COVID-19: impact on mental health

4th June 2021

**Title:** Happy to help: the welfare effects of a nationwide micro-volunteering programme

London School of Economics and Political Science | 31st May 2021

This report estimates the wellbeing benefits from volunteering for England’s NHS Volunteer Responders programme which was set up in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It found that active volunteers report significantly higher life satisfaction, feelings of worthwhileness, social connectedness, and belonging to their local communities.

In a survey of over 9,000 active participants on the NHSVR programme, the researchers found that even small acts of volunteering, including talking to at-risk individuals on the phone or helping to deliver groceries boosted participants sense of wellbeing and increased feelings of belonging within the local community. Importantly, the authors found that the positive impacts on wellbeing lasted up to three months after the last task had been completed.

A social welfare analysis shows that the benefits of the programme were at least 140 times greater than its costs.

Full report: [Happy to help: the welfare effects of a nationwide micro-volunteering programme](https://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/dp1772.pdf)

See also: [Volunteering in the NHS: Covid-19 Volunteer Responders Programme significantly increased volunteers' overall life satisfaction](https://www.lse.ac.uk/News/Latest-news-from-LSE/2021/e-May-21/Volunteering-in-the-NHS-Covid-19-Volunteer-Responders-Programme-significantly-increased-volunteers-overall-life-satisfaction)

**Title:** Psychological distress during the acceleration phase of the COVID-19 pandemic: a survey of doctors practising in emergency medicine, anaesthesia and intensive care medicine in the UK and Ireland

Emergency Medicine Journal | published online 24th May 2021

The objective of this study was to quantify psychological distress experienced by emergency, anaesthetic and intensive care doctors during the acceleration phase of COVID-19 in the UK and Ireland.

5440 responses were obtained from a cross-sectional survey. 81.1% (n=4414) either agreed (31.1%, n=2709) or strongly agreed (31.1%, n=1705) that their personal health was at risk due to their clinical role.

Findings indicate that during the acceleration phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, almost half of frontline doctors working in acute care reported psychological distress as measured by the GHQ-12. Findings from this study should inform strategies to optimise preparedness and explore modifiable factors associated with increased psychological distress in the short and long term.

Full paper: [Psychological distress during the acceleration phase of the COVID-19 pandemic: a survey of doctors practising in emergency medicine, anaesthesia and intensive care medicine in the UK and Ireland](https://emj.bmj.com/content/emermed/38/6/450.full.pdf)

**Title:** Weathering the storm? The pandemic’s impact on young people’s wellbeing

The Health Foundation | 27th May 2021

As the immediate danger of the virus to older people thankfully diminishes, focus is shifting to groups who have had their health suffer in a different way. This article looks how the pandemic has affected young people’s mental health, and what society can do to help.

Full detail: [Weathering the storm? The pandemic’s impact on young people’s wellbeing](https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/blogs/weathering-the-storm-the-pandemics-impact-on-young-peoples-wellbeing?utm_campaign=12409985_May%202021%20newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_source=The%20Health%20Foundation&dm_i=4Y2,7DZLT,6ZKZT4,TZUUT,1)

**Title:** Inside the teen mind: what’s happening to mental health?

The Health Foundation | 22nd May 2021

The pandemic has created profound challenges for young people over the past year – with education, work, relationships and social time all affected.

We also know about the wider economic trends which pile pressure on teens to make it to college to have a better job in the future, and the social trends which might undermine their security as they transition from child to adult. Combined with big changes in how young people are living their lives – such as a huge increase in the use of social media – it’s perhaps unsurprising that we’ve seen trends of increasing levels of depression, self harm, anxiety, eating disorders and other mental health issues in teens.

This Health Foundation podcast discusses these issues with two expert guests.

Full detail: [Inside the teen mind: what’s happening to mental health?](https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/podcast/episode-08-inside-the-teen-mind?utm_campaign=12409985_May%202021%20newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_source=The%20Health%20Foundation&dm_i=4Y2,7DZLT,6ZKZT4,TZUUT,1)

**Title:** Self-harm in over-65s ‘needs post-pandemic focus’

BBC News | 3rd June 2021

Self-harm among the over-65s must receive greater focus because of the increased risks associated with the pandemic, a leading expert has said. Loneliness, bereavement and reluctance to access GPs can all be causes in older adults, said Prof Nav Kapur, who has produced guidelines on the subject. He warned that in over-65s, without the right help, self-harm can also be a predictor of later suicide attempts. The NHS's mental health director said it had expanded its community support.

