

## Mental health and wellbeing as at 24/7/20

Our COVID-19 survey has been running since early May 2020. We published interim snapshot reports in June and July. In June we also published a brief report relating to the feedback about GP access and technology.

This month our focus is on mental health and wellbeing. This covers people who already have a mental health diagnosis, and also how dealing with the pandemic has affected people's wellbeing and mental health generally.

We have included statistics up to downloading the data on 24 July. Surveys are being completed all the time, so these statistics may change as time goes on, and this will be picked up in future monthly snapshot reports.

We asked the commissioners of mental health services at Tameside & Glossop Clinical Commissioning Group what types of information would be useful to them. Hopefully, this report will provide some of the feedback they are looking for. We will carry on collecting data to try and fill gaps in the topics people tell us about.

We have given some examples of what people are telling us, however more detailed anonymous feedback and quotes will not be shown until our final report at the end of the project, after the survey closes. A date has not yet been set for this, but will not be until after we are getting back to something closer to normal.

A couple of weeks ago, we updated the wording of some of the questions, following the easing of lockdown and shielding. This will allow people to answer in relation to during lockdown, more recently and looking forwards. We have also added a question asking whether people have completed the survey before. People may have completed the survey in May or June, but now have additional information to tell us, so we are encouraging people to complete it again.

We are still looking for feedback about people's experiences and ideas for the future, so please complete our anonymous survey.

The link for the online survey is [www.healthwatchtameside.co.uk/covid-19-survey](http://www.healthwatchtameside.co.uk/covid-19-survey).

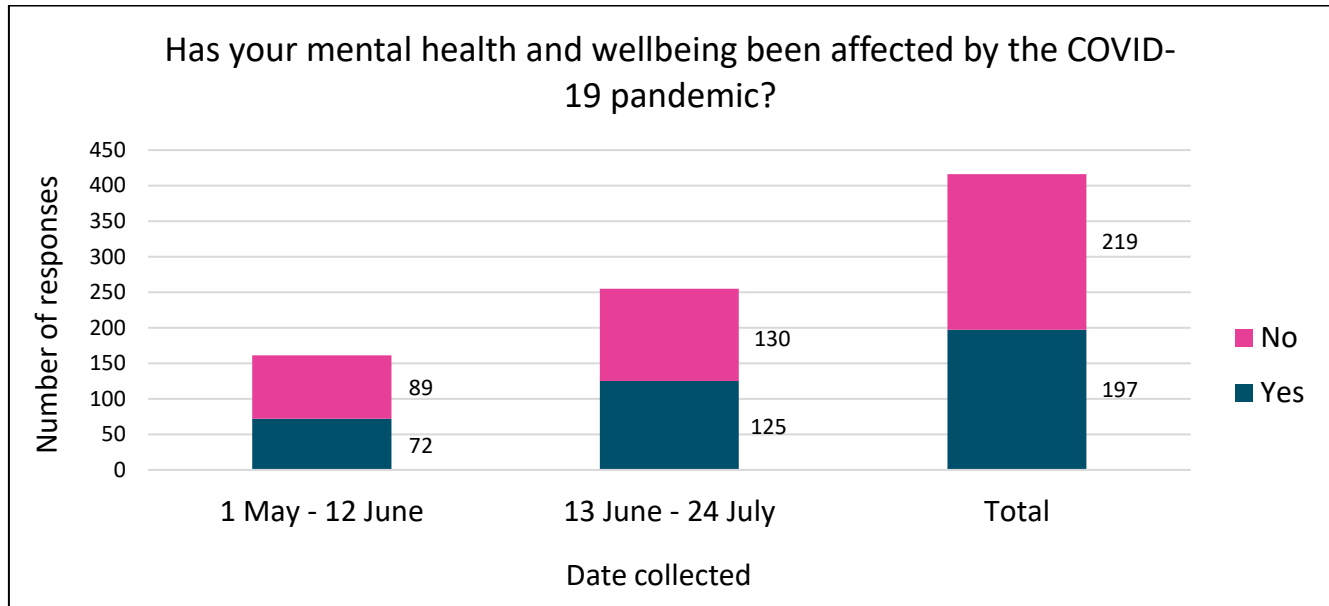
There is also a post pinned to the top of our Facebook page which can be shared [www.facebook.com/HealthwatchTameside/](https://www.facebook.com/HealthwatchTameside/)

People can give us a call on **0161 667 2526** to request a paper copy and FREEPOST envelope, or a call-back from us to fill it in over the phone with them.

