

CALL FOR EXAM ADVICE

# Bridging the gap

Young people's experiences of mental health before and during the COVID-19 outbreak

DON'T! FORGET!  
TO WASH!  
YOUR! HANDS!



NEED HELP?  
CALL US!

Telephone



HOW DO I  
KNOW IF I HAVE  
ANXIETY?



A study by

**Young Healthwatch Westminster**

## Introduction

When we first began reaching out to young people in 2019 (between the ages of 14 and 25) who were living, working or studying in Westminster, we wanted them to tell us about the health and social care issues that mattered the most to them.

These [Young Healthwatch Westminster](#) members told us that **mental health** was the most pressing issue for people their age, and they chose to focus their 2020/21 outreach and research on mental health concerns among this group.

The results in this study come from a survey that was designed and conducted by Young Healthwatch Westminster. It is a study made by young people, for young people.

The survey was created before the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) was recognised as a global health crisis, and the questions relating to the pandemic were added in April 2020.

[The survey is still live](#). This report highlights the findings collected between **27<sup>th</sup> April - 16<sup>th</sup> June 2020**, and will be updated again over the coming weeks.

## Young Healthwatch Westminster wanted to learn:



How young people think about their mental health

What causes stress among young people



What young people know about local and national support for mental health

How the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their wellbeing.



## We asked:

What does mental health mean to you?

How comfortable do you feel talking about your mental health?

What do you think causes the most stress for young people?

How has COVID-19 affected you and your loved ones?

Where do you look for help and support with your mental health?

Which local mental health services have you heard of? Where did you hear about them?

Has there been enough information provided about where to find support?

## Findings

The information in this report is based on **144 responses** that we received from young people across London (including Westminster, Camden, Brent and Haringey) between 27<sup>th</sup> April and 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2020. We found that 11-13 year olds (44) and 14-16 year olds (58) responded the most, with only 30 respondents in the 17-18 age range, 2 in the 19-21 range, three in the 22-25 range and seven declined to answer.

## Talking about Mental Health

In general, respondents reported feeling 'neutral' when asked how comfortable they are talking about their mental health.

'Uncomfortable' and 'comfortable' responses have remained at a similar level (around 30%) since the survey opened, showing no sign of variation through different stages of the UK response to the COVID-19 outbreak.



## Misunderstanding Mental Health

Many of the responses we received appeared to **confuse** **“mental health”** and **“mental illness”**

27 people answered the question: 'what does mental health mean to you?' with variants of “sickness” and “depression” or loaded terms such as “crazy.”

## CAMHS and other services

CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) is a term for all services that work with children and young people who have difficulties with their emotional wellbeing.

Young Healthwatch shared this survey with youth mental health support service providers, in order to gather experiences of not only recognising, but using these services.

**35% of the respondents to this survey had used CAMHS.**

## Disparities between respondents on the basis of ethnicity

**36%** of the people who responded to the survey identified themselves as being from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) background.

**36%** identified as White British and **6%** opted out of stating their ethnicity.



**15%** of young people who identified as being from a BAME background **said that COVID-19 has affected their mental health 'a lot'**, compared with only 9% of their non-BAME counterparts.



**One in four respondents (25%)** who identified with a BAME background **reported losing a family member or neighbour** and the process of coping with this loss, compared with only **7%** of young people from non-BAME communities.

## Accessing information

**82%** of respondents said that they felt they could find mental health support if they needed it, and **78%** said they believe there has been enough information on mental health support during the crisis.

### However...

Over **60%** of respondents had **not heard of CAMHS**.

Perceptions of CAMHS among those who had heard of it were mixed, from excellent to extremely poor.



Responses stating that there was a lack of information on or support for mental health from schools during the COVID-19 outbreak were common.

Young Minds

The Mix

Kooth

Every Mind Matters

Healthtalk

Papyrus

Mind Westminster

Insight

We listed eight national and local mental health support services and almost **35%** **hadn't heard of any of them.**

The most well known youth mental health service was **Young Minds** (recognised by over **50%** of the young people).