Over-65s are hospitalised more than 5,000 times a year in England because of self-harm and self-poisoning, figures obtained from NHS Digital show.

Full detail: [Self-harm in over-65s ‘needs post-pandemic focus’](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-57164918)

**Title:** Mitigating the impacts of COVID-19: where are the mental health trials?

The Lancet Psychiatry | 1st June 2021

COVID-19 will have continuing and long-term effects on mental health, and many unknowns remain. For some problems, the scaling up of existing treatments is a sufficient response. However, many problems will be new and will exacerbate pre-existing health inequalities; these will require new evidence-informed solutions. Some of the impacts of COVID-19 will be on sections of the population for whom innovative (and unevaluated) methods of delivery (such as eHealth) are needed in non-mental health settings, such as schools.

Other impacts are on the NHS workforce, for whom the problems of workplace stress and moral injury require scalable interventions and decisions about when, how, and whether to intervene. Some new problems, such as long COVID, will require increased integration of psychosocial models of care with physical health services.

This comment piece suggests that when evidence is not available to inform mental health practice and policy, then trials should be rapidly designed and delivered at scale to determine which treatment approaches work and discard those that are ineffective. Trials have been fundamental to the global pandemic response, but mental health has not been part of this success story. In short, the mental health research community has been successful at describing the nature of the impact of COVID-19, but less successful at generating solutions and providing clinical trial data to establish what works in mitigating the impacts.

Full detail: [Mitigating the impacts of COVID-19: where are the mental health trials?](https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2215-0366%2821%2900204-2)

**Title:** Depressive symptoms, mental wellbeing, and substance use among adolescents before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in Iceland: a longitudinal, population-based study

The Lancet Psychiatry | 3rd June 2021

Adolescence represents a crucial developmental period in shaping mental health trajectories. In this study, the authors investigated the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and substance use during this sensitive developmental stage.

The results of this study suggest that COVID-19 has significantly impaired adolescent mental health. However, the decrease observed in substance use during the pandemic might be an unintended benefit of isolation, and might serve as a protective factor against future substance use disorders and dependence. Population-level prevention efforts, especially for girls, are warranted.

Full paper: [Depressive symptoms, mental wellbeing, and substance use among adolescents before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in Iceland: a longitudinal, population-based study](https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2215-0366%2821%2900156-5)

Related Comment piece: [A lost generation? COVID-19 and adolescent mental health](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366(21)00179-6/fulltext)

**Title:** Holding the frontline: a cross-sectional survey of emergency department staff well-being and psychological distress in the course of the COVID-19 outbreak

BMC Health Services Research | 29th May 2021

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak has been associated with stress and challenges for healthcare professionals, especially for those working in the front-line of treating COVID-19 patients. This study aimed to: 1) assess changes in well-being and perceived stress symptoms of Dutch emergency department (ED) staff in the course of the first COVID-19 wave, and 2) assess and explore stressors experienced by ED staff since the COVID-19 outbreak.

Mean self-perceived stress symptom levels almost doubled during the peak of the first wave. Half of the respondents reported experiencing more moral distress in the ED since the COVID-19 outbreak. High levels of distress were primarily found in situations where the staff was unable to provide or facilitate necessary emotional support to a patient or family.

Analysis of 51 free-texts revealed witnessing suffering, high work pressure, fear of contamination, inability to provide comfort and support, rapidly changing protocols regarding COVID-19 care and personal protection, and shortage of protection equipment as important stressors.

The authors conclude that actions to limit drop-out and illness among staff resulting from psychological distress are vital to secure acute care for (non-)COVID-19 patients during future infection waves.

Full article: [Holding the frontline: a cross-sectional survey of emergency department staff well-being and psychological distress in the course of the COVID-19 outbreak](https://bmchealthservres.biomedcentral.com/track/pdf/10.1186/s12913-021-06555-5.pdf)

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