### Question 3

#### Has your mental health and wellbeing been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?

This question was answered by 416 people, of which 47% said they felt their mental health and wellbeing had been affected by the pandemic.



A small number of people answered 'No' to this question, but in other question answers talked about needing assistance for a mental health crisis. Could this have been because they did not feel the pandemic had affected an existing condition?

There were also several people who answered 'No' to this question, but went on to describe their feelings of loneliness, anxiety, low mood and/or depression, due to the pandemic. Maybe they do not consider these to be feelings relating to their mental health?

Most of the people who answered 'No' missed going out, seeing their families and their social activities.

The second part of the question was '**Please tell us more about this. Did you know where to get help? Was help available?**' 204 people included a comment in the free-write box, although most did not answer the second part about getting help.

Of those that did answer this second part:

- 10 people did not know what help was available.
- 7 people said they did know.
- 4 people said they did not think any help was available.
- 2 people said they did not know what bereavement support was available.
- Others said they did not feel they were bad enough to ask for help, but did not say whether they knew what was available.
- A person with autism said there was no support in place - they needed counselling and support groups.

The remainder of the report will group the comments from the free-write answers into themes, along with any from our other survey questions, which refer to mental health and wellbeing.

## Diagnosed mental health condition

49 people said they had a diagnosed mental health condition, either in answer to this question, or in other parts of the survey. Of these people, almost half did not say what that diagnosis was, but mentioned medication, or the mental health practitioners or community groups they received support from.

The following were mentioned:

- Anxiety
- Anxiety and depression
- Autism
- Bipolar
- Depression
- OCD
- Panic attacks
- PTSD

19 people said they had anxiety and/or depression, and most of them said they were feeling worse since the pandemic started. Some had been in touch with their GP for increased medication.

People talked about mental health support which had stopped or been changed. Where the number of people is not mentioned, the comment was from one person. Here are some of the types of support:

- 2 people said they had not received any help from Pennine Care when they needed it.
- 2 people said they had not received any help from the Community Mental Health Team (CMHT for the rest of the report).
- 3 people said Anthony Seddon Fund drop-in sessions and groups had stopped.
- 3 people said the Health & Wellbeing College groups and 1 to 1 sessions had stopped.
- 4 people said Tameside Oldham & Glossop Mind (TOG Mind for the remainder of the report) face-to-face support groups and counselling had stopped.
- 6 people said they had been waiting many months following a referral to Healthy Minds, had not heard anything yet, and expected an even longer delay.
- Assessments for children for EHCP (Education, health, and care plan) and ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) put on hold.
- Change Grow Live (CGL for the remainder of the report) groups stopped.
- Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN for the rest of the report) cancelled a visit and then had no further contact with them.
- Counselling at the Women's Centre stopped.
- Gaining access to mental health medication was difficult.
- Healthy Minds support worker reduced to weekly phone call.
- Some crisis lines were not available.

Some of these services provided alternative solutions, including phone and video appointments. People who completed the survey mentioned:

- 4 people had contact with Healthy Minds.
- 4 people had contact with their mental health consultant.
- 9 people contacted their GP.
- CGL
- CMHT
- Counsellor

The feedback is mixed. Positive comments include:

- Easy
- Helpful

Negative comments include:

