**Title:** The state of children’s mental health services 2020/21

Children’s Commissioner |28th January 2021

In her annual report, the Children's Commissioner Anne Longfield, states that mental health remains the biggest issue raised by children, this year. An estimated 1 in 6 children is thought to have a probable mental health condition, and the number of children being referred for help is increasing. In 2019-20 this rose to 538 564, an increase of 35% from 2018-19 and up 60% from 2017-18.

In this briefing the Children's Commissioner reflects on the last five years, during this time there's been unprecedented number of Government initiatives, a Green Paper, a White Paper and other commitments on children’s mental health

It also considers the impact of Covid, which has turned the lives of children upside down  
and placed the NHS under unimaginable strain. Although the data used in this report is from the period to the end of March 2020, so largely in the pre-covid period.

Children have had major disruption to two years of education, and have had extremely limited opportunities to see friends and wider families, to play and enjoy activities. More than this, many will have been very worried about the impact of Covid on their families.

The key findings of the report:

1. Access to children’s mental health services is still not adequate
2. Access is improving, but not as quickly as we would expect. NHS England will need to increase the pace at which services expand to meet the commitments in the NHS Long-Term Plan
3. Spending on children’s mental health is slowly increasing but highly variable and still inadequate
4. The postcode lottery remains

Full report: [The state of children’s mental health services 2020/21](https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/cco-the-state-of-childrens-mental-health-services-2020-21.pdf)

News release: [Damage to children’s mental health caused by Covid crisis could last for years without a large-scale increase for children’s mental health services](https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/2021/01/28/damage-to-childrens-mental-health-caused-by-covid-crisis-could-last-for-years-without-a-large-scale-increase-for-childrens-mental-health-services/)

See also: [Covid-19: Children’s mental health services in England are “nowhere near sufficient,” says commissioner](https://www.bmj.com/content/372/bmj.n258) | BMJ

**Title:** One in 10 UK adults say brain health has deteriorated in pandemic

Alzheimer’s Research UK |  January 2021

A poll conducted by Alzheimer’s Research UK shows that 14 per cent of UK adults feel that brain health has declined since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Two thirds of the respondents in this survey said they would consider making changes to improve their health as a result of the pandemic.

The charity's findings in the poll, underline that people’s awareness of dementia has increased, 16 per cent of respondents reporting an increased awareness. The charity believes now is the opportune time to support people to take positive action, particularly with new lockdown measures in place.

To this end they have launched a new campaign *Think Brain Health,* whichaims to increase awareness of three rules for improving brain health:

* Looking after heart health, by exercising regularly, eating a healthy diet and keeping blood pressure, weight and cholesterol in check.
* Staying sharp, by taking part in activities that keep the brain active.
* And keeping connected, by staying socially active and connecting with other people.

Full detail: [One in 10 UK adults say brain health has deteriorated in pandemic](https://www.alzheimersresearchuk.org/one-in-10-uk-adults-say-brain-health-has-deteriorated-in-pandemic/)

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