

'Generation COVID'? Socio-economic factors impacting young people's mental health in the wake of the pandemic

March 2021

This is the first of three briefings developed by Youth Access to support our members, the wider youth sector, commissioners and policymakers to anticipate and respond to the scale of need among younger generations over the coming year and beyond. It pulls together research from a wide range of sources to summarise the major socio-economic challenges facing young people in light of the pandemic, and their impact on mental health.

For sources of the information provided in this briefing and further readings on the topics covered, click the  icons where they appear in the text.

Introduction

The varied and disproportionate impact the pandemic is having on young people has led many to refer to them as 'Generation COVID'. From mass job and income losses, to being trapped in abusive households, and paying rent for university accommodation they can't use, each new day seems to bring another news story of the blight of Coronavirus on the lives of the young.

This is deeply concerning for the wellbeing of 16-25s, whose mental health and emotional needs were already inclining steadily before the pandemic. Mental health is inextricable from our place in, and treatment by, wider society - the more unequal a society is, the worse its mental health outcomes.  What's more, the major socio-economic risk factors for mental health are some of the very areas of our lives most profoundly impacted by the pandemic, while the building blocks of good mental health and adolescent development have been much harder to guarantee, if not entirely prohibited. 

“ *Mental health inequalities are economic and social inequalities.*

Commission for Equality in Mental Health 

Knowing this, it comes as no surprise that pre-existing inequalities in mental health have been exacerbated by the pandemic. The same people who have been hardest hit by the pandemic – including young women, people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities and young people living in poverty – already experienced the worst mental health prior to the crisis.

As we prepare for a period of recovery and seek to understand the true cost of the pandemic to young people's mental health, we must get to grips with its effect on their lives as a whole. This is something that Youth Access members and partners know all too well. Based in communities up and down the country, Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Services (YIACS) provide youth-led, "whole life" support to some of the most vulnerable young people that addresses the socio-economic factors impacting their lives, as well as their mental health and wellbeing.  They have been at the forefront of innovating to meet the challenges of the past year, and ensure their services continue to reach the young people who need them most. 

“ *Mental health doesn't stop when you step out of the counsellor's office, and neither should mental health support...Our support should extend beyond mental healthcare services into our everyday life to reflect the intersection between our mental health needs and the economic, social and cultural factors which affect young people's lives.*

Rights Advocates, Our Minds Our Future Manifesto 

What does this briefing cover?

This briefing looks at the major socio-economic issues facing young people, and their impact on mental health, following nearly a year of unprecedented disruption to the UK. The information contained is based on the most up-to-date studies and evidence, as well as insights from Youth Access members, and covers areas including education, income and debt, poverty, housing, and employment. Each issue is looked at in turn, followed by a consideration of the specific needs of young people who face particularly large obstacles.

The briefing does not cover every aspect of young people's lives – indeed, the full impact of the crisis won't be known for years to come – but nonetheless attempts to take a broad view of the issues, based on the available and emerging evidence.

The term 'young people' used throughout this text refers to 16-25-year-olds, unless otherwise specified, while 'children' denotes young people aged under 18.

“ *[The scale of deterioration in mental health since the pandemic] is of a magnitude unlike anything we have seen in recent years.*

Institute for Fiscal Studies 

“ *Having a support network that spans outside of the family unit is especially important during the crucial time of adolescence when young people need to be able to leave their family home, branch out into the world and become an adult.*

Young Ambassador, No5 Young People's Counselling Service

Digital divide

Despite government commitments to provide one million devices to pupils who need them, the rollout of such schemes has been slow and piecemeal, with schools being forced to plug the gaps in the meantime. 📖 To date, hundreds of thousands of children and young people still go without access to devices or the internet. However, accessing remote support is not just a question of being able to access to a device or not. It's also about the quality, stability and cost of internet connection, how many are sharing a device in a house, whether there is space and privacy to work, how comfortable someone feels using remote technologies and whether home is a safe place to be.

The evidence for remote interventions suggests that, while in-person support is vital for many, digital and remote access can reduce barriers for young people who face inequality in access to services. Any digital support that is offered, therefore, needs to be accessible outside of educational settings. As Youth Access' members know, remote or alternative access can be an important lifeline for young adults seeking mental health and wellbeing support, advice, guidance, and other essential services. As such, a limited focus on extending remote access to school-age children risks leaving whole swathes of the population behind.