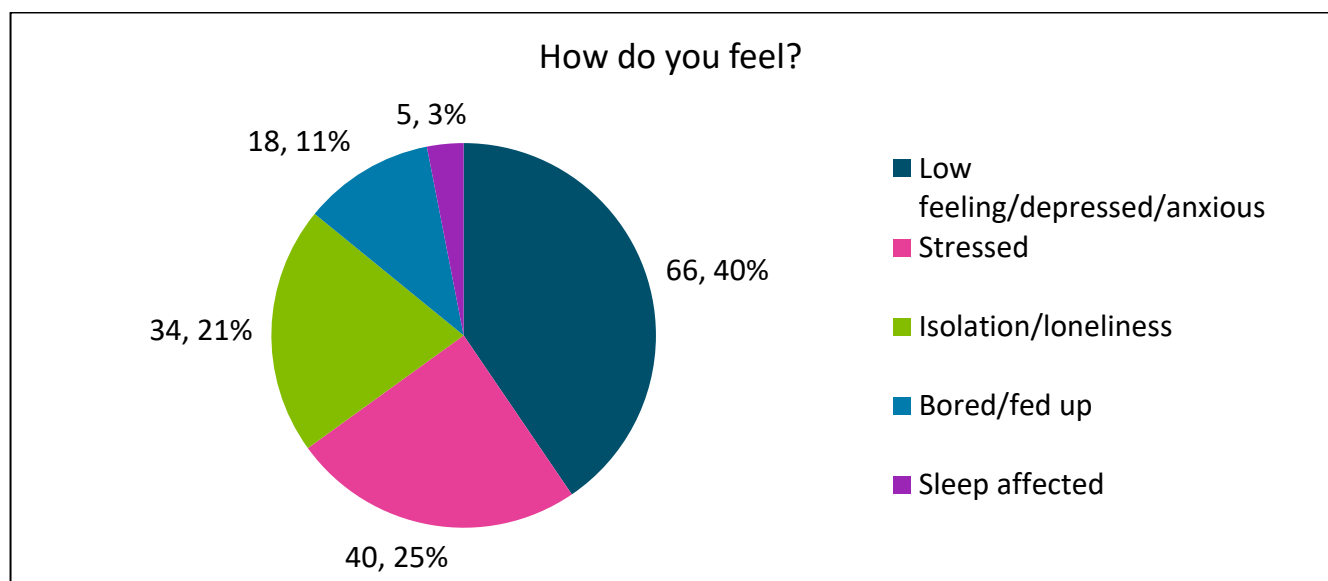
- A lack of privacy using the phone or video at home when you do not live alone.
- It is difficult to have a conversation with someone when you are struggling with your mental health. They need to see your body language.
- It is not the same on the phone.
- Need to have IT working to be able to use video.
- Not helpful.

One person talked about seeing a private counsellor by socially distancing in a park, when lockdown eased, as they could not wait any longer on the waiting list.

Another person said they did not feel safe following their personal safety plan, which involved going to hospital, as they lived with an immunocompromised family.

### Undiagnosed mental health conditions and general wellbeing

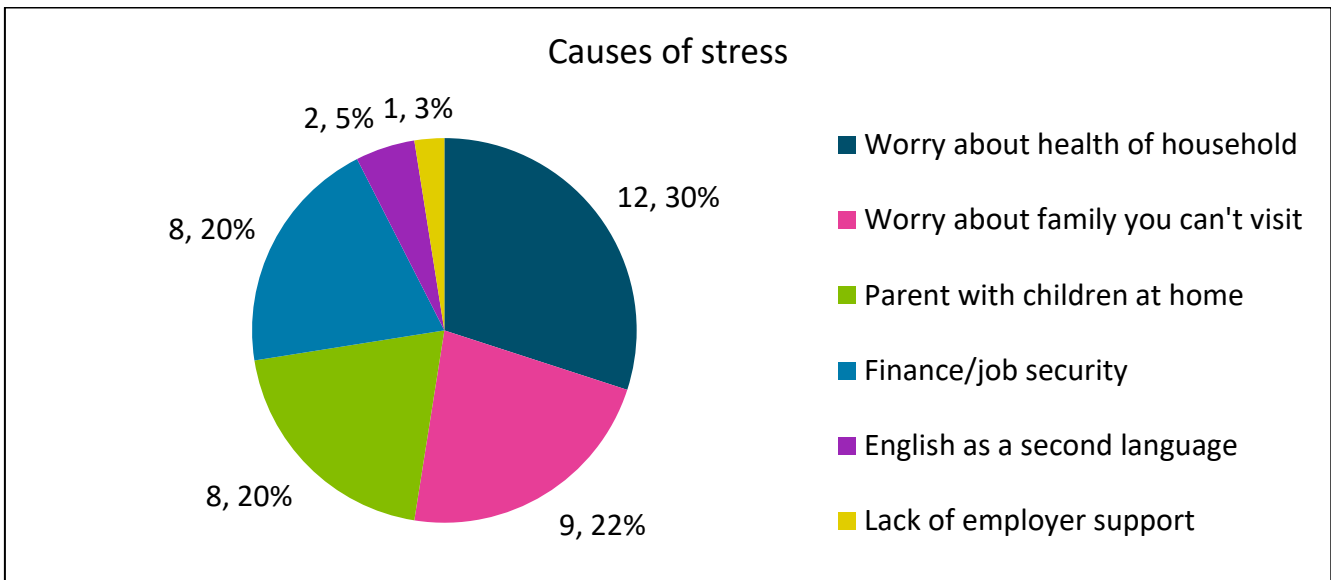
Within the questions with free-write answers, people have commented on how the pandemic is making them feel. The comments are mostly negative, and include:



'Low feeling/depressed/anxious' includes low mood, feeling like a prisoner, feeling confined, and anger.