## Sources of support

## Barriers to access

Many responses mentioned either encountering or perceiving barriers to asking for help, including respondents' concerns that they might not get the treatment they feel they need, and not knowing how to access help from different service providers.

"Yes [I can easily access help], because I am in the system, but I think it would be harder for a young person who is not."

"There is such a lack of availability for all these services that makes the person feel like even the help services don't have time for them and that it's not worth it"



"I think I would get help but the extent of the help is difficult. Someone might email or call back, make referrals to CMHT, but then it takes so long for actual support like counselling or talking therapy to be put in place."

## Strong social networks

Some respondents reported the importance of having supportive networks in their lives. These respondents reported fewer issues relating to mental health and wellbeing.

Some expressed worry about opening up to others, even if they still considered friends and relatives their first point of contact.

"In my opinion it feels quite selfish in a way when I try to talk to them about it, but I shouldn't."



"My friends are there for me and so is CAMHS"

"I feel able to go to a therapist at school or to seek help from teachers"

## Sources of support

We asked where young people go to for information and support for mental health related queries.

### GP

Of the young people who had heard of one or more of the services we specifically asked about, only **1%** had heard about the service from their GP.



Just over **25%** of young people would go to their GP for support with their mental health.

### Family & friends

Respondents would go to **family (58%)** or **friends (61%)** for mental health support.



### School or college

Many responses suggested that the messaging from schools around mental health support has been insufficient.

“The information, our school is really bad at it”

“There’s nothing [informing us about mental health services] in schools”

### Respondents made some suggestions:

- + A hotline for remote mental health support
- + Online counselling
- + Information on bereavement support
- + Easy to access phone numbers and email addresses



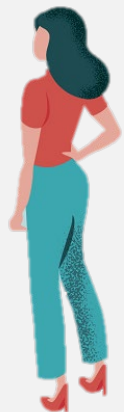
## Sources of stress

The survey respondents told us that **exams, body image** and **school** are the three most stressful aspects of their lives.

“Body image the most as it is constantly being thrown at us, also school as I feel stressed about the future”

Over **80%** of respondents **identified body image** as a key cause of stress for young people.

**60%** also mentioned “social image” and linked both concerns to social media use.



“Exams can cause me to stress out easily. I think school is too focused on exams.”

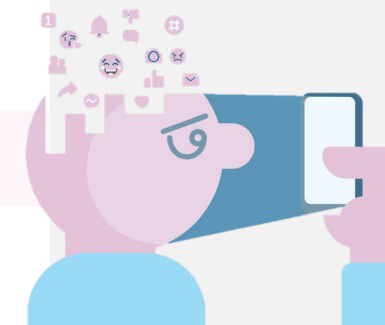
**Three quarters (75%)** of respondents **said exams caused stress**, with just under **70%** also saying that “school” caused stress for young people.



“Social media dramatically exacerbates negatives emotions and pressures regarding body image, because generally people only display appealing and ‘perfect’ aspects of their lives online.”

Almost **60%** of respondents **said that social media contributes to stress.**

Body image-oriented content was highlighted as a cause of pressure.



## Coping during the COVID-19 outbreak

Almost **40%** of the young respondents to the survey said that they had been impacted a “**moderate**” amount by COVID-19. The second most popular response was that they had been **impacted “a little” (25%)**.

Many respondents mentioned an initial sense of relief from existing stresses, such as school and exams. However, these were replaced with different anxieties, including illness or bereavement, pressurised family relationships, concerns about jobs, education and finances, as well as social isolation as they spent long periods without being able to see friends.

“I have been able to reflect more on myself and my processes, how I deal with problems”



“Flare ups of [my family members' existing] anxiety and depression have been more frequent during isolation, as our support systems aren't as easily accessible.”



“It's made everything stressful, I miss my life.”



“Positive: no more exams, staying at home with family, resting, cooking, etc.”



“Initially positive because the stress of exams was lifted, I was able to slow down and enjoy life... but I've started missing the freedom of 'normal' life.”



# Contact us

If you would like to contact Young Healthwatch about this report, or about our other research and local engagement in Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea, you can get in touch with us here:

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You can still respond to the survey here: [Young Healthwatch Mental Health Survey](#)