- Ofcom estimates that that the number of children without access to a laptop, desktop computer or tablet is between 1.14 and 1.78 million. Its 2020 Technology Tracker found up to 913,000 children only able to access the internet using mobile data, and up to 559,000 children without any internet access at all. 📖
- The ONS has shown that only 51% of households earning between £6,000 and £10,000 have internet access. 📖
- The picture of access to remote learning also looks starkly different across state and private institutions, and digital inequality may have increased over the pandemic. While 54% of teachers in private schools say that all their students had a device for learning, only 5% in state schools say the same, compared to 4% last year. This mirrors the proportions of teachers in private and state schools who report that all their students have internet access, at 51% and 5% respectively. 📖

- This January, the Department for Education and broadband providers announced a scheme to provide disadvantaged families 20GB of free internet data per month, until July 2021. However, whether this is enough to meet the amount of data needed for remote learning is unclear - one online learning platform has suggested that just four of its remote lessons would use 1000MB of data. 📖

Education

Prior to the pandemic, students from disadvantaged backgrounds were on average 18 months behind their more affluent peers on educational attainment. 📖 School closures over the past year have exacerbated these existing educational inequalities, and recent evidence suggests that academic progress for BAME students has regressed since the beginning of the pandemic. 📖 Not only are repeated interruptions to school attendance due to infections more likely to take place in deprived areas, but children from more disadvantaged backgrounds fall further behind during time away from school compared to others. 📖 Attainment inequalities have been further compounded by a lack of access to remote working resources and online teaching hours for young people from poorer backgrounds, and are unlikely to be redressed by the government's £350m National Tutoring Programme. 📖

- According to research from the London School of Economics, 74% of private school pupils had full school days during the first lockdown, compared to just 38% of state school pupils – and one quarter of students had no schooling or tutoring during lockdown. 📖
- Since September last year, one in five of the highest earners had spent over £200 on their child's home learning, while almost a third of the lowest earners have spent nothing. 📖 Middle class households are almost twice as likely as working class parents to have said they have paid for private tutoring this school year (13% compared to 7%). 📖
- Evidence suggests that poorer students are more likely to be underpredicted at A Level than their peers from more affluent backgrounds. This is a particular concern for students

Quick glance: increasing mental health need among the young

- According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), the deterioration in overall mental health scores seen during the pandemic is nearly double that seen 2014-15 and 2017-18. Twenty-four per cent of people aged 16 and over surveyed by the IFS have reported experiencing a mental health problem "much more than usual" – a 14% increase since before the pandemic. 📖
- Eighty-one per cent of Barnardo's frontline workers have reported that they are seeing increasing mental health issues among the children and young people they work with during the pandemic. Of these, 63% report that young people's biggest concern is loss of contact. 📖
- Various data show that children and young people requiring treatment for eating disorders, and reports of self-harm, safeguarding incidences, prescriptions for sleeping pills and suicidal ideation have shot up during the pandemic. 📖 📖
- The Mental Health Foundation has found that 22% of young people aged 18-24 reported suicidal thoughts and feelings during the pandemic – over double the proportion of the population as a whole. Their study also found that this age group more frequently say they feel stressed due to the pandemic than the population as a whole, and are more likely than any other group to report feelings of hopelessness, loneliness or not coping well. 📖
- Research from the Prince's Trust shows approximately a third of young people having panic attacks and struggling to think clearly during the pandemic, and over a quarter saying they felt unable to cope with life. 📖

from BAME backgrounds and Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller communities, who are some of the poorest in the country. 📖 A 2011 study conducted by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills found that while 53% of white university applicants received accurate grade predictions, the same could be said for just 39.1% of Black applicants. 📖 An Equality Act Review of June 2020 warns that the teacher assessment system to award grades may be biased against, and negatively impact BAME pupils and those from disadvantaged backgrounds – and in doing so “structurally limit equality of and access to opportunities, perpetuating a viscous and unbreakable cycle”. 📖

- As a result of the pandemic, it is likely that more young people will enter and stay in education – a trend already being evidenced by the record number of 18-year-olds who applied to university by June 2020. One Senior Research Economist at the IFS has suggested that postgraduate applications could greatly surpass even the 10% spike in postgraduate applications after the 2008-9 recession. 📖

Poverty and disadvantage

“ Without continued financial support for those at risk of losing their income, there will be higher unemployment, rising levels of poverty and greater levels of food insecurity.