A number of people with poor sight or who are blind completed the survey by phone. They have worries about receiving information about the pandemic in a format they cannot see if they received anything at all. Some have lost their independence, especially when they rely on others who they do not live with to escort them outside. They struggle with social distancing, which creates further worries.

'Stress' can be broken down further into reasons behind the stress:



52% of the comments about stress are concerned with worries about people's own health, that of the families they live with, and how the family members they cannot see are coping with the pandemic, and keeping well.

8 parents said they had children at home and that was causing them stress. 6 of these people were also trying to work from home.

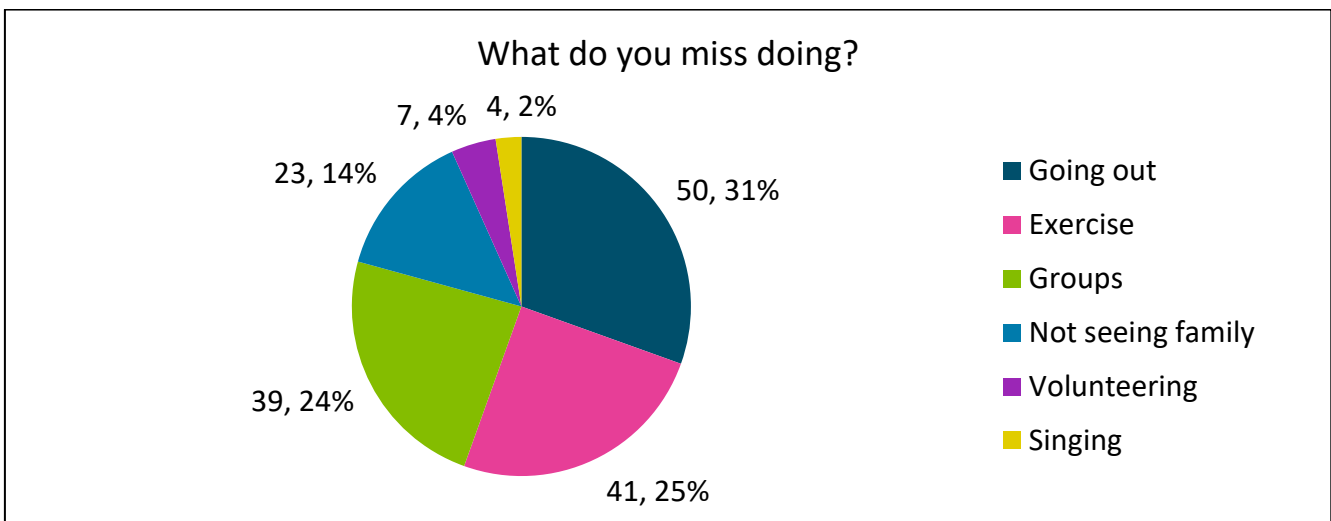
Where English is a second language, there was a worry about not understanding what was happening in the pandemic, and not being able to get a translator for medical telephone appointments.

The lack of employer support was in relation to mental health.

### Social activities

Question 4 asks 'Face-to-face social groups and community activities have been cancelled. Has this affected you?'

We have looked at the answers people gave to this question who answered 'Yes' to question 3 about their mental health and wellbeing being affected by the pandemic. Here are the types of activity in broad themes. Many people said doing these activities helps their mental health, and it is the lack of activities which has affected them.



'Going out' includes shopping, meeting friends, university events, days out, going to the pub, eating out, going to the library, cinema, theatre, concerts, and quizzes.

'Exercise' includes swimming, running, dancing, keep fit, going to the gym, long walks, golf, yoga, snooker, and football. Some of these exercises were done in groups with friends (not included in the 'groups' theme) which added to the social aspect.