Turn2US 📖

Child poverty was rising before Covid-19: 4.2 million children currently live in poverty in the UK, and affected families are more deeply in poverty than they were five years ago. 📖 In 2019, the total number of people experiencing destitution at some point in the year was estimated to have increased



Focus on... While all young people are at risk of the long-term scarring effects of the pandemic, there are serious concerns about its impact on young people who already faced multiple disadvantages. Here we give a summary of risks and challenges facing four groups of young people who are not only more vulnerable to poor mental health but are at greater risk of being shut out of support that caters to their specific needs and circumstances.

These sections don't cover the challenges faced by all vulnerable communities, but it is hoped that shining a spotlight on the specific needs of these groups will demonstrate the particularly uphill battle that some young people face to get the support they require.

by 54% since 2017, and the number of children affected increased by 52%. BAME, disabled and migrant children, and children from single-parent families are affected disproportionately by poverty, as are lone-parent families and young people under 25. 📖 One quarter of BAME students are on free school meals. 📖

The impact on the mental health of those affected by poverty is of deep concern. Children from the poorest fifth of households are four times as likely to face serious mental health difficulties by the time they are 11 as those from the wealthiest fifth, and young women aged 16-34 who live in the most deprived households are five times more likely to self-harm than those in the least deprived households. 📖 📖 And yet, while people living in England's more deprived areas are more likely to be referred to IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) by their GP, they are substantially less likely to receive complete treatment and have lower rates of recovery.

- Only 11% of mental health trusts view children affected by poverty as a priority group for accessing services. 📖
- 55% of Barnardo's frontline workers have seen an increase in poverty among the families they have been supporting since the first lockdown was announced. 📖
- According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's polling in October 2020, 44% of private renters, and at least 37% of social renters, whose incomes have dropped since March had reduced spending on food for their family. 📖
- The Joseph Rowntree Foundation predicts that levels of destitution in the UK will approximately double due to the pandemic, even when government interventions to mitigate the crisis' impact are considered. 📖

Focus on... young people in care

- The pandemic has increased the challenge of finding placements for children in care, 📖 with placement shortages affecting in-house foster care in particular. 📖 Across England, the number of children referred to Barnardo's fostering services has risen by 57% between April and December 2020, 📖 while in Wales referrals rose by 30%. 📖
- In a system already beleaguered by funding and capacity issues, it is feared that child protection issues will be more likely to be undetected and unreported due to prolonged Covid restrictions and pressures. This, in turn, may lead to a steep rise in child protection referrals in the coming year and further funding shortfalls. 📖
- Children and young people with experience of care have poorer educational outcomes than their peers - by 25-30% at Key Stage 2 - which worsens with age. They are almost four times more likely to have special educational needs, affecting 55.9% of all children in care. 📖
- Young people with experience of care can find it harder to access apprenticeships and face additional barriers to attending further education due to the concurrent stresses of leaving care and living independently. 📖 They are also much less likely to go into higher education: in 2018-19, only 13% of pupils who had been in care for 12 months or more entered higher education, compared to 43% of other students, and were 12.1% less likely to achieve a first or upper second-class degree. 📖
- Care leavers remain at significant risk of homelessness, and a third become homeless within the first 2 years after leaving care. As they are under 25, they are eligible for less Universal Credit than older adults, which fails to cover necessities such as rent. 📖
- Following the dissolution of Public Health England, it remains unclear where oversight of the children's health strategy will lie. 📖

Employment

“ *The uncertainty of getting a job as a graduate was already enough, now it is feeling close to impossible.* ”

Young Ambassador, No5 Young People's Counselling Service

Employment status has strong links to mental health, with problems more common among the unemployed and precarious workers. Moreover, previous experience has shown that economic crises have the effect of further compounding existing societal inequalities, and that those on lower incomes have a greater risk of developing poor mental health following a crisis. Following the economic crisis of 2008, for example, individuals with chronic health conditions – especially those relating to their mental health – suffered the worst effects of changes in employment. 📖

The same tremors are being felt in the time of Covid-19, with the young and disadvantaged experiencing the worst losses in the jobs market and, subsequently, suffering the worst effects on their mental health. Papyrus, the youth suicide prevention charity, have received higher numbers of calls, texts and emails from young people who feared losing their income or job. 📖

“ *Young people have borne the brunt of the impacts of COVID-19 containment measures in terms of rising unemployment and reduced prospects. We anticipate further increases in youth unemployment when the furlough scheme ends, which could have significant lifelong repercussions, including on health.* ”

The Health Foundation 📖

- Young people aged 16-25 have felt the worst impact on employment and earnings during the pandemic: under-25s are more likely than any other age group to be furloughed, and more than twice as likely to lose their job as older employees, affecting nearly one in 10. 📖 As of October 2020, six out of 10 young employees had seen their earnings fall GC. By November 2020, the youth unemployment rate had risen to 14.2%, up from 11.3% a year before and representing the highest level of youth unemployment since 2016. 📖
- This is driven, in part, by the fact that the young are more likely to be in low-paid, more junior jobs that can't be carried out from home, and are often in the sectors worst hit by the pandemic. 📖

- Pre-Covid, nearly a third of all workers under the age of 25 were employed in sectors that were shut down and most at risk of redundancies. 📖
- The pandemic's impact on employment and income has been felt most severely among BAME and disabled communities, women, the self-employed and those who grew up in a poor family. 📖 📖 Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, where there are higher proportions of self-employment than other ethnicities and the population overall, may be particularly vulnerable to the impacts of the pandemic. 📖
- The impacts of the pandemic on employment have not been evenly felt across the country - the most deprived areas have been the worst hit. While the South West of England has seen the largest unemployment rate increase – with significant increases in London and the South East, too – the North East had the highest rate of unemployment both before and during the pandemic. 📖
- Youth unemployment and reduced job opportunities will linger long after the pandemic. Numbers of graduate jobs advertised have fallen at a faster rate than jobs overall, and apprenticeships halved between 23 March and 30 June 2020. Moreover, the Resolution Foundation has predicted that lower skilled workers will be a third less likely to be in employment three years after starting in the jobs market as a result of the pandemic, and has suggested that those young people who do have work will face up to 13% lower average wages for several years. 📖
- Unemployment is expected to rise dramatically after the furlough scheme ends. The IFS expects 2.6 million people will be out of work – twice as many as before the pandemic 📖 – however the true cost of the pandemic on employment levels is still unknown. 📖 According to Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the same people who have been at greatest risk of losing their job during the pandemic may also be the least likely to be able to find work elsewhere. 📖

Income and debt

“ *Many households ...will face shortfalls that have the potential to spiral into unmanageable debt very quickly.* ”

The Health Foundation 📖

Focus on... girls and women

- Girls and young women aged 16-24 are three times more likely to have common mental health problem than their male peers, are more likely to report feeling lonely and are more likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act. Almost a quarter experience PTSD. 📖
- Self-harm rates among girls and young women have tripled since 2000, and rates of suicide among them have jumped by 72% in the last 10 years – reaching the highest number on record in 2019. 📖
- Young women aged 16-24 had 16% worse than average mental health scores before the pandemic, and have been the most affected by it. 📖 A recent survey from Girlguiding found that 53% of girls said the pandemic had negatively impacted their mental health – citing concerns including loneliness, sadness and anxiety – which rose to three-quarters of girls aged 15-18. 📖
- According to one study, by August 2020 the demand for services for women and girls facing multiple disadvantages increased by 63% since the start of the pandemic, and 89% of organisations reported an increase in the needs of women receiving support. By far the largest group of organisations seeing an increase were those supporting young women and girls experiencing domestic abuse. 📖

Over the course of the pandemic, “there has been a sharp and unprecedented rise in the number of people who are now frequently running out of money, before they are paid again”, according to UK charity Turn2Us. Even before the Covid-19 outbreak, incomes were falling, and falling fastest among the lowest paid, in most part due to the freeze in benefits after 2016. In-work poverty was on the rise, affecting almost 13% of workers in 2018/19 and in particular minority ethnic groups and lone parents. The sectors absorbing some of the pandemic’s biggest impacts include those that already had high rates of in-work poverty, including accommodation and food services, where workers are more likely to be women, from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, and young. 📖

While the Money and Pensions Service has committed an additional £38 million for debt advice in England to meet an expected 60% increase in need, 📖 debt advice services are typically poorly accessed by young people. 📖

- Families on low incomes have been “hit very hard” during the pandemic, according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Eleven per cent of people on the lowest incomes (AHC) before the pandemic saw their debt levels increase between July and August 2020, compared to 4% in the top fifth. 📖
- Nearly 18 million, or 34% of people, have had to resort to some form of debt to get by since the start of the pandemic, with 12% of people using multiple forms of debt. The communities most likely to be affected are those with disabilities, from ethnic minority backgrounds, women, families with more than three children, single parents, and those receiving Universal Credit. 📖
- Differences in financial resilience between age groups have also widened: among 18 to 24-year-olds, 40% have reported frequently running out of money in the past year – a near-doubling since before the pandemic. This compares to 8% of over-55s. Over two million young people are now running out of money every week or month. 📖
- The debt charity StepChange has seen an increase in the proportion of young people aged 18-24 contacting them. Among all individuals getting in touch, under-25s were

most likely to say the pandemic was the main reason for their debts. 📖

Benefits

“ When businesses start making difficult decisions about redundancies, young people are likely to be disproportionately affected.

Hannah Slaughter, Resolution thinktank 📖

The pandemic has seen an explosion in the number of people claiming benefits. By August 2020, almost 4.6 million households were receiving Universal Credit – a near 90% increase on the start of the year. 📖 Of those claiming for the first time, one in three was under 25, rising from one in five in March. 📖 Areas in the north of England have tended to be the worst-hit, with parts of Liverpool and Blackpool experiencing the greatest impact on their young populations. 📖

The rise in benefits claims will have serious consequences for the financial health of the population, which in turn will impact the mental health of individuals affected. The fact of being on benefits increases the likelihood of people being plunged further into poverty: those who receive income-related benefits have higher levels of debt, smaller savings and are more likely to need to borrow in the case of unexpected bills and money shortages. 📖

- The number of young people claiming unemployment-related benefit more than doubled between March and November last year. 📖 Despite important government interventions to increase benefits during the pandemic, many have been left without this additional support or have seen the £20 uplift in Universal Credit outweighed by even larger reductions to their income. People on legacy benefits such as Jobseeker’s Allowance or Employment Support Allowance have not received an uplift – despite being received primarily by disabled people and carers – nor have families impacted by the benefit cap and two-child limit, or those in receipt of child-related benefits. 📖

Focus on... LGBTQ+ young people

“ [Many LGBTQ+ young people] no longer have the respite of their friends, communities and partners.

Barnado’s 📖

- Young LGBTQ+ people experience higher levels of poor mental health than their heterosexual and cisgender peers, which has, in part, been linked to discrimination faced by these communities. This can also contribute to disadvantage in other areas of a young person’s life, for example youth homelessness, exclusion from education and unemployment. 📖
- Coronavirus restrictions have placed additional risks on LGBTQ+ young people, many of whom have been forced to move home with family members who are ignorant of, or hostile to, their sexual orientation or gender identity, and who may have had contact with their chosen communities restricted. 📖
- There has been a surge in young LGBTQ+ people approaching homelessness charities for support. The number of young people seeking help from the Albert Kennedy Trust, which represents young people who are LGBTQ+ and homeless, in June 2020 was 190% greater than the year before. This is particularly concerning for LGBTQ+ young people from the BAME community, who already faced disproportionate levels of homelessness. 📖
- Contact with LGBTQ+ support charities has risen significantly during the pandemic. Calls, emails and texts to the UK LGBTQ+ helpline Switchboard have increased by 20% during this period. 📖
- The Albert Kennedy Trust recommended that young people “press pause” on coming out during the pandemic, until they had support networks in place. 📖

- Moreover, uplifts to benefit and the increase in reliance on Universal Credit have led to more households being affected by the benefits cap: between February and August 2020 alone, there was a 112% increase in UK households having their benefits capped in the UK. The two-child limit on benefits currently affects around 860,000 children in the UK, and is expected to rise to two million by end of 2024. [1]
- The planned removal of the £20 per week uplift to Universal Credit will plunge a further 760,000 people into poverty, according to estimates from the Fabian Society. [2]
- The benefit cap has a disproportionate impact on households in poorer parts of London and the south east, and single parents. In August 2020, 10.2% of all London single-parent households were affected by the benefit cap – a near doubling since February 2020. [3]
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation's polling last May 2020 found that most families with children who were receiving Universal Credit or Child Tax Credits were getting by without essentials, were building up debt and were falling behind with their bills or rent. [4]

Housing

“ While all areas of the UK are likely to feel the financial impacts of this crisis, households living in areas with high rents and an over-reliance on private renting are likely to face severe difficulties because of their housing situation.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation [5]

Affordable housing was a concern long before the pandemic: the gap between local housing allowance and income and average rents was large in some parts of country, [6] and family homelessness was on the rise. In the past five years there has

been a 51% increase in the number of homeless children, and in 2019 an estimated 135,000 children were homeless and living in temporary accommodation. Official homelessness figures are thought to be much higher, as local authorities don't record the 'hidden homeless' such as those living on others' sofas. [7]

Despite some key government interventions to address housing concerns over the past year, the prospect of bigger job losses and a rise in benefits claimants – not to mention the removal of temporary housing protections [8] – threatens to push many more into debt, poverty and homelessness.

- Between February and August 2020, there were an additional 560,000 private renting households receiving help through Universal Credit or Housing benefit – a 36% increase. London saw the largest increase, while households in the north east and north west were the most likely to need help. [9]
- Support received by those struggling to make payments in the past year has been uneven: just 4% of private renters were granted rent holidays, compared to 26% of mortgage holders. [10]
- By October 2020, 200,000 private renting households (5%) had fallen behind on rent, and 700,000 (15%) had fallen behind on bills such as Council Tax and utilities. Social renters were more likely to fall behind on bills and rent early into the first lockdown, with 26% behind on at least one bill (including rent) by August 2020. It is estimated that there was a 10% increase in rent arrears among social renters in the first month of lockdown. Last October, 30% of private renters, and 27% of social renters, were worried about paying their rent over winter – while 21% of white adults expressed concerns, this rose to 42% among adults from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. [11]
- By 30 June 2020, the number of households in temporary accommodation in England had risen

Focus on... Black young people

- Children who experience racism are likely to experience low self-esteem, high levels of anxiety and depression, and reduced ability to recover from other kinds of trauma. [12]
- Black communities face significantly increased barriers to accessing mental health support that is appropriate to their needs. Despite experiencing higher rates of PTSD, being more at risk of suicide and more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia, they are the least likely ethnic group to report receiving medication, counselling or therapy for their mental health, and have consistently lower recovery rates than among white communities. Black young people aged 16-24 experience the highest rates of self-harm, and yet are less likely to receive support. [13]
- Moreover, when Black people are supported by the mental health system, they are more likely to receive specialist, acute, restrictive or compulsory mental health support, and are four times as likely to be sectioned under the Mental Health Act. CEMH2 Racially minoritised young people are twice as likely to enter youth mental health services via a court order than their white peers. [14]
- Black young people are over-represented in the criminal justice system. More than half of all young people in custody are from BAME communities – a record high – and the proportion of Black children cautioned or sentenced has doubled since March 2010, from six to 12%. In the same decade, the average custodial sentence for children has increased by over seven months, from 11.3 to 18.6 months. [15]
- As demonstrated in this briefing, Black and Asian people have been at heightened risk of job and income losses, educational inequalities, and serious illness and death from Coronavirus. This raises serious concerns for communities already living at the sharp end of an unequal society, and who faced greater levels of mental health need at the start of the pandemic. This is particularly worrying for Black and minoritised young women, who experience mental ill health at higher rates than their white peers. [16]

by nearly 14% since the end the previous year, including 127,240 children. 📖 A further 420,000 children could be at risk of eviction from their homes. 📖 Six hundred and forty thousand children are currently living with families being forced to use up their savings or borrow more to cover living costs, and who are at risk of being in rent arrears later on. 📖

- More families are being housed in B&Bs for more than six weeks, illegally, and hundreds of families are estimated to have spent the whole of the first lockdown in a B&B. These families face multiple risks, including to educational attainment, health and wellbeing, and are without the guarantee of being able to freely access the internet, outdoor play space or shops. 📖
- According to Refugee Action, Asylum Matters and Scottish Refugee Council, overcrowding in government-controlled accommodation has led to some refugees and asylum seekers being forced to share cramped living spaces, and even beds, with strangers who have been moved in after lockdown was imposed. 📖

Violence and abuse

“ Covid-19 did not create the domestic abuse crisis – but it has exposed it.

Katrin Hohl, City University of London & Kelly Johnson, Durham University 📖

The pandemic has, for many children and young people, further trapped them in abusive households and made getting help all the more difficult. During the first lockdown, 160,000 children were thought to be living in households where there was domestic abuse, and occurrence of abuse in this period increased by an estimated 25%. 📖 This is reflected by the rates of contact with support services over the past year, which have spiked sharply during the national lockdowns. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that the severity of the abuse has intensified over this period, featuring high levels of violence and coercive control. 📖

This is a particular concern for girls and young women aged 16-24, who report the highest rates of domestic abuse of all age groups. Over half of all women who have a common mental health condition have experienced violence and abuse; for a quarter of those women, the abuse starts in childhood. 📖 For women who have experienced significant sexual and physical abuse, 36% have attempted suicide, 22% have self-harmed and 21% have been homeless. 📖

“ Physical and sexual violence is perhaps the single greatest risk factor for poor mental health amongst girls and young women, alongside poverty and other forms of disadvantage.

Agenda 📖

- Kooth saw a 51% increase in the numbers of young people experiencing abuse at home between March and April 2020, compared to same period in 2019. Data released the following month suggested there had been a 69% increase in issues relating to child abuse, sexual exploitation and neglect in England, compared to the previous year. 📖
- Refuge saw a tenfold increase in visits to its website during the first three months of lockdown, while calls

to NSPCC's Childline increased by 20% during the first four weeks of lockdown. 📖 The National Domestic Abuse Helpline recorded more than forty thousand calls and contacts during first three months of lockdown – mostly from women seeking help - and received 80% higher than usual calls and contacts in June. 📖

- Sixty-seven per cent of women experiencing abuse in the first lockdown, and who reported to Women's Aid survivor survey, said it had got worse. 📖 Domestic homicides nearly doubled in the first three weeks of lockdown. 📖
- A quarter of girls and young women aged 14-21 have reported they'd be less likely to report sexual harassment as they didn't think it would be seen as priority in the pandemic. 📖
- One study has found a sharp decline in the numbers of individuals telling police they had separated, or attempted to separate, from abusive partners, and its researchers suggest that the restrictions and socio-economic strains of the pandemic are making leaving abusers more difficult. However, the easing of restrictions after the first lockdown saw a surge in women seeking refuge, and police and domestic abuse services have been told to “prepare for a surge in high-risk and high-harm reports when Covid restrictions lift in 2021.” 📖

Conclusion

“ Once restrictions are lifted, it is vital that funding to youth organisations is restored to pre-2010 levels. Building back fairer requires far greater investment and resourcing in services for young people, especially in more disadvantaged areas.

The Health Foundation 📖

The current social and political focus on mental health is welcome, but mental health cannot be limited to a simple diagnosis, nor does it exist in a vacuum – it impacts and is impacted by our context. Young people in particular face so many complex and novel challenges as they enter adulthood, and the experience and outcomes of these will shape their wellbeing – and thus, their reliance on services – long into the future.

It's clear that young people have borne the brunt of the socio-economic impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic, and will continue to do so unless effective, targeted and sustainable measures are taken to support them across every area of their lives. Vital to this effort will be the voices of young people and the local voluntary sector organisations who are already supporting them to work through this difficult time.

While Covid has posed many challenges for statutory and voluntary sector services alike, many community-based organisations have taken bold and innovative approaches to quickly respond to the changing context and prevailing needs. Our task now is to capture and invest in the developments that have supported many young people to access support against the odds this past year, while reinvigorating the community links and in-person services that are crucial to equitable access. Securing proper support for those young person-centred services will be crucial to this, and this support must be sustained as the hidden and long-term impacts of the pandemic unfold.

How to support these young people will be the subject of the second briefing in this series. In it, we will outline the effectiveness of Youth Access members – and ‘open-access’ services more generally – at addressing the “whole life” issues affecting young people’s mental health. The third and final briefing will set out recommendations for what needs to be in place at a local, regional and national level to ensure the sustainability and expansion of the support that Youth Information Advice and Counselling services offer to young people.

Before you close this PDF... We want to hear from you!

Did you find this briefing useful? Do the issues covered reflect the concerns raised by young people in your area or organisation?

Let us know your feedback and reflections by clicking here.

If you have any questions about the briefing or want to get in touch, contact Ruby Livings Waterworth, Policy and Campaigns Officer at Youth Access - ruby@youthaccess.org.uk.

Youth Access exists to make sure all young people have somewhere local to turn to whenever they need to talk. We work with both young people and our membership of Youth Information Advice and Counselling Services (YIACS) to ensure that young people in every community can access great quality support as they move into adulthood.

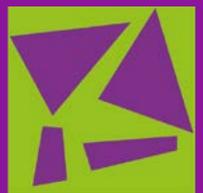
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