'Groups' include antenatal and postnatal peer support, community mental health peer support, carer support, church services and church-organised social activities (includes all faiths), community centre groups, health support groups, classes for hobbies and/or learning new skills, uniformed organisations for children, and various social groups.

## **Pregnancy and mental health**

Of the 6 people who completed the survey who mentioned being pregnant, or giving birth, or being a father, the comments were similar. They referred to concerns about:

- Not being able to visit the labour ward prior to the birth.
- Partners not being allowed to attend the antenatal appointments or the birth.
- Reduced midwife appointments.
- The lack of peer support from cancelled group classes.

50% said the pandemic had affected their mental health, but we do not know whether they asked for help.

## **Ways to improve mental health**

We looked at what people said they were doing during the pandemic, to help themselves keep busy, and improve their mental health. Again, this is feedback from the people who answered 'Yes' to question 3. The types of activities include:

- Conversation with NHS colleague.
- Gardening.
- Looking at information websites.
- Online free activities.
- Online quizzes.
- Online TOG Mind Zoom course - mindfulness. This person said they preferred the online course, because they did not have to find somewhere to park.
- Phone calls with:
  - Action Together/social prescriber.
  - Anthony Seddon.
  - Being There.
  - Inspire.
  - Silverline.
  - Support worker.
  - TOG Mind.
- Private counselling.
- Video (e.g. Zoom, etc,) and phone calls with friends and family.
- Volunteering by helping neighbours with shopping, etc. or with foodbanks, and so on.
- Walking.

## Benefits to lockdown

Some people said there were benefits to the pandemic and lockdown. These included:

- A slower pace of life.
- Able to get out walking and learn about the local area.
- Having to stay at home took away some personal stresses.
- One person said it took away the pressure of going out, which helped their mental health.
- Some people describe themselves as not being very sociable, and were happy to stay at home.
- Someone with agoraphobia said there was now more available online, and they were able to take part in things that they could not do before.
- The quiet atmosphere of working from home.

## Online support

Question 6 asks ‘**Since the beginning of the pandemic, have you done any of the following? (please tick all that apply.)**’ One of the options is ‘**Used a website or app for mental health support**’ and 27 people selected this option.

We then asked, ‘**If yes to any of these, please tell us about your experience.**’ People told us about speaking to a GP, or about one of the other options, but few mentioned their experiences of the mental health website or app. What we were told included:

- Anxiety website - there was too much information and it was difficult to follow.
- App downloaded for relaxation techniques - no comment about whether it helped, or not.
- Online form completion - one person needed to get help to complete. Another said phone would have been preferred.
- Rethink Mental Illness - provided good support, but was not enough for someone living on their own.
- Samaritans and Mind websites - looked at after crisis episodes, but not much practical help.

## General comments

Here are some other comments relating to mental health and wellbeing:

- Being isolated gives people time to think. Buried memories re-surface causing problems.
- Dementia:
  - People without a diagnosis are deteriorating.
  - The clinic was closed so family unable to get a diagnosis or advice.
  - People with dementia find it hard to understand what is happening, and what the rules are. The same applies to people with autism, including children.
  - Not being able to go to groups is affecting the mobility of people with dementia who do not like to go for walks.
- Key workers have found it hard being isolated from their families.
- Loss of independence was mentioned many times, and the feelings this leaves people with.

- Pain is having an impact on mental health and wellbeing because of:
  - Delays in physical treatment.
  - Cancellation of pain relief injections.
  - Lack of exercise which keeps arthritis manageable.
- People can feel lonely or isolated, regardless of age and circumstances. Younger people living alone, children missing their friends and people who live with a partner but miss a busy social life out of the house.
- People have concerns about lockdown easing and rules being confusing around social distancing and wearing masks. Several people said they will be staying at home as much as possible.
- People living alone are worried they may become ill and no-one will know.
- Respite is missed by:
  - Parents - when children cannot attend their usual activities.
  - Carers - because all the day centres and activities are closed.
  - Young Carers - groups are not meeting.
- Support may be needed in the future for the impact of the pandemic on children - not seeing their friends, not going to school, not attending clubs and activities, not being able to take part in sports. One person said the younger children in their family seemed to be coping better than the older children.
- Suggestion in a survey response - *“We need to rethink how we provide mental health support - there is and will be an increased amount of people who need to access this. I believe support groups in the community are the way forward to allow people to process their experience of this time in a safe and supportive space